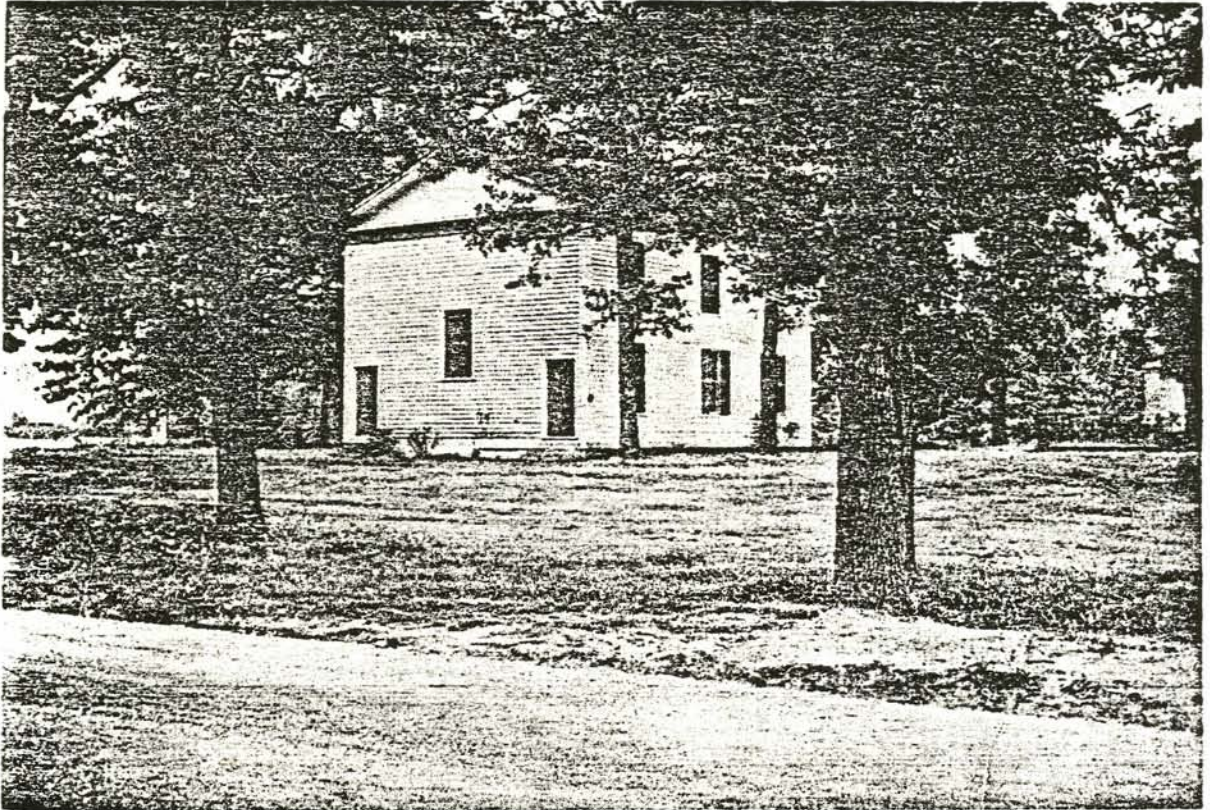


AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE
ELIZABETH METHODIST CHURCH



Elizabeth Methodist Church

AND
CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS
AND
CHARTER MEMBERS

Johnston County Historical Society
1959

ELIZABETH METHODIST CHURCH

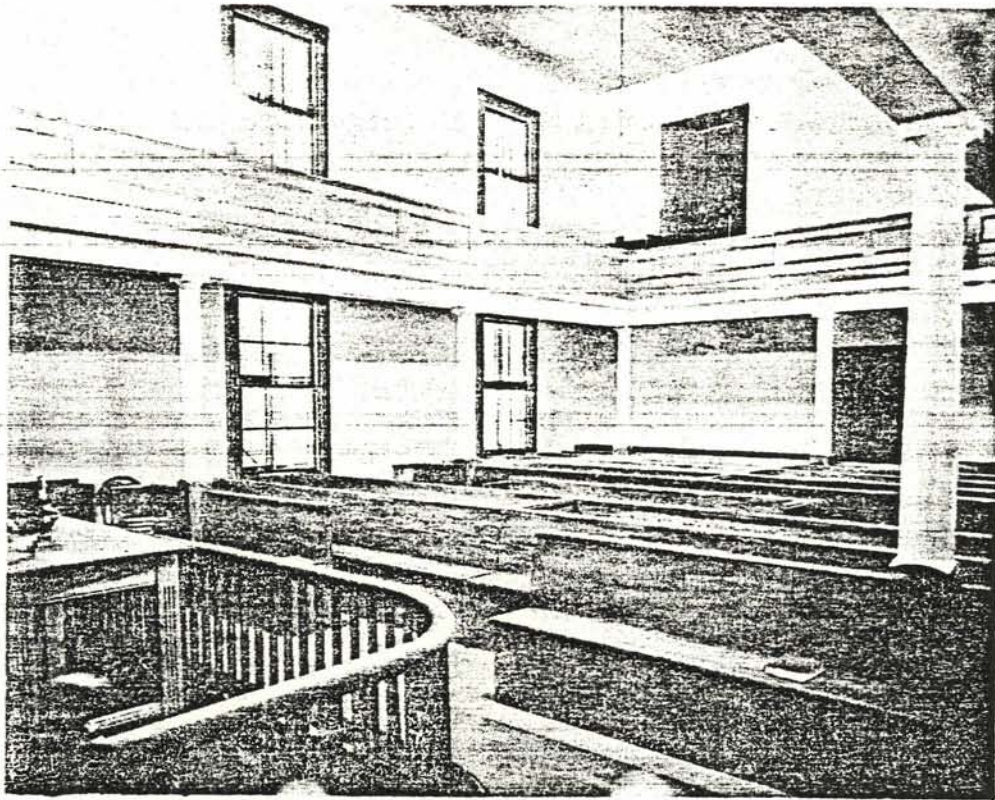
Elizabeth Methodist Church, located in a shady grove six miles west of Smithfield on the Cleveland School Road, is not only the oldest Methodist Church building in Johnston County, but it is the only church building of any denomination that retains a gallery built more than a hundred years ago for the use of Negro slaves. Recently an educational building has been constructed, but it was not joined to the old church in order to preserve the original architecture.

This church was built in 1853, says Miss Emily Smith, who has lived all of her life in that community. Her father, the late J. Henry Smith, made the pulpit stand and also put the molding finish on the seats for the church. Mr. Smith was a member of Oakland Presbyterian Church but when Elizabeth Church was erected, the whole neighborhood assisted with the construction. Indeed the whole community worshiped at both Elizabeth and Oakland churches, at Oakland on the first Sunday and at Elizabeth on the third Sunday.

Church 128 Years Old

The history of Elizabeth Church goes further back than 1853. In 1839, when Centenary Methodist Church at Smithfield was formed as a part of the Waynesborough circuit, Elizabeth was the circuit camp meeting ground. It was located on land belonging to Willis H. Sanders. Three years later, in 1842, a church building was erected and the church was officially designated as Elizabeth Church. According to the quarterly conference records, the church was named for Elizabeth Peters Sanders, the second wife of John Fletcher Sanders, who was credited as being the founder of the church. John Fletcher Sanders was the father of Willis H. Sanders. This first building burned down and in 1853, the present structure was built.

The church is a 30 x 50 frame building of the plain style of church architecture prevailing a hundred years ago. It has the appearance of a two-story building because of the balcony which runs around three sides. Two rows of benches are in the balcony, indicating that there might have been a considerable number of slaves who worshiped there. Entrance to the church is made through two doors on the front and two on the back, one of the back doors opening on the balcony. In keeping with the old style the windows have green outside shutters. Between the front doors is the pulpit and the original pulpit stand is still in use. The original benches of heart pine are also still used. Some of them are built around the posts that hold up the balcony. Steps to the balcony now go up from the outside, but some of the members think that they might have originally been on the inside.



Deed to Church

Oddly enough the deed to the church property was not acquired until 1878. In that year Willis H. Sanders and wife, Lucinda Sanders gave the land and made a deed which is on record in the Johnston County courthouse. The deed was made to the following trustees for the Smithfield-Waynesborough circuit: John B. Beckwith, S. R. Morgan, Harry Durham, David Smith, J. H. Tomlinson, Needham Barnes and A. M. Sanders. In that year the church building had been damaged by a storm, and the church officials would not finance the necessary repairs unless a deed to the property was secured.

The present white-painted building, which seats around a hundred persons not including the balcony seats, looks practically as it did back in the 1850's. The balcony is rarely used now -- only on overflow occasions. But before the new educational building was erected, Sunday School class rooms had been curtained off in the balcony. It was in 1956 that the educational annex was built to provide adequate space for the Sunday School and for the social activities of the church. There are three class rooms and a large assembly room for the Sunday School which has an enrollment of 50. And there is a kitchen where meals can be prepared for church groups. The second floor of this \$10,000 frame structure has not yet been completed.

Numerous Changes

This 128-year-old church has seen many changes since its organization. Until 1849 it was a part of the Smithfield-Waynesborough circuit. Then a division of the circuit was made and from 1850 to 1880 it was on the Smithfield circuit. After 1880, for a year, Elizabeth was a part of the Smithfield Charge after which it was transferred to the Hannah's Creek Mission. From 1909 to 1950, it was on the Four Oaks charge and then became a part of the Garner circuit. The church at Garner was a station and the other three churches were Elizabeth, Holland's and Mount Zion. These three churches were served by the Rev. Charles E. Sparks, a Duke divinity student, who resided at the circuit-owned parsonage at Holland's Church. In 1961 Elizabeth left the Holland's-Mount Zion charge and went station with retired ministers filling the appointments. They were: George W. Blount, A. S. Parker, Russell Caudill (only one Sunday and suffered a stroke), and E. C. Maness. These were followed by James Hicks.

In 1968 Elizabeth was put back on the Holland's charge as retired ministers were becoming difficult to find. Ministers serving during that period were Nelson W. Fulford and Eric O. Murray.

In 1975 Elizabeth left the Holland's charge and was placed on a charge with Whitley Memorial Church of Smithfield. Elizabeth is currently on the Whitley charge. Ministers for this period of time have been Lawrence W. Greene, Gladys Williford, Robert Rudd and the present minister is B. R. McCullen.

Pastors Since 1840

Pastors who served Elizabeth Church in chronological order as well as can be determined include the following: James E. Joyner, William H. Barnes, Amos W. Jones, John Tillet, Samuel Pearce, P. W. Archer, I. T. Wyche, J. W. Wilson, C. P. Jones, R. R. Donkley, L. W. Martin, P. J. Carraway, C. W. Pepper, William E. Pell, Lucian Shell, John R. Brooks, Carson Parker, J. D. Buie, L. S. Burkhead, Joseph Wheeler, T. Page Ricaud, A. R. Raven, William H. Moon, J. E. Thompson, James F. Smoote, R. M. Brown, P. L. Herman, M. C. Thomas, R. C. Beaman, A. M. Lowe, A. E. Wiley, B. C. Allred, R. W. Bailey, J. J. Parker, J. M. Ashby, M. M. McFarland, J. T. Draper, S. A. Cotton, G. W. Fisher, Joseph V. Williams, G. B. Starling, R. F. Taylor, T. E. Davis, E. B. Craven, J. A. Russell, W. J. Watson, E. D. Dodd, N. C. Yearby, W. H. Brown, H. B. Baum, J. C. Whedbee, J. T. Greene, F. A. Lupton, J. A. Auman, J. W. Garrison, E. W. Rogers, Charles E. Sparks, George W. Blount, A. S. Parker, Russell Caudill, E. C. Maness, Wesley Jones, James Hicks, Nelson W. Fulford, Eric O. Murray, Lawrence W. Greene, Gladys Williford, Robert Rudd and B. R. McCullen.

The tenure of ministry, as recorded in the minutes of the quarterly conference, was attended by many interesting experiences. The records are all too brief, and one can only guess at the ups and downs of the church. For one thing, the ministers received a mere pittance for their circuit-riding services. In 1857 the expenses for the entire circuit totaled only \$756.20. Of this amount, Elizabeth raised \$166.20, or more than a fourth of the whole amount. Just how many churches were on the circuit that year is not known. But two years later, in 1859, there were eleven preaching places on the circuit and two preachers were assigned. These were the Rev. Lucian Shell and the Rev. John R. Brooks. The preaching places included: Clayton, Smithfield, Elizabeth, Bentonville, Boon Hill, Sanders' Schoolhouse, Turner's Schoolhouse, D. Smith's Schoolhouse, Pine Level, Zion and Elevation.

Pay Good in War Times

By 1864, during the Civil War, the Smithfield circuit had been reduced to six churches as follows: Smithfield, Elizabeth, Boon Hill, Bentonville, Mount Zion and Clayton. The total amount raised that year was \$1,191. The pastor, the Rev. L.H. Burkhead, seemed to fare very well. In addition to \$991 in cash, he received the following items: 853 pounds pork, 77 pounds bacon, 79 pounds lard, 17 1/2 barrels corn and meal, 102 pounds of beef, 2 bushels of wheat, 25 pounds soap, 16 bushels potatoes, 4 bushels peas, 5 dozen eggs, 20 pounds rice, 100 pounds flour, 37 pounds butter, 2 pounds candles, 4 1/2 yards cloth, 2 ducks, 3 chickens, 4 turkeys, 3,930 pounds fodder, and all of his wood.

On June 17, 1865, just after the war closed, the third quarterly conference was held at Elizabeth Church. At that time the pastor, the Rev. Joseph H. Wheeler, made this report:

"During the peculiar and exciting times upon us, our religious interests have greatly suffered. Three Sabbath Schools were in successful operation at the beginning of the year with promise of good. These schools have been suspended because of the passage of hostile troops through the country. I am making efforts to have these schools resumed. It is difficult to tell the real condition of the circuit. Our work has been greatly hindered by the causes before stated. Most of the churches have been closed for a time and the church at Bentonville burned. Under the providence of God we have resumed our labors and hope to see the work of God revive. None have been received or expelled."

Recent History

Always a rural church, Elizabeth has never had a large membership. At the present time there are about 50 members. The oldest active member is Mrs. Gladys Sanders Roberson who is a direct descendant of John Fletcher Sanders, founder of the church. Preaching services are held on the first, third and fifth Sunday mornings of each month. Sunday School is held every Sunday. It is said from the beginning the third Sunday has been a regular preaching time at Elizabeth.

Many of the present members are descendants of men and women who figured in the early development of the church. They are carrying on in the same splendid fashion of their forebears as evidenced in the erection of an educational building. This enterprise was accomplished largely under the leadership of the Rev. E.W. Rogers who left this pastorate in April, 1956 to go to South Carolina. He and his wife, when they left, presented the church with a beautiful altar set -- a cross and candle sticks. In 1980, the educational building was covered with vinyl siding and storm windows.

Mrs. Seth Lassiter was the church organist for 59 years. Due to failing health she has been unable to fill that responsibility regularly since about 1976.

Gifts and Purchases

About 1956 or '57 a communion table was given by the Faulkner family in memory of the late Mr. and Mrs. H. V. Faulkner and the late Buren Faulkner, who had been life-long members of Elizabeth.

Previously, in 1935, a communion service had been given to the church by Joe Sanders, Mrs. Bessie Faulkner and Mrs. Harris Roberson, as a memorial to their father, the late Robert A. Sanders.

Mrs. G. W. Blount gave a brass baptismal font.

The Hobart family gave two brass vases in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Don Hobart.

A low brass vase was given in memory of Mabel Tomlinson by the WSCS.

Rev. A. S. Parker built and installed a rack inside the altar rail for the communion glasses.

The Hymnals in the educational building were given in memory of Mrs. Buren Faulkner. Flower stands were also given in memory of Mrs. Buren Faulkner.

The chairs in the educational building were given in memory of Arthur Faulkner.

Table and pulpit scarves were given by the W. S. C. S.

Hymnals were given in memory of Rev. and Mrs. N. C. Yearby and Mr. Seth Lassiter.

In 1973, the Ogburn family donated the piano in the educational building in memory of Ira T. Ogburn.

The first organ was purchased in 1962. The second organ was purchased in 1973.

A piano was purchased for the church in 1970.

(The facts concerning this history of Elizabeth Church have been gathered by Mrs. Mildred Faulkner Arwood who is a member of Elizabeth Church. February 14, 1981.)