

The History of
Massey's Chapel
Methodist Episcopal
Church, South,
to 1931



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One Sunday morning in September (1931) the Sunday School session at Massey's Chapel was in progress, with no more interest or enthusiasm in evidence than had been manifested at some of the Sundays just previous. Perhaps not so much. At any rate, the time came in the service where the Superintendent (J. Frank Elliott) announced: "The teachers will now take charge of their classes."

Bro. Pleas H. Massey, teacher for the Adult class (and has been ever since there has been a Sunday School at Massey's Chapel) evidently sensing the pessimism of the class began to use strange, but true, comparisons of our day and the early days of Massey's Chapel church and Sunday School. Soon the class forgot hard times, handicaps, pessimism, and defeat, and soon were leaning forward in their seats listening intently, fearing some gem of early recollection might fall too swiftly or too softly for them to catch. His lecture was interspersed with notes of pathos, humor, and victory; swinging the class in either direction as the occasions came.

The Superintendent almost forgot to ring the bell for closing the service, in order that there might be time left for preaching in the morning hour. But, the bell finally rang. His lecture ended. Opportunity was given for questions or discussion. No questions were asked. All looked at each other instead, smilingly. Then the pastor (Rev. F. B. Jackson) expressed a desire that the class request Bro. Massey to write, at his leisure time,

his recollections of the church as a form of history of the early days down to the present time. Each member of the class expressed themselves as heartily in favor of this proposal. Vote was taken. It was unanimously in favor of the request. Bro. Massey modestly accepted the responsibility. Within a few days later Bro. Massey had written out the following account:

Some Facts About Massey's Chapel Church

Organized in 1855, we find that on September 14, 1856, it had on the roll five names, as follows:

John Massey
Elizabeth R. Massey
Emily M. Massey
Tempy Cates
Catherine Herndon

There is no record as to who was pastor or what the activities of the church were, until in 1864 the membership had grown to twelve. No mention is made as to the date when the members were received, except Emeline Elliott who joined February 27, 1864.

During 1864 Numa F. Reid was Presiding Elder and William M. Jordan was pastor, the only pastor mentioned from 1856 to 1869. But, from other sources, we find that Tinnin, Waltz, and Betts, and perhaps others served the church.

During these years we had preaching only once per month and always on a week day. We had no Sunday preaching. We had neither Sunday School nor prayer meeting, there being no one in the church or community who would lead in prayer or conduct a religious meeting.

In the meantime a Baptist church, Berea, had been organized about two and one-half miles north of us and a strong Christian church was flourishing

two and one-half miles south of us, so the territory of Massey's was limited and the hope of building up a strong Methodist church was weak; yet, believing that God did not despise the day of small things the church struggled on with hope.

In 1869 R. S. Webb was sent to the church as pastor and became very popular and deservedly so. Having been brought up in rather easy circumstances, educated at the University of North Carolina, he had known little hardship. But the war left the family wrecked and young Webb poor—too poor to pay for a horse. So he made his rounds on foot. He walked the rounds of the circuit, how far is not now known. That would look hard now, but not so hard then, for when he came on foot he met a congregation that also came on foot. Often there would not be a horse on the grounds. There were no buggies. Webb did a fine work at Massey's. Webb was followed by John Tillett, who was severe and harsh and the church lost much of its interest and life.

Tillett was followed by J. J. Wren, under whose pastorate the church began to thrive. On October 31, 1875, he received P. H. Massey into the church. He (P. H. Massey) began to interest himself at an early date in church matters and the Spirit grew on him. There being no Sunday School at his church he attended the Baptist School at Berea and taught a class for several years and did what he could to build up that church. But, when it was decided later that Massey's Chapel would have a Sunday School of its own he put his best efforts into it.

C. Massey was made superintendent and P. H. Massey teacher of the Bible class. The other members of the church fell in line, and there the real work of the church began. Until this time all the work of the church was done by the pastor.

Now the church lined up to help the pastor. While the work was not easy, it bore some fruit. We had reached a point where we could hold a religious meeting without a preacher. Until this time if one died there was no one to speak a word or offer a prayer at the grave. The pastor would be away on his round and could not be reached. But there began to be an awakening and things began to change.

About this time a strange thing happened to Joseph Elliott, husband of Emeline Elliott, who was a faithful member at Massey's Church. Joseph, who had been ungodly and profane decided within himself, without going to preaching or any one talking to him on the subject, that he would leave off all his wicked ways and give his life to Christ. He made known his mind to his family and joined the church. This action greatly stimulated and was much help to the church.

As time moved on C. Massey retired as Sunday School Superintendent and J. W. Elliott, son of this Joseph Elliott was made superintendent and put his life and much energy into the work. The school increased in number and interest. P. H. Massey continued to teach the Bible class and was powerfully urged by the Spirit that he should put himself out in a larger field. In 1880 he was licensed to preach.

When it was decided to build Massey's Chapel church there was no one in sight who could give any material aid except John Massey. He was a poor farmer and had about as much as he thought he could do to maintain his family and live. So the question arose as to how they would build the church. Mr. Pleasant Trice, a wealthy slave owner gave \$25.00 and John Massey built the church, making many sacrifices to do so.

Did it pay him? Let us see if anything ever

came back to him. For a number of years he always took care of the preacher. He would go with Bro. Massey for dinner and usually spend the night. No doubt lofty ideals and pure atmosphere of the preacher in the home greatly helped and inspired the children. Let's all see what became of them. The oldest son volunteered and joined the Confederate Army and lost his left arm in the war. Coming home from the war he prepared himself and taught school for a number of years and met with signal success. Two of the other boys gave much of their lives to teaching, one of them became a local preacher and traveled far enough to preach the Gospel free to go around the world. Another of the boys became a member of the North Carolina Conference, and was for a number of years Editor of the Christian Advocate and later President of Louisburg Female College. The girls became active members of the church. Does it pay to have the home in sympathy with the church?

But let us come back to the work of the church. As the Sunday School advanced it became a question as to how to keep the children interested. The Superintendent conceived the idea that it would be well to treat the children, at least every Christmas.

P. H. Massey had in the meantime married and Mrs. Massey came into the church and was always ready with every good work and word and took a very prominent part in those Christmas exercises, as we always had a program with the treat. She always put her best efforts in arranging and training for these programs. It proved to be a wonderful help to the children and a source of much pleasure to the parents.

Later on when we had Circuit Sunday School Conferences we always acted our part with credit.

This stimulated the Sunday School and gave the church a better rating. As this work continued and the children developed Massey's Chapel held a higher place on the circuit and especially in the Sunday School Conference until the last Conference we attended. The Sunday School rendered a program never equaled on the circuit.

Until this time we were a part of Durham Circuit. The question of dividing the Circuit had been agitated for several years, while Massey's opposed it. Now, under the pastorate of W. P. Constable who advocated division regardless of any opposition, prevailed and Massey's Chapel with several other churches was cut off. It greatly chilled our zeal and retarded our progress. While divisions sometimes became necessary to development and progress, they have their disadvantages also. It is like breaking up a large family and forming new ones. There is always a lack of that amity and fellowships that prevailed in the old home that is sorely missed in the new. Massey's Chapel felt very keenly this want. Quarterly Conferences and Sunday School associations were occasions of great social and spiritual fellowship with old friends and kindred spirits, with whom we seldom met. This was all cut off and we suffered likewise. But, withal we continued in the faith.

In the meantime we had built a new church. By great effort and some sacrifice by some. Several families had moved into the community and were a great help to the church, notably the Hunters, the Duhllins, the Bordeaux, the Youngs, the Copleys, all of whom moved to some other place and we missed them sorely.

In the meantime the health of J. W. Elliott failed so that, to the regret of all, he was forced to give up the work which lay so close to his heart, and to which he had given so many years of

faithful service. J. Frank Elliott, his son, was made Superintendent of the Sunday School, which office he still holds to the satisfaction of all.

J. W. Elliott passed away and was greatly missed by all. A little later W. H. Elliott, a son of J. W. Elliott who ought to have been called Peter, for he was solid as a stone, who had been a very faithful and efficient steward for a number of years was taken away in the bloom of manhood. His passing was a great shock to the church. Then E. E. Massey and Emily M. Elliott who had rendered much service to the church were also called away. Sarah Craig, who for a long time had been a faithful member, to the great sorrow of all had to obey the summons to go. Mrs. Hancock, another faithful member, also passed away.

Having lost so much by removals and death we were struggling on as best we could. Recently several families have come in to inspire and encourage us. Among those we would mention the Tilley's, the family of Harwards, Gunter's, and others. These adjusting themselves to the work together with the old guard, have brought into Sunday School several new members which the church greatly appreciates and is using every means trying to prove itself helpful.

P. H. Massey and wife, who for more than fifty years have rendered the best they had, and devoted their lives to the church by reason of years and failing strength see that their work is almost over. They are greatly encouraged in their last days to note the activities of those upon whom the responsibilities and leadership of the church will devolve. May they bear this responsibility as workmen that need not be ashamed!

Let us close with the prayer that these and some whose talent not now used in its largest capacity may come and lay their talents on the altar of

God, and may the blessing of God be upon them and upon all who in any way are or may be connected with Massey's Chapel church.

About the middle of September (1930) Rev. and Mrs. F. B. Jackson, (Rev. Jackson a member of Holston Conference) arrived from Virginia to finish out the year (until Nov. 18th, 1930) for Rev. A. A. Jones who had left the work, Orange-Massey Circuit, in order to go to his own Conference in New York. The Presiding Elder, Dr. J. C. Wooten, having given the new preacher the necessary information to find the location of the church and its people, and information concerning other affairs of the church, the new preacher and wife made their way out to Massey's Chapel in search of the home of Mr. and Mrs. P. H. Massey. Upon arriving at the home they received a warm welcome, as do all preachers no doubt.

The next preaching appointment came, (Sept. 23, 1930) and Rev. Jackson preached from the text, Numbers 13:30, "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.'" The subject of the sermon was the latter half of the verse, and at the close of the sermon an opportunity was given for those who were willing to then and there start to possess this land of Canaan here in Massey's Chapel community to join the pastor at the altar for a prayer of consecration. A number of the Lord's faithful met at the altar and prayed. The fire on the altar of the Lord began to blaze and from that day to this it has burned brighter and brighter.

Since that time, without any special effort, fifteen members have joined the church; Sunday School has doubled in attendance, and the School has been reorganized with two additional classes;

prayer meetings have been held each Wednesday night, with fine attendance, averaging about twenty-five in number; and it is the hope of the congregation to build a new, brick veneer church with a Sunday School unit of three rooms, and one room on each side of the vestibule at the church entrance, thus accommodating six Sunday School classes. It is planned to also equip the church and Sunday School departments with modern and convenient furnishings in order that the best possible work may be done.

There is no attempt to mention the many fine things that have been done by the membership of the church. Their love and concern for the pastor and his wife have been manifested in many ways. It is evident that the church has been doing fine work by the fact that it is our earnest expectation to pay out every claim of Massey's Chapel in full this year, even in spite of the hard times that so many people are talking. This financial success is largely due to the skill and interest of Mrs. P. H. Massey and her other stewards who have so faithfully and unselfishly devoted themselves to this important task.

There has been little conscious effort on the part of your pastor to "revive" the church or to "do big things". He has put extra energy into the work of Massey's Chapel because he loved the people and wanted to spend much time among them. Out of the twenty or more churches that your pastor has served during his ministry, few, or perhaps none, have afforded more pleasant relationships than that with Massey's Chapel.

It is only about ten days until our Annual Conference meets. The pastor expects to be able to say: "Bishop, Massey's Chapel has had a fine year. Had a good revival; received several mem-

bers into the church; the church is spiritually alive; all collections and salaries are in full.”

Then, at the next Annual Conference he hopes to include in this report that “the new church has been completed, paid for, and dedicated.”

Though he and his wife may pass on and soon be remembered only as another preacher and wife on the work, yet they shall both hold in their minds sacred memories of bygone days at Massey's Chapel.

F. B. JACKSON,
Duke University,
Durham, N. C.
(Nov. 7th, 1931).