



METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH

1832 - 1939

METHODIST CHURCH

1939 - 1968

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1968 - 1982

150 YEARS

THE HISTORY
of
CHESTNUT RIDGE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
1832 - 1982

By Stephen C. Compton

"This meeting-house is situated on a high hill, and a few years ago looked like the vineyard of the Lord; yea the wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad."

-Alson Gray
1833

The first decades of the Nineteenth Century were years of controversy and change within the Methodist Church in America. The Methodist Episcopal Church was less than half a century old, having been officially organized in Baltimore in 1784. The nation was only a little older, and it too was undergoing change. The War of 1812 with the British had served to test the foundling nation's strength and resolve. At about the same time the rise of populism, brought about in part by Jacksonian Democracy, excited the new Americans and led them to widespread participation in aspects of government previously reserved for the elite few. The voice of the common man and woman took on new importance in determining the course of the nation's future.

This desire for citizen participation in the affairs of the nation spread into some quarters of the Methodist Church at about the same time. But whereas for the nation this movement would lead mostly to beneficial democratic reforms, for the Methodist Church it would lead to a major schism.

Those who would be reformers in the Church called for three fundamental changes: First, that presiding elders (something like our present day superintendents) be elected by the preachers rather than appointed by the bishops of the Church; Second, that local preachers be given rights commensurate to those of itinerating preachers; Third, that lay people be given equal representation in the decision making conferences of the Church.

Those who held to the old way within the Church proved to be as stubborn as those of the reform way were persistent. After many years of controversy and debate, with no resultant compromise in effect, the reformers separated themselves into new Methodist societies. In 1828, the Methodist Protestant Church was officially begun.

It is within this context of controversy, reform, and separation that the history of Chestnut Ridge Church begins.

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As early as 1827, Rev. Charles L. Cooley was invited by a layman, Samuel Smith, to preach at an Orange County site in the woods near the present day Chestnut Ridge Church.

Tradition has it that Cooley's first sermon at the Ridge was delivered in the open near the top of a rocky knoll. For a pulpit, a barrel was turned bottom up. The people who gathered to hear Cooley preach sat on rocks. Split logs were soon added at the site for more comfortable seating and the barrel-turned-pulpit was replaced by a plank placed between two Chestnut Oak trees.¹

It is from the Chestnut Oaks found on this isolated ridge of high ground in Orange County that the Church has taken its name. Through the years, the Church has been variously referred to as the Ridge, Chestnut Oak Ridge, and Chestnut Ridge.

Cooley, formerly an elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and a member of the Virginia Conference, was expelled by that body in 1825 for his reformist views. Shortly thereafter, he moved to the town of Hillsborough. On October 1, 1829, Charles Cooley

was received as an elder in the Methodist Protestant Church and was appointed to the Hillsboro Circuit.

Cooley continued to preach at the Ridge for some time, though it was not yet an organized Methodist society. According to a brief historical sketch written around the end of the Nineteenth Century, Cooley invited Alson Gray, Superintendent of the Guilford Circuit of the Methodist Protestant Church at the time, to preach at the Ridge.

This could have been in the spring of 1831 when Gray was traveling throughout the bounds of the Circuit. Gray would ultimately play an important role in organizing the people who came to hear preaching at the Ridge into a Methodist Protestant Church. In years to come, Uncle Alson Gray, as he was called, would become a much loved and respected visitor and pastor at the Ridge.

At some time prior to 1832 a log meeting house was constructed on the Ridge for Rev. Cooley to preach in. Tradition has it that this building was also used as a school, which was not an uncommon practice in those days.

The log meeting-house was a one room building located to the east of the present building. A second log building having similar dimensions was joined to the meeting-house to accommodate the growing congregation. The wall between the two buildings was removed and the pulpit was placed near the center of the room. Doors were located at either end of the building.

The building must have been quite open since one writer recalls a time when bumble

bees made a home in the confines of the pulpit and then attacked Rev. James Deans as he preached.

Another man came to the Ridge to preach during these years before the formal organization of the church into a Methodist Protestant society. His name is James H. Christie and he was accepted into the itinerant ministry of the Methodist Protestant Church on March 1, 1832. It is believed that Christie preached at the Ridge twice prior to the fall of 1832. It is James Christie, writing in October of that year, who gives us the first clue to the organizing date of the Chestnut Ridge Church. He gives the following account:

"We have formed several new societies. One has also been formed very recently at a meeting house built for brother Charles Cooly (sic) to preach in -- and whose labors have not been in vain in the Lord. We have recently included it in our circuit appointments. The first time I preached at that place, there were two or three who were seeking Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. At the second appointment there, we had a heavenly season, -- Many broken hearted penitents presented themselves before the Lord and implored the pardon of their sins with strong cries and bitter tears. We encouraged and pointed them to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, as the only hope and refuge of their souls, and they did not call on or look to Him in vain. Seven souls professed the personal knowledge of the forgiveness of their sins."

Christie goes on to say:

"On the last Saturday and Sabbath in September, we held a two-days' meeting at the same place. On Saturday we had a respectable congregation, -- a number of mourners were seen and heard calling for the mercy of God. One professed to have found the pearl of great price. On Sabbath the congregation was very large. Brother Cooly (sic) baptized five adults, and delivered an interesting discourse. After which I preached a short sermon."

Then Christie concludes by saying:

"After preaching we invited such as were sincerely seeking redemption in the blood of Christ to come forward that we might all unite together in prayer to God for their deliverance; between thirty and forty accepted the invitation and we offered our petitions to God on their behalf, when one more was raised to declare that God hath power on earth to forgive sins.²"

James Christie's account gives several clues leading to the determination of the date of organization of the people who met at the Ridge Meeting-House into a Methodist Protestant society. Writing in October, 1832, he says that the society was "very recently" formed.³ Also, since he notes that several persons present at the two-day meeting in September were baptized by Rev. Cooley, it may be assumed that the society into which they were becoming members had already been formed. It is not impossible to believe that the society was organized in the course of this weekend revival.

But according to the Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church, the request for the organizing of a society had to be made by the people to either the president of the Annual Conference or the superintendent of a circuit.⁴ Neither Willis Harris, the President of the Conference at the time, nor Alson Gray, the Superintendent of the Guilford Circuit, seem to have been present at this two-day meeting.

Since in 1833, and ensuing years, it was the practice for the churches within the Guilford, and later the Orange Circuits, to hold camp meetings in August and September and it was the practice of the superintendent to be present at these meetings, it is not unlikely that Alson Gray organized the society at the Ridge Meeting-House sometime between the beginning of August and the last weekend of September, 1832. On the last Friday in August, a camp meeting was held at Mt. Hermon Church in Orange County (now Alamance County). The next camp meeting was held at Sandy Ridge in Guilford County on Friday, the 15th of September.⁵ It may be that Alson Gray came to the Ridge Meeting-House between these two meetings sometime in late August or early September of 1832 for the purpose of organizing the society.

Martha Ann Smith, the daughter of Jesse and Phoebe Daniel, and the wife of Charles C. Smith, was a charter member of Chestnut Ridge Methodist Protestant Church. In writing her obituary, Alson Gray notes that the Methodist Protestant Church at the Ridge Meeting-House was begun twelve months prior to the time of his writing, which is dated September 16, 1833.⁶ This, then confirms the approximate time of organization of the society at a time in August or September of 1832.

Robert Faucette, Samuel Smith, Robert Hastings, John Pender, Sr., Mrs. Charles Smith, and other members of these families are thought to have been among the first members of Chestnut Ridge Church. According to Alson Gray, in one year's time this number had grown to fifty-six.⁷

At the time of its inception, Chestnut Ridge Church was added to the Guilford Circuit of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, of which Alson Gray was the superintendent. At the next Annual Conference, the church was made part of a new circuit, called Orange. Alson Gray was again the superintendent with James Christie serving as his assistant. Charles L. Cooley was assigned to the Ridge Meeting-House. One other church, called Hickory Grove, was on this new circuit. It was served by Rev. William McMasters.

On June 24, 1833, a deed was made conveying land owned by Joseph Thompson to the trustees of the Ridge Meeting-House.⁸ These trustees are listed in the deed as follows: Thos. Squires, Robert Cheek, Robert Watson, Samuel Smith, Robert Hasting, Andrew Watson, and John Dockrey (or Dailey). The two acres of land were sold to the church for the sum of five pounds. The deed also provided for the congregation's use of a fresh water spring lying on the north side of the purchased property.

Beginning in 1833, the Ridge became the site of many exciting camp meetings. The first was held from Friday, August 23rd, until Tuesday, August 27th, 1833. Describing this first camp meeting held at the Ridge Meeting-House after its organization

as a Methodist Protestant Society, Alson Gray writes:

"We had those that dwelt in tents here; our congregations were large and very attentive. Our brethren from Granville and Guilford came up to help us; and blessed be the name of God! Our labors were not in vain in the Lord. There were a great many mourners; something near a dozen gave their names for membership. This meeting-house is situated on a high hill, and a few years ago looked like a wilderness, but now it looks like the vineyard of the Lord; yea the wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad.⁹"

Willis Harris, then President of the Annual Conference, was also present and gives this account of the 1833 camp meetings:

"The first camp-meeting I attended was held at Chestnut Ridge Meeting-House, a new place taken in by the Methodist Protestants a year ago; tenting on the ground was a new thing to most of them; there were not a great many tents, say thirty, with large, and attentive congregations. And it is believed that on one occasion, one hundred truly penitent sinners came to the altar soliciting the prayers of the saints for the mercies of Christ. -- There were converted at the lowest calculation, thirty souls.¹⁰"

On August 15, 1834, the second camp meeting was held at the Ridge Meeting-House. Alson Gray says that "the people had made

some improvement in the way of building tents"ll since the year before. About thirty people were converted and ten joined the society during this revival.

The camp meeting continued to be regular fare at the Ridge for many years to come. It seems that the last was held sometime in the closing years of the Nineteenth Century. By then, the community had become more sophisticated in its preparation for the fall revival services as is evidenced by an account given by James Cheek of his remembrance of Chestnut Ridge Church.

"In my early boyhood they still had camp meetings there. A row of log cabins was built fifty to one hundred yards from the church. In these cabins, some of the families would stay through the meeting, one member going back and forth to take care of the stock at home.

I thought it was great to spend the night there with Cicero Jones. His folks had a cabin and stayed during these fall meetings . . . I would sometimes stay overnight with Cicero. We ate at the camp table, which had a charm for me that I cannot express.

Not far from the church, there was an arbor under which they held meetings when the weather was suitable. It had a high pulpit, mourner's bench and straw all around in front of the pulpit."

Cheek further reminisces by writing:

"I can see those old circuit riders mounted on their horses, with their

saddlebags. They would ride up to a tree, dismount and hitch their horses to a swinging limb and walk slowly and reverently through the grounds shaking hands with the brethren." 12 13

It was from these camp-meeting styled revival services that much of the early membership growth came to Chestnut Ridge Church.

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From its pioneer beginnings, Chestnut Ridge Church and the Orange Circuit continued to prosper and grow throughout the Nineteenth Century. In 1899, the Ridge had nearly 400 members on roll. As early as 1865, the Circuit recorded 340 members, ten of whom were listed as "colored".

In 1864, Conference President T. H. Pegram wrote of the Orange Circuit: "I do not think that there is a better organized Circuit in the Conference. Every man and woman appears to know his duty, and performs it promptly. There is little danger of an industrious preacher starving here; this people will pay their preacher."¹⁴

Brother J. L. Michaux, writing a few years later, called the Orange Circuit a "living vine"¹⁵.

It is ironic that the very prosperity of the Circuit would become the cause of great consternation for some.

Conference President William H. Wills, presiding in 1860, believed that the Circuit

had grown too large for effective administration by a single superintendent. Therefore, Wills moved for the division of the Circuit by the Conference. Writes Wills of the matter:

"My mind is clear that its (the Circuit's) interests will be advanced by such division, and a visit to its camp meeting in September more strongly impresses me with its propriety. It is a large and valuable field of labor, and no minister can attend properly to its interests in its present form. Pastoral visiting . . . cannot to any extent be performed. Divided, there is and will be a large field for operation, South and East.¹⁶"

Wills found some support among the Conference delegates for his suggestion and the Stationing Committee made a formal motion concerning such a division, using the Haw River as the dividing line.

Much debate and many charges followed the motion to divide the Circuit. Wills' desire to divide prevailed. Chestnut Ridge, Flint Hill, and Hebron churches came to be known as the Hillsboro Mission. It was later resolved that "Orange" be substituted for Hillsboro, thus giving the name Orange Mission to the three churches involved. Of the three churches, Chestnut Ridge was the largest. At its inception, the Mission had 214 white members, 1 colored member, 1 itinerant minister, and 3 unstationed preachers.

Continued dissatisfaction with the division of the Orange Circuit led to an attempt in the following year to rejoin the Mission

to the Alamance Circuit, thus reforming the original circuit. This does not seem to have been done, although the name Orange Mission was soon changed to Orange Circuit. In 1863, Salem Church (located in present day Alamance County) was added to the Orange Circuit.

The years immediately following the Civil War were a time of growth for Chestnut Ridge and the entire Circuit. Conference minutes show that around the year 1869, as many as three houses of worship were being built in the Orange Circuit. One of these was at Chestnut Ridge. It is believed that a subscription was taken by Rev. Joe Kennett to build this building as early as 1850. John U. Smith was employed to construct the church, but for some reason it was not completed until 1870. An earlier writer describes the building this way:

"It was first built with the pulpit where it now stands with a small window at the back of the pulpit, and a door on each side of (the) pulpit and one in the opposite end, some dissatisfaction caused a change in (the) pulpit to (the) north side of (the) church, and a small window at the back of it, a door being put in (the) opposite side in front of (the) pulpit. Dissatisfaction again caused a change in (the) pulpit and doors, to their present position."17

With so many changes is it any wonder that it took twenty years to complete the building!

Rev. J. F. Minnis recalls seeing this old building prior to its removal around

1906. The one room frame structure had two doors, one used by the men upon entering, the other by the women and children. Inside, a partition as high as the backs of the pews divided the sanctuary, separating the two groups during worship. The pulpit from this house of worship is presently located in the vestibule of Chestnut Ridge Church.

The third structure, after the original log meeting-house and the building of 1870, was constructed in 1906. This roomy, white, frame building, with a commanding tower entry on its southeast corner, was graced by a dry flagstone wall similar to the one presently fronting the church's cemetery. For many today this building brings back fond memories of fellowship, worship, and the first stirrings of the Spirit in their lives.

Initially, plans were made to remodel the 1870 structure. Then an unexpected occurrence halted these plans. Later, it was decided that a new building would be built to replace the old one.

We find an explanation of the incident which caused the halt of plans to remodel the church in 1906 written by a Circuit reporter in OUR CHURCH RECORD (The METHODIST PROTESTANT HERALD) in November, 1906:

"Just as the work was to have begun, we had the misfortune to have our dormitory at Chestnut Ridge Institute destroyed by fire and failed to get any insurance to rebuild. It was decided to postpone our church and rebuild the dormitory, hence the delay in (the) church. The people united and have another

handsome building erected on the same site, and the school is now in rapid progress, an enrollment of 75. Now we are going ahead with our church and it is believed that a new one will be erected instead of remodeling our old one."18

This school, variously called the Chestnut Ridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge High School, and the (Chestnut) Oak Ridge Institute, was located at the Buckhorn crossroad near Chestnut Ridge Church. Though it was not a denominational school, its supporters, students, and teachers were mostly Methodist. The members of Chestnut Ridge Church seem to have had much to do with its founding and continued operation. At times, ministers from Chestnut Ridge Church served as teachers and principals of the school. The Institute served on several occasions as the initial source of educational preparation for men entering the ministry from the Ridge congregation. Mentioned in Conference Minutes as early as 1887, Chestnut Ridge Institute was still in operation in the early decades of the Twentieth Century.

The 1906 church building stood until 1959 when the present building was occupied. Under the leadership of two of the Church's pastors, Rev. James R. Hailey and the Rev. Gayle T. Alexander, the present facility was planned and constructed at a cost of approximately \$45,000.

At the second Quarterly Conference of the Orange Circuit, in May of 1887, a motion was passed to purchase two acres of land for the purpose of building a parsonage. On October 20, 1888, a motion was adopted to build a parsonage and a plan was approved.

It was decided that the parsonage should be located at the Buckhorn road crossing. Then, in 1891, the parsonage yet unbuilt, a motion was again made upon recommendation of the parsonage committee to construct a residence for the pastor, but the motion was lost. Again in 1895, efforts were initiated to plan and build a parsonage for the Circuit. In 1898, it was decided that the parsonage would be built at Efland using existing plans. A deed for land in Efland was secured and funds were solicited for the project. Still without a parsonage, the Quarterly Conference voted in September of 1908 to build a parsonage back at the original Buckhorn location. This was done, and the house was completed in 1909-10. This first parsonage for the Orange Circuit still is standing today and in recent years has been owned and occupied by Roy and Estelle Dodson.

The Circuit's second parsonage was located in Efland. Then in subsequent years, Chestnut Ridge and Hebron shared a parsonage. Finally, in 1962, Chestnut Ridge was made a station charge. A new parsonage was completed in 1964 under the guidance of Rev. J. F. Minnis. This house is located next to the present Chestnut Ridge church building.

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Chestnut Ridge Church has seen a number of its members enter the Christian ministry. The earliest seems to have been J.D. Williams. Williams was granted a license to preach by the fourth Quarterly Conference of the Orange Circuit on October 22, 1892, and was subsequently recommended by the Quarterly Conference to the Annual Conference for itinerancy

and orders on November 11, 1893. Others entering the ministry after an association with the Chestnut Ridge congregation include D. R. Williams, T. A. Williams, Caldwell Williams (who became a member of the Baptist denomination), S. G. Dodson, Jr., M. Ivey Crutchfield, Felix Sykes, Willard C. Clark, Roland Stubbins, O. B. Williams, Jesse F. Minnis, and Ronald Thompson.

The following recommendation for the licensing of Brother J. F. Sykes (c. 1905-06) has been found in the minutes of the Orange Circuit Quarterly Conference:

"Owing to the fact that Bro. J.F. Sykes has been a follower of Christ for so short a time, and owing to the fact that he has been in school so little, and because his examination was so much better than we had expected, we therefore recommend that he be licensed to preach the gospel of Christ. But we most earnestly urge that he be watchful and careful in his life, give himself to earnest prayer, and to careful study of the Word, and also of his text books."¹⁹

The recommendation was signed by (Rev.) A. G. Dixon, George F. Crutchfield, J. S. Pender, W. A. Davies, and S. T. Forrest.

Certainly, some of these men who felt the call to ministry in God's Church were greatly influenced by the preaching of the circuit riders and revivalists of their day, many of whom passed through the oak shaded grounds at the Ridge. Perhaps it was one of these great orators of the Word who was in the mind of young Roland Stubbins the

day his preaching nearly got the best of him.

It is told that as a boy, Brother Stubbins practiced preaching while standing on the end of an upturned barrel. One day he preached so hard he stomped his way right through the barrel and onto the ground. Some say that the shock from the fall was so great that he forgot what he was doing and came up preaching a different kind of message with words preachers were not supposed to know!

One of the outstanding contributions made by those who entered the ministry by way of the Chestnut Ridge congregation was by Jesse F. Minnis and his wife Meryl. Rev. and Mrs. Minnis served as missionaries to the Church in India for more than thirty years through the auspices of the Methodist Protestant Church. Upon returning to the United States, Rev. Minnis pastored several churches in the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church, including Chestnut Ridge during the period when the present parsonage was being built.

Chestnut Ridge Church has always found a determined strength in its laity. Perhaps that in itself has been an essential ingredient in the raising up of so many ministers from its collected family. But so many have served the church well right at home. The Church's very beginnings are traced to Samuel Smith, a concerned lay person. In its first century, individuals like Cicero Jones, a respected leader in local church and Conference affairs, and the evangelistic song leader, T. O. Pender, stand out as exemplary models of the Church's lay strength.

In more recent years, concerned lay people again recognized a need of the church and gave themselves to the task of seeing the need fulfilled.

For years, the church cemetery, which had been used by the Ridge Church and the community since as early as 1839, had suffered from neglect and the effects of time and weather. Graves were overgrown by brush and weeds which had been allowed to flourish on this hallowed ground. The superbly laid dry rock wall, built by church families and their slaves in the Nineteenth Century, and which at the time enclosed the cemetery on all sides, had fallen into disrepair.

Moved by the pitiable condition of the once beautiful cemetery, a group of concerned and determined congregation members, led by the efforts of Teresa Sykes and her brother Gera P. Sykes, organized the Chestnut Ridge Memorial Association.

The first meeting of the Association was held at the home of Chester A. Sykes on Sunday, August 3, 1941. G. P. Sykes was elected president of the Memorial Association. Teresa Sykes was elected secretary, with Mrs. L. S. Hastings serving as treasurer. Present at this first meeting were E. L. Cheek, O. F. Jones, G. P. Sykes, J.F.A. Thompson, T. O. Pender, Chester A. Sykes, Mrs. L. S. Hastings, and Teresa Sykes. Mr. G. P. Sykes continued to serve as president of the Association until poor health hindered his effort in recent years.

In 1942, a driveway was cut along the south wall of the cemetery and a new section, more than doubling the size of the

cemetery, was added. Efforts were made to clear unwanted plants and debris from the property and a regular schedule of care was begun. In the late 1960's, the north, south, and east walls of the cemetery were removed. The west wall was moved closer to the road, this time reconstructed with mortar, and the remaining stones from the other walls were used to continue this wall along the front of the new section of the cemetery. A flagpole was donated in this period by the family of Danny Ray following his death during the Vietnam War. In recent years the road, once bisecting the two sections of the cemetery, was extended around the perimeter.

The Memorial Association has funded its work through memorial offerings made during Homecoming and Memorial Day services and by individual contributions given throughout the years since its inception. Certainly, the efforts of this dedicated group have given to Chestnut Ridge Church one of the most beautiful cemeteries in all of Orange County.

Mr. G. P. Sykes, the longtime president of the Memorial Association, was also instrumental in the establishment of Camp Chestnut Ridge. The camp, owned and operated by the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, is a residential and retreat camping facility located on nearly 350 acres of land adjacent to Chestnut Ridge Church. Mr. Sykes, a landowner and tree-farmer, along with his wife Ruby, both laymen dedicated to the advancement of the Methodist cause, made a donation of 84 acres of land to the Conference for the purpose of building the camp.

In 1959, Robert E. Reed of Smithfield was selected as Superintendent of Camping for the Conference. The first campers used the facility that same year. Soon thereafter, Bob "Pop" Reed, his wife Fannie, and their family became active members of Chestnut Ridge Church.

The building of Camp Chestnut Ridge was greatly supported by member congregations of the Burlington and Durham Districts through the sale of so-called "Investment Bonds" and through private contributions. It remains today as one of the most used facilities for retreat and camping groups in the North Carolina Conference.

In addition to the individuals and groups of lay people mentioned above who have given much to Chestnut Ridge Church through their dedication and work, we must add the tireless efforts of the women of the congregation.

Nothing is known of the earliest organization of the women at the Ridge though it is believed that a group known as the Ladies' Aid was meeting in the late 1800's. Around 1911, during the pastorate of Rev. R. C. Stubbins, the Ladies' Auxiliary was organized which was composed of two circles, one at Buckhorn, and the other nearer the church. These units were active until around 1939. Following an inactive period during the 1940's, the women were reorganized in November of 1949 at the home of one of the members under the leadership of Mrs. L.S. Hastings. This was during the pastorate of Rev. D. K. Christenberry, Jr. This group has continued to meet regularly since that time, first as the Women's Society of Christian Service (W.S.C.S.) and presently as the United Methodist Women (U.M.W.).

Funds raised by these groups have been used throughout the years for the support of missions and local church improvement. Regular contributions have been made to the mission work of the Church and aid was given to the Elon Home for Children during the Superintendency of Rev. A. G. Dixon, a former Chestnut Ridge pastor. This group has been twice responsible for the initiation of projects to carpet the church sanctuary. In addition, the women have in the past provided for an organ, a piano, and chancel furnishings. They have also raised funds for the construction of the present church building and parsonage.

The members of the womens' organization have and do continue to offer a significant ministry to the church and community through their numerous visits to the sick and shut-ins. Members and supporters of the work of the United Methodist Women who have made outstanding contributions through their commitment to the organization's work have been recognized by the presentation of Life Membership pins each year since 1967.

The life, ministry, and history of Chestnut Ridge Church is richer because of the efforts of its women.

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From its beginnings as a reformist Methodist Protestant society, Chestnut Ridge Church has followed the denomination in significant moves toward unity among Methodists. In 1939, the Methodist Protestants, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church South united to form

the Methodist Church. In 1968, the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to begin the United Methodist denomination. Chestnut Ridge followed these movements toward union in each case.

Although no longer as large in membership as it once was, nor as influential as at times past in matters of the greater Church, Chestnut Ridge Church remains a "true vine" to its community and to the United Methodist Church.

The richness of its one hundred and fifty years of history is certainly to be credited for much of the vitality which remains in its commitment to Christ and His mission. From a wilderness has been carved a beautiful place. From a people torn by differences and injured by intolerance a century and a half ago have come a people united. The footsteps of circuit rider, evangelist, preacher, and saint have touched the now hallowed ground underneath the majestic Chestnut Oaks for many years and one can hardly walk their path and not feel their presence today.

But history alone must not become the foundation of the continued faith of this community of God's people. Those who are now in this place and those who are yet to fill its halls and worship in its sanctuary must continue to add pages to this history. The journey from 1832 to the present seems long, but is only a beginning. God's Spirit still moves on the Ridge. God has much yet for this people to do.

September 1982

ENDNOTES

¹This information comes from an historical sketch of Chestnut Ridge Church written by an unknown author around 1900. The writer may have been Walter A. Bunch, pastor of the Orange Circuit at the time. Other notes will refer to this sketch as the Bunch history.

²James H. Christie, The Methodist Protestant (October 1832): 338.

³Ibid.

⁴Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church (Baltimore: Methodist Protestant Church, 1831), pp. 17-18.

⁵Alexander Albright, The Methodist Protestant 2, No. 42 (October 19, 1832): 330.

⁶Alson Gray, The Methodist Protestant 3, No. 41 (October 11, 1833): 328.

⁷Ibid.

⁸This deed is recorded at the Orange County Register of Deeds Office in Hillsborough, North Carolina, Book 26, p. 209.

⁹Alson Gray, The Methodist Protestant 3, No. 41 (October 11, 1833): 322.

¹⁰Willis Harris, The Methodist Protestant 3, No. 41 (October 11, 1833): 322.

¹¹Alson Gray, The Methodist Protestant 1, No. 34 (January 28, 1835): 268.

¹²James Cheek, Footprints of a Human Life (published by the author): 64-66.

¹³In 1979, an iron staple used for hitching the horses of those attending services at the Ridge to a tree was found deeply embedded in a felled Chestnut Oak located on the west side of the present building.

¹⁴T. H. Pegram, Conference Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, 1864.

¹⁵J. L. Michaux, Conference Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, 1867.

¹⁶William H. Wills, Conference Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, 1860.

¹⁷Bunch history.

¹⁸Our Church Record (The Methodist Protestant Herald) 13, No. 2 (November 15, 1906): 4.

¹⁹This recommendation is a hand written note which was found between the pages of the Quarterly Conference Minutes of the Orange Circuit for the years 1905-1906. With it was another recommendation to the ministry for T. A. Williams.

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Some of the information regarding the history of Chestnut Ridge Church found in this history was previously researched and recorded by individuals interested in the preservation of the story of these pioneer Methodist people. These writers include

Reverend Neil McDavid and Reverend Michael Hale, former pastors of Chestnut Ridge Church, and Ruth Cheek, who updated the so-called "Bunch History" in the 1940's.

MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED
CHESTNUT RIDGE CHURCH SINCE 1832

1832 - 1834	Charles Loveland Cooley
1834 - 1887	Between these years the following ministers are thought to have served Chestnut Ridge Church: Robert R. Prather Rev. McCoin Rev. Neese J. W. Heath F. S. Gladson James Deans Joe Kennett A. W. Lineberry Rev. Forbis James Riley Ball Rev. Hurst C. F. Harris R. R. Micheaux T. F. McCulloch W. W. Amick Rev. Whittaker C. A. Cecil
1887 - 1890	D. A. Highfill
1890 - 1891	C. A. Pickens
1891 - 1894	W. F. Kennett
1894 - 1899	William M. Pike
1899 - 1900	D. A. Highfill
1900 - 1901	Walter A. Bunch
1901 - 1902	Unsupplied

(Roll of Ministers continued)

1902 - 1905	W. D. Fogleman
1905 - 1906	A. G. Dixon
1906 - 1907	William M. Pike
1907 - 1908	Unsupplied
1908 - 1910	Homer Casto
1910 - 1911	Albert H. Bryans
1911 - 1914	Roland C. Stubbins
1914 - 1915	J. A. Burgess
1915 - 1916	C. L. Whitaker
1916 - 1917	Unsupplied
1917 - 1920	H. F. Surratt
1920 - 1923	H. L. Powell
1923 - 1924	Roland C. Stubbins
1924 - 1936	B. M. Williams
1936 - 1937	H. F. Fogleman
1937 - 1942	C. P. Morris
1942 - 1945	E. H. Measamer
1945 - 1948	T. W. Lee
1948 - 1952	D. K. Christenberry, Jr.
1952 - 1954	James R. Hailey
1954 - 1955	Vance Lewis

(Roll of Ministers continued)

1955 - 1956	W. Keith McCord
1956 - 1962	Gayle Thomas Alexander
1962 - 1964	Jesse F. Minnis
1964 - 1966	James Oliver
1966 - 1969	James P. Clodfelter Jr.
1969 - 1973	Robert Neil McDavid
1973 - 1975	Michael L. Hale
1975 - 1978	Phillip Edwin Sims
1978 - 1980	Stephen Charles Compton
1980 -	David P. Sparrow