

A Brief History
of the
Oxford Methodist Church
Oxford, North Carolina



1812-1950

A BRIEF HISTORY
of the
OXFORD METHODIST CHURCH

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This is only a brief sketch of the church history. To give an account of all the wonderful deeds done by so many of the members would take volumes. It is only to record the early history of the church with a few high lights and changes since the present church was started in 1898.

THE OXFORD METHODIST CHURCH



THE THIRD CHURCH—1867
LOCATED AT
CORNER OF MAIN AND SYCAMORE STREETS

THE OXFORD METHODIST CHURCH



PRESENT CHURCH—1902

LOCATED AT

CORNER OF COLLEGE AND McCLANAHAN STREETS

BRIEF HISTORY

of the

OXFORD METHODIST CHURCH

Available records give a quite inadequate idea—or no idea at all—of the beginning of Methodist meetings in and around the territory we now call Oxford. The most authoritative record of early Methodism in Oxford are the minutes of the annual conferences. These show the names of the pastors assigned to this charge.

The late Hon. A. A. Hicks, who was perhaps better qualified to speak on this subject than any other man of his time, quotes Bishop Asbury as having written that he sojourned for a while in the home of George Harris, in Granville County, and preached there. From this early beginning, says Mr. Hicks, grew Harris' Meeting House, and from that meeting house grew Salem Church, and from Salem Church grew the Oxford Methodist Church.

It is interesting to note that among the stewards of the church today are Garland Talton, Jr., a great-great-great-grandson of the George Harris in whose house Bishop Asbury preached, and that another member, Mrs. Garland Talton, Jr., is a granddaughter of the presiding elder, Rev. L. L. Hendren, who was so largely instrumental in bringing to a successful issue the efforts in 1867 to build the church at Main and Sycamore Streets. There are several other descendants of George Harris in the church—the Hicks children and grandchildren, and possibly others. Mrs. J. W. Hays was a granddaughter of George Harris.

Records show that as early as 1812 Oxford was one of thirty churches in the Caswell Circuit and so remained until Granville Circuit was established in 1821. This circuit, of which Oxford was a unit, extended from the Raleigh and Gaston (Seaboard) Railroad to Flat River, in Orange County.

In Granville Circuit in 1867 were these churches: Oxford, Bullock's, Perry's Chapel, Gray Rock, Bethel, Mount Tabor, Moore's, Ebenezer, Calvary, Salem, Shady Grove and Hermon. The list for 1871 does not contain the name of Ebenezer, a church which stood on the farm of Maurice Smith, in Oak Hill Township.

Oxford Circuit was cut off from Granville Circuit in 1876, when Rev. J. T. Gibbs was assigned to the new charge.

The Oxford Church remained in the Oxford Circuit until 1885,

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when it was made a station, with Rev. T. A. Boone as pastor.

Oxford Methodist Church began about 1815, as shown by Presbyterian minutes, which read: "From 1812 to 1817 there were occasional services by different ministers of the gospel. A small Methodist society had been collected and a Methodist Episcopal Church nearly finished." The Presbyterians were invited to hold services in this church.

This Methodist Church building was the first church of any kind erected in Oxford.

The year, 1821, the Granville Circuit was established, the Methodists of Oxford had an organization which was able to buy a lot and build the first house of worship the organization had ever owned. This was on the corner of Main and Sycamore Streets. Of this early building but little is now known, but it must have been a small and humble affair indeed since its immediate successor was called a decided improvement on it.

When the church abandoned its first home, the building was converted into a residence and was occupied by Lyman Latham.

In 1836, seeking a house of worship more in keeping with the growing importance of the church, the trustees bought a lot on Spring and Gilliam Streets, and sold the old premises on Main Street, the money received for it to be applied to the building of a new church.

Many years ago the late Mrs. Ella C. Peace wrote interestingly of the rather quaint and old-fashioned church on Spring Street. She said that the building was unpainted, had no vestibule, had one aisle, on the left side of which as one entered sat the men, and on the right sat the women. The pews were straight-backed, innocent of paint, and uncomfortable.

The pulpit was a high one reached by two or three steps leading to a door which the preacher closed after him when he entered, and was lost to sight when he sat down.

Notwithstanding the fact that there was a stove in the church, in winter the Sunday School was discontinued on account of the cold.

During the Civil War Oxford women gathered in this old church and sewed for the soldiers. They deposited their lunch baskets in the closed pulpit to protect them from roving dogs.

In 1859, the year she came to Oxford, says Mrs. Peace, Mr. and Mrs. John W. Hays were bride and groom. He was superintendent of the Sunday School and so remained for forty years, and she was a teacher and later the church's first organist. They

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were together, continued Mrs. Peace, "the greatest helpers our Methodist Church ever loved and honored."

In conclusion, Mrs. Peace says, there was no organ, and no choir. The minister read the hymn, two lines, and the congregation sang it, two lines at a time.

As the town grew and the church with it, the cramped building on Spring Street proved inadequate for the purpose which it originally served. A new building was envisioned, and what better place for it than the site of the first building?

So, in 1867 the trustees bought a small corner of the lot on Main Street the church had sold three decades earlier. At the same time they sold the Spring Street property, and the building on it was converted into a residence. This residence, enlarged and made into three apartments, still stands at the southwest corner of Spring and Gilliam Streets.

On the newly acquired lot on Main Street was erected a building which at the time seemed all that the congregation could desire. It was of frame construction and had two aisles. A pulpit and altar rail that even now, as the older members picture it in their minds, looks quite appropriate and architecturally well proportioned. This building was moved to a site a few miles south of Oxford, and now serves the congregation of Knott's Grove Baptist Church.

On September 1, 1867, Rev. Dr. R. S. Moran preached the dedicatory sermon which launched this building on a great many decades of usefulness. Rev. W. C. Gannon, the preacher in charge, and Rev. C. B. Riddick, one-time head of the original Oxford Female College, assisted in the dedicatory services.

The erection of this church was the result in a great measure to the energy of Presiding Elder L. L. Hendren and Mr. Gannon. Lay members, too, men and women, devoted themselves with untiring zeal to the task of erecting and furnishing the building.

In this church, as in its immediate predecessor, the men sat on the left as they entered and the women on the right. The middle tier of pews was occupied by both men and women.

The church bell hung in a tall latticework belfry at the rear of the church. The principal means of giving fire alarms in the earlier days was the rapid ringing of this and other church bells in the town.

It was in this church that the first organ serving the congregation was installed. It stood in front of the altar in the middle tier of pews and, as stated by Mrs. Peace, was played at first by Mrs. John W. Hays. Among later organists were Miss

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Victoria Hunt, Miss Lorena Bobbitt, Mrs. Hays' two daughters, Lucy and Katherine, and her son, Dr. J. Mack Hays, and down through the years by Mrs. A. A. Hicks, Miss Eva Minor, Miss Daisy Minor, Miss Mattie Renn, and others whose names cannot be called without the possible omission of some, so no attempt will be made to complete the list.

Even with the steeple and vestibule added later, the building which was regarded as a masterpiece in 1867 was not considered adequate to the requirements of a new century. The church's membership had grown to large proportions, more room was necessary in the main auditorium, classrooms for the church school were needed, and space for recreational uses were in demand.

So, in 1895, a contract to buy the lot on which stands the present church was made and immediate steps were taken to put a modern building on the ground.

Led by the building committee, namely, W. B. Ballou, J. S. Brown, Dr. E. T. White, and J. S. Hall, both the clergy and the lay members put forth their utmost efforts to build a new church.

By 1902 the new building was ready for occupancy, and on Sunday, September 28, of that year, the minister in charge, Rev. Alpheus McCullen preached the first sermon delivered in the present building, and Miss Daisy Minor presided at the organ.

Three years later, on November 5, 1905, the dedication of the building took place, Bishop J. C. Granberry being the principal speaker. Rev. F. M. Shamburger was the pastor at that time and Mrs. Katherine Hays Fleming, a great-granddaughter of the George Harris in whose house Bishop Asbury preached, the organist.

Even now the modern twentieth century building does not fully meet the needs of the church, additional room having been provided and more being in contemplation.

The Lyon Memorial building, erected by the late Z. W. Lyon on the church lot, was presented by him to the church in 1913 and duly dedicated. This building, long used as a classroom for the Sunday School and for other purposes, is now undergoing alterations and enlargement, and will go a long way toward increasing the usefulness of the church.

A gift to the church of a house and lot adjoining its property on McClanahan Street, was made by Mrs. W. N. Thomas, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Bullock, in 1944. The lot, now

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that the old frame residence that stood on it has been removed, adds much to the value of the church's real estate.

The Oxford Methodist Church has been host to the Annual Conference four times, first in 1819, then in 1825, then in 1849, when Bishop Andrews presided, and again in 1913, with Bishop McCoy in the chair. Each of these conferences brought about a great spiritual awakening in the church and in the community generally, resulting in much good.

The church maintains an active and thriving Sunday School which was established so long ago that no one can say when. It certainly antedates the Civil War, as shown by Mrs. Peace's reminiscent articles. It is expected that a new impetus will be given to the work of this school when the enlarged Lyon Memorial Building is ready for occupancy.

The Ladies Aid Society was organized in 1884 "for the purpose of cultivating social Christian intercourse, raising funds for the church and promoting its general welfare."

The Woman's Missionary Society was organized in 1887 by Rev. and Mrs. J. A. Cunningham.

The North Carolina Conference of the Woman's Missionary Society was held in this church in May, 1920.

The pipe organ now in use in the church was installed on July 8, 1911, at a cost of \$2,500 of which about half of this amount was contributed by Andrew Carnegie at the solicitation of Rev. F. M. Shamburger, the beloved pastor of the church.

Extensive repairs of the present church auditorium were made in 1929, under the ministry of Dr. E. J. Rees, when the gallery was removed and the old pews under the gallery were replaced with pews to match the others, in the main auditorium.

On October 13, 1947, the Board of Stewards elected Rev. O. W. Dowd pastor emeritus of the Oxford Methodist Church.

On the first Sunday in November, 1948, a Building Fund Campaign was launched by a special committee appointed by the pastor, Rev. S. A. Maxwell. This program met with such signal success that on January 9, 1949, the Quarterly Conference set up a Building Committee and authorized it to secure an architect who would submit plans to contractors. On September 11, 1949, the Quarterly Conference authorized the Building Committee to let the contract for the construction of an Educational Building embodying the present Lyon Memorial Building.

The ground-breaking ceremony was held October 9, 1949. It is anticipated that the new building will be officially open for use on June 7, 1950.

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Little has been said in this sketch of the spiritual growth and influence of the Oxford Methodist Church.

This expansion has been practically uninterrupted from the first, keeping up with the growth of the town. The church's influence on the community cannot be measured, but that it has been of large proportions no one can gainsay. The work of its long line of consecrated pastors aided by the good men and women of the congregation has borne abundant fruit.

The membership of the church has increased as new people have come into the field in which it labors and the church is moving forward at a pace in keeping with the needs of the community which it serves.

CHURCH REAL ESTATE

Deeds on record show that the Oxford Methodist Church on December 24, 1821, bought of Thomas B. Littlejohn for five shillings a lot fronting 44 yards on what would have been an extension of Main Street (which street then ended in front of the present home place of Mrs. A. H. Taylor) and 99 yards deep. Trustees taking title to this lot were William Barnes, John S. Glenn, Thomas Booth, Nathaniel M. Taylor, and Joseph B. Littlejohn.

In August, 1836, this lot was sold to Ira E. Arnold for \$100, the money to be applied to the building of another church, for which a lot had been purchased the previous April. This new lot was sold to the church by Thomas B. Littlejohn for \$50. It measured 132 feet on Spring Street and 152 feet, 10 inches on Gilliam Street. The deed was made to Ira E. Arnold, John Mallory, James Crews, John Brummitt and Benjamin W. Fulford, trustees. Ira E. Arnold, who had bought the old church lot on Main Street for \$100, sold it to Lyman Latham the following year for \$250.

Thirty years later, Lyman Latham sold to the church a corner of this lot fronting 50 feet on Main Street and 70 feet deep for \$200, the trustees in this transaction being Robert W. Lassiter, Samuel A. Williams, Joseph P. Hunt, William J. Mallory, Lewis K. Willie, and John W. Hays.

Evidently the 50-foot frontage was considered too narrow, as in August, 1868, the trustees bought an additional strip with a frontage of 8 feet on Main Street from Lyman Latham for \$20.40.

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In that same year, 1867, the property on Spring and Gilliam Streets was sold to James H. Horner for \$1,000, the deed being signed by Lewis K. Willie, Richard P. Taylor, John W. Hays, A. H. Cooke, James A. Crews, Joseph P. Hunt, and L. M. Van Hook.

The lot on which the present church stands, at the Southeast corner of College and McClanahan Streets, was bought of William R. Taylor and his wife, Eva Grandy Taylor. The contract to buy this property for \$2,150 was entered into in 1895. The final transfer of the lot to the church was made in 1898. At the same time the church bought of the Johnson estate 36 feet frontage and 280 feet deep on College Street, adjoining the former Taylor property, for \$300. Trustees in these deals were Dr. D. C. White, A. S. Peace, H. O. Furman, C. D. H. Fort, John W. Hays, J. T. Cheatham, J. E. Howell and D. T. Cheatham.

In 1903 the new building was completed and the trustees were W. B. Ballou, J. G. Hunt, Z. W. Lyon, J. S. Brown, J. S. Hall, John H. Bullock, S. W. Minor, L. B. Turner, E. T. White, J. T. Cheatham, A. S. Peace, D. C. White, H. O. Furman, J. E. Howell, W. Z. Mitchell, and R. L. Brown. Incidentally, Mr. Brown was Superintendent of the Sunday School.

PARSONAGES

In the more primitive days when the circuits were large and the churches far apart and travel difficult, the circuit riders were mostly single men. It is believed that Rev. Peter Doub in 1823 was the first married preacher to be assigned to the Granville Circuit, the beginning of the Oxford Methodist Church.

He resided with his family in a house that stood at the northwest corner of Gilliam and High Streets, where Mrs. R. H. Lewis now lives.

During succeeding years various preachers occupied various rented houses.

It is recalled that Rev. A. D. Betts, who was the first preacher assigned to the charge after the building of the new church at Main and Sycamore Streets, lived in a house that stood flush with Sycamore Street immediately in the rear of the present Reuben Green house lot. That old building no longer exists.

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Rev. J. T. Gibbs, a preacher who came later, being a man of independent means, in 1879, bought a lot on which he built a house for his occupancy. This house, remodeled, is now the home of Mrs. John G. Webb and Miss Sallie Webb. Prior to this time, Mr. Gibbs had lived in the old church building, remodeled, at the corner of Spring and Gilliam Streets.

In 1881, during the pastorate of Rev. L. H. Gibbons, the church bought a house farther down Sycamore Street on the northeast corner of Orange, but did not keep it long as the locality was not suitable.

The church's next parsonage was on College Street, the present Frank F. Lyon home place, built in 1890.

Eight years later, having acquired for a parsonage additional frontage on College Street adjoining the present church lot, the trustees sold this place to W. A. Adams.

The present parsonage was on the lot bought in 1898 of William R. Taylor and his wife, Eva Grandy Taylor.

LIST OF MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED THE
OXFORD METHODIST CHURCH

<i>Caswell Circuit</i>	
1817—William Peebles	1826—Geo. Nolly
James Thomas	1827—Jas. W. Dunahay
Samuel Garrett	1828—Henry Alley
1818—A. R. Bernard	1829—Henry Alley
William Harris	1830—Wm. Holmes
1819—John Lattimore	1831—Geo. W. Dey
A. C. Treadway	1832—Wm. Holmes
1820—Lewis Kimball	1833—Benjamin Kidd
John Thompson	1834—R. O. Burton
1821—George Chesley	1835 and 1836
	—H. T. Weatherly
	1837—Henry Speck
<i>Granville Circuit</i>	
1821—George Chesley	1838 and 1839—J. Goodman
1822—Charles Cooley	1840—D. B. Nicholson
1823—Peter Doub	1841—Wm. Compton
1824—Peter Doub	1842—Thomas S. Campbell
1825—Wm. Compton	1843—John Tillett
	1844—John Tillett

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1845—Ira T. Wyche
1846-47—J. L. Nicholson
1848—Nathan Anderson
1849—W. M. Jordan
1850—W. M. Jordan
1851-52—To be supplied
1853—Alfred Norman
1854—Alfred Norman
1855—John D. Halsted
1856—P. H. Joyner
1857—John W. Floyd
1858—Junius P. Moore
1859—Williamson Harris
1860—Theophilus W. Moore
1861—W. S. Chaffin
1862—W. C. Gannon
1863—To be supplied
1864—W. C. Gannon
1865—No minutes, perhaps
no conference.
1866-68—John Tillett
1869-70—A. D. Betts
1871—W. C. Gannon
1872-74—J. R. Griffith
1875—S. V. Hoyle
1876-79—J. T. Gibbs
1880-82—L. H. Gibbons

1883—J. T. Gibbs

Oxford Station

1884-85—T. A. Boone
1886-89—W. L. Cunninggim
1890-91—R. F. Bumpass
1892—J. H. Cordon
1893-95—J. B. Hurley
1896-98—M. H. Tuttle
1899-02—A. McCullen
1903-06—F. M. Shamburger
1907-08—L. S. Massey
1909-10—F. M. Shamburger
1911-14—A. P. Tyer
1915-17—R. H. Willis
1918-20—R. C. Craven
1921-24—E. M. Snipes
1925-26—A. L. Ormond
1927—W. H. Brown
1928-31—E. J. Rees
1932-34—T. G. Vickers
1935—L. B. Jones
1936-39—O. W. Dowd
1940-43—C. F. Heath
1944-45—D. A. Clarke
1946—S. A. Maxwell