

HISTORY OF EBENEZER CHURCH

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To serve the yearning of man in his search to find the reason for his being and to provide him with the hope, the faith, the love, the assurance that there is a Supreme Being behind this cosmic universe -- "In the beginning God"-- this has been and continues to be the purpose and vital force which has kept the Methodist congregation in a community known as Ebenezer active since the turn of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the community gets its name from the church, and it continues the religious upbuilding of the community.

Records indicate that William Rose and three brothers moved to North Carolina from Virginia 1784. William settled in Wayne County and married Keziah Daughtry. There were nine children, the oldest son, Ransom. Records show that William purchased some 630 acres of land between 1808 and 1843, leaving it to his wife and children at his death in 1843.

Let us use a valuable reference source here as the history relates to the church. In Dr. Will B. Crawford's history of the church written in 1927 he used his mother's active participation in the work of the church in the early days as his reference. We quote,

"To go back to the very first days of Methodism and a church in this community would take one over a long lapse of years which would make a century if not a little over, when William Rose, Billie as he was lovingly called, built the first Methodist Church of this section. It was located just behind the barn at the homeplace of Frank Rose in dense woods. The building was a log structure of approximately twenty by twenty-two feet. Billie Rose, "grandfather of the community's esteemed and respected citizen," preached there as long as he lived.

Original documents found at the homeplace of Josiah Rose, son of Ransom, show that William was a local preacher. These were men commissioned, or given authority, to serve a local congregation. These men were in many respects the backbone of the early Methodist movement. They were brought into the fellowship of the Methodist Movement through one of the itinerant preachers who traveled through the State in the early years on horseback, stayed for a period of time in a community and then

moved on, leaving behind those interested in the better life to the care of the local preacher.

Records show that William received renewal of license to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church on the Snow Hill Circuit in June or July of 1839, 1841, 1842, and 1843. He died October 9, 1843.

How long he had been preaching, what date the folk in this community were really organized, who was the person who gave him the local preacher's confirmation as a Methodist, are not known. We do feel that since these were renewal of license to preach that it had been for some time.

Other factual bits of information to support the supposition that William and Ransom Rose had been active in the early church movement: An original document in hand signed by Capt. Bryan Langley concerning Ransom which reads: "This is to certify that Ransom Rose is a regular ordained minister of the Gospel it appears to my satisfaction and is therefore exempt from militia duty." Dated: July 27, 1831. Also, records of the Smithfield-Waynesborough Circuit from 1841 to 1853, show that Ransom Rose applied for and obtained renewal of license to preach.

Here again let us pick up from Dr. Crawford's history some thoughts on Ransom.

Ransom Rose, who had felt the call to preach when quite a young man and had been actively engaged in carrying out ministerial duties, took the mantle from his father's shoulders in October (or earlier) 1843 and faithfully took up the work. He threw his heart and soul into it and before long a larger meeting place was needed.

Thus it was that in October 1845, Edwin R. Cox executed a deed to Curtis Hooks, Ransom Rose, Morris Howell, Solomon Pearson, Willie Hasting, Joseph Ingram and B. W. Raiford, Trustees, in trust for the Methodist Episcopal Church, that they shall erect and build thereon a house of worship for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America according to the rules and discipline which from time to time may be agreed upon and adopted by the ministers

and preachers of the said church at their general conferences and in further Trust and confidence that they shall at all times hereafter permit such ministers or preachers belonging to the said Church as shall be duly authorized by the general conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church or by the annual conferences authorized by the said general conferences to preach and expound God's holy word therein." (Direct from copy of deed of property.)

According to Dr. Crawford, Ransom Rose, Rufus Cox, Edmund Coor and Morris Howell, and we are confident the other trustees assisted, built the first building on the present location. It was situated just to the rear of this building.

From minutes of the quarterly conferences of the Smithfield-Waynesborough Circuit, it has been determined that between October 31, 1845 (date of the deed) and March 14, 1846, a church building was erected and named, as the Second Quarterly Conference of the Smithfield-Waynesborough Circuit met on March 14, 1846, at Ebenezer Church. Minutes prior to this, back to 1840, do not show Ebenezer, but do show Ransom Rose in attendance and participating and the use of the name "Rose" in listing some of the churches in attendance. (note spelling)

From Dr. Crawford's history, we find that Rev. Ransom Rose, the minister in charge, was given the privilege of naming the church. After much thought, consideration and prayer, he named it Ebenezer. Here we quote from Dr. Crawford:

He could not have possibly found a more appropriate name, or one that would stand as a monument to the good work of all concerned. The name means "Stone of Help", the stone set up by Samuel after a signal defeat of the Philistines as a memorial of the help received on the occasion from Jehovah. So this church is a memorial of help received by those who were responsible for its beginning, and though each one of them have long since gone to their eternal reward, their good work here still goes on.

Here we quote an original document in hand about the final payment of the building: "Rec'v. of Edwin R. Cox for his and Ransom Roses's part of what was behind in the paying up for the building of the Methodist Episcopal Church called Ebenezer in full." Signed by B. W. Raiford and dated June 27, 1848,

That church structure was moved after the completion of the present sanctuary in 1880 to the farm of Mr. Chas. Cogdell and was used as a barn. Dr. Crawford commented in 1927 that it still bore the mute evidence of the fine material and superior judgment of the builders.

Let us look briefly, then at this man, Ransom Rose, since available material on William Rose is very limited.

Dr. Crawford described Ransom as follows, and let us not forget that this was first-hand information from his mother.

Uncle Ransom, as he was known by every one, preached in the old church until his death, and was loved by every one who knew him, for he was never known to be unjust, or unkind, or not to heed the call of his church duties. And in fact, his devotion to his ministerial duties was just a little nearer his heart than anything else and weather was never too unfavorable and the night never too dark and gloomy for him to refuse to render service either in the pulpit, or at the marriage altar, around the death beds, or at the tomb. He was not a highly educated man, as that class were few and far between in his day and time, but he was a pioneer in the advancement of all that pertained to the betterment of his community, and above all else, he had a fund of sound hard common sense, combined with industry, and frugality which enabled him to not only make a success of his church work, but also his farming interests, placing him a head and shoulders above the average....

Dr. Crawford continues that Uncle Ransom was a good Bible student. He was blessed with good health, took care of himself, and had not habit that affected his rugged health and active mind. He preached the old-time gospel sermon, hoeing the line and let the chips fall where they might. He was a Fundamentalist (Dr. Crawford's words) in the fullest sense of the term. He was a great revivalist, both in the home church and other communities where his services were sought. He was noted for his honesty of purpose, integrity of character and strict adherence to the teaching of his Bible, as he understood it, regardless of everything else.

He received no salary, according to Dr. Crawford, nor did he ever expect any, and, in fact, would have taken it as an affront had he been offered any for any service rendered. To substantiate this statement by Dr. Crawford, an original document is on hand which reads:

We the undersigned having heard of Ransom Rose losing a horse feel willing to contribute the sums annexed to our several names for the purpose of purchasing him another provided he will accept it knowing him to be opposed to receiving anything for his clerical services and never having received anything we think this is a fit occasion to tender him aid and we do it in a spirit of kindness without consulting him on the subject. December 31, 1850.

Signed by Edmund Coor, Edwin R. Cox, J. B. Tautam, Joseph E. Kenidy, Levi D. Howell, Calvin Holt, Wm. Holt, Willie Hastings, Ruebin Perry, Wm. Hollowell, G. Anders, D. B. Evritt, Richmond Washington, Lewis Sasser, John T. Kenidy, Wm. K. Lane.

Ransom Rose married Nancy Sasser and there were seven daughters and five sons. None of the daughters married. Three of the sons did. One son was lost at the close of the Civil War. Ransom was a farmer, and it was a self-contained operation. Dr. Crawford comments, "He made plenty and to spare from the vegetables and meats in his garden and smokehouse, and the corn and wheat in his barn, and fodder for stock, to the genuine woolen suit he wore, raised on his own sheep, spun and woven and made into coats, and vests, and pants, by his faithful wife and daughters." The last living child, Frank Rose, died in 1934 at his home just down the road from this church.

Another original document in hand on Ransom Rose shows his ordination to the office of Deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, signed by Bishop George Hines and dated December 6, 1857.

Ransom Rose died on December 5, 1880, and according to Dr. Crawford, had been able to preach one sermon in this sanctuary. The Goldsboro Messenger, Monday, December 6, 1880, carried this note: "The funeral of Rev. Ransom Rose, 74 years old and esteemed citizen of Fork Township, who died yesterday, will be preached today by John N. Andrews."

In closing thoughts on Ransom Rose, we use a paragraph in the address of Rev. Jno. N. Andrews given at the laying of the corner stone of Goldsboro M. E. Church, South, July 12, 1883, and published in the Raleigh Christian Advocate August 8, 1882. This was nearly three years after his death.

Rev. Ransom Rose--a pure diamond in the rough; a precious ointment in the unquarried granite; a man of great zeal but little knowledge except of divine things; like Enoch, he walked with God, capturing the esteem and confidence of his fellow men by the indomitable power of the good life. The common people heard him gladly, and the cultured forgot his bad grammar and mutilated rhetoric for the time while they felt that he was delivering God's truth to their conscience. He died in great peace, Stephen-like, with the visions of heaven opened to him.

The church itself continued to grow during the Civil War and during Reconstruction. From 1860 to 1866 the church membership grew from 46 to 77. As it continued to grow and prosper, it became evident that larger facilities were needed. Once again Ransom Rose and other leaders in the church rose to the occasion. Mr. Milton Harding of Goldsboro was contacted and furnished the plans for this sanctuary you sit in today. Let us review for you the official record we have of this church going up as taken from the Goldsboro Messenger.

Monday, June 14, 1880: "A new Methodist Church is soon to be built at Ebenezer in Fork Township a few miles from Goldsboro."

Thursday, September 2, 1880: "The new church at Ebenezer is nearing completion and bids fair to be a monument to the county."

Thursday, November 11, 1880: "Ebenezer Church is to be dedicated Sunday next." (This was not done, as indicated below.)

Thursday, December 9, 1880: "Rev. Mr. Bagwell will officiate on Sunday morning at the dedication of the new Ebenezer Church in Fork Township. ..."

Monday, December 13, 1880: "A large congregation attended the new Ebenezer Church in Fork Township yesterday among whom were many from Goldsboro to witness the dedication of the church. The interesting ceremonies were performed by Rev. J. T. Bagwell who, we learned, also preached a most excellent sermon.

AND FROM THE SAME ISSUE:

CHURCH DEDICATION

The new Methodist Church at Ebenezer was dedicated yesterday, Rev. J. T. Bagwell officiating. Mr. Bagwell delivered an earnest and instructive discourse from the subject- "The Kingdom of Heaven." The building is a "little beauty" the plan of which was kindly furnished by your townsman, Mr. Milton Harding, to whom we are indebted for many favors. We also desire to render our sincere thanks to our many friends, regardless of denomination, for the encouragement and liberal support, and pray that the "new Ebenezer" may prove a blessing to them and their children.

We missed the familiar face of Rev. Ransom Rose ("Uncle Ransom") who was not spared in the flesh the consummation of his hearts desire, but we felt that from the "heights of Glory" he was looking down upon us.

Soon after the present structure was dedicated a gracious revival was held, according to Dr. Crawford, with Rev. J. T. Bagwell and R. P. Troy as preachers. Dr. Crawford indicates that the services ran for a number of weeks with a large crowd attending. Nearly one hundred were converted, including many young people which resulted in the breaking up of the occasional square dances held in the community.

Another interesting fact gleaned from Dr. Crawford's history was the installation of an organ shortly after the dedication. The custom in most rural churches was that the preacher would "give out" the hymn two lines at a time and the congregation would then sing them. As usual when tradition is broken, there were objections to putting in an organ, but finally, with the consensus of the congregation, one was installed. Lizzie Crawford was made organist and a choir was formed. Dr. Crawford was a member of that first choir.

The date of the establishment of the Sunday School is not known. It was going on in 1895.

It is also interesting to note from correspondence with Leon Atkinson that his parents remembered the first time they had seen flowers at a funeral. He states they related that at the funeral of Edmund Coor in 1897 violets were carried.

During the last century the world has indeed become one world through the many advancements in mass media, mass communication and travel.

This church has not stood still. In 1927 the pastor, R. E. Brown, and the congregation sponsored a big homecoming celebration with hundreds from across the state and some from out of state/ attending. Rev. J. M. Wright of Carthage, pastor of Ebenezer in 1914 and 1915, delivered the morning sermon. The afternoon program consisted of a history of the church prepared and delivered by Dr. Will B. Crawford and a eulogy to the deceased members of the church presented by Chas. L. Neal.

In 1940 under the leadership of Rev. and Mrs. Willis R. Stevens, a Woman's Society of Christian Service was organized with charter members as follows:

Mrs. H. W. Ellis, Mrs. J. O. Baker, Mrs. Gurney Ingram, Mrs. J. C. Thompson, Mrs. G. K. Smith, Mrs. W. M. Newsom, Mrs. W. B. Crawford, Miss Smithy Pipkin, Mrs. W. R. Stevens, Mrs. N. D. Walters, Mrs. Elton Rose, Mrs. C. E. Coor, Mrs. Needham Rose, Mrs. Katie Rose, Mrs. Sarah Pipkin Atkinson.

In 1941 a new day arrived when the church was wired for electricity. A question arose about replacing the chandeliers. Better judgment won out and the chandeliers were wired and have continued to grace this sanctuary.

Other renovations followed during the ensuing years. The church changed from wood to gas heating, was painted, a lawn planted, an outdoor marker installed. In 1955 a big step was taken when it was decided to install ^{Colored} stained glass in the windows. Rev. L. T. Wilson was the pastor. Committees went to work and soon various families had given a window in memory of a loved ones or donated the funds for one. Also included was one of Sallman's Head of Christ for the pulpit area donated in memory of Herman W. Ellis. The dedication of these windows and the picture was held January 14, 1957, with Rev. H. M. McLamb leading the service. Windows were donated in memory of: Mr. J. C. Thompson, Mr. Charlie Coor, Mrs. N. B. Ingram, Mr. O. E. Dawson, Mr. Harvey Dail, Mr. N. D. Walters. Other windows were

presented by Mr. and Mrs. O. P. Snipes, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bridgers, Mr. and Mrs. Delmus Bridgers, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Bridgers, Mr. and Mrs. Butler Holt, Mr. and Mrs. Molton Ingram, Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Neal, Mrs. N. D. Walters.

Since a Sunday School had been started sometime in the late 1800's, all classes had met in the sanctuary. Under the leadership of Rev. L. T. Wilson a drive was started to add an education wing. Trees for the project were donated by Willie F. Howell, Mrs. Nora Walters, Mr. and Mrs. N. J. Rose, Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Neal, Mr. David Pipkin. Ralph Bridgers, chairman of the tree and building committee, was able to get the services of Willie B. Langley in getting the trees cut, taken to the sawmill and the timber back to the church yard. Mr. Herman Massengill was in charge of the construction. The Duke Endowment Fund assisted with the financial part of the construction along with the concerted efforts and giving of the local congregation.

The annex, completed in 1955, contains a large room which is used for large groups and can be divided into two classrooms, another room and storage on the first floor and two classrooms on the second floor.

During the 1960's, rest rooms were installed, central heating and air-conditioning was installed, shrubbery, some donated, was planted and other landscaping done, additional land was acquired from Willie C. Parrish on the south for parking. The church had lost most of its parking area when Highway 70 was four-laned.

In December 1965 the Woman's Society of Christian Service presented a pulpit Bible. The original Bible was restored and is preserved at the church.

Memorials have been added through the years including one of Sallman's Head of Christ in memory of Mrs. Sallie Hooks Swinson; brass cross in memory of Mr. and Mrs. N. B. Ingram; brass candlesticks in memory of C. E. Coor and Mrs. Katie Rose; and the pews were restored to their original wood as a memorial to William Frederick Howell; and a water cooler in memory of Wilbur Creech, Jr., former pastor.

In closing, we call forth these thoughts from Dr. Crawford, making adjustment as necessary - So we see that the Methodist Church in this community has been reflecting the light of that great love which gave the world its redeemer for over one hundred and fifty years. It is still pointing the way to those in spiritual darkness into the marvelous light and liberty of the Son of God, the only true Christ; the beloved Son of God given as a sacrifice, not only for your sins and mine, but for the whole world.

*Zelda Coor
September 28, 1980*

- Sources: Original Rose Family documents.
The Complete Church Register, Smithfield Circuit, North Carolina Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Southern Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, Tenn. 1834.
N. C. State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C.
"History of Ebenezer Church," written in 1927 by Dr. Will B. Crawford Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N. C.
Interviews, correspondence, phone calls, etc.
Official Board Minutes, Ebenezer Methodist Church.