

Frank

PLEASANT GROVE

"The Little Church"

This church has the distinction of being the one formed when Hopewell became the home church of Bishop Lowry of the new Lumber River Holiness Methodist Conference. Daniel Edwin Lowry tells how it happened.....

"In the month of October of 1900, the all-Indian Methodist churches were asked to send delegates to Hopewell to discuss the formation of a new conference for Indian Methodist churches. Complaints against the the Methodist Conference were cause for concern.

what were they

Hopewell Church was the only Methodist church in Union Township at that time. The Hopewell delegation was divided on the issue. The majority of their delegates voted to join the new conference, but seven stayed put. The Methodist Conference stood ready to help them form a new church. The seven who voted 'no' were James Lowry and his wife Manda, his brother Allen Lowry and his wife Janie and their son Daniel Edwin, and Aaron Lowry and his wife Kayline.

For the first year, worship services were held in the home of James Lowry. John Bridger of Lumberton was assigned as the first pastor. Before the first year had passed, a new and influential member, Sinclair (Sinc) Lowry, had joined the group, a trend that was to continue.

The small group decided to build a church. An agreement was worked out with the conference whereby the congregation would put up the frame and the conference would supply the money to finish out the building. The next morning the building was started. Members worked diligently until the frame was in place. Members of Old Bethel Church, in the same conference, lent helping hands.

When the framing was completed, the conference was as good as its word. Seven hundred dollars came to finish the building. After the materials were bought, only forty dollars were left for labor. A generous carpenter offered to finish the job for that amount. I was his willing helper.

After the church building had been completed, Sinclair Lowry donated four acres of land in the front of the church to the conference. A shaded section of this tract has been made into a park.

As time passed, the membership grew - one by one - and the church has progressed under the name Pleasant Grove Methodist Church.....

Pastor Bridger was followed by Charley Baines. After that, Pleasant Grove, like all Native American Methodist churches in Robeson County, was served by the available native preachers. Rufus Woodell was the first, then came Mahoney Locklear, D.F. Lowry and J.W. Smith.

The assignment practice continues to the present. In

recent years Pleasant Grove has been pastored by Simeon F. Cummings, 19_ _; Harvey Lowry, 1959-1972; Milford Oxendine, 1973 and 1979-80; Dufrene Cummings, 1975-1978; and Bill James Locklear, 1986 - .

The physical facility has continued to grow and to be improved, as has the church's ministry. The old church building was sold and a new one was built in 1970, at a cost of approximately \$110,000. A conference grant of \$40,000 paid the debt off in 1973 and the church was dedicated in October of that year.

participants?

A fellowship hall, which cost \$80,000, was dedicated in 1979. For his much help in money-raising for the project, Dr. Wilson Nesbitt was honored with a plaque placed in the hall at the dedication.

During the full-time ministry era, 1973 - 1989, a great many vital church and community enriching programs have been developed. Youth groups, choirs, Bible study, visitation, UMW a civic club, and frequent housing of summer work teams. A once vibrant music program, led by Vera M. Lowry, is coming back. Roxanne Inman and Jennifer Smith now work with the music programs.

The two-point charge of Ashpole and Pleasant Grove requires that some cooperative Christian charity be practiced in the scheduling of events. Most congregations want preaching at the traditional eleven o'clock hour. At Pleasant Grove it comes at 9:30. Ashpole has the eleven o'clock slot. The regular Sunday afternoon activities are attended by the pastor alternately, too.

The pastor's living arrangements are different, also. Brother Bill, as he affectionally called, and his family live in the parsonage from Momday through Friday. They go to their home in the Prospect Community on the weekends.

During the incumbent pastor's tenure, the physical plant has needed further work. The sanctuary and the wings of the church have been renovated. Martin C. Rnsom was the person in charge. New pews, chairs, carpeting and an outside bulletin board have been added. The graveyard, cleared of trees, bushes, and rubble, has been seeded with grass. The park area is a project from the mind of James R. Sanderson, and many have bought into it. The MYF bought materials for picnic tables and D. E. Lowry, the oldest and only surviving charter member, built the tables.

Growth in stewardship is evident in the church's finances. The finance committee no longer relies on BBQ plate sales to supplement the budget. The homecoming offering ranges from \$4000 to \$5000 per year. With a membership of 108 and an average attendance of 50 - 75, the weekly offering ranges between \$300 and \$500. The pastor's salary which was \$2400 in 1971 was \$9300 in 1980.

The future looks bright for Pleasant Grove United

Church. The probability of a full-time minister now seems in the realm of possibility. So, hopes are high and springing eternally!