

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH

The spirit of faith and adventure, evident in those who gave birth to our Church even before the birth of the city of Roanoke Rapids, has continued to motivate our Church life through more than eighty years of Christian ministry.

As an organized effort in Christian outreach, the Reverend J.R. Tillery, then pastor of the Shiloh Church in Northampton County, began a gathering of interested persons for Sunday School study and worship in a tobacco barn on the farm of Mr. Gross. This tobacco barn became the first Church gathering place, located in the neighborhood of the Elementary School on Vance Street.

As the numbers grew the congregation moved to a school building located where the old hospital stands on Roanoke Avenue. The group decided to move this school building to Hamilton Street. The records indicate the Methodists did not let this deter them from worship for they held Sunday services in the building while it was only half way to its destination.

In 1895 the North Carolina Annual Conference recognized the desire of the congregation and made this one part of the Roanoke Rapids Circuit. The Reverend J. H. Frizelle was assigned as the first regular pastor. Shortly afterward a movement was begun to erect a permanent building. This was encouraged by the offer of Mr. Thomas L. Emry and Mr. John Armstrong Chaloner who said they "would give land to any group who wanted to establish a church."

Since these two men were stockholders in the then Roanoke Rapids Power Company, it was through their influence that the Company, on February 4, 1896, deeded to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, three lots on the west side of Jackson Street. On those lots a church and a parsonage were constructed. This became the first church building of any denomination to be erected in Roanoke Rapids.

During the ministry of Reverend William Towe the Annual Conference granted the petition to make the church a station appointment. The first pastor

to be assigned to this new station, now to be known as First Methodist Church, was the Reverend G. S. Bearden.

In 1917 the Reverend E. C. Few was appointed to serve the Church. By this time the congregation had reached a membership of 300, and the frame building was in need of extensive repairs. Rather than go to this expense, the Board of Stewards began thinking in terms of a new building.

On September 25, 1918, a four lot site was conveyed to the congregation by the Roanoke Avenue Development Co., and a church was erected on the present location. The original cost of the building was more than \$55,000 with the cornerstone laid June 16, 1919. In 1920 the trustees were forced to borrow \$30,000 to complete the building. For a number of years the congregation struggled with the indebtedness until, during the ministry of the Reverend E. B. Fisher, in 1937 the debt was paid and the notes burned.

During the pastorate of Reverend J. F. Herbert a new brick parsonage was constructed on Roanoke Avenue. Plans were drawn for the first addition to the Church's educational facilities. This educational building was erected during the pastorate of the Reverend Leon C. Larkin, completed during the pastorate of Robert L. Jerome on March 20, 1955.

The church continued to grow in number of members and opportunities for service to the community. During the pastorate of Reverend Junius Neese, in 1964, the congregation became aware of the need for more educational space and began to draw plans to bring these needs to reality. When Reverend T. R. Jenkins came in 1965 the plans were ready, and on March 6, 1966, ground was broken for the new educational building.

Early on the morning of January 26, 1967, within two or three weeks of the completion of the educational building a devastating fire destroyed the sanctuary which had stood for nearly fifty years.

At a called meeting of the Official Board, with Allen Bobbitt presiding, the congregation determined to rebuild as quickly as plans could be drawn. Many meetings and months later the present sanctuary was completed on the site of the old Church.

As the Church physical facilities grew, the membership grew in number and strength. During the pastorate of Reverend Dewey Tyson, the congregation voted to add an Associate Minister, and Reverend Edward Morrison was appointed in 1971 as the first Associate.

Mr. Morrison served also with the Reverend A. P. Hill. In 1975 Dr. Thomas A. Collins left North Carolina Wesleyan College which he had served as President for sixteen years to become the pastor of First United Methodist Church, and the Reverend Dennis M. Adams came as the new Associate Minister. One of their first acts was to lead the Administrative Board in the decision to produce the first Church Directory for this distinguished congregation.

#### MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, ROANOKE RAPIDS, N.C.

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| 1892 - Reverend J. R. Tillery, organizing pastor             |  |
| 1895 - Reverend James Henry Frizelle, first appointed pastor |  |
| 1898 - Reverend G. E. Wright                                 |  |
| 1900 - Reverend Andrew J. Groves                             | 1942 - Reverend Lester A. Tilley                 |
| 1901 - Reverend Leon M. Chaffin                              | 1945 - Reverend D. A. Clarke                     |
| 1902 - Reverend E. R. Welsh                                  | 1947 - Reverend J. R. Edwards                    |
| 1903 - Reverend G. D. Langston                               | 1948 - Reverend J. Furman Herbert                |
| 1905 - Reverend James T. Stanford                            | 1952 - Reverend Leon C. Larkin                   |
| 1906 - Reverend Jesse T. Draper                              | 1954 - Reverend Robert L. Jerome                 |
| 1908 - Reverend W. A. Piland                                 | 1959 - Reverend W. Junius Neese                  |
| 1910 - Reverend W. F. Galloway                               | 1965 - Reverend T. R. Jenkins                    |
| 1912 - Reverend William Towe                                 | 1969 - Reverend M. Dewey Tyson                   |
| 1915 - Reverend G. S. Bearden                                | 1971 - Reverend J. Edward Morrison,<br>Associate |
| 1917 - Dr. E. C. Few   |  |
| 1920 - Reverend L. B. Jones                                  | 1973 - Reverend Alton P. Hill                    |
| 1921 - Reverend R. H. Brown                                  | 1975 - Dr. Thomas A. Collins                     |
| 1925 - Reverend Leon M. Hall                                 | 1975 - Reverend Dennis M. Adams,<br>Associate    |
| 1930 - Reverend J. W. Harrell                                |  |
| 1931 - Reverend S. J. Starnes                                |  |
| 1935 - Dr. Edgar B. Fisher                                   |  |
| 1939 - Reverend Daniel Lane                                  |  |

# First United Methodist Church

P. O. Box 277

Roanoke Rapids, N. C.

27870

June 1, 1978

Rev. Franklin Grill  
P. O. Box 10955  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27600

Dear Frank:

The brief history which A. P. Hill deposited with you has been up-dated slightly and we would like you to insert this addition in your records.

*Capitals & additions*

"As an organized effort in Christian outreach, the Reverend J. R. Tillery, then pastor of the Shiloh Church in Northampton County (APPOINTED IN THE FALL OF ~~XXXX~~ ~~XXXX~~ 1892), began a gathering of interested persons for Sunday School study and worship in a tobacco barn on the farm of Mr. Gross (DURING THE SPRING OF 1893. THIS TOBACCO BARN WAS MARKED AS "METHODIST SUNDAY SCHOOL" IN THE LATE SPRING, AND BY OFFICIAL ACTION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD AND CHARGE CONFERENCE IN OCTOBER, 1926, THE FIRST SUNDAY IN MAY, 1893, WAS OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED AS THE BEGINNING OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF ROANOKE RAPIDS. This tobacco barn became the first Church gathering place, located in the neighborhood of the Elementary School on Vance Street.

"As the numbers grew the congregation moved to a school building ....

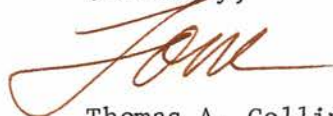
"In 1895, the North Carolina Annual Conference recognized the desire of this established congregation and made this church a part of the Roanoke Rapids Circuit.

You will note the insert was well documented and approved by the Charge Conference before we had our first Homecoming and 84th Anniversary service in May, 1977, then our 85th anniversary in May 1978. A Methodist Church did in fact exist for two years before a pastor was assigned by the Conference and it was served during this time by the Reverend Mr. Tillery whom this congregation lists as its first pastor, though the first pastor assigned by the North Carolina Annual Conference was the Reverend J. H. Frizelle.

We believe this to be a true, and as nearly exact, a record as is potentially available. Thanks for your interest. This change was made by the Historical Committee, Mrs. Robert Towe, Sr., Chairman, then confirmed by Charge Conference action.

See you at Conference. Let me know if I can be of further help.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Collins