

Information for Time Capsule about
Divine Street U. M. C.

Several accounts of the history of Divine Street United Methodist Church have been handed down through the years and herein will be combined to form as correct a statement as possible for the Centennial Celebration of 1987 of our church and of Dunn. The history of this church is so interwoven with the history of the Sunday School from its inception down to the present, that a record of the one includes necessarily the record of the other. Those who have lived and wrought under the Methodist banner in this community have made a contribution to Sunday School and church alike; to begin with the Methodist Church effort in this community is to begin with the birth of the town itself in 1886, when Dunn was laid off in city blocks and called Lucknow. In October of '86, building lots were sold at public auction and people from surrounding areas began to move in. The Town of Dunn was incorporated in February, 1887. The record of those earlier days indicates that some of these people were good -- many not so good. Open saloons flourished. Near the spot where Divine Street Methodist Church stands was one of the worst. Fights were frequent, pistols were freely brandished, and human life was cheap. This was known as the dark corner of Harnett. Law and order were little respected. For a year or more after the town was laid out in blocks, it is said there were but two or three women in the community. There were no schools, no churches.

People of different denominations gravitated to this community and all worked together. The handful of church-goers would often meet in the upstairs of a wooden building where the Gromartie Hardware Company was then in business. This was on a lot where the McLeod Furniture Company is now located, on an alley cornering Broad, halfway between Railroad and Wilson Avenue. The church-goers would often meet together and worship without much thought of denominational lines; and these people constituted the small minority of the community which was then largely irreligious, if not actually lawless.

The few Methodists who had moved in after 1886 and were a part of this first settlement wanted a preacher and a meeting house of their own. So, they made known their desires to the Conference of North Carolina Methodist, held in Fayetteville, N.C. in December, 1887. The "Averasboro Mission" was to be supplied by Rev. John F. Butt, then 69 years old. This is recorded in the Conference Journal of December, 1887. This assignment included the "Dunn Mission" and most probably several other organized church communities. (In the Conference Journal of 1888, it is recorded to be called the "Dunn Circuit.") It is said that Rev. Butt arrived in Dunn by train in December, 1887 and was met by Mr. J. L. Thompson, who was the first Methodist to greet the first Methodist preacher. Mr. Thompson reported that the Rev. Butt arrived here with the true spirit of the pioneer Christian in his heart because he set immediately to work to lay the foundations of Methodism in the Dunn Community.

The first thing Rev. Butt did was to select a plot of ground - the lot on which the Divine Street Methodist Church now stands -- and forthwith arranged to purchase it for \$50.00 from Mr. Henry Pope. Brother J. L. Thompson had the distinction of having made the first payment on this lot, which was recorded in Lillington, May 29, 1888. His wife, Mrs. Thompson, had the distinction of having been instrumental in securing the money for the church bell, which was installed in the old church and re-installed in the present brick church when it was completed in 1917.

In the meantime, while work was being done to erect the frame building of the first Methodist Church in Dunn, Rev. Butt rented an old storehouse belonging to Mr. Julius J. Wade fronting on Broad Street for a temporary church and Sunday School. This building consisted of a dirt floor, four walls, and a roof. On the bare ground the early Methodists of the "Dunn Mission" would gather for Sunday School and Church; and it was related by older residents that when the little congregation would sing the old Methodist hymns, without organ or piano, large rats would gather along the rafters and listen to the music of the services. It was in this old temporary building that the first Methodist Sunday School was organized under the superintendency of H. J. Strickland. The church building was completed in 1888.

After moving into the church, members of the congregation noted that there was no organ. Under the suggestion of Mr. J. L. Thompson and Mr. E. F. Young, an organ was purchased for \$65.00, and this served all purposes until the present pipe organ was installed in the new brick structure in 1917.

The early struggles of the pioneer Methodists should give us great inspiration today as we review them. "Old Uncle Butt," our first assigned minister, by faith in God and hard work, built that first church here. He brought timbers to the building site upon his own shoulders and served as carpenter, as well as a shepherd of his flock. He was aided in this undertaking by Brothers J. D. Barnes, J. L. Thompson, J. G. Johnson, J. J. Strickland, E. A. Parker, and others, but the burden of leadership was upon Rev. Butt -- and he bore it well, serving his Dunn people for two years.

Years streamed by and the membership outgrew the old wooden church structure. In 1913 the frame church was removed from the lot and the present brick church was begun. Church services were held at the then Presbyterian Church (presently Cromartie Funeral Home) on the adjacent property until the sanctuary and Sunday School building were completed in 1917. The facilities, which included the sanctuary, Sunday School rooms, and basement, were dedicated in 1924.

As time passed, it was realized that the old wood frame parsonage needed replacing, so the congregation voted on Sunday, December 19, 1948, to sell it and build a new one. Rev. H. B. Porter, District Superintendent at that time, presided, and called for the vote. A large majority favored the project and the minority cooperated in the project. A building committee was elected and composed of: Raymond L. Cromartie, Jr., Chm.; E. B. Culbreth, N. M. Johnson, Jr., J. H. Capps, and Dr. W. W. Stanfield.

F. E. Summerlin was authorized to sell the old parsonage at public auction, which was purchased by Earl G. Vann for \$2,550. It was moved to the corner of Layton and Divine Street, across the street next to the sanctuary, and remodeled into a modern home. Work on the new parsonage was started on July 5, 1949, on a lot adjoining the church behind the sanctuary. The job was completed November 15, 1949, at a cost of about \$21,000.

Rev. J. V. Early and family moved in on December 2, 1949. The parsonage committee (consisting of Mrs. J. O. Warren, Chm.; Mrs. H. C. Turlington, Mrs. W. J. Thompson, Mrs. Earl (Marie) Mahone, and Mrs. Ed Tart.) purchased new furniture for the home on January 4, 1950. An open house was held during February 1950.

In January of 1950, Rev. J. V. Early organized the Methodist Men.

The sanctuary of our church was redecorated during January and February, 1951. A new green carpet was installed, the first carpet to be placed in the sanctuary.

In 1952, Divine Street Methodist was named the Outstanding Church of the ^{North} West Carolina Conference. The Christian Advocate covered the event with a special story. The selection of our church for this honor was largely due to the organization and support of a "mission church" which is now known as Leslie United Methodist Church.

A new church kitchen was installed in September of 1952 at a cost of \$1700.

In August of 1960 a committee was set up by the Official Board for the purpose of working out some plan for the remodeling of our church. The committee members were Mrs. H. C. Turlington, Mrs. R. L. Cromartie, Jr., Bill Corbin, Ben Hartsfield, Nathan Johnson, Jr., Paul Hester, O. W. Godwin, Jr., and E. H. Mahone. An every-member canvas to raise funds for the construction was begun in March of 1962.

The entire project was done while Rev. Carlos Womack was minister in the mid 60's. It was completed after Rev. Wallace Kirby became minister. The work included a complete facelift of the sanctuary and the construction of a chapel and education building.

All Methodist churches became known as United Methodists in 1964. Divine Street was no exception, as it took on the name Divine Street United Methodist Church, thus Divine Street UMC.

During the 1970's members of the congregation saw a need to redecorate the Fellowship Hall, so work was done in paneling the walls and carpeting the floor. The years passed and Divine Street continued to supply the Christian needs of the Methodists in our community.

In the fall of 1982 a Bicentennial committee was formed consisting of Marilyn Bryan, Blanche Grantham, Mildred Hartsfield, Grace Oliphant and the Rev. Tom Loftis, with the goal being the celebration of two centuries of Methodism. Plans were made and followed by several informative and entertaining events depicting the history of our heritage. Member participation helped to focus on the words of John Wesley, "The World is my parish." The Bicentennial was from 1784-1984.

The thirty-five year old parsonage became too out-dated to be used by a minister, so on November 24, 1984, a parsonage committee was appointed by the trustees to plan the construction of a new parsonage. This committee was composed of the following persons: Dal Snipes, Chm.; Paul Perry, Delmon Williamson, Don Butler, Jane Yates, Betty Johnson, Mayo Smith and Martha Wiseman. A parcel of land located on West Pearsall Street was given by James and Betty Johnson on July 1, 1984. Ground was broken on March 12, 1985, at 5:00 p.m. in a special ceremony. A story featuring this event appeared in the Christian Advocate. The approximate cost of the new parsonage was \$135,000. It was completed for occupancy in mid-November of 1985. Rev. and Mrs. Jack M. Hunter moved into the new home just one week before Thanksgiving on November 21~~8~~, 1985. This home is known to be one of the finest parsonages in the conference. The old parsonage (on Divine Street near the corner of Divine St. and McKay) was sold at auction to the only bidder, Mr. Mayo Smith, for \$10,000. He in turn, resold it to be moved. It was bought and moved to the corner of Pearsall St. and McKay Ave.

The Fun Club was organized in the fall of 1985. This group was started to bring together the retired members of the church for "fun" outings.

At present, our church has many functioning parts which help her reach out to the community. It has a good music program with a Chancel Choir (adults and youth) a carol choir (3rd through 6th grade) and a cherub choir (ages 3-7). There are two handbell choirs: adult (Divine Street Ringers) and youth (Chapel Ringers.) The United Methodist Men (chartered in 1954) and the United Methodist Women with six circle groups (organized sometime before 1920) are great support groups of our church. The junior high and senior high UMYF groups who meet together each Sunday evening for fun, food and fellowship, have various service projects and retreats every year. The Sunday School Department still functions with 5 adult classes. (Men's Bible Class, Fellowship Class, Daughters of Wesley, Young Adult Class and Upper Mobile Christians-UMC) : two youth classes of junior high and senior high students and five classes covering the children's division from nursery through sixth grade. With a congregation of over 600, our Sunday School has much room for improvement as the average attendance lately has only been about 85-90 people. Vacation Bible School is held during the summer every year, which averages about 35 in attendance. The church sponsors boys and youth basketball teams each year, as well as a men's softball team. There has been a church sanctioned 3-day a week four-year-old pre-school operating independently for 5 years with a class of 12 each year. The Fun Club meets monthly for the enjoyment of our members of age 55 and over. The many and varied programs of Divine Street touch many families in our community and hopefully are a good influence on life today.

The year of 1987 is the Centennial year for Divine Street UMC. Many special events are planned with the culmination to be the last week in October, ending on November 1. The Centennial committee planning the events consists of the following people: Barbara Bynum and Joyce Draughon, co-chairmen; Mary Lib Williamson, Doug Wells, Grace Oliphant, Paul Perry, Irene Hester, Betty Johnson, Jonathan Brooks, Rev. Jack Hunter, pastor and Mary Lou Collins, program director. To help preserve our Methodist heritage, the Historical Corner (a special room) has been set aside to house our precious relics. Accompanying this is a tentative schedule of Centennial Events for the year.

Churches are formed by people.

"Time marches on and waits for no one." People come and go; they are born; they die. We each make our mark on some page of history, whether it be in Dunn or elsewhere. It is our wish as members of the congregation of Divine Street United Methodist Church in 1987, that when this is read 100 years from now, you will realize how we love our church. We have tried to preserve what our ancestors have struggled so hard to establish. We place this in your capable hands in hopes that it finds Divine Street UMC to be a thriving and growing church and that you are contributing to its success.

Ministers of Divine Street United Methodist Church

John F. Butt	1887-1889
John D. Pegram	1890-1891
George Thomas Simmons	1892-1893
Charles W. Cain	1894
Langhorne Leitch	1895
Eli Caleb Sell	1896
David Bascom Parker	1897
William A. Forbes	1898-1900
Eugene Malcolm Snipes	1901-1904
Jacob Alexander Lee	1905-1906
Asa Joseph Parker	1907-1908
Franklin A. Bishop	1909-1910
John Henry Shore	1911-1914
John Albert Hornaday	1915-1916
James Martin Daniel	1917-1919
James Henry Buffaloe	1920-1921
Gaston Troy Adams	1922-1924
George Bradbury Starling	1925-1927
Charles Lewis Read	1928
Cornelius Blackman Culbreth	1929-1932
John Armstrong Russell	1933-1936
Leon McGowen Hall	1937-1939
Orren Wesley Dowd	1939-1943
Forrest Hedden	1943-1948
Joyce Virgil Early	1948-1952
J. Worth Lineberger	1952-1957
Burrell Duke Critcher	1957-1960
Carlos P. Womack	1961-1964
Wallace H. Kirby	1964-1968
Sidney G. Boone	1968-1973
Robert F. McKee	1973-1977
Thomas E. Loftis	1977-1984
Jack Manly Hunter	1984-