

HISTORY
OF



CENTER HILL
UNITED
METHODIST
CHURCH

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November 21, 1976

In the early 1800's Center Hill Methodist Church was known as Skinner's Meeting House. The land on which the church stands was originally a part of the Skinner Tract of land and was deeded in 1838 by William R. Skinner to the following local Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Jordan D. Elliott, Josiah Perry, Thomas Evans, James M. Goodwin, Sanford E. Goodwin, Thomas Jackson and William R. Blanchard. The deed is duly recorded and in good standing in the Register of Deed's Office, Chowan County, Edenton, N. C., in Book Q, Pages 284 and 285. A Plaque hangs on a wall in the Chowan County Courthouse in memory of Mr. William R. Skinner because of his faithful and efficient work in Church and State.

From Evans United Methodist Church History, we found that the church belonged to the Virginia Conference originally. In February 8, 1837, at a meeting of the Virginia Conference, the N. C. churches were separated from the Virginia Conference and the North Carolina Conference was formed. Again, in 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church divided and after this division the local churches became known as Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

It has been said that during the Civil War of 1861 the building was used as a hospital. Soldiers were encamped in the old church building and on the grounds. Several soldiers might have died and been buried under a portion of the church.

Early records which are dated December 6, 1897 show that Dr. R. K. Hargrove was Bishop of the North Carolina Conference, Rev. R. A. Willis, Presiding Elder of this District and Rev. John A. Hornaday, Circuit Pastor. Later records show that Lay Preacher Josiah Elliott who lived in Hertford, N. C., was the Circuit Preacher. He drove a horse and buggy from Hertford, N. C., each week and was faithful in all kinds of weather. He later left the Methodist N. C. Conference and became associated with the Southern Baptist.

Since early church membership rolls are not available, Mrs. H. E. Lane has supplied a list from memory of some of the past loyal and faithful members who were outstanding in their work within the church prior to 1900: Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Burke, Mrs. Martha Elliott, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Brinn, Mr. and Mrs. Dick Brinn, Mr. and Mrs. Rosser Brinn, Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Chappell, Mr. and Mrs. Dowd Chappell, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse P. Chappell, Mrs. Elizabeth Perry Bunch, the Johnny Goodwin family, Mrs. Jake Hudson and daughter Sabra Hudson, Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Winslow, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Lane and boys George and J. T. Lane.

The original church was a log building and has been remodeled three times. In 1916-17, it was remodeled to its present condition. The Rev. J. A. Russell (1914-1917) was pastor of the church at that time. A bell was purchased during the remodeling and placed on a scaffold in the church yard. This bell was hung in the belfry after the remodeling was completed and is still there. For many years, J. S. Turner called the worshippers together by ringing the bell at 9:30 and 11:00 every Sunday morning and at 6:00 in the evening for the Youth to congregate for Epworth League.

In 1927, a new deed was obtained from W. S. Summerell, the only known descendant of William R. Skinner, thereby removing some restrictions regarding

the use of the land and making the property acceptable by the N. C. Methodist Conference.

Many revivals have been held in this church. They were week-long meetings with two services each day. During the pastorate of Rev. J. A. Russell in July 1917, a tent meeting was held on the grounds with a well-known evangelist team -- Rev. Raymond Browning, the evangelist, Harry Chamberlain, the song leader, and a Mr. Kondo, a native of Japan, assistant minister. Two services were held daily. The church yard was full of horse-drawn buggies, surries, etc., and the tent filled to capacity to hear the Word.

The Church Paper known as the Raleigh Christian Advocate dated Feb. 20, 1913, states that Rev. M. T. Plyer was Elizabeth City's Presiding Elder and lists church officials present at each Quarterly Conference in Elizabeth City District. Those present in 1912 from Chowan were L. R. Bunch, Z. W. Evans, and J. M. Turner, who were stewards or Trustees of their respective churches. The church assignments were spoken of as Circuits. Later we spoke of them as Charges. A copy of this paper is owned by Mrs. Lillian Turner Bunch.

Rev. B. T. Hurley (1912-1914) was assigned to the Chowan Circuit at this Annual Conference and the article in the same issue of the "Raleigh Christian Advocate" under the heading of "Personal Pointers" has this to say about Rev. Hurley: "...Some of the invincible ignorant of the up-country told young Hurley before coming to the Chowan that the people took quinine out of their hands at church to keep off the chills, but Hurley has seen a great light since coming to Chowan and the people have found in him a cultured, well trained young minister, capable of taking the place made vacant by the going of their much beloved J. A. Martin, who goes to Moyock and found that the

people were as equally attached to Marvin Self as the Chowan people were to him, this condition speaks well for a people. Hurley has all the elements for success at Chowan. So has Martin at Moyock." Rev. B. T. Hurley followed Rev. J. A. Martin (1910-1912) on this Chowan Circuit.

During these years, the young people of the church were active in the youth group known as the Epworth League and this same issue of the "Raleigh Christian Advocate states that this District leads the Conference in the number of Leagues at work. The Epworth League is making sure and steady advances in the Albemarle section. Some years later, the name of the Youth group was changed from the Epworth League to the Methodist Youth Fellowship.

All the Charter members of the church have long gone to their reward, but we have descendants still attending, and some families have 5th and 6th generations still on roll and active in the church today. Mr. Henry E. Lane served many years as Sunday School Superintendent. Mr. Lane was a faithful and dedicated worker in the church. Mr. J. S. Turner was elected Sunday School Superintendent and has served more than 45 years in that office and has proved himself worthy of that position.

The church has had many improvements during the years as well as the usual upkeep. A communion table was presented to the church in 1910 by Mr. and Mrs. Rosser Brinn, a gift from their home. The table was one of the first pieces of furniture that the Brinns purchased after their marriage.

A piano was placed in the church in 1925 by members of the church to replace the old pump organ. The bill of sale and dates of payment on the piano are still fastened to the inside of the piano. This was found a few years ago when the piano was being refinished.

A pulpit Bible was presented to the church on June 20, 1950 in memory of Mrs. Annie Perry Twine. It was given by her children. A daughter, Mrs. E. M. Goodwin presented the Bible and it was accepted by Rev. Moody Chappell and dedicated by Rev. E. R. Meekins, who was pastor of the church at that time.

During the 1930's the Methodist Hymnals were placed in the church by members in memory of deceased members of their families, and a kneeling pad was given by interested members of the church in 1955.

The marble top table was given to the church by Mrs. Herbert Bunch in memory of her husband, Herbert Bunch, and his mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Perry Bunch, known to everyone as "Aunt Lizzie Bunch."

The brass candle holders and the cross were given to the church by Mr. Titus E. Chappell, Mrs. Millicent Bunch and Mrs. Mable Perry in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse P. Chappell. A special service was planned for the presentation and the children and grandchildren took part in the service.

Nearly 20 years ago, the church grounds committee decided to make some changes in the landscaping and upkeep of the grounds. Most of the credit must be given to Mr. and Mrs. Emmett P. Jones for having the grounds landscaped, planting the shrubbery around the church and planting more than 100 azaleas and camellias among the pines behind the church. These things were done as a living memorial to Mrs. Ida E. Reed. Mr. Jones has kept the grounds clean and mowed neatly, which has provided a beautiful setting for the church.

During the pastorate of Rev. E. R. Meekins (1946-1950), the Elizabeth City District Conference was held at this church. It was well attended and a plaque was presented to the church by Mrs. J. T. White and her children in memory of J. Timothy White, a loyal member of Center Hill Church. Dinner was

served on the grounds by the four churches of the charge. Rev. C. A. Johnson, Jr., son of a former pastor, gave the response to the welcome.

The older heads of the church say that years ago one annual conference was held at this church.

Through the years, we have been served by some true men of God who made untiring efforts to be of service to the church and the community. It is interesting to note that a few of our former pastors brought their wives to the Chowan Charge as brides. They were: Rev. J. A. Martin, Rev. B. T. Hurley, Rev. J. A. Russell, Rev. H. A. Chester, Rev. R. E. Walston, and Richard Griffin.

Sunday School teachers through the years who devoted much time and effort to their church include: Mrs. L. J. Lane, Mrs. Jesse Lane, Mrs. Minnie Turner, Mr. Titus E. Chappell, Mr. H. E. Lane, Willie E. Monds, and Mrs. Bertha White. Their dedication is still evidenced by the faithful workers of our church today. All the above are deceased except Willie E. Monds, who lives in Florida. Presently, Mrs. Rufus Smithson is teacher of youth and Emmett P. Jones, adult teacher. Others who served were Mrs. Lillian Turner Bunch, Mr. and Mrs. C. B. White, and Mrs. Nell Forbes. Mrs. J. S. Turner has served as Sunday School treasurer and Mrs. Oscar Bunch financial secretary for many years.

During the years, we remember our beloved "Miss Bertha," Mrs. J. T. White, as our choir leader. She had a fine appreciation of music and she gave her best in keeping alive the "Great Methodist Hymns." She was always there at church time and one of the most active choir members. We must also remember Mrs. Elizabeth White Ware, who for many years was the organist for the church and a song leader.

One of the church's oldest members who was a former pastor in the Western N. C. Conference was Rev. Moody Chappell. After his retirement, he came back to the area to live and attended this church regularly until his death, September 12, 1965.

Our men have been active in the Layman's program of the church and the District.

Extensive repairs and upkeep have been made to the church. A few to be mentioned are as follows: new lighting which was dedicated April 14, 1958 and given by the youth fellowship of the church; new floors sanded and finished; new plastering inside; painted outside; pulpit furniture refinished and reupholstered; new carpeting; heating system installed. New United Methodist Hymnals have been placed in the sanctuary. A storage room was added in 1972. Center Hill Sunday School purchased and installed a new heating system in the parsonage.

Our church has seen its youth come and go to various fields of work. Rev. Rufus Smithson, Jr., now pastor of Pearson Street United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, N. C., is a product of Center Hill Church. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Smithson, Sr., grandson of Mrs. H. E. Lane and the late H. E. Lane. He is much loved and respected by his home church, and has served many years as a member of the N. C. Conference.

During trying war years of our country, several of the young men and women of the church were in active military service and actually participated in activities overseas.

In 1927, Center Hill and Evans Church women formed jointly the Willie Evans Missionary Society. With the union of the Methodist Churches in 1939, the name of the group was changed to Woman's Society of Christian Service.

In 1974, the name was changed again to United Methodist Women. The women of the churches are active in their local UMW groups. They have donated time and money to various projects which benefit church, parsonage, and community. September 13, 1970, the group presented and dedicated a Bible for use in the Prayer Room of Chowan Hospital, Edenton, N. C. There have been many improvements to both churches and to the parsonage by the U.M.W. Mrs. C. B. White, Sr., is at present leader of the group.

The first community Vacation Bible School was held at this church during the pastorate of Rev. A. L. G. Stephenson and was held jointly with Center Hill Baptist Church.

It is also interesting to note that Chowan County's first Easter Sunrise Service was held at this church in 1951 during the pastorate of Rev. R. M. Gradeless (1950-1952). The first Sunrise Service was county-wide and pastors of other denominations took an active part in the services. The church was filled beyond its capacity. The Sunrise Service has long since outgrown one church and several years ago broken into local church groups. Center Hill Baptist, Great Hope Baptist, Anderson United Methodist and Center Hill United Methodist now join in sunrise services, rotating the services each year.

August 15, 1971, Mrs. Henry E. Lane and her family installed organ chimes in the church in memory of Mr. Henry E. Lane, who was a faithful and Christian leader. He was Sunday School Superintendent, teacher and church treasurer for many years and has been greatly missed by all who knew him. Rev. Rufus M. Smithson, grandson of Mrs. Lane, presented the chimes and Rev. Dan Forbes accepted them in behalf of the church.

In the early years of the church, it was the center of all activity and had the full devotion of its members. Under the hardships of traveling by horse-drawn vehicles people came from great distances to worship. Each Sunday the church was filled. Many Sundays there was dinner on the grounds.

Both churches in the community were so involved that Sunday School teachers would be from either church. Center Hill Methodist had their service at 11:00 in the morning and Center Hill Baptist at 3:00 p.m., which gave each congregation a chance to visit the other. That cooperation is evidenced today even though the church schedules have changed.

The few members left are very active and strong in their faith under the efficient leadership of our dedicated pastor, Daniel Forbes, who came to Chowan as a lay leader in November, 1969. He was appointed in June 1970 under the direction of Rev. G. R. McKenzie, District Superintendent. After obtaining his license to preach, he was appointed as a full time lay pastor by Bishop W. R. Cannon to serve Chowan in 1971.

Former pastors that have served on the Chowan Charge:

* John A. Hornaday	12-6-1897
* W. M. Towe	1905-1909
* M. Y. Self	3-12-1909
* L. N. Booth	1909-1910
* J. A. Martin	1910-1912
B. T. Hurley	1912-1914
J. A. Russell	1914-1917
* C. C. Carson	1917-1919
* J. L. Midgette	1919-1922
* N. W. Wright	1922-1923
M. R. Chambers	1923-1925
* H. A. Chester	1925-1926
* C. A. Johnson	1926-1928
* R. F. Taylor	1928-1929
* F. E. Dixon	1929-1932
* W. B. Humble	1932-1935
M. O. Stephenson	1-11-1935
R. E. Walston	1935-1939
* J. T. Stanford	1939-1941
* A. L. G. Stephenson	1941-1946
Earl R. Meekins	1946-1950
R. M. Gradeless	1950-1952
C. H. Beale	1952-1954
* P. M. Porter	1954-1957
F. W. Fortescue	1957-1961
C. T. Wilson	1961-1963
G. D. Miller	1963-1965
* Gillette Bryant	1965-1966
* W. D. Moore	1966-1968
* Richard Griffin	1968-1969
* Dan Middleton	1969-8/69
Daniel Forbes	11/69

* Deceased or residence not recorded
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