

A HISTORY OF PURDIE METHODIST CHURCH

(By Rev. Nash A. Oden, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dublin, N. C., and President of the Bladen County Historical Society.)

Purdie United Methodist Church is one of the oldest Methodist churches on the Upper Cape Fear Valley. The exact date that it was organized is not known. The earliest mention of the church is found in THE JOURNAL AND LETTERS OF FRANCIS ASBURY, Vol. II, 1794-1816. Francis Asbury was America's first Methodist Bishop. The home of the Richardson family, "Harmony Hall," and the home of the Purdie family, "Purdie Place," were always open to this "apostle of Methodism in America" and at these gracious homes he often stayed and rested his weary, sickened body. The entry in his Journal for Monday, February 7, 1803, states: "We had about twenty-two miles to make to reach Purdy's Chapel. I preached upon Titus ii, 11, 14. We lodged at Samuel Richardson's. I have had a day and night of temptation."

It is the opinion of this writer that Purdie Methodist Church began as a chapel on the historic Purdie plantation at some time around 1800. It was begun as a meeting house by the Purdie family for the traveling preachers who came through. This writer believes it was once located near the old family cemetery on the plantation. This is a historic cemetery and contains the graves of both the Richardson and Purdie families as well as graves of people not connected with the families. At least two early Methodist ministers are buried in this early burial ground: "Rev. Samuel N. Richardson born June 14, 1778, died March 1, 1851," and "Rev. Alex B. Smith died July 20, 1853, age 47 years." The diary of Elizabeth Ellis Robeson notes that Mrs. Robeson "...went to Preacher Simpson's wife's funeral at Mrs. Purdie's burial ground. She was a stranger among us but was beloved by those who knew her best." This was October 7, 1861. The earliest burial in the present Purdie Church Cemetery was 1882.

The entry in Asbury's Journal for Tuesday, February 29, 1811, states "We pushed on to Amos Richardson's. and thence after dinner to James Purdy's. I

preached in the evening. I have been deeply afflicted with an influenza; but God is with me, and supports me." Amos Richardson lived near old Bladen Court House on the western side of the Cape Fear River about half way between present day Dublin and Elizabethtown. He is buried in the Purdie Cemetery and his monument reads: "Amos Richardson, Esq. died March 22nd, 1812, Age 40 years." James Purdie is also buried in the same cemetery and his monument reads: "James S. Purdie, born Jan. 31st 1767, died Feb. 9th 1818."

The last visit that Asbury made to the Purdies was on Thursday, January 21, 1813. His entry notes that he had "A bitter cold ride of thirty miles (which) brought us to James Purdy's. I have a high fever, and in great pain."

The present house of worship used by Purdie Methodist Church was built at some time before 1845 and is the oldest house of worship of the Methodist denomination in Bladen County. The published history of Trinity Methodist Church in Elizabethtown states that the old Trinity Church building on Broad Street was built in 1848. Other references document this date. The present building used by Carver's Creek United Methodist Church was built in 1859 according to their recorded history.

The date given for Purdie Methodist Church building is given in a letter dated March 4, 1845, written by Mr. John P. Leonard of Fayetteville to Mr. Samuel Hobson who lived just above Purdie Church. The letter reads as follows:

Fayetteville, March 4, 1845.

Mr. Samuel Hobson

Dr. Sir

Anaxed you will see a Notice that a Temperance Lecture will be delivered at the Methodist Meeting House I know not what it is called the one below your house, will you be so good as to set up this notice ' also give publicity of the same. I canot tell who will address you but should nothing happen some one from this Society will be there, probably myself, & I earnestly entreat you to consider on it your self, for the regard I have for you & our long acquaintance I do earnestly beseech you to reflect, we are now both past the meredian of life and it is evident neither of us can be here much longer & I earnestly invoke the all wise disposer of events to aid assist and bless you & yours.

John P. Leonard

Set up the Notice at the Methodist Church the one lately built near you and give such other notice as you think proper."

Mrs. Elizabeth Ellis Robeson, wife of Mr. Samuel Robeson, often mentions her attendance at the Methodist Church though she held her membership at Beth Car Presbyterian Church a few miles above Purdie Church. We are indebted to her for naming the early preachers at Purdie Church. In her diary she lists the following ministers: Mr. McCorquidale (1847-1848); Elder Tally (1850); Mr. Simmons (1850); Mr. Byers (1851); Mr. Robinson (1851); Mr. St. Clair (1852); Mr. Martin (1853); Mr. Adam (1853); Mr. Pepper (1854); Mr. McDuffy (1855); Mr. Jones (1856); Mr. Mahoney (1856); Mr. Jones (Mar. 16, 1856-Oct. 19, 1856, and Mrs. Robeson notes: "It was his last sermon at this place for this year."); Mr. McDuffy (1856-1857); Mr. Carraway (1857); Mr. Robin (1857); Mr. Carraway (Nov. 1857-June 1858); Mr. Bibbs (Jan. 30, 1859-Nov. 10, 1859, and Mrs. Robeson notes on Jan. 30 of Mr. Bibbs "It was an excellent discourse as it was his first at the church.); Mr. McCormick (1859); Mr. Alexander Davis Betts (Jan. 15, 1860, and Mrs. Robeson notes, "The new circuit preacher, Mr. Betts preached." - Sept. 4, 1860. (Rev. Betts was born on August 25, 1832, in what is now Harnett County. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on June 7, 1855, and married Mary E. Davis of Chapel Hill, on May 12. He joined the N. C. Conference at Greensboro in 1856. He served as a Chaplain of the 30th N. C. Troops. His diary has been published. On Sept. 4, 1860, Mrs. Robeson notes in her diary: "Mr. Betts was having a meeting at the church during the week. They had a love feast at night which ended the meeting." She notes on Nov. 18, 1860: "Mr. Betts preached his last sermon for the year."); Mr. Simpson (Jan. 21, 1861, - Oct. 7, 1861. Mrs. Robeson notes that her son "Evander went to the Methodist Church to hear the new Circuit Preacher, Mr. Simpson." Then on Oct. 7, 1861, Mrs. Robeson notes: "..went to Preacher Simpson's wife's funeral at Mrs. Purdie's burial ground."); Mr. Johnston (June 15, 1862 - Aug. 15, 1863); Dr. Perkins (1863-1864); Mr. McDonald from Georgia (1864); Mr. Culbreth (1864. Mrs. Robeson notes in her diary: "Oct. 16,

1864. Sabbath. I went to church. Mr. Culbreth's text was in Revelation 14th Chapter 13th verse. It was cousin Prudence Cain's funeral sermon preached by the request of her son, James Cain."); Mr. E. A. Yates (Jan. 1865 - Oct. 1865). The names of the ministers from Oct. 1865 to 1883 are unknown.

In the oldest records of Purdie Church we find the names of the following pastors who have served the church beginning in 1883. They were: J. B. Bailey (1883-1884); J. M. Lumley (1884-1885); Daniel May (1885-1887); C. W. Smith (1887-1889); J. R. Sawyer (1889-1890); H. J. Parker (1890-1891); W. H. Townsend (1891-1894); C. W. Starling (1894-1896); C. W. Smith (1896-1897); C. P. Snow (1897-1898); D. A. Futrell (1898-1899); Geo. T. Simmons (1899); W. E. Brown (1903-1905); K. C. Forneyduval (1905); W. C. Everton (1905-1906); D. A. Watkins (1906-1908); F. A. Noblet (1908-1909); D. B. Parker (1909-1912); G. H. Biggs (1912-1916); W. B. Humble (1917-1919); H. L. Brown (1920); W. J. Underwood (1922); H. E. Lance (1923); W. J. Underwood (1928); N. P. Edens (1933-1935); C. W. Barbee (1939); and R. Z. Newton (1944-1947). Other ministers who have served in recent years have been McD. McLamb, Mr. White, Mr. Weaver, Paul W. Boone, Charles Lancaster, W. Gregory, Vance Lewis, and the present pastor, Rev. Henry W. Lee, who has been serving the charge for the past five years.

The land where the present building is located was given to the Church by Mr. John W. Purdie. The deed was not made out until 1877 and not recorded until May 3, 1880.

The church has been remodeled in recent years by the small congregation and appears in essentially the same way as it did 130 years ago. The building contains galleries and the old kerosene lamps that lighted the church before the day of electricity still hang on the sides of the sanctuary walls. The congregation has added modern conveniences such as heat and electricity. The old pews are still being used and the tall stately windows are adorned with ancient wooden shutters. Great spiritual contributions have been made to the community and Bladen County through the almost 175 years of the church's existence.