

THE COLLINS CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

C. Franklin Grill, Conference Historian

Late in 1958, the Reverend Doctor F. Lowry, native Lumbee and retired school teacher, was the appointed pastor at Ashpole Church. While there he began a venture into the northern part of Robeson County near Lumber Bridge to preach to his native Lumbees and encourage them to assemble into a small mission in order to become a church. The response was slow and difficult but through respect for the kind pastor whose goal in life was to found Lumbee churches, some people did begin to meet. He solicited the support of Dr. J. E. Garlington, superintendent of the Wilmington District and pictured a bright future for this church in an area that until now was not serving his people. Since the North Carolina Conference was at the time in the midst of a church extension explosion, Garlington listened to these overtures and saw how such a promising new congregation fit into the program for founding new churches.

Out of a small number of Sunday school classes with a total of about forty-seven persons, people were called to become the first charter members of a new church. At a small ceremony held on May 1, 1959, the Rev. D. F. Lowry and Dr. J. E. Garlington organized a native American congregation of fifteen members at Lumber Bridge in Robeson County.

Other agents in the early foundation of the congregation, in addition to Lowry and Garlington were Dr. Thomas A. Collins, then executive director of the Conference Board of Missions and Dr. O. L. Hathaway, who succeeded Collins in that capacity in 1959. Collins was instrumental in securing an ARMCO steel building from ARMCO Drainage and Metal Products, Inc. of Atlanta, Georgia and had it erected by local labor on a lot about two and a half miles south of Lumber Bridge purchased by the Board of Missions, Inc. on November 11, 1958 from Ellen Collins and held by the board for use by the new congregation. The church was named in honor of the family that provided the land for the new building.

That particular site has been the continuous location of Collins Chapel church although several additions have been made to the steel building. On September 8, 1978, the original site located near the intersection of county roads 1750 and 1749 was finally deeded to William A. Locklear, Everett McNeil, Dollie Locklear and Franklin Collins, trustees of Collins Chapel United Methodist Church. It contains about an acre of land.

D. F. Lowry continued to be vitally interested in the growth of the new congregation and garnered support for the faithful while witnessing to the unfaithful to "mend their ways" and live for God and become a part of the fledgling congregation which sang, prayed and shared inside of the steel chapel. He solicited financial support from every quarter to aid with the meager resources provided by the people. Such was his style as Lowry enabled the beginning of Collins Chapel and several other Lumbée churches throughout Robeson County. In all, Lowry preached in about twelve churches, several of which he organized, and most of which he at some time served as pastor and never got outside of Robeson and Bladen County. Two of his churches were just across the line from Robeson in South Carolina.

Another early advocate for Lumbee work among the Methodists was the Rev. Hampton Anderson, a Choctaw Indian, former district superintendent at the Oklahoma Indian Mission and a consultant with the Division of National Missions of the Board of Missions of The Methodist Church in Philadelphia. On a visit to the Lumbee Methodist churches in the area, he met the new congregation at Lumber Bridge in 1962 and prepared an incisive report for Dr. Allen B. Rice, executive secretary of the National Division of the Board of Missions of the General Church. His summary of the state of the church and the promise for the future of Methodism among the Lumbees is included here in order to provide an on-site report of the desire of the Reverend Clyde S. Boggs, presently superintendent of the district, to qualify the ministers educationally and try to seek a union of the Holiness Methodist churches and the Conference churches into a stronger Methodism.

December 4, 1962.

Dr. Allen B. Rice
Executive Secretary, Home Section
Division of National Missions
1701 Arch Street
Philadelphia 3, Pennsylvania.

Dear Doctor Rice:

During my visit to the Lumbee Indians, which is a geographical rather than a tribal designation, I was afforded considerable opportunity to study the situation regarding present work and the possibility of extending that work through union with the Methodist Holiness churches.

Reverend Clyde S. Boggs, the District Superintendent, met me at Fayetteville and took me to several of our churches that afternoon and we had a profitable visit with Reverend Doctor Lowery. It was a real pleasure for me to renew my acquaintance with him and gain some first-hand information about the history of the Methodist Church among the Lumbee people. The next day we visited some more churches and got to meet some of the members. Reverend Boggs was most helpful with ideas about future procedures and, in every way, gave evidence of his keen desire to promote the work.

As you are aware, one of the regular Methodist churches is First Church, Pembroke. In that church the membership consists almost entirely of Lumbee Indians but it also serves members of the faculty and student bodies of a local college and some non-Indians of the town. It is possible for the people of this church to catch a vision of the great service they can render the total Indian community. For the present, however, I am in agreement with the District Superintendent that First Church should be excluded from the program he has in mind for the remainder of the Lumbee churches.

Reverend Boggs called on all of the pastors and others interested to meet at First Church, Pembroke, on Friday morning, to discuss plans for the future of their people and churches. After discussion of matters in general, Reverend Boggs posed two questions: 1) Shall our churches seek a closer relationship with the ministers and members of the Methodist Holiness Church which may lead to union? and 2) Would they welcome a sub-district for the rural Lumbee churches as now constituted and, in the event of union, would they favor the possible establishment of an Indian district within the Conference and, in either case, under Indian leadership? The answer to each question was an emphatic "yes", and I gained the impression that they are will to do whatever is necessary to increase activity and more concerted action.

Brother Boggs explained that other portions of the district are operating under sub-district leadership and, in line with that practice, he announced that the rural Lumbee churches would henceforth be a sub-district. As the ministers listened to this announcement, I could sense that it was a

a great moment and one for which some of them had been patiently waiting for quite a long time. The District Superintendent then outlined a three-point program for sub-district leadership: 1) Induce every preacher with a college degree to take the course of study to qualify for Conference membership; 2) Encourage a closer working relationship between the present rural congregations; and 3) Promote, through conversation and otherwise, a desire on the part of Methodist and Methodist Holiness churches to unite to form a strong sub-district, at least, if not a district of the Conference.

Brother Boggs said he could find no reason for delaying action in initiating the program to which all appeared to be in hearty accord and, with that statement, announced the appointment of Reverend Simeon Cummings as sub-district leader, inasmuch as Brother Cummings is at present the only Indian pastor in full connection with the Conference, but that it is anticipated other Indian pastors will qualify upon completing the course of study. In that eventuality, Brother Boggs stated that sub-district leadership would be on a rotating basis. He further stated that, in the event of union, he would exert every effort to have all of the Lumbee churches set up as one of the districts of the Conference, with an Indian as superintendent.

Reverend Cummings was a bit hesitant about accepting the responsibility of leadership but, after reflection, graciously accepted and said he would do everything possible to carry out the three-point program.

During the course of the conference, Doctor Lowery told us that the Methodist Holiness people separated from the parent body years ago because those then in authority did not look with favor on incorporating all of the Indian churches into a separate district, and said: "Now that Doctor Boggs has set us up as a sub-district with the possibility of becoming a district, the Methodist Holiness people will welcome the opportunity to return".

We were informed that the old Bishop of the Methodist Holiness Church has been retired on account of illness and that he has been succeeded, for one year, by a younger minister who lives in another county. It was also reported that a layman of the Methodist Holiness Church had conducted a recent survey which indicated a willingness on the part of a majority of the ministers and members to seek union with the parent church. With the proposals advanced by Reverend Boggs looking toward the ultimate creation of an Indian district, it would appear that the desire for union should now be much greater, if not unanimous.

It was suggested that a series of joint services for the two groups, with an invitation to all interested persons to attend, would do much to promote harmony and develop a genuine desire for unity. This suggestion was favorably received and it was decided to hold the meeting at Prospect church, starting on April 1 and ending on the following Sunday. The writer was invited to conduct night services and assist during the day with training classes for pastors and other leaders. All agreed to promote the undertaking. From conversations with the ministers and some of the members, I am persuaded that the proposed meeting will do much to cement the ties and build a strong unit of the Conference. The idea of the joint services and school strongly appealed to Reverend Boggs.

Although you are conversant with the general situation, I submit the following factors which appear to me to be of vital significance in considering future plans:

- 1) There are reported to be at least 33,000 Lumbee Indians and most of them live in Robeson county, although there are two congregations just across the line in South Carolina,
- 2) These people trace their ancestry to European forebears and to several Indian tribes, including the Tuscaroras and Cherokees,
- 3) They claim to be Indians and want to be regarded as Indians and not as whites, having obtained governmental recognition as Indians, notwithstanding that the majority are fair complexioned and have every appearance of being all white,
- 4) It would appear that, in the past and perhaps now in some quarters, the dominant society did not and may not now accord them first-class status,
- 5) There are at least 12,000 Lumbee students enrolled in grade and high schools throughout the county,
- 6) It would appear that no more than one-third of the total Indian population is identified with any church, including Methodists, Baptists, Methodist Holiness, and Church of God, but that no native religion or practice prevails among non-Christians,
- 7) Many of these people own land and are well-to-do farmers and tradesmen, far outnumbering the tenant farmer element, although one of the churches is composed almost entirely of tenant families,
- 8) Many have finished high school and the percentage of college graduates is high, bespeaking a wholesome desire for self-improvement.

I was delighted to meet Reverend Robert Mangum of First Church, Pembroke and to learn that he has a strong desire to serve in a missionary capacity to Indian people. I was sorry to learn that he may not freely serve the Indian community and remain obedient to the wishes of the leaders of his church, as was demonstrated when a group ministry was attempted. It came somewhat as a surprise to hear him say that he desired to be relieved of the pastorate of First Church at the end of the current year. It does appear, however, that his ministry has been hampered since, in the last four and one-half year period, the membership of his church reflects a net gain of no more than thirty. Despite that fact, I believe he should have the opportunity to realize his ambition and I am persuaded that he has the ability and talents to render a great service in a strictly mission field.

I concur in Reverend Boggs' announced program and strongly urge every effort to advance its fulfillment.

Sincerely yours,

H. W. Anderson

cc Rev. Clyde S. Boggs. ✓

As a result of the consultation by H. W. Anderson, the National Division of the General Church approved several of the Lumbee churches for subsequent financial grants, salary support and promotion for Advance Special giving. Some of these programs still exist today as the General Church supports ethnic minority congregations and church development.

The practice for church extension in the North Carolina Conference in the 1950's was to place a young promising minister as pastor to a new congregation at a station appointment, so on February 1, 1960 the Reverend Donald Hanks of Orrum was assigned as pastor at Collins Chapel. This appointment lasted only a few months before discovering that a caucasian minister did not have the credibility to lead the native American congregation. The congregation insisted on having Lowry as their pastor, so the Rev. Doctor F. Lowry, the founding pastor, was appointed to serve the congregation on what was then called the Ashpole Circuit.

The next year Lowry secured Johnny Bullard and Oscar Cummings, two local preachers, to assist him and asked the Board of Missions to support them financially. One of the local preachers worked at Collins Chapel and the other at Philadelphus near Red Springs which had been organized just two weeks earlier than the Lumber Bridge church. Lowry appealed to conference funds to pay the local preachers, general church funds to pay for educational and program materials, church extension funds to build classrooms adjacent to the steel building and was unusually successful in these regards. Collins Chapel being a new congregation, it qualified for a Ten Dollar Club grant and Lowry siezed the opportunity to get this commitment.

In 1963 Jakie Locklear was appointed pastor at Collins Chapel. In addition to being a good pastor, Jakie also had mechanical skills. With the financial commitments Lowry had secured, he and Jakie teamed up to get the work started on the brick and block addition. The Reverend LaFon C. Vereen, then executive of the Conference Board of Missions, coordinated the administration of the project, drawing on other sources of funds to supplement the meager building fund.

With the creation of two new districts in the Conference in 1964, the Lumbee churches in Robeson County were transferred from the Wilmington District to the Fayetteville District. Locklear continued as pastor and the work progressed to develop plans for the classroom addition.

Another agent working on behalf of Collins Chapel during this period while building plans were being formulated was the Reverend Simeon Cummings who was serving as pastor of Prospect Church. Meanwhile, church membership reached 72 persons, the highest it had ever been, and a record that was not surpassed for fifteen years. Cummings had contact with the National Division now located in New York, and became a conduit for financial assistance through that agency for funding the building program.

The Reverend French R. Lowry, a retired Lumbee supply preacher, was appointed pastor at Collins Chapel in 1967. At the same time, the Rev. D. F. Lowry was acting as Director of Church Extension for the Pembroke area which meant supporting native American church growth. The time had come to move ahead with the plans to build. Branch Street Church in Lumberton, and Philadelphus in Red Springs, were both removed from the charge in order to concentrate on the building project. Since French Lowry was not reappointed in 1968, it may have become apparent that the only person who could guide this project through was the founder, D. F. Lowry. Once again he was appointed to Collins Chapel as the leader of the flock. It may be simplistic to say, but cannot be overemphasized, that Doctor Lowry was still the beloved pastor championing the cause for his friends at Collins Chapel. Some of his correspondence which is still on record has evidence of his style in soliciting support for the church. One example was his correspondence with Dr. M. Wilson Nesbitt, Director of Church Affairs of The Duke Endowment. Lowry's persistent appeal to this source for funding building projects paid off with a \$6,000.00 grant from the Durham Endowment.

The project to construct the educational facilities was budgeted to cost \$25,000, an energetic program for only 72 members, but D. F. Lowry was the leader.



The Methodist Church

DOCTOR F. LOWRY, MINISTER
PHONE 5411

PEMBROKE, N. C.

Collins
Chapel

August 19, 1969

Dear Brother Nesbit:

Here are the facts in the Collins Chapel building procedure: We began with a little more than \$3,000.00 dollars in the building fund. We went up to the Parole Board, in Raleigh and asked for Lewis Cummings, a former contractor, and a good carpenter and a prisoner for drunken driving; and, they placed him on work release and placed under ~~me~~^{MY} care. I had to drive to the prison camp-10 miles, and from there to the church 10 miles-work 6 hrs. then back to camp, then on home-56 miles daily-for me.

after working the one prisoner for about two weeks, the Supt. at the camp gave us another prisoner, whom was a finished carpenter, then a few weeks later, they assigned a third prisoner who-formerly-was a contractor in building homes in South Carolina, thus giving us three good carpenters on the job at $\frac{1}{2}$ price.

The three men were, viz: Lewis Cummings, brother to Rev. S.F. Cummings, Jas. Chavis, of Pembroke, and Roy Harrison, of Greenville, South Carolina-all of them were good carpenters. I had to pick them up at the prison camp each morning and deliver them back to camp each day-six days to the week. I was not fearful of them-the parole man at Raleigh ~~said~~ told me in case one would run I would not have to shoot him.

I preached to these three prisoners, making good boys of them to the extent that--all three have been set free. two of them were at my church last Sunday for the close of our week's revival. out of ten confessions, we baptized eight-two went to the baptist..(what a pity)

"NOW", this was to be a "PAY AS YOU GO JOB" and if you can't pay don't go. When we spent all the GRANT money--\$4,500.00 plus the local treasury and the 4th Sunday offerings, plus gifts from friends, and the \$2,500.00 loan from the Conference Board; then, in order to keep the work going, my wife and I went to the local bank and borrowed \$4,000.00 and placed it in the Bank of Red Springs-(1st. Union Bank) to the credit of Collins' Bldg. Fund, and the work kept going--we ran out of money again and I personally placed \$600.00 of my own money to the credit of the Bldg Fund--the work went on and lastly I recently put \$400.00 more to the

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The Methodist Church

DOCTOR F. LOWRY, MINISTER

PHONE 5411

PEMBROKE, N. C.

"Patience"

credit
of Collins Bldg.

Fund-tous making a total of
\$5,000.00 deposited to the credit of the
Building Fund for the project. The work didnot stop
until ~~the~~^{it} work was finished. The building
has the secoand paint coat out-
side, and is fully
painted in
side.

*"My type writer
makes errors"*

Finally
not a person has
been able to pass and look
at the work and ask if we had run out
of finance. Its yet a big puzzle to some of the
people in the community now the work kept on going without
a break. It is now a complete turn-key-job, However, we owe some
recent accounts not yet due-pay as you go means every 30
days. We have every thing but the curtains dividing
the two big rooms. Now, Dr. if you will send
your \$6,000.00 grant passed on July 29 70

Brother
La Fon C. Vereen

Raleigh, North Carolina and

have him come down with his ~~\$22,000.00~~
\$2,000.00 from the \$10.00 club grant he and I will
pay in full every thing the church owes
except the loan from the local
Board \$2,500.00

Thanks

D.F.

It is now 12/5 A.M.

"WE NEED MONEY NOW".

Come see us.

D.F.

Midnight

It was during Lowry's three-year pastorate that the building was erected begun with a pledge and commitment of personal funds to launch the project. His eagerness to begin may be seen in correspondence he had with Bishop Paul N. Garber as early as August 15, 1967.

"I am mailing to you a rough sketch of what is desperately needed at once at Collins Chapel. Kindly have Dr. Nesbit, (sic) our architect, and Dr. Eubank (Dr. Graham S. Eubank, Fayetteville District Superintendent) come at their earliest convenience and determine the needs, and prepare the blue-print. Thank you.

Bishop, as you know, Dr. Harry S. Komuro, Executive Secretary Missions and Provisional Annual Conference has money for the Indian projects of the Methodist Churches throughout the U. S. Dr. Komuro's address; 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N. Y. 10027.

It would take quite some time to get money from either the Duke Foundation, Extension Board, or the \$10.00 Club. Now, if you would have Dr. Komuro to appropriate me a 1200.00 supplement salary for this conference year, Mrs. Lowry and I would go to our local bank and borrow \$1200.00 and put the material on the ground at the church as soon as the architect would prepare the blue print and give us the order for the material."

For the completion of the needed classroom space, a loan of \$2,500.00 was secured from the Conference Board of Missions, the first of several such credits used for the completion, furnishing, remodeling and repairing of the present church facility from time to time.

With the creation of the Rockingham District in 1972, the Lumbie churches were placed in that geographic division. Dr. Joyce V. Early was district superintendent and the Reverend William J. Locklear, a part-time lay pastor was appointed preacher. Unfortunately, instead of the church membership growing now that additional facilities were provided, it declined during a three year period to 51. It was quite a day for celebration in the summer of 1973 when the building loan was fully repaid and the congregation was finally debt-free. Philadelphus was again added to the charge, and so it remained, a two-point charge until 1979 when the Robeson County Cooperative Ministry was established under the direction of the Reverend Simeon Cummings for Ashpole Center, Branch Street, Collins Chapel, Fairview, Hickory Grove,

Philadelphus and Sandy Plains churches. The Cooperative Ministry now has the determination of how to deploy variously two or three ministers in addition to the director. The Reverend Jerry Lowry became Director of the Cooperative Ministry in 1985.

The most recent assessments of the condition of the church facilities at Collins Chapel included the need for proper heating and cooling, roof repairs, cracks in the foundation and the need for carpeting. All of these needs are being addressed by the combination of local funds, grants and a Conference loan. The present membership at Collins Chapel is reported at 80 members.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CHARGE</u>	<u>CHURCHES</u>	<u>PASTOR</u>	<u>MEMBERSHIP</u>
1958-59	Wilmington District, Organized May 1, 1959,	Collins Chapel	D. F. Lowry, Ashpole Ct.	15
1959-60	Ashpole Circuit	Ashpole, Collins Chapel	D. F. Lowry	35
1960-61	Ashpole Circuit	Ashpole, Collins Chapel	D. F. Lowry (Feb. 1, 1960; Donald Hanks)	36
1961-62	Collins Chapel	Collins, Philadelphus	D. F. Lowry	47
1962-63	Collins Chapel	Collins, Philadelphus Branch Street	D. F. Lowry	50
1963-64	Fayetteville District Pembroke	Collins, Philadelphus	Jakie Locklear	60
1964-65	Pembroke	Collins, Philadelphus	Jakie Locklear	70
1965-66	Philadelphus	Collins, Philadelphus	Jakie Locklear	71
1966-67	Prospect-Collins Chapel	Prospect, Collins	Jakie Locklear	70
1967-68	Collins Chapel	Collins Chapel	French R. Lowry	72
1968-69	Collins Chapel	Collins Chapel	D. F. Lowry	71
1969-70	Collins Chapel	Collins Chapel	D. F. Lowry	71
1970-71	Collins Chapel	Collins Chapel	D. F. Lowry	45
1971-72	Collins Chapel Rockingham District	Collins Chapel	William J. Locklear	51
1972-73	Collins Chapel	Collins Chapel	William J. Locklear	52

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CHARGE</u>	<u>CHURCHES</u>	<u>PASTOR</u>	<u>MEMBERSHIP</u>
1973-74	Collins Chapel	Collins, Philadelphus	William J. Locklear	52
1974-75	Collins Chapel	Collins, Philadelphus	William J. Locklear	54
1975-76	Collins Chapel-Philadelphus	Collins, Philadelphus	To be supplied (William J. Locklear)	56
1976-77	Collins Chapel-Philadelphus	Collins, Philadelphus	William J. Locklear	56
Note: On August 13, 1977, The Reverend Doctor F. Lowry died at 96 years of age.				
1977-78	Collins Chapel-Philadelphus	Collins, Philadelphus	Wilton R. Cummings	56
1978-79	Collins Chapel-Philadelphus	Collins, Philadelphus	Wilton R. Cummings	57
1979-80	Robeson County Cooperative Ministry	Ashpole Center Branch Street Collins Chapel Fairview Hickory Grove Philadelphus Sandy Plains		59