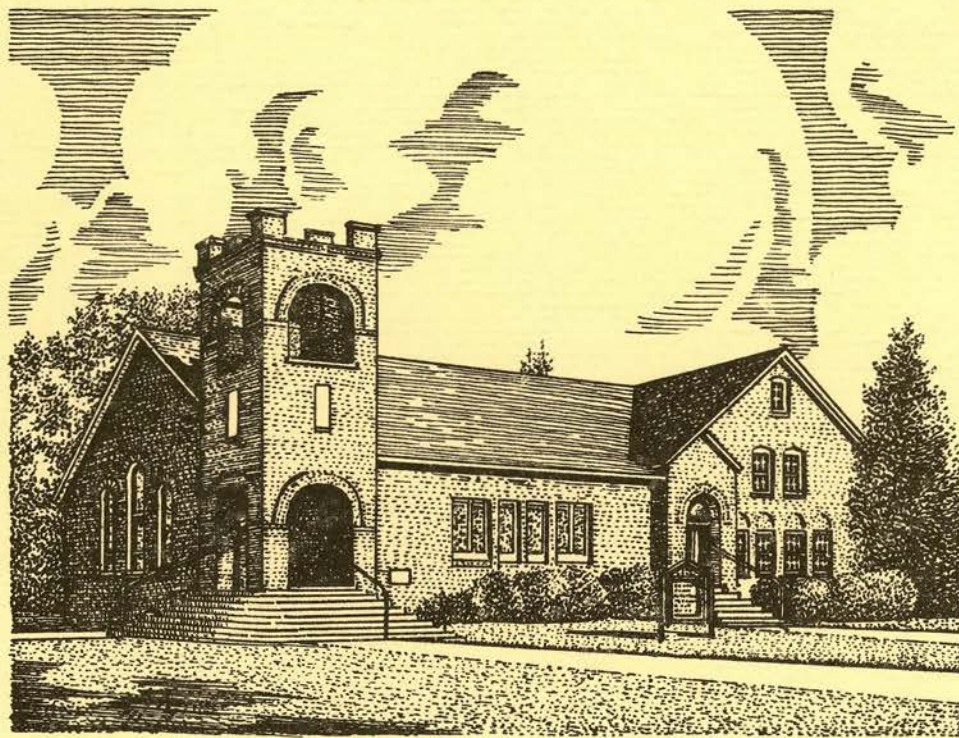


ORIENTAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## HISTORY OF ORIENTAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

Marion W. Hardy

Revisions with L. Elbert Wethington

Twelve years before the town of Oriental was incorporated (May 10, 1899), a Methodist congregation was established in 1887. At first the Methodist congregation was primarily a Sunday School with worship services--generally called "preaching"--about once a month. The Oriental Methodist Church was added to the Pamlico Circuit of the New Bern District.

Pamlico County was created in 1873 out of the northeastern part of Craven County. The population was sparse, and the transportation was probably more by water than by land. Fishing, lumbering, and farming were the main occupations. A few churches--"meeting houses"--and schools were spread throughout the county. Stonewall was the first county seat, then Vandemere, and a little later Bayboro. The first Methodist Church in the area of what is now Pamlico County was at Kershaw, and the second, in 1848, was at Stonewall, named in the year 1865, incorporated in 1870.

Oriental Methodist Church came into being as an expression of the missionary, evangelistic, educational concern of the Methodist Episcopal Church organized in America in Baltimore on Christmas Day 1784. Through the efforts of the first bishops, Thomas Coke whose mission focused primarily on the West Indies and Africa, and Francis Asbury who travelled throughout the thirteen colonies, Methodism was becoming one of the two or three most numerous Churches in the United States.

In the year Oriental Methodist Church was founded, 1887, Louisburg College was 100 years old, North Carolina had three Methodist colleges, about 700 churches, and approximately 60,000 members. At this time the denomination was called The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, reflecting the division that occurred in 1845-46 over the issue of slavery.

Before 1887 the few people who were around what is now Oriental traveled by horse and buggy to the only Methodist Church within 8 miles, the Kershaw Methodist Church. From its beginning the Delamar and Harris families were among its faithful. The last service, a funeral, was held in the Kershaw Church on July 9, 1955; The Annual Conference officially discontinued the Kershaw Methodist Church July 1, 1958, and the remaining members were transferred into the Oriental Methodist Church.

Oriental Methodist Church began in a little wooden school house on the Walter Paris corner lot across the street from the present church building. Sunday School and worship services were held in this building from 1887 until 1894. Sun-

day School was every Sunday afternoon, and Church (worship service) was once a month. The Methodist Church was the only church in Oriental until the Baptists organized in 1899 and the Free Will Baptists in 1900.

Oriental was growing by the turn of the century. The births were increasing and new families were coming in. Some of the new-comers were from the South River area on the south side of the Neuse River and near Adams Creek where there was a Methodist Church, Merrimon, which was served for a time by the pastors assigned in the earlier days to the Oriental Methodist Church. If that same arrangement had existed in the winter of 1917-18, the pastor could have walked across the 5 mile-wide Neuse on ice instead of coming by boat! In those early days the appointed pastor had several churches to serve, so he arrived for "preaching" about once a month for each congregation. The lay members conducted the Sunday School weekly.

Everyone went to church in those early years. The population was small, but the few members were determined to have a church of their own. They managed to raise money for their first wooden church in Oriental by having ice cream socials, oyster and barbecue suppers. They also had food baskets that the women of the church prepared and auctioned to the highest bidder. Some older members still recall some cases when eating together led to love and marriage! They also had "apron parties" when the women would bring aprons without hems to be sold. The men would hem them, and the one who did the best job received the prize.

About 1894 the Methodists accumulated enough money to build their own building, a new wooden church, located at the present site on land donated by Mr. Arthur Midyette. The building was finally completed in 1897. The architect was a man from New Jersey who had come to Oriental to catch eels and buy fish.

In the early 1900s a farmer-minister named Tom H. Carmine came to Oriental and rented the Bob Midyette farm. He was a fine, very friendly person, a good singer and speaker. He would sometimes speak and sing at the church, and people came from all around the sparsely populated county to hear him. After his death his wife and daughter donated a church bell to the Oriental Methodist Church. That bell, still hanging in the tower, will sound its 100 peels on Sunday March 1, 1987! To the glory of God! and a reminder to all the congregation and town of its good heritage of grace and truth in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The records show that the first pastor was Fernie S. Becton who was appointed again in 1890-93. Oriental was listed as a part of the Pamlico Charge in 1893, and in 1900 part of the Pamlico Circuit was set apart as the Oriental Circuit (Oriental, Kershaw, Arapahoe, and town of Pamlico).

It was the Reverend Walter Patton, sent to Oriental on his first appointment 1909-1910, who managed to get the members interested in building a brick church. The old wooden church building was sold to the Episcopalians who moved it a short distance away in 1911. During Pastor Patton's appointment Mary Love Ritch was the music and choir director. She was a faithful member of the church in the early years, taught the Men's Sunday School class which had been organized by Ben O'Neal, and she has continued to be loved and fondly remembered throughout the years. Mr. Will Midgette, son of "Uncle Lou," was the organist for many years; although he could not read music, he could play in perfect chord. Mrs. Etta Clare Perry followed Miss Love as music director; she also served faithfully until her death, but not before she had trained Edward Lupton to succeed her. The worship of God was enhanced through the purchase of an electronic organ. A house for the minister and his family was purchased in 1918.

A great loss was suffered in 1934 when the church building was destroyed by fire; only the brick walls were left. Members contributed generously of their time and money for the rebuilding in 1936 during the midst of the Great Depression. While the church was being restored services were held under the leadership of Pastor C.E. Hix in the school building and Free Will Baptist Church. It is interesting to note that in spite of the fire and severe economic hardship, the membership of Oriental Methodist Church had grown to 325 by its Jubilee, fiftieth anniversary in 1937. During those days, the typical offering of a child in Sunday School was 1 or 2 cents.

Precious memories of individuals have enriched the fellowship in Oriental. Some living members still remember when Mr. Arol Land joined the church in 1915 while the Reverend J. B. Brasse was pastor. Mr. Land who served as custodian for more than ten years remembers attending church as a boy with his friend Rufus Whorton. They said one Sunday the Methodists were singing "Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown," while across the street the Episcopalians were singing "No, Not One...!" Mrs. Hugh Harris, Sr. (Miss Ethel) who had come to Oriental to teach in 1915, and later got married, transferred her membership to Oriental Methodist Church. She recalls when Messers Jess and Preston Spruill came from the Free Will Baptist Church in Merritt (Trent) in 1923, the same year Mr. Amy Lupton joined the church. When asked in 1987 what was the most important thing that happened in Oriental, she replied: "My marriage to the finest man in the church." As young boys, Hubert and Tom Smith, Rodman Spruill, J.J. and Lester Goodwin, Virgil Nelson, Gerald Midyette and Lin Spruill, played ping-pong in competition at the parsonage. In those days also Maude Allen was very active in the church; after first being a member of Kershaw Methodist Church, she came to Oriental, and gave strong leadership in the choir and the Woman's Society of Christian Service. During that time she also took orders for flower arrangements

and applied her commission to the remodeling of the church's interior. The chancel woodwork is the fruit of her labor. She was honored for her lifetime of devotion when the women's Sunday School class took her name after she died in 1980. The oldest living member of Oriental United Methodist Church is Mrs. Ada Harris who celebrated her 109 birthday February 14, 1987!

The other "heroes of faith" are too numerous to mention in such a brief history. But one faithful member of Oriental Methodist Church, vividly remembered and loved, was John Henry Wiggins, a successful farmer and highly respected Negro member of the community: he is remembered best perhaps for his spirit-filled prayers in the worship service.

Throughout its 100 years The Methodist Church has been much involved in the common life of Oriental. It has rejoiced and suffered with many changes through the years. In 1890 the steamships "Neuse" and "Ocrakoke" carried freight and passengers between New Bern, Oriental, Manteo, and Elizabeth City. In addition to fishing and farming, timber became a big industry after the turn of the century, especially with the coming of the John Roper Lumber Company to Oriental. The railroad came in 1905 with two trips daily until 1954. Bus service began in 1930. With the increased production of truck farming and shipping of potatoes and grain by 1935 large trucks began to be used for more rapid shipping. In the 1930s Oriental had 2 cotton gins, an ice plant, a cement block and tile plant, a bottling plant, a tobacco warehouse, and George Perry's Ford dealership. Oriental boasted the first electric plant in the county, and the first school bus in the state. The first bank was established in 1906. Telephones came to Oriental in the early 20s. Most all supplies and services essential to life in a small town of less than 1000 people were available in Oriental-on-the-Neuse. Musicians, milliners, druggists, barbers, mechanics, carpenters, physicians, fishermen, farmers, teachers, students, homemakers, hotel-keepers, cooks, clerks, realtors, morticians, and ministers! They all were a part of Oriental Methodist Church.

The Great Depression of the 1930s and impact of World War II probably brought the greatest changes to life in Oriental. Many youth and some adults went away to school, armed services, or employment, and population decreased for a period until the early 1960s. Yet, the Oriental church experienced the upsurge in church membership in the late 1940s and 50s seen throughout most of America. In 1948 a wooden bridge was constructed across Green Creek on the west side of Oriental; that bridge was replaced with a high concrete bridge in the early 70s. In the early 60s Oriental began to be "discovered" as a sailing mecca and an idyllic retirement home. New families from other states began to come into the membership and were warmly welcomed by those who had grown up in the church. New possibilities of more effective ministry began to appear in the 1960s and 70s.

From its beginning Oriental Methodists have been an integral part of the Methodist connectional system and contributed faithfully to its missionary, educational, and administrative agencies. It has also participated in those ecumenical concerns. In 1939 there was a healing of the earlier national divisions in Methodism with the uniting of The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, to form The Methodist Church. This organizational structure did not greatly affect the local congregations except to give them more of a sense of participating in the larger ministry of the Church. Another union occurred in 1968 when the former United Brethren, previously German-speaking Methodists largely in the north and midwest, joined with The Methodist Church to become the United Methodist Church. Such unions meant mergers and reorganizations of general boards like missions, publications, pensions, discipleship, finance and administration. But it meant the consciousness of being a part of a 10 million member body of Methodist Christians composed of a rainbow of ethnic groups of Native Americans, European descendants, Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Hawaiians, and others. These unions were expressions of increased ecumenical emphasis upon the God-given unity of the Body of Christ and the integrity of its witness to the world. The United Methodist Church is also a member of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, The World Council of Churches, and The World Methodist Council.

Oriental has enjoyed an interesting and special relationship with Duke University, formerly Trinity College which was established in 1841 as Union Institute Academy, then Trinity in 1857 in Randolph County before moving to Durham in 1892 and becoming Duke University in 1924. In 1920 and for several years a summer school program directed by Duke was held in Oriental. Duke faculty and students became close friends of the people of Oriental. And Oriental Methodist Church has felt a much closer relationship to Duke because for many summers since the 1930s ministerial students through the Duke Endowment have served as summer interns in Oriental. In 1986 the Duke Endowment contributed 23% of the construction costs of the long-awaited fellowship hall and educational wing to the church.

Growth in membership and expansion of its ministry became more real in the early 1970s when in 1973 Oriental was made a Charge with its own pastor, the Reverend David Lupton. In 1980 Oriental made a leap of faith in accepting a full-time pastor and becoming self-supporting. Other "firsts" were the visit of a bishop, Bishop William R. Cannon in 1982, and in the same year the first ordained woman to preach there, the Reverend Carol Coehring. Bishop Cannon came again to preach for the July 4th program in 1983. Bishop C.P. Minnick was our guest February 1, 1986. Outstanding growth in membership and expansion in ministries of the church have been seen since 1980 during the pastorates of the Reverends David O. Jenkins and H. Gray Southern. In God's grace Oriental is prepared to move out courageously and faithfully into its second century.

Pamlico

# ORIENTAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH DIRECTORY OF CHURCH MEMBERS AND FAMILIES

Oriental United Methodist Church  
P.O. Box 70  
Oriental, N.C. 28571  
(919) 249-0229  
June 1983

Many people contributed to the making of this first directory - Eula May Walker and Ethel Harris to the history, Marie Borden to the typing and organization, Norma Smith to the location of many lost members - but the directory is complete and full because of the efforts and work of Diane Piland. Thank you.

The Methodist Episcopal Church of Oriental was first organized in April, 1887. Those first members came together for worship in a school house which was located near our present church. Its first pastor on record was F.S. Becton. Ten years later a church building was constructed across the street from the present home of Mrs. Okla Caroon with H.E. Tripp serving as minister to this new church. That church building was later sold to the Episcopal church.

In 1900 the Pamlico Circuit was set apart and the Oriental Circuit was organized under the leadership of J.L. Rumley. Then in 1911 and 1912 a new and large church was built on the present site, the land having been donated by Arthure Midyette whose son, Robert, is an active member of the church today.

On a Sunday morning in 1935 that church burned and the existing sanctuary was built one year later in 1936, still the Oriental Methodist Episcopal Church. C.E. Hix was the pastor. The church remained part of the Oriental Circuit until 1973 when it became a charge unto itself, pastored by David Lupton until 1980. That year Oriental made a leap of faith in accepting a full-time pastor and beginning a new era of growth and fellowship.

## PASTORS

1887	Fernie S. Becton	1911-1913	E.C. Glenn	1945	A.S. Lancaster
1888	unknown	1914	H.B. Hill	1946	L.C. Vereen
1889	D.A. Watkins	1915	J.P. Bross	1947	C.G. Nickens
1890-1892	Fernie S. Becton	1916-1917	S.N. Hurst	1948-1952	P.R. Maness
1893	J.C. Jones	1918-1920	R.R. Grant	1953	W.G. Lowe
1894	J.C. Jones and Edward Kelley	1921-1922	O.P. Fitzgerald	1954-1956	R.L. Hithcox
1895	C.P. Snow	1923-1924	J.C. Whedbee	1957-1960	L.A. Green
1896-1897	H.E. Tripp	1925	L.T. Singleton	1961-1962	F. Fortescue
1898-1899	J.M. Lowder	1926	B.B. Slaughter	1963-1964	G.C. Smith
1900-1901	J.L. Rumley	1927	J.T. Stanford	1965-1966	Harold Elliott
1902-1903	Fernie S. Becton	1928-1931	R.E. Atkinson	1967-1968	Paul Oldaker
1904	W.E. Brown	1932-1935	J.C. Humble	1969	George Campbell
1905	J.J. Barker	1936-1938	C.E. Hix, Jr.	1970	J.H. Coile
1906-1907	W.T. Usry	1939-1941	J.K. Ormond	1971	E.F. Seymour
1908	G.B. Webster	1942-1943	C.E. Kinlaw	1973-1980	David Lupton
1909-1910	Walter Patton	1944	Perry and Reisinger	1980-present	David Jenkins

1983  
1983-present H. Gray Southern