
A History
of
Mount Bethel Methodist Church



By
HARLEY A. CHESTER
Pastor

1949

A History Of MOUNT BETHEL METHODIST CHURCH

By
HARLEY A. CHESTER

According to papers filed at Hillsboro, the county seat of Orange county, there came to this country a man by the name of Nathaniel Harris about the year 1740 and purchased a large tract of land containing about 6000 acres at the price of six cents per acre. Mr. Harris being a religious man, felt the need for a place of worship; a place where the spiritual need of himself and those associated with him might receive spiritual strength that was necessary for the huge task he and they were undertaking. Building a log Meeting House on the lands owned by him he set a pace that was to be the pattern of the community for time to come. This Meeting House was used by any who desired to worship there, both white and colored.

It is said that the first funeral and the first grave made at the Meeting House was that of a slave belonging to Mr. Harris. Many graves of colored people are to be found near where this first building stood.

Old grave stones bearing names and date verify the statement that this church building was here sometime in the middle 1700's. We find the name of Wm. Harris who died 1824. The name of Robert Harris who died 1843 and the name of Nathaniel Harris, supposed to be the son of the first named Nathaniel Harris, died 1849. Many of the earlier graves have no marker to give us an insight further into this history.

The foundation of the chimney of the first church building can be seen at the present time, marking for us the place where the first church building was erected that was destined to become Mount Bethel Methodist Church in later years.

Sometime during the year 1808 a number of the male members, namely, the Tilley's; Towitt Harris; Mark Harris; William Harris; Nathaniel Harris, supposed to be the son of the original Nathaniel Harris; the Clemment's; the Garrard's and Samuel Bumpass met and decided that the Meeting House needed to be connected with some denomination and receive a permanent ministry. As up to this time the spiritual guidance was left entirely to passerbys and the layety of the community. At this meeting the building and property was turned over to the Methodist Episcopal Church and placed on the Granville Circuit of the Virginia Conference. This circuit embraced an area around Clarksville, Virginia, Person, Granville and a part of Orange County, North Carolina. The Reverend James Skidmore was assigned as the first pastor. Following this there came a long list of Methodist Circuit Riders serving the church. Namely, Reverend Mr. Dye; Reverend

Mr. Speck; Reverend Mr. Jeter; Reverend Mr. Lumsden; and Reverend Mr. Campbell.

It was in the year 1838 that a new church building was erected. This brought to three the number of buildings erected on this property in a little less than one hundred years. Reverend Hezekiah Leigh was the pastor, and it was through his hard labors and evangelistic zeal that this building was brought to completion. Following Mr. Leigh we find the names of Reverends Nicholson; James; Jameson; Halstead; Walsh; Johnson; Paul Carraway; Culbreth; McMannen; Helsbeck; R. O. Burton; J. E. Martin; John Tillett; J. J. Renn; H. H. Gibbons; Jordan; Hunt; Maynard; Archer; Holmes; Galles; Farror; Herndon; J. M. Martin; J. T. Lyon; W. M. Barrenger; T. J. Gattis; J. T. Gibbons; W. H. Bobbitt; P. L. Groome; Oliver Ryder; W. J. Finley; C. W. Robenson; Thomas Lowe; J. J. Renn; W. H. Moore; W. S. Davis; P. Greening and J. H. McCracken.

Mount Bethel received that name in 1808 when it became a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This church was placed in the North Carolina Conference and on the Hillsboro circuit in the year 1828.

At the conference of 1878 Mount Bethel was placed on the Durham circuit, and remained there until 1917 and was placed on the Rougemont circuit. In 1926 the Rougemont circuit was divided and Mount Bethel became the center around which the present Bahama circuit was formed.

It was sometime during the year 1851 that the fourth church building was erected. It was here that Washington Duke attended his first Sunday School at the age of eleven. Later Washington Duke was converted under a brush harbor at the rear of the church and joined the Methodist Church. Later he would leave us this message, "What ever I am, I accredited it to the Methodist circuit riders." It was here that the spiritual birth of the father of those making possible the great Duke foundation and Duke University was made.

In May 1901 the members decided to build a new building. This building was to be erected across the road and the building committee was composed of the following: A. W. Tilley, chairman; J. D. C. Turner, secretary; W. J. Ball; D. J. Tilley and J. L. Garrard. J. H. McCracken was the pastor.

According to a news story in the Durham Herald-Sun papers this notation was made. The church was the most beautiful country church in Durham county and cost \$1,200. This building was completed and dedicated on November 16, 1901.

Records of the church conference give us the following data: The entire budget of the church was \$100. At this church conference a committee was appointed to wait on two members that had not attended services in more than a year.

The church conference records of 1902 show that J. B. Thompson was pastor and at the first and second quarters

nothing had been paid by the members for the support of the church, however this notation was made, "three copies of the Advocate were taken and the church school used the Methodist literature."

In the records of 1903 we see that nothing had been paid for missions or other causes late in the year with this notation made, "The church will do its full duty we trust."

Other names appearing in the long list of appointments include: Reverend J. B. Thompson, S. T. Moyle, L. M. Hall, B. F. Boone, B. O. Merritt, D. A. Perry, J. F. Starnes, R. E. Pittman, M. R. Chambers, J. Bascome Hurley, W. F. Craven, C. W. Barbee, M. C. Dunn, O. I. Hinson, E. D. C. Brewer, T. M. Vick, Jr., and the present pastor, H. A. Chester.

Sometime during the year 1927, Mr. Cameron donated to Mt. Bethel the bell. This bell was cast in England and brought to this country for use in the old Episcopal Church that stood on the Cameron estate. The Camerons came to North Carolina from Virginia about the same time that the Harris's came. The records show that the Cameron estate adjoined the Harris lands.

During the year 1936, Rev. M. C. Dunn led in the erection of the cabin and Sunday School rooms which are incorporated in the present building. The building committee for the new stone church was composed of the following: D. M. Thompson, chairman; C. M. Allen, secretary and treasurer; W. M. Johnson, Clifton Ball, C. E. Thompson, R. B. Murphy, and the pastor who was T. Marvin Vick, Jr., for the first period. H. A. Chester was pastor for the second period. The finance committee for this building was composed of the following: Fletcher Woodall, chairman; R. H. Hraris, Mrs. R. B. Murphy, James Farlow, Mrs. Florence Lloyd, Mrs. Cooper Mangum, Mrs. E. T. Jones, Mrs. M. P. Sanford, Mrs. D. M. Thompson, H. L. Umstead and A. C. Eddins.

The last wedding to be held in the old church was Helen Lashley and Elisha Eugene Watts. The last funeral in the old church was held on February 5th, 1948, being the funeral of Mrs. Ollie Thompson. The first funeral in the new church was that of Mrs. Pattie U. Grey on June 27, 1949.

Mt. Bethel Methodist Church, a little church in the very small village of Bahama, twelve miles north of Durham, needed a new church building. Could the two hundred members, widely scattered as they were, ever hope to build?

Since 1901 the congregation had worshipped in an old frame church building. With the exception of adding Sunday School rooms, nothing had been done to the building since its erection. The pews were really home made benches. Perhaps they were made so uncomfortable on purpose!

In July 1944, Mr. H. L. Umstead, a member of Mt. Bethel, then living in Roxboro, sent the treasurer of the church a check for \$100, with a note that the check was to help build a new church. This started the ball to rolling. People went

to work—men, women, children, church members and non-church members. Under the leadership of Mr. Brewer, our pastor, a building committee and finance committee were appointed in October of 1944. Both made recommendations to the congregation time after time. However, nothing much was accomplished in 1944 and 1945. The total in the building fund at the end of 1945 was only \$580.00. The blame may be on the war.

The pastor following Mr. Brewer, Mr. T. M. Vick, Jr., had an architect draw plans for the new church. The cost of the church was to be \$18,000. Before it was completed the cost went to almost \$42,000.

Meeting after meeting was held. Plan after plan was presented to the congregation and vote after vote was taken. Finally, the congregation voted to build a \$30,000 stone church. All this time the people were busy raising money for the church. By the end of 1946, there was about \$3,500 in the building fund treasury. The stone was bought and delivered. The building fund grew steadily, if painfully.

On the second Sunday in April, 1948, the first board was torn off the old church by the man who had sent the first \$100 to the building fund. The following week, the "tearing down" was begun in earnest and the congregation moved to the school building.

The old church was torn down in about a week. The basement was dug and we wondered if a church would ever rise from that hole. Finally, cement foundations began to be poured and everyone watched eagerly as work progressed all through the summer and into the fall.

All the time the women of the church were doing things to raise money. Gallons of Brunswick stew were made and sold, suppers were given, bazaars were held, Negro minstrels, plays, a womanless wedding and almost anything to make an honest dollar. Friends in Durham and surrounding territory were generous, indeed, in their contributions. The more money we raised, the more building materials rose in price. Our situation looked hopeless.

In the midst of our building program, conference came and our pastor was sent away. He had been such an inspiration to us in our work, we hated to see him go. We wondered what the new pastor could do to help us in our program. We had about half enough money to build our church.

The pastor sent to us was Mr. H. A. Chester. He threw his whole soul, seemingly, into our building program and gave us the inspiration needed to finish our goal. Soon after Christmas he announced to us that we would be in our new church on Easter Sunday and it would be paid for. Mouths dropped open, for people wondered where or how we would get more than \$10,000. A Five Percent Club was formed. People gave five percent of their earnings to the building fund. This still did not bring in enough money. Our pastor

still kept telling us we could raise the amount required to finish our church.

I suppose we believed in miracles too, since we believed that. The Board of Stewards met and set up a special committee and assessed the members a proportionate sum of the amount remaining to finish the church. Letters were sent to members and the results were amazing.

Work progressed more rapidly than anticipated and the church was ready to be occupied on the first Sunday in April. We gathered for the first service owing \$346. A member of the congregation wrote out a check for that amount. So, miracle of miracles, we held our first service in our beautiful new church free of debt. Our gratitude to our leaders and to each person who helped us during the past three years has filled our hearts.

The total amount raised was \$42,241. Of this amount, the Duke Endowment paid \$5,900 and the Board of Missions and Church Extension gave \$750.

Words cannot describe how pretty we think our church is. To us it represents untold hours of work, sacrifices, and even disagreements. Through it all, however, we seemed to feel the hand of God leading us on. Our church is dedicated to the glory of God. Ye who will, come and worship with us.

The Board of Trustees at this time is composed of the following: D. M. Thompson, chairman; Clifton Ball and H. L. Umstead.

The Board of Stewards serving this year are as follows: H. L. Umstead, chairman; C. M. Allen, secretary and treasurer; Fletcher Woodall, A. C. Eddins, Ewell Umstead, R. B. Murphy, Mrs. John Suggs, Mrs. Cooper Mangum, Clifton Ball and Fred Luxton.

The membership of Mount Bethel Methodist Church at this time is as follows:

J. E. Fortner	Mrs. Edna E. Copley	Mrs. Marvin Gray
Mrs. J. E. Fortner	G. D. Crabtree	Virginia Gray
C. M. Allen	Mrs. G. D. Crabtree	John William Gray
Mrs. C. M. Allen	John Crabtree	Bobbie Lee Gray
Mary Ruth Allen	Mrs. Maggie Crabtree	Arthur David Gray
Bowling Anderson	Mrs. Dora Sexton	Michael Speed Gray
Mrs. Bowling Anderson	A. C. Eddins	D. W. Hall
Adolphus T. Ball	Mrs. A. C. Eddins	Mrs. Pearl B. Hall
Mrs. Annie T. Ball	Mrs. Roy Farthing	Harold Hall
Clifton Ball	Sarah Farlow	D. W. Hall, Jr.
Mrs. Clifton Ball	James Farlow	Mrs. Robert Hall
Mrs. Fannie Ball	Mrs. James Farlow	Violet H. Bishop
E. Marvin Ball	L. A. Fowler	Jack Hall
O. B. Bass	Mrs. L. A. Fowler	Sterling Harris
Mrs. O. B. Bass	Astor Fowler	Mrs. Sterling Harris
Mrs. Thelma H. Bates	Carey Fowler	Mrs. Hubert Montague
William Biggers	Jean Fowler	Don Harris
Helen Blalock	Mae Franklin	Mrs. Don Harris
Mrs. Vera M. Bowling	Estelle Franklin	Robert Harris
Mrs. Iris S. Bryant	Mrs. H. R. Goodall	Mrs. Myrtle Harris
Mrs. Cora Lee Copley	Marvin S. Gray	Mary Ella Hill

Mrs. Ruth H. Hill	Essie Mangum	Dwight M. Thompson
Mrs. Alice Lee Hill	John Mangum	Mrs. Alma Thompson
Victor Hill	James Mangum	Sue Francis Thompson
Mrs. Mildred T. Hill	George Mangum	Wallace Thompson
Mrs. Nelrose Hopkins	Archie Mangum	Mrs. Wallace Thompson
Mrs. Annie Jacobs	Mrs. Hubert Montague	Eugene D. Umstead, Jr.
W. M. Johnson	R. B. Murphy	Bessie Umstead
Mrs. Ruth T. Johnson	Mrs. R. B. Murphy	Malcolm Umstead
Bernard Johnson	Mrs. E. Percy Parrish	Mrs. Malcolm Umstead
Mrs. Dora M. Jones	Herbert Roberts	Ewell Umstead
Shirley Jones	E. Marie Roberts	Mrs. Ewell Umstead
Thomas Jones	Eva Mae Roberts	Gary Umstead
Blanche Jones	Pauline Roberts	Lary Umstead
Warren P. Landis	Staley Sanford	Oscar L. Umstead
Rebecca S. Landis	Ralph Sanford	Eugene D. Umstead
T. W. Lloyd	Mrs. M. P. Sanford	Mrs. Eugene D. Umstead
Mrs. T. W. Lloyd	Louise Sanford	Vertee Umstead
Mrs. Lucile Long	Edward Sanford	H. Lee Umstead
Bradley Long	Mrs. Edward Sanford	Mrs. H. L. Umstead
Fred Luxton	Mrs. Cora Sanford	Norflot Umstead
Mrs. Fred Luxton	Oscar Sanford	Eveyline Umstead
Mrs. Julia McBride	Mrs. Oscar Sanford	George Umstead
Mrs. Edith T. McBroom	Mary Sanford	Mrs. Ada Umstead
Luther McFarland	Mrs. S. H. Southerland	Hazel Umstead
Shelton McIntire	Richard E. Southerland	Mrs. Della Umstead
Mrs. Alma Sue McIntire	Margaret Southerland	Mrs. Nelle Veasey
Bobby Lyn McIntire	Carolyn Southerland	I. L. Veasey
Mrs. C. P. McIntire	Hanna Southerland	Mrs. I. L. Veasey
Alfred Mangum	Dorothy S. Roak	Norwood Wade
Mrs. Alfred Mangum	Sammy Southerland	Regenal Wade
Martin Mangum	Mrs. John Suggs	Peggie Wade
Mrs. Jacqueline Mangum	Mrs. Clyde Tacket	Fletcher Woodall
Cooper Mangum	Pat Tacket	Mrs. Bertha Woodall
Mrs. Lucy Mangum	Nancy Tacket	Elisah Eugene Watts
Mrs. Edith Mangum	Maurice Thompson	Mrs. Helen L. Watts
Jennis Mangum	Mrs. Maurice Thompson	Lucile Wheeler
Mrs. Jennis Mangum	Levi Tippet	Nanne Mae Tilley
Bruce Mangum	Mrs. Annie L. U. Tippet	Clifford Tilley
Ben Mangum	Charlotte Tippet	Erwin Carver
Mrs. Rosa Mangum	Mrs. Jean Partrige	Mrs. Mary Teasley
W. B. Mangum	Raschard Tilley	Mrs. Marion T. Hicks
Cleo Mangum	Mrs. Raschard Tilley	C. T. Muse
Aleas Mangum	Hubert Tilley	Mrs. Rebecca C. Muse
Marqus H. Mangum	Mrs. J. Edgar Tilley	H. Archie Chester
Mrs. M. H. Mangum	Mrs. P. G. Tilley	Mrs. Edith M. Chester
Alton Mangum	Preston Tilley	Mrs. Eveyline J. Buchanan
Mrs. Alton Mangum	P. G. Tilley	Mrs. Lillie M. Ellis
Myrtle Mangum	Mrs. Mary Blackwood	Mrs. Gladys M. Patterson
Robert Mangum	Mrs. Bryant Tilley	Mrs. Doris T. Blalock
Mrs. Nelle B. Mangum	Joyce Tilley	Clinton Harris
Melvin Mangum	Betty Tilley	Mrs. Dorothy M. Warren
Mrs. Mildred Mangum	C. E. Thompson	Ralph Tilley
Preston Mangum	Mrs. C. E. Thompson	