

A HISTORY OF  
Chestnut Street Methodist Church  
IN LUMBERTON



1949

LUMBERTON, NORTH CAROLINA

A History of  
**Chestnut Street Methodist Church**

in Lumberton

Prepared by

THE JUNIOR DEPARTMENT OF  
Chestnut Street Methodist Church School

Rev. F. D. Hedden, Pastor

1949

Lumberton, N. C.

## FORWARD

This little book was begun as a project of the Junior Department in Vacation Church School in the summer of 1948. Due to the polio epidemic that summer, completion of the book was delayed until this summer.

The department is happy to present this book to the congregation on this Dedication Day for the new educational building September 25, 1949.

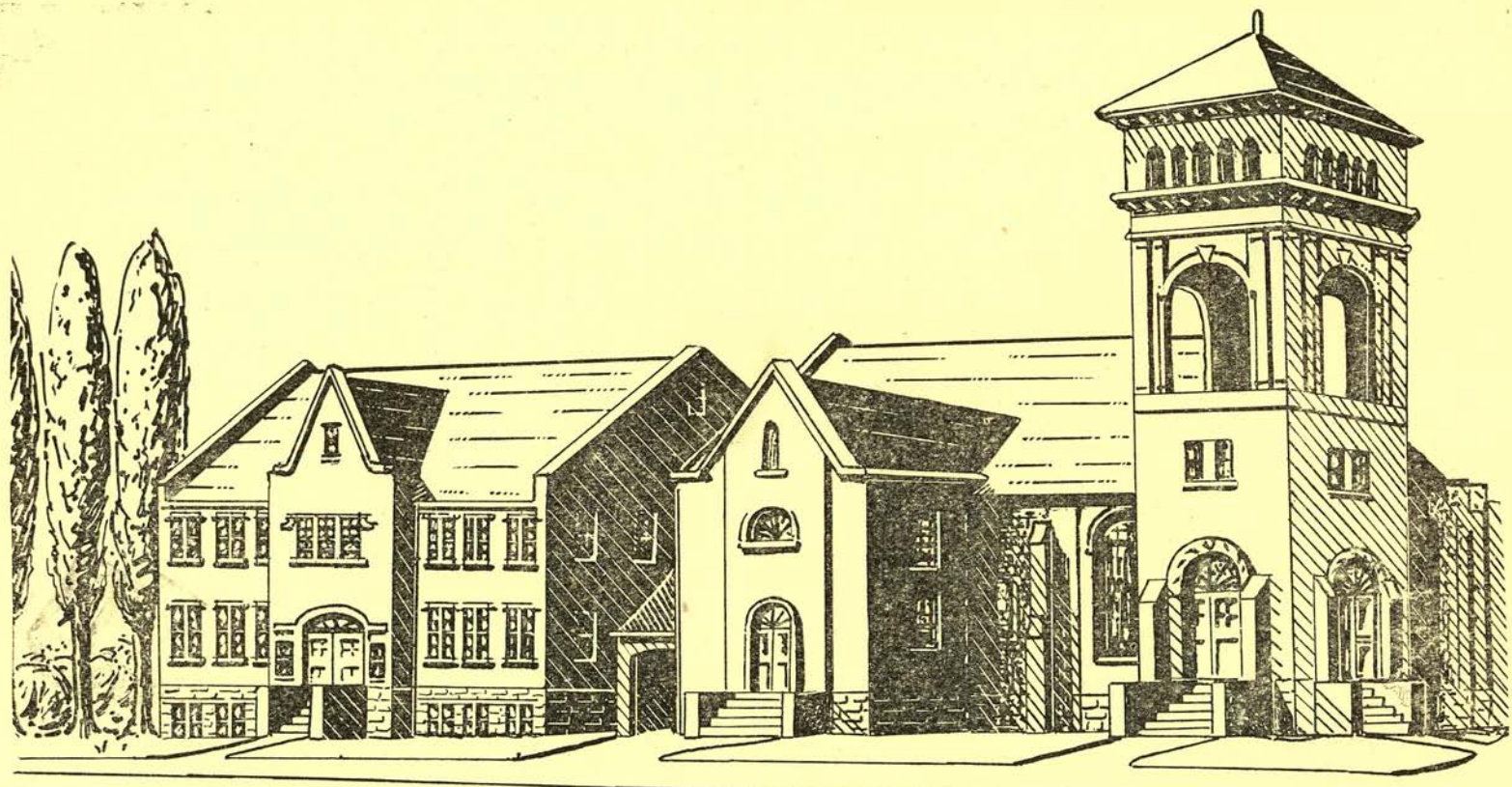
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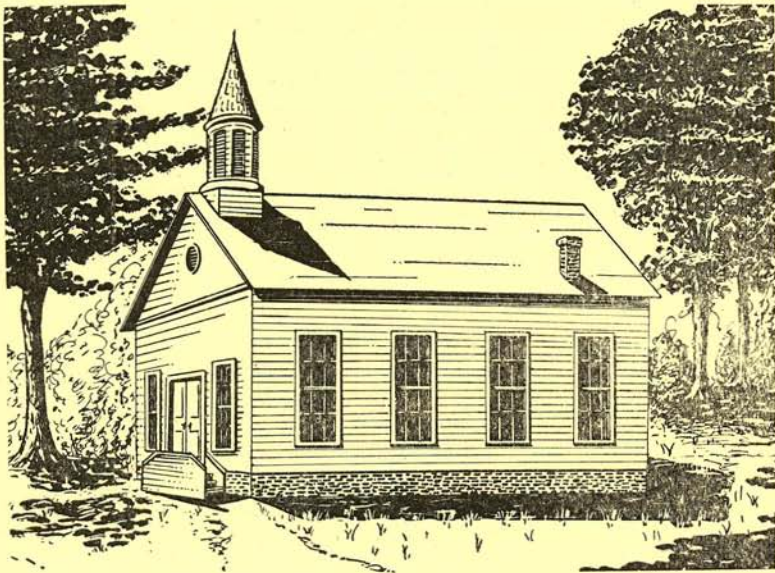
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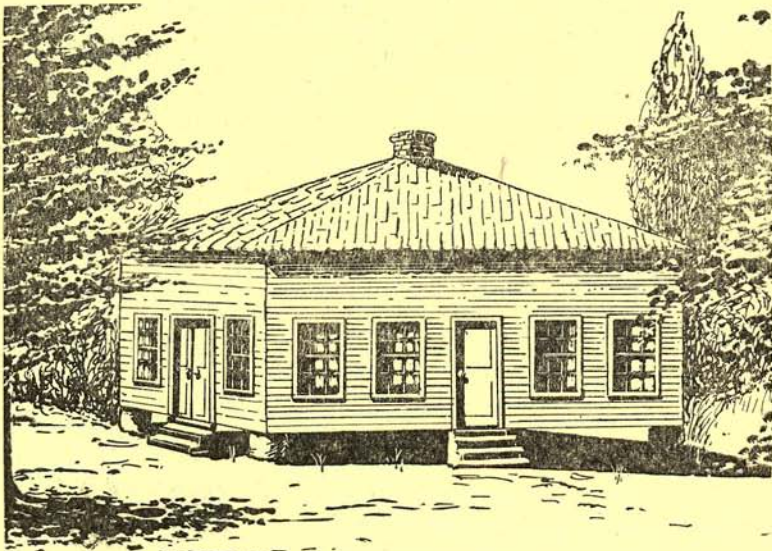
WRITERS: Sara Hamilton and Sarah Hall Goodwin.



Chestnut Street Methodist Church and Educational Building today.



Second church building, which stood on the corner of Chestnut and Seventh streets, where N. P. Andrews home now is located. Used from about 1879 until 1913.



First known Methodist church in Lumberton, which was located on Water street between the gully and Eighth Street. Used until about 1879.

## A History of the Methodist Church in Lumberton

Chestnut Street Methodist Church is the oldest church in Lumberton, and there are good reasons for believing that it is as old as the town and county in which it is located. But the exact date of the beginning of the Methodist church in Lumberton, or "society" as it was called then, has been lost sight of in the 150 or more years that have rolled by since that day.

The Lumberton Methodist church was originally included in the South Carolina conference as a part of the Robeson circuit, but since records were often improperly kept and often lost, little is known about its organization and activity in those early days. There are some records preserved, however, that show the general, though not exact, time of the founding of the church. The late C. B. Townsend wrote a brief sketch of the church's history about 1923, stating that the traditions held by early inhabitants of the town showed that this church was one of the oldest in Robeson county, dating back to the formation of the county in 1786 and the beginning of the town of Lumberton in 1787.

Bishop Francis Asbury, the first Methodist bishop in America, who traveled on horseback over much of the eastern United States visiting Methodist groups, mentions several visits to Lumberton in his **Journal**. On Sunday, March 11, 1787, he wrote that he "preached at Robinson's new court-house," but makes no mention of a Methodist society. The county of Robeson had been created the year before, but the court action which gave General John Willis permission to establish on his lands a town to be called Lumberton was not given until May 12, two months after Asbury's visit. It was 16 years later before Asbury visited Lumberton again, according to his **Journal**. He describes Lumberton at that time as having "about twenty families, and a hundred buildings; an academy, which serves also as a church; a very good prison, and a court house, it being the county town of Robinson. . . . We have a small society in this town." Asbury mentions stopping at Lumberton for overnight "lodging" or for meals at five more occasions up to 1813, but has nothing further to say about the church.

It is likely, therefore, that the Methodist church in Lumberton was organized some time between 1787 and 1803, probably soon after 1787. It is remotely possible that a society existed before Asbury's visit, but later organization seems more likely. Thus this church has a history of 150 years or more.

### FIRST CHURCH

Was the academy which served also as a church noted by Bishop Asbury on his visit here in 1803 the first of the three Methodist churches that are known to have stood in Lumberton? There are some reasons for thinking that it is. Mr. Townsend wrote in 1927 that this building, which was located on Water street between the gully and Sixth street, had stood there "as far back as there is any authentic history of Lumberton." It is recalled by several older Lumberton citizens that this church building was also used as a school during the span of their memory or that of their parents. Then, too, the church-and-school building mentioned by Asbury was necessarily used by Methodists, since other churches do not have histories dating back that far.

This first church, located near or on the site of the present J. H. Floyd house, is mentioned in a deed in 1850, when Dr. R. C. Rhodes sold 3,000 acres of land, including all of Lumberton north of the Elizabethtown Road. He had either given or provided the land for the church, since the deed excepts a small lot "where now stands the Methodist church."

Recollections of life-long members of the church and other local citizens preserve for us the picture of a one-room, wooden building, unpainted inside and out. It had no steeple, but a large bell hung in the churchyard. According to some, this bell is the same that now calls worshipers to the present church, having been put in the steeple of the second, then the third building. Inside the first building the pulpit stood at one end surrounded by a rustic altar, which is said to have been built by Dr. Rhodes with his own hands. No flowers decorated the altar, and the seating arrangement placed men on one side and women on the other. There was no lighting in the church; members brought their own lamps and candles. When the church was used as a school building during the week, there was a partition so that the principal could teach on one side and a teacher on the other.

Present-day church members probably would find religious practices rather different. Until 1865 or later, as in most Southern Protestant churches, there were Negro members, who sat on one side of the church in a place especially provided for them. It is said that members were much more reverent than today and that there was no talking in the church. There was much shouting, however, when worshipers were stirred by the long sermons preached or by older members' accounts of their experiences during the "love feasts." It is recalled that one revival or "protracted meeting" in this church lasted two months.

It is surprising to modern Methodists to learn the large number of churches served by one pastor. R. C. Lawrence in his book, **The State of Robeson**, mentions two outstanding Methodist preachers who very probably served this Lumberton church. Before the Civil War Peter Daub was pastor of the Asbury church at Raynham and preached to 15 other Methodist congregations in Robeson (undoubtedly including Lumberton). In the years shortly after the war John Tillett also was pastor of 15 churches, probably including Lumberton. Definite information about preachers at this time is not available, since there are no records preserved at the church prior to 1879.

This first church was modern in that it had a library, and as in its present-day successor there was a Sunday school. A ladies' aid society was organized soon after the Civil War, according to a report written by the late Mrs. O. C. Norment in a history of women's work in the N. C. conference published in 1929. Organized under the leadership of Rev. W. S. Chaffin, the society had as its object "to care for their parsonage and to help others when needed and to send supplies to needy ministers. This society grew into the Home Missoin Society, and kept up its work intermittently until the union of the home and foreign work."

Membership in this church included some names familiar because thier children or grandchildren are Lumberton citizens today. Some of the leaders were Bunn Stansel, Bush Blake, Mr. and Mrs. Gus Fuller (parents of Mrs. A. E. White), Mr. and Mrs. John Pope (grandparents of Mr. Hugh A. McAllister).

Two of the first Sunday school superintendents were Junius Townsend (brother of C. B. Townsend) and John Pittman. One of the first organists was Mrs. John McAllister, mother of Mr. Hugh.

## SECOND CHURCH

A deed dated July 10, 1878, is recorded in the Robeson county court house for a lot on the corner of Chestnut and Seventh streets, where the N. P. Andrews home now stands, to the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, south—B. Stansel, W. C. McNeill, Daniel Biggs, Alex Humphrey, Thos. Barker, E. T. Regan, John G. Smith, O. C. Norment, and H. C. Mercer. After the new church building was completed the old church was dismantled and its timber reportedly used in the construction of the J. H. Floyd house on Water Street. The second church, a long wooden structure, was in use for over thirty years, until the present brick structure was erected in 1911-1913.

Many interesting facts are recalled about this church. The bell brought from the old church hung in its steeple. C. B. Townsend personally superintended the building of the steeple to make sure it would be strong enough to hold up the bell. The building was high off the ground, with windows of frosted colored glass. Inside it was lighted by two large lamps and heated by two stoves. Once lightning struck the building, tearing off plastering back of the pulpit and knocking the collection plates to the floor. Since repairs had to wait until cotton could be sold, a red curtain was hung to cover the damage temporarily. When repairs were made a bay window was cut at the spot.

From the time of the second church on, more definite and detailed information about the life and growth of the church is available, since quarterly conference minutes have been preserved since 1879, and other records are available. The local church at this time was known as the Lumberton Methodist church and was one of several churches making up the Lumberton circuit. The other churches were Smiths, Regans, Barkers, Pine Grove, and for a while Red Banks and Salem. At the turn of the century, the total membership of the circuit was around 500, 107 of whom belonged to the Lumberton church.

The church choir was under the leadership of Mrs. O. C. Norment. Singing was accompanied by a pedal organ and later by a vocallion, which was used in the present church until the pipe organ was installed. The late Mrs. C. B. Townsend was organist after Mrs. McAllister. After Mrs. Townsend, her daughter, Mrs. Claudia Spaulding, was organist for nine years. Then, another daughter, Miss Vivian, took the position and served faithfully for 36 years, using both the vocallion and the pipe organ in the present church.

One outstanding event during this period was a great revival led by an evangelist who was a brother of Governor Glenn. The revival outgrew the church and was moved to the old court house. Another event recalled was a sweet potato party given one Halowe'en for the benefit of the Methodist orphanage. Each person brought one potato for every year of his age, and three barrels of potatoes was the result.

During the years of the second church the Christian education program expanded, and at least three new organizations were formed. According to an



old book of minutes, a Woman's Missionary Society was formed by the "ladies of the church" on October 9, 1889. This was probably an outgrowth of the ladies' society organized much earlier. Mrs. L. S. Townsend was elected president, and the charter members were Mmes. J. A. McAllister, J. E. Thompson, L. S. Townsend, G. E. Rancke Sr., S. W. Bennett, O. C. Norment, Misses Ellen Jones and Maggie Johnson. Young people came in for recognition in the formation of an Epworth League in the spring of 1904. This league and one at Barkers for a while were the only two in the Rockingham district. A Bright Jewels society, a missionary group for children, also was organized. An indication of the vigor and growth of the regular Sunday school may be seen in the fact that by 1904 the school was supporting two orphans in the Methodist home.

The first stewards and trustees for the Lumberton church alone were elected in 1904. Previously those two boards had represented the churches of the entire circuit. The first board of stewards included O. C. Norment, Bunn Stansel Sr., C. B. Townsend, A. E. White, J. P. Stansel, and J. B. Pitman. Trustees were the same with the exception of Mr. Pitman.

In 1906, its membership grown to 160, the local church was made a station (it was now the only one served by its pastor) under the name, Chestnut Street Methodist church. Membership now began to grow rapidly. From 1907 to 1911, when Rev. E. M. Hoyle was pastor, church membership increased 60 percent and the Sunday school about 300 percent. This tendency to expansion was not kept within the local church, for the members had evangelistic fervor that reached beyond their own group. Soon after the church became a station, local leaders helped to organize in 1909-1911 churches at East Lumberton, West Lumberton, and in St. Pauls. These three were part of the Lumberton charge as missions for several years.

Another indication of growth during this period can be seen in financial contributions of the church. In 1879 the entire circuit, including five or six churches, gave a total of less than \$1,000, of which \$700 was the pastor's salary. Lumberton alone gave a total of \$6,499, in 1911. In that year almost half given went to the building fund, and the pastor's salary was \$1,000.

Increased thus in membership and wealth and in its organization, Chestnut Street congregation early in 1913 moved into its new brick church and also into the third phase of its history.

### THIRD CHURCH

Bishop John C. Kilgore, former president of Trinity College (now Duke University), preached at the dedication of the new church, which was not held until 1917. The building cost \$30,000 and was built on the lot formerly occupied by the parsonage.

The parsonage, incidentally, was moved to the adjoining lot, and when no longer needed as the pastor's home, was used from 1934-1948 as a Sunday school annex. It was torn down when excavation for the present educational building was begun. The present parsonage, purchased in 1927 still contains some furniture, including a Victorian love seat, reportedly given by the McNeill family of Moss Neck church (the present Pembroke church), which was long ago a part of the Lumberton circuit.

The church continued its development in its new home. A Cradle Roll for the Sunday school was started in 1912. The Epworth League was reorganized in 1912 under the direction of the late W. J. DuBois, and in 1913 a Junior League was begun. A Young Ladies' Missionary Society was also started by 1915. A Methodist Men's Club, organized with 60 members in 1921, contributed to church life for a while. Though disbanded during World War I the young people's groups had recovered their vitality sufficiently by 1924 to have a larger delegation at the assembly at Morehead City than any other church in the conference. The church maintained an interest in and helped support the East Lumberton church as late as 1919.

Membership grew steadily from 279 in 1913 to 463 by 1929. The pastor's salary increased from \$1,150 in 1913 to \$3,300 in 1929.

The spiritual state of the church also was reported favorably during these two decades (1911-1930). Dr. W. B. North, pastor from 1913-1917, reported to the quarterly conference on August 2, 1914: "Our church services are attended remarkably well. . . . The attendance at prayer meeting has gradually increased all year." Rev. T. McM. Grant, who served from 1923 to 1927, observed in August, 1924: "It is our firm belief that the spiritual condition of our church is above the average. . . . Our people are ready to testify for Jesus. They are giving their time in many cases to conducting prayer meetings and assisting in a very positive manner in revival work and are attending the regular services of the church."

Contributing to the spiritual life of the church and community were at least two evangelistic campaigns sponsored by the Methodists. One of these was led by Raymond Browning, former Methodist evangelist now living in Oklahoma, who preached to large crowds in a tent located on Elm street on the site of the present John C. Fuller home. This revival took place in October, 1913. Later McKendree Long began preaching in March, 1930, in the Methodist church. Such large crowds attended that the meeting was moved first to the high school building and later to a tobacco warehouse. These services continued for a total of seven weeks, during which time great crowds attended and a whole city was deeply stirred.

At the beginning of the thirties the Lumberton church was transferred from the Rockingham to the Wilmington district and entered the era which was to see a depression and another world war.

The program of Christian education was expanded with the initiation of a Daily Vacation Bible church in the summer of 1933. This has been a yearly event since. Unification of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, with the northern Methodists and Methodist Protestants in 1939 brought some changes in local organization. The Epworth League became the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and the Woman's Missionary Society was reorganized on September 11, 1940, as the Woman's Society of Christian Service. Mrs. Frank Moore was elected president, and 104 members were enrolled.

The war years brought new problems to the church members as most of the young men were called from civilian lives to serve in the nation's armed forces around the world. A total of 103 young men and women entered service and their names were listed on the church's Roll of Honor which hung in the vestibule until recently. Of these, four lost their lives: Woodrow Falls, John Coltrane

Fuller Jr., John Franklin McLean, and Hugh Ramsaur. The war years also brought one of the church's two longest pastorates. Rev. Edgar B. Fisher served for six years, 1939-1945, as did an earlier pastor, Dr. R. C. Beamon, from 1917-1923.

A second full-time workers was added to the church staff in August, 1946, when Miss Doris Sutton came to serve as director of religious education. After two years Miss Sutton was succeeded by Miss Frances Southerland, who resigned this summer.

The Christian education program received another boost in 1948, when work was begun on the long-needed educational building. Approval for beginning construction was given at a congregational meeting on Easter Sunday, April 4, 1948, and excavation was started July 13. The building was completed in the summer of 1949, having cost nearly \$100,000.

With the completion of the educational building the church ends another phase of its history. Its membership, wealth, and organization have continued to grow. Reports for 1948 showed total membership to be 766. Total giving for that conference year was \$45,341, including \$4,300 for the pastor's salary and \$29,197 for the building fund. The church school is organized into six departments with Dr. David King Jr. as superintendent. Membership is 403, and there are thirty-three officers and teachers. The Woman's Society of Christian Service includes five circles with a total membership of 99. Mrs. W. W. Parker is president.

Since 1878, from which time records exist, the church has had 26 pastors. So far as can be determined, only one member of this church has entered the Christian ministry: Rev. Dennis Kinlaw, now pastor of the Faison, N. C., charge. Several others have been licensed as local preachers, but apparently he is the only one in full-time service. The church has two "oldest" members in length of membership: Mrs. A. E. White, and Miss Ellen Deese, both of whom joined the church in 1879.

The church thus may look back over long years of service that have paralleled most of this nation's history. There it can be challenged by the devotion and faith of many who have gone before. It can also learn through the mistakes of the past. But Chestnut Street Methodist church has more than a backward look. It may choose through renewed consecration to Jesus Christ a future of greater service to God and man. It may well pray with the hymn writer:

"God of grace and God of glory  
On Thy people pour Thy power;  
Crown Thine ancient church's story;  
Bring her bud to glorious flower.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
For the facing of this hour."

## PASTORS OF THE CHURCH\*

Daniel May .....	1878-1881
Andrew P. Tyre .....	1881-1883
W. S. Chaffin .....	1883-1884
J. T. Finlayson .....	1884-1888
J. Ed Thompson .....	1888-1890
F. B. McCall .....	1890-1893
B. B. Culbreth .....	1893-1894
J. D. Bundy .....	1894-1898
W. J. Crowson .....	1898-1899
J. P. Pate .....	1899-1903
Z. Paris .....	1903-1906
P. L. Kirton .....	1906-1907
E. M. Hoyle .....	1907-1911
J. W. Bradley .....	1911-1913
Dr. W. B. North .....	1913-1917
Dr. R. C. Beaman .....	1917-1923
T. McM. Grant .....	1923-1927
E. H. McWhorter .....	1927-1929
R. A. Swaringan .....	1929-1930
W. P. Watkins .....	1930-1932
B. B. Slaughter .....	1932-1935
T. G. Vickers .....	1935-1939
E. B. Fisher .....	1939-1945
F. W. Paschall .....	1945-1947
H. L. Hendricks .....	1947-1948
F. D. Hedden .....	1948-

\*Records are not available for pastors before 1878.

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