

**History of the Gray Rock United Methodist Church**  
**1835-1995**  
**September 24, 1995**

**Early Methodism in Granville County**

The circuit riders of early Methodism came into Granville County soon after the first Methodist sermon was preached in the colony of North Carolina. Joseph Pilmoor was the first Methodist preacher sent out by John Wesley to enter North Carolina and to him goes the honor of having preached the first Methodist sermon in the colony. This took place on September 28, 1772, at Currituck Courthouse in Currituck County.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Williams was the second Methodist preacher to enter North Carolina and it is believed that he was the first to enter Granville County. Williams landed in New York in 1769, helped Philip Embury some at Wesley Chapel in New York City and then made his way southward. He came to Maryland where he assisted Robert Strawbridge for a time, then pushed on into Virginia and was the first to introduce Methodism in Virginia. It should also be noted that Williams began the first publishing venture by a Methodist preacher by distributing tracts attributed to John Wesley. Williams was forbidden to continue this practice at the 1773 Conference quite possibly because he had married and become a "local preacher" rather than remaining single and "itinerating."<sup>2</sup>

Jesse Lee, an early Methodist historian wrote, "In the beginning of this year (1774) Robert Williams began to form societies in Virginia...Soon after he began to preach through the country from Petersburg into the North part of North Carolina, and the fruits of his labours began to appear, and souls were awakened and brought to the knowledge of God." The Carolina Circuit was formed at the Fourth General Conference held in Baltimore on May 21, 1776. This circuit included all the territory of North Carolina and was served by three preachers: Edward Dromgoole, Francis Poythress and Isham Tatum. The Sixth General Conference, held in Leesburg Virginia on May 19, 1778, brought forth three circuits from the Carolina Circuit which were called: Roanoke (for Roanoke Rapids) Circuit, Tar River Circuit and New Hope Circuit.<sup>3</sup>

Methodism in Granville County, much like Methodism through much of America at that time, found its beginnings in the homes of dedicated lay people. Granville County Methodism found its home in the house of George Harris sometime between 1776 and 1778. A church building was eventually erected for the conference and was named "Harris Meeting House" and was the first Methodist Church ever built in Granville County. As is true with much of history, the first date of services at this church is unknown but it is known that a Methodist preacher, Micajah Debruler from Maryland, witnessed the marriage of Ann Hicks and William Matthews on July 12, 1778. Debruler was one of two circuit riders stationed on the Tar River Circuit. The other preacher assigned to this circuit, Adam Cloud, married a Granville County resident, Miss Mary Hicks, daughter of William Hicks, in 1782 and lived on land adjoining the Harris Meeting House. The Harris Meeting House continued to serve the needs of Granville County Methodists until 1828 when the church was disbanded and Salem and Rehoboth Methodist Episcopal Churches were formed.



Both early Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, were known to have traveled and preached in Granville County from the years 1780 to 1785.

### "Good Hope" and "Gray Rock"

Another trend in early rural Methodist Movements appears to have been the use of camp meetings and "bush/brush arbor preaching" services. Many churches had their beginnings in this way including a small log building known as "Good Hope" about one mile east of the present location of Gray Rock United Methodist Church, on the farm owned by the Herbert Brummitt family. "Good Hope" began holding Methodist meetings in order to meet the spiritual needs of the people of this section of Granville County somewhere between 1835 and 1845. By 1850 the congregation at "Good Hope" had relocated itself to the present location of Gray Rock UMC. The "Good Hope" congregation had been given a tract of land near the B.P. (Dee) Woodlief home by Captain (Confederate Army) Ed Lyon and his wife. This land was traded to John Scott for the present site. It is interesting to note also that all of this movement from the location of our parent church, "Good Hope", to the present site, took place at the same time the Methodist Episcopal Church was splitting into two branches over the issue of slavery. Many of the church records from this period are difficult to locate.

Mrs. Ed Lyon is attributed for naming the new church "Gray Rock" because of a large rock located near the structure. Some of the charter members for this Methodist Episcopal Church, South congregation were: Woodson and Bessie Jenkins Blackley, Howard and Aletha Harris Blackley, William and Emily Harris Blackley, Jimmy Harris, Asie Harris and William Brummitt. A fairly new tombstone marks the location of the burial plot for William Brummitt who was the first person buried in the present cemetery.

Between 1850 and 1900, the congregation grew in size until the need for more space was realized. In 1910, the back of the building was extended ten feet and new windows were installed. In 1930 the ceiling was raised and wood was installed over the existing plaster. (It has often been reported that a list of the volunteer workers on this project was kept in a pickle jar while the building was in process but the jar was no where to be found when the task was complete.)

Major renovations were discussed by the congregation for several years (from 1945 to 1951) but eventually the congregation decided to build an entirely new structure. Trees were cut from several area farms and the Old Harris Cemetery (very close to the location of "Good Hope") to provide the lumber to build the church. The old building was torn down in February of 1953. Walter H. Harris drew the plans for the new church and built some of its furnishings. Although most of the work was done by the members of the congregation, five carpenters were hired to provide supervision and skilled labor. While this construction was taking place, Wilton High School served as the sanctuary and meeting place for the congregation. With the assistance of a Duke Endowment grant, sacrificial giving by members of the congregation, and a good deal of hard work by the members, the present structure was dedicated debt free on Easter Sunday, 1953. Total construction time was less than three months!

As ministry changed in the 1970's the congregation met those changing needs by building a Fellowship Hall adjacent to the sanctuary. This project was completed in December 1974.

In the last twenty-one years, Gray Rock has continued to meet the changing needs of their congregation by constantly improving their property. In May of 1981, a new steeple and cross were added to the church. In August of 1983 new carpet, pew cushions and stained glass windows were installed. In 1986 (while our visiting preacher was pastor) a new brick sign was erected in front of the church. Two donations of land in recent years has allowed the church to expand the cemetery and parking lot.<sup>4</sup>

In 1991 talk of changing the facilities began again as the need for more classroom space, kitchen area and improved rest room facilities were noted. An architect was hired in early 1993, a contractor was hired in September of that same year and work began on the present Fellowship Hall. This work resulted in a doubling of the former space provided by this building. Breakfast was served in this new facility on Easter Sunday of 1993. The building was consecrated in a service held on January 9, 1994, with the Durham District Superintendent, Rev. Albert Shuler, proclaiming the message. Continued sacrificial giving on the part of the congregation and their friends as well as continued blessings from God are enabling us to pay for this improvement much faster than expected.

### The Hopeful Future

The congregation of Gray Rock United Methodist Church continues to look forward to the future that God has promised to bring to us. Many challenges will come our way in the years ahead but we can look back on a faithful history to know that whatever comes our way, we have the good hope that God will continue to guide us as a church in meeting the needs of the people of this community and through out the world.<sup>5</sup>

By Maude Ellen (Harris) Peters  
and Scott Sears

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this essay is attributed to Claude A. Renn in "History of Shady Grove Methodist Church, " published by Renn in 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism*, Abingdon Press, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Renn

<sup>4</sup> Much of the history contained in this portion of this document is based on a history compiled by Rev. Garry Shelton in 1958 and distributed during the Homecoming service on *June 8, 1958*.

<sup>5</sup> Further information about the future of Gray Rock UMC can be found in the *Vision 2000* document approved by our Administrative Council in 1994.



PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED GOOD HOPE AND  
GRAY ROCK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1835-36	H. T. Weatherly	1900-03	J. D. Pegram
1837	H. Speck	1904-07	W. H. Pucket
1838-39	J. Goodman & R. C. Maynard	1908-10	A. S. Barnes
1840	D. B. Nicholson	1911-1914	L. H. Joyner
1841-42	H. G. Leigh	1915-16	C. A. Jones
1843	W. Compton	1917-20	B. C. Thompson
1844	J. Tillett	1921-23	B. H. Black
1844-52	No record—Division of church	1924-25	N. B. Strickland
1852	J. P. Moore	1926-28	J. H. Lanning
1853-55	A. Norman	1929-31	B. D. Critcher
1856	J. D. Halstead	1932-34	P. H. Fields
1857	P. H. Joyner & M. J. Hunt	1935-37	T. S. Richmond
1858	J. W. Floyd	1938	J. F. Stames
1859	J. P. Moore	1939-41	L. C. Brothers
1860	W. Harris	1941-48	J. L. Smith
1861	T. W. Moore	1949-51	R. I. Epps
1862	W. S. Chaffin & J. W. Floyd	1952	J. R. Regan
1863	W. C. Gannon	1953-54	J. L. Beaty
1864	Supplied by Riders	1954-58	G. J. Shelton
1865	W. C. Gannon	1958-60	R. Randolph
1866	No minutes <i>Journal say Gannon</i>	1960-63	B. Bass
1867-69	J. Tillett <i>Release Prohib</i>	1963-66	S. Letorre
1870-71	A. D. Betts	1966-67	L. Buzzard
1872	W. C. Gannon	1967-68	J. Coyle
1873-75	J. R. Griffith	1968-69	L. H. Turner, Jr.
1876	S. V. Hoyle	1969-70	E. C. Crawford
1877-80	J. T. Gibbs	1970-73	Joe Forbes
1881-83	L. H. Gibbons	1973-75	D. R. Dowling
1884	J. T. Bibbs	1975-78	R. L. Thompson
1885	T. A. Boone	1978-80	Steve Porter
1886-88	N. E. Coltrane	1980-84	William Townsend
1889-92	J. H. Hall	1984-89	Brian Wingo
1893-94	P. L. Herman	1989-90	James King
1895-96	G. B. Perry	1990-93	Tryon Lowry
1897-99	K. D. Holmes	1993-96	Scott Sears
		1996-98	Lily Chou
		1998-	Carolyn Kyle Sims