

## A HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH

Those who would read this history of Cordova United Methodist Church are to be made aware that much effort has been made to insure that what is written is accurate, yet while that statement is made it must also be stated that there are probably inaccuracies. For the compilation of material our gratitude is expressed to Mr. Bill Whitley, Mr. Will Lampley, Mr. J. B. Diggs, Rev. D. D. Traynham, Mr. Lindy Brooks, Mrs. Sandie Leviner, and Mrs. Lucille Lampley. The assistance of these people has been invaluable. Much of this information has been received second hand, for an effort has not been made in previous years to preserve the history of our congregation by having its charter members write about it. Relying only on memory and on what we have heard, surely some omissions have been made; surely there have been some mistakes. For this we apologize and yet we rejoice at being able to present the following as the result of our efforts at knowing about the life of the people of this community.

According to the deed on record at the Richmond County Courthouse, the land on which the original church was built was sold to the trustees of Steele Mills Methodist Episcopal Church, South for ten dollars by the Ledbetter Estate and the Corporation of Steel Mills Manufacturing Company on November 13, 1899. Clearly stated in the deed is that the land was to be "kept, used, and maintained for the use of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South" and that it was for the "erection of a church building, not for a burial place for the dead." The date of the actual building of the church is not known, but the lumber used for its construction was floated down the same river that gave the mill its power source. Prior to the construction of the church building, those people who "desired religion" in this community, many of whom moved here from Anson County to work in the mill, met in a home on Ledbetter Road. Money for the construction of the building came, to a great extent, from work done by the Ladies' Aid Society of the church.

The first church building was a one room, frame structure heated by a large, round wood stove around which was a large box filled with sand into which the men of the church would spit their tobacco as they warmed themselves by the fire. Lighting of the church was done by oil lamps which burned coal oil. Seating was on slat benches on three rows with an additional section known as the "amen corner" from whence men sat and encouraged the preacher. The church was constructed by the men who attended service, and it was done on Saturdays and off days when the mill was closed. At first there was no assigned preacher for the people here, and various ministers of different denominations would come by and hold services. Many of the early preachers of this church came in on horse and buggy and preached at one church and then others on the same day. As more people came to the church and money became available, additional rooms were built on the side and back of the church building for Sunday school space.

Our church was part of what was known as the Richmond Circuit of Methodist churches in its initial days. The churches that were on that circuit were Mizpah, Pee Dee, St. Paul, and Zion in addition to our church, which was known at that time as Steele Mill Methodist Church. In 1917 Midway Church was added to the circuit; all of these churches were served by one pastor. In 1920, Pee Dee and Trinity were taken off the circuit and in 1929 the Richmond Circuit consisted of St. Paul, Steele Mill and Zion. At that time the salary paid the pastor was \$280 per year and the membership of our church was 71.

In 1930, our circuit was absorbed into the Roberdel Circuit along with St. Paul, and we were moved into the Fayetteville District. In 1931 the Roberdel Charge consisted of Beaver Dam, Green Lake, Ledbetter, Roberdel, St. Paul, and Steele Mill. Membership of Steele Mill was up to 136. The value of our property was listed at \$3,000. The pastor's salary had increased to \$285 per year and our giving to Conferences benevolences was \$15. In that year, we raised \$364 for all church activities.

In 1940, Beaver Dam was taken off the Roberdel Circuit and in 1940, the name "Cordova" first appeared in the Conference Journal, replacing the name "Steele Mill." In 1948 a new charge, called Cordova, was formed and it consisted of St. Paul and Cordova Methodist churches. In that year, membership at Cordova was 156, the value of our property was \$9,000 and the pastor's salary had increased to \$600. Under the ministry of the Rev. Foster Jones, Cordova church became a station church. In 1964 the area in which it was located was placed in the Sanford District, but in 1972 it was moved back to the Rodkingham District where it is today.

At the present time, the church membership is 264, the total budget is nearly \$52,000, and the pastor's salary is nearly \$15,000.

The building in which the congregation now meets is located one street to the south and several blocks to the

east of the original church. This building was constructed in 1952-1953 with the first service being held on June 20, 1953. The building was dedicated on October 16, 1966 at a service presided over by Bishop Paul Garber. The present structure is a three floor, brick building with a sanctuary that will seat in excess of 200 people.

The present parsonage is located directly beside the church building. It was bought from a Mr. Mahaffey. The original parsonage was located further down Ledbetter Road in the village of Cordova. That parsonage was built on a lot that had been given to the church by the mill as well. The land was given with the provision that the first thing that the church did with its money was built a parsonage on that lot. It was done. Having this parsonage at Steele Mill made it easier for the church here to have its own pastor rather than a pastor who lived at Roberdel. In the last year, the current parsonage has been renovated so that it contains four bedrooms, two bathrooms and meets quite well the Conference guidelines for United Methodist parsonages.

The church has fared well through the years, enjoying both periods of prosperity and hard times. Now, because of the vital and exuberant service of the people, it is in excellent condition in all ways. Cordova United Methodist Church is proud of its heritage, pleased with its current condition, and enthused about its future as she serves the people of this area of Richmond County.

### **PASTORS OF OUR CHURCH**

* 1899-1900	Rev. L. S. Ethridge
* 1900-1901	Rev. E. C. Sell
* 1901-1903	Rev. S. E. Mercer
* 1903-1904	Rev. C. O. Durant
1904-1908	Rev. N. L. Seabolt
1908-1911	Rev. A. J. Groves
1911-1913	Rev. B. E. Stanfield
1913-1914	Rev. Y. E. Wright
1914-1916	Rev. J. J. Barker
1916-1919	Rev. B. B. Watson
1919-1923	Rev. D. A. Clark
1923-1927	Rev. C. A. Jones
1927-1929	Rev. N. M. Wright
1929-1930	Rev. Leon Russell
1930-1935	Rev. E. C. Crawford
1935-1936	Rev. W. L. Dawson
1936-1939	Rev. F. A. Lupton
1939-1945	Rev. F. B. Brandenburg
1945-1947	Rev. K. F. Duvall
1947-1949	Rev. I. J. Strawbridge
1949-1952	Rev. O. C. Melton
1952-1956	Rev. C. A. Johnson
1956-1959	Rev. H. L. Rogers
1959-1961	Rev. Foster L. Jones
1961-1967	Rev. Ralph W. Pritchard
1967-1968	Rev. Henry A. Bizzell, Jr.
1968-1972	Rev. Ralph H. Lewis
1972-1973	Rev. Earl Matoy
1973-1977	Rev. Luther Wesley
1977-1981	Rev. Jefferson W. Davis
1981-present	Rev. William E. Braswell

\*While these men were pastors of the Richmond Circuit, records do not indicate whether or not Steele Mill was in existence at the time of their ministries.