

Riverview United Methodist Church
A History of Methodism To A Common People

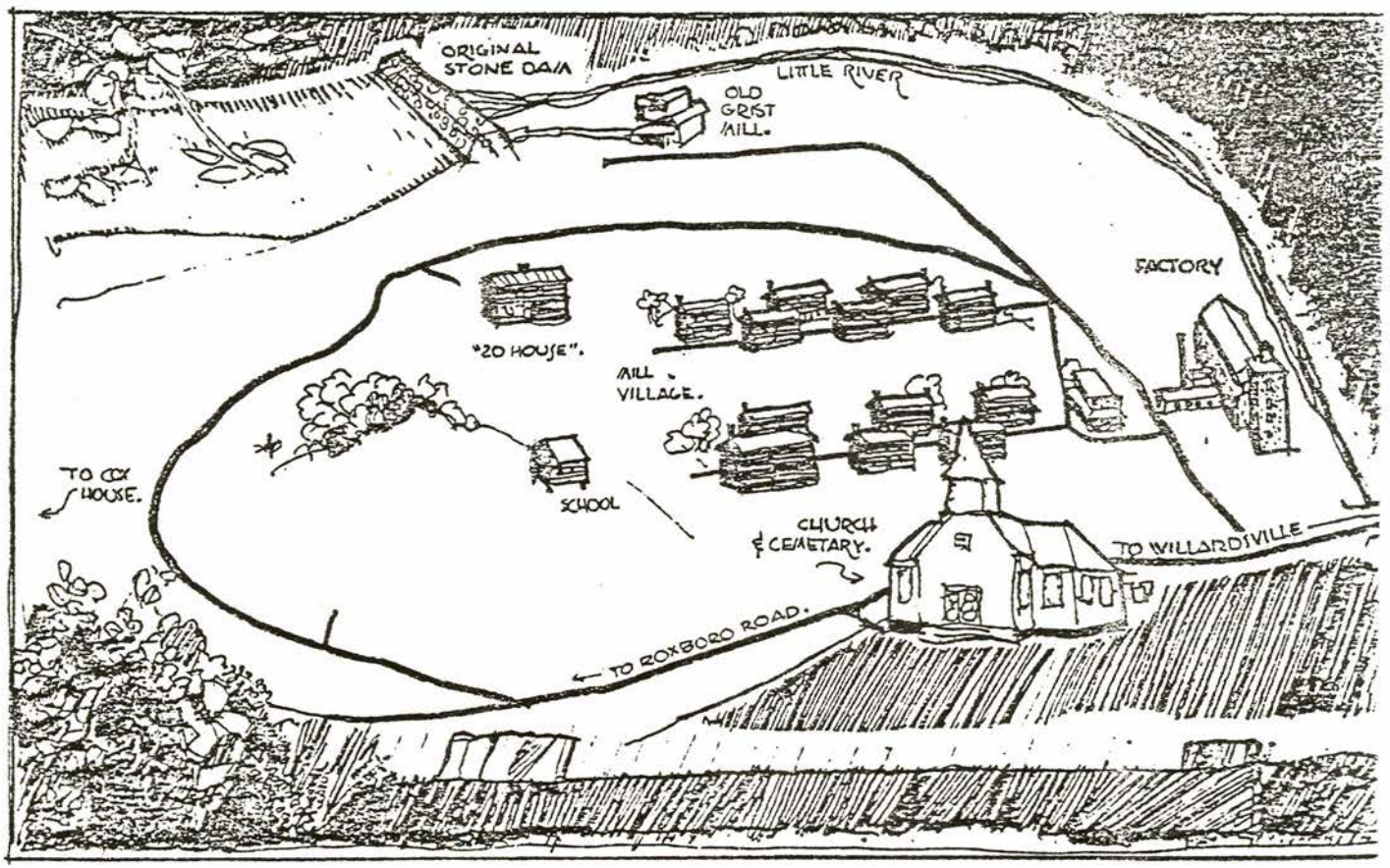
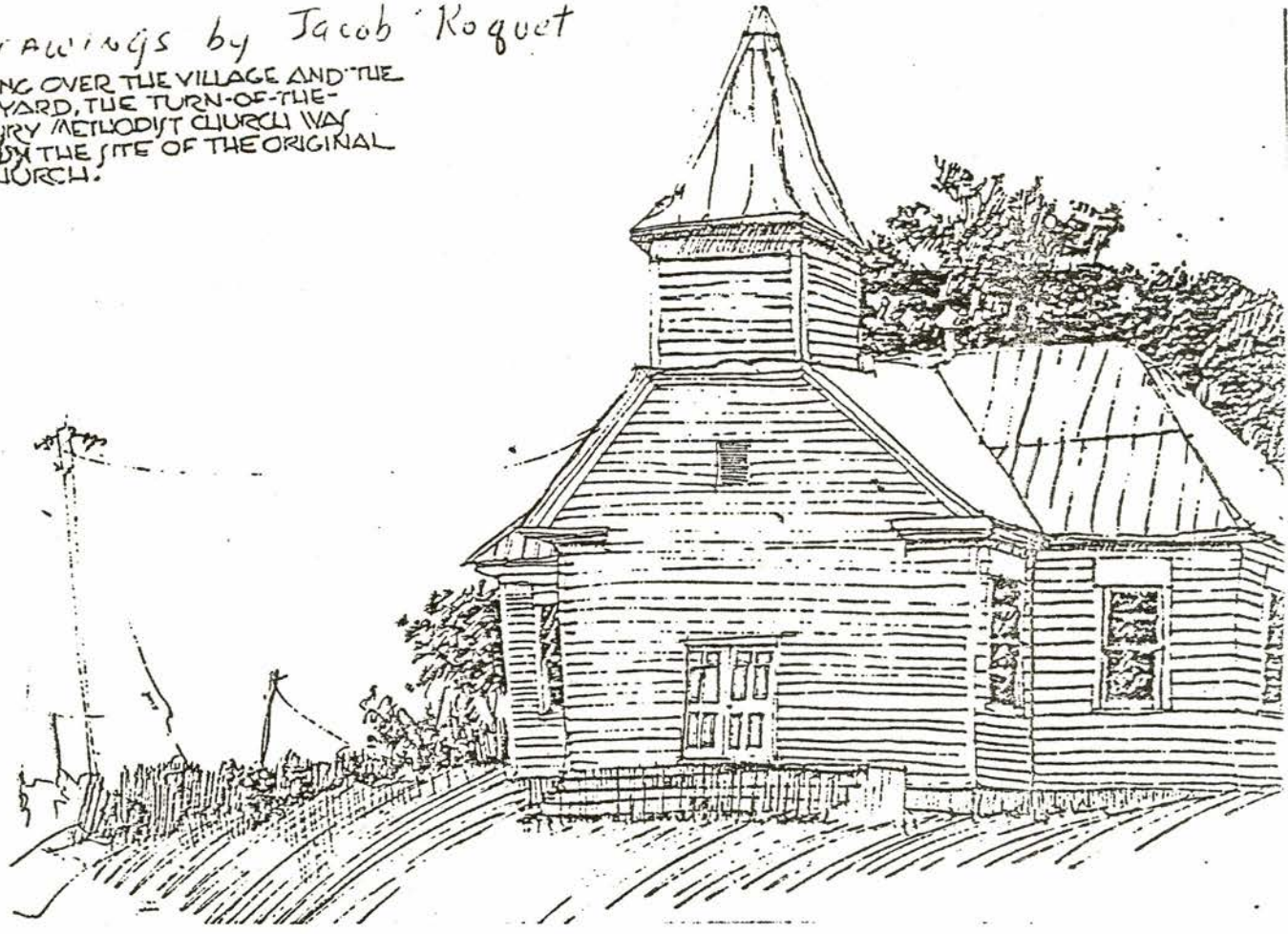
Historical Background

The history of Riverview United Methodist Church is *Not* a history *marked* by well-known and famous religious figures. John Wesley never preached here nor did Francis Asbury pass through the community. Famous revivalists never preached here to create that flame of enthusiasm that results in tremendous growth. As a matter of fact, according to historical records, Riverview never saw enough growth to enable it to be a station church. Despite the lack of great names and great events, this history is important because in it consists the history of a large portion of methodism. This history of a common people, poor people, working people, and dedicated people is Methodism at its best. A community of people, a family working together, a struggle to survive, and through it all, a spirit of unity and love creates a history that is relevant to the complex family that we call United Methodist.

Nestled in northern Durham County about two miles off of Highway 15-501, the church and community are relatively unnoticed in the broad context of history that spans the region. To the west at the intersection of Orange Factory and Roxboro Road stands the home of the community's first doctor. A short distance beyond is the William Lipscomb plantation at the junction of Roxboro and Mason Farm Roads. The magnificent manor house was built in the 1830's. To the east was once the estate of Judge Duncan Cameron's son-in-law Richard Benneham. *It was*

Drawings by Jacob Roquet

DRESSING OVER THE VILLAGE AND THE GRAVEYARD, THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY METHODIST CHURCH WAS BUILT ON THE SITE OF THE ORIGINAL LOG CHURCH.



established in the 18th century and^{it} became one of the largest agricultural complexes in North Carolina. Benneham with his brother-in-law, John Cameron, established the estates of Stagville and Farintosh. To the north were the plantations of two of the county's most distinguished families-U.S. Senator Willie P. Mangum of the Walnut Hall Plantation and the estate of Captain Taylor Duke whose son was Washington Duke. To the south is Snow Hill Plantation, home of Wm. Johnston, colonial merchant, kinsman to a royal governor, patriot, and treasurer of the Transylvania Land Company which sent Daniel Boone to explore Tennessee and Kentucky.¹ The region is rich in history and although the people which make up Riverview Methodist Church do not lay claim to a history of elegant plantations it nethertheless has a claim to history as a mill community.

Orange Factory Community was a settlement in the St. Mary's Parish by the 1850's. This is evident through the selling of the land which today is Orange Factory by O.F. Long to John C. Douglas and John H. Webb.² Douglas and Webb formed a partnership for the manufacturing of cotton goods and established a textile mill at what is now known as Orange Factory Community. Traditionally the name Orange Factory was derived from the stands of Mock Orange Trees that stood next to the River. The Orange Factory Mill was among the first to be built in the

¹Historical background material from: Flowers, John Baxton, Orange Factory, (Durham: Orange Factory Preservation Society, 1978)

²Deed, Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, North Carolina.

state in 1852. In the Hillsboro Recorder of February 7, 1852 the mill is mentioned:

While on the subject of improvements we propose to notice some which have recently taken place in the county, and which promise, at no distant day, to greatly advance the business and interests of the people.

Webb and Douglass have just completed a Cotton Factory, on Little River, about thirteen miles east of Hillsboro, and are now receiving their machinery from the North. They expect to commence operations during the summer, and will run 1000 spindles.

The village was complete with a post office by 1859,³ a store, and housing for the employees of the mill, including the "Twenty House" - a large four room structure that housed up to twenty employees. Many of these structures are still standing and are in use. On October 23, 1860, Douglass sold his interest to the postmaster, John H. Webb. During the Civil War this factory is reported to have made cloth for Confederate uniforms.⁴ During General William T. Sherman's march his soldiers were reported to have reached the factory. A resident of the community, Mrs. Henry Castle stated:

A woman used to live on the hill; her name was Dixon. She could remember when them Yankees come in and went through that mill... I think the people they was after the big farmers and all.⁵ There weren't nothin' here but just poor folk.

Where was Riverview Methodist Church during this period? The name Riverview was not in existence during this period. The earliest Church records indicate that its previous name was

³Postal records, North Carolina Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁴Timberlake, Carr, Jr., "Orange Factory Village is Tumbling Down Around Prehistoric Civil War Mill", Durham Herald-Sun, Dec. 21, 1941, Durham, North Carolina.

⁵Pasco, Pamela, Orange Factory: A Mill Village, Durham, North Carolina, 1975

Orange Factory Methodist Church. These records date 1884.⁶

A local historicalian remembers reading that the original church was called Holman's Church. She could not remember the document that would factualize this but there are some facts that point to this possibility. A W.C. and S.W. Holman had purchased the Orange Factory in 1881 for \$30,000 and which they ultimately sold to W.H. Willard in a deed dated April 1, 1887.⁷ Also these two men are recorded as members of the Orange Factory Church.⁸ There is some controversy on when Willard acquired the company but the more important fact for this history is from whom it was purchased. Not only was S.D. Holman a church member, but from 1869-1879 he was postmaster at Orange Factory and operated the general store.⁹ Evidently Holman was a prominent citizen and a leader of the community and it would not be uncommon for a church to be named after such a person; especially if the person helped to establish the church. This is speculation, however, since none of the older members of the community ever remember hearing the name associated with the church.

The present church was built in the late 1890's. The deed records were dated Dec. 2, 1899. Prior to the present structure there were two log structures positioned on land across the road

⁶Minutes of the Durham Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1882-1895, Manuscript Room, Perkins Library.

⁷Deed, Durham County Courthouse, Durham, N.C.

⁸Membership Register of the Durham Circuit, Durham District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, Manuscript Room, Perkins Library, Durham, N.C.

⁹Postal Records, N.C. Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

from the present structure. While the name "Holman's Chapel" is uncertain, local history tradition does agree that one of its earliest names was "Little River Church" later changed to "Orange Factory" Church and even later changed to "Riverview." Recorded facts of the church can be dated back to 1884. Prior to that, historical evidence is scarce except for oral tradition. The name, "Orange Factory", was listed with the churches of the Durham Circuit in 1884 which is the earliest minutes of the quarterly conferences of the Circuit that has been found.¹⁰ J.T. Lyon was the pastor of the Durham Circuit in 1884 at the time the Durham District was formed. The minutes of the Hillsborough District¹¹ can be found dating back to 1882 and J.T. Lyon was pastor of the Durham Circuit. While the Hillsborough Circuit Minutes do not mention the churches on the circuit it is highly probable that Orange Factory Methodist Church was on the circuit then. Branson's North Carolina Business Directories prior to 1884 do not list any church for the community.¹² These directories generally list churches and the name of the ministers for each county in North Carolina but can not be considered conclusive if they fail to do so. The absence of such information does lend doubt to the existence of Orange Factory as a main-line denominational church. This could also lend explanation to the lack of official records of the church prior to 1884.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Durham District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1884-1895, Manuscript Room, Duke Univ.
 also Branson's North Carolina Business Directory 1884 lists Orange Factory Church.
¹¹ Minutes of the Hillsborough District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1882-84, Manuscript Room, Duke Univ.

¹² Branson's North Carolina Business Directories 1866-1897- 1st-9th editions.

The lifestyle of the community members prior to 1884 is very much in evident today. Many of those who are members of the church live in houses built during this period. John Baxton Flowers III gives a description of village life:¹³

"Each house had fireplaces for heat and cooking, and it was not till the turn of the century that cooking ceased in the fireplaces and wood cook stoves were installed. All the water used for cooking and bathing came from the three wells that were dug in the village, and when the wells were low in the summertime, water was hauled from the river. Privies stood behind the houses, and as late as 1938 there was no indoor plumbing in the village. Each family had its garden plot and orchard behind the house."

While the existence of a church this early is not substantiated by fact this gives an idea of the environment in which the earliest church members lived.

The most prominent figure associated with Orange Factory was William H. Willard, born in Massachusettes. His mother was a cousin to the poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson. He came south for health reasons, stopped in Washington, North Carolina and prospered in the mercantile business. His side-wheel steamer, "Oregon" was the first to go through the new costal inlet that attained its name in 1845. He became a banker and served as president of the Round Step Bank in Raleigh. He was involved in banking in Durham when he became a half-owner of the R.F. Morris & Son Tobacco Company. He became sole owner of Orange Factory in 1887. The name of the factory changed to Willard Manufacturing Company, Willard died in 1889 and left his property to his grandchildren.¹⁴

¹³Flowers, John, Orange Factory, p. 19.

¹⁴Flowers, John, Orange Factory, Information on Willard gathered from a broader history of Willard, p. 25-29.

During this period of time there is documented fact of Orange Factory Church on the Durham Circuit. Churches on the Durham Circuit during this period were: Orange Factory, Duke Chapel, Fletchers Chapel, Orange Church, Massey's Chapel, Mt. Bethel, Mt. Sylvan, Pleasant Green, and McMannen.¹⁵ J.T. Lyon was the pastor in charge from 1882-84.¹⁶ From 1885 to the turn of the century Orange Factory had eight ministers. The minutes of the Durham Circuit indicate that the Durham Circuit was a difficult circuit. There were a large number of churches- nine- over a relatively large area at a time when transportation was limited and difficult. The ministers often were only able to visit the churches once or twice a quarter and sometimes only a couple of times a year. One of the major concerns of all the ministers was the Sunday School program and the spiritual condition of the churches. At the Quarterly Conference at Orange Factory on April 17, 1897, Rev. W.J. Twilley reported that although he was new to the circuit he saw "signs of Holy living" in the lives of some of the people.¹⁷ Perhaps it was due to the difficulty of travel to all the churches in the circuit and also to the small church status, that Orange Factory is not listed at the June Quarterly Conference in 1897 but is once again included on the circuit in 1898.¹⁸

¹⁵Minutes of the Durham Circuit of the Meth. Episcopal Church South.

¹⁶Minutes of the Durham District of the Meth. Episcopal Church South.

¹⁷Minutes of the Durham District - Apr., 1897- Duke Man. Room

¹⁸Ibid, June 1897, Jan. 1898.

Orange Factory Church was not a rich church then, and neither is it now. Money paid out from the church rarely exceeded over thirty dollars.¹⁹ This church served the people of a mill community. They worked to survive and gave as much as they could afford. A village resident, Garland Roberts, could remember when his father received a dollar a day as a wagoner hauling yarn to the depot from the mill.²⁰ This gives an idea of the financial condition of the people. Factory workers worked ten to twelve hours a day and often made less than five dollars a week. The mill workers were paid with a ticket stub redeemable at the Company store for cash minus deductions for rent and store expenses.²¹

After J.T. Lyon pastored, Rev. W.S. Davis served for two years followed by J.B. Martin-two years, Jonathon Sanford-two years, J.W. Jenkins-two years, C.W. Robinson-two years, S.T. Moyle-one year, W.J. Twilley-one year, and J.H. McCracken-three years.²² In 1889 the church listed fifty-seven active members declining to thirty-nine by 1905.²³ This small, isolated community church marks a trend in methodism and although membership trends have been erratic the church survives and still contributes to the Methodist Church through clinging tenaciously to the heritage that is theirs.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Pasco, Pamela, Orange Factory: A Mill Community, p.1

²¹Ibid.

²²N. C. Conference Journals - 1880-1900.

²³Membership Register, Durham Circuit of the Durham District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

Samuel Ashe was the son-in-law of William Willard and it was to Mr. Ashe and his grandchildren that a life interest in the property was given. During the late 1890's the present church structure was built. From the present appearance of the structure, the church was well built and maintained and probably the expenses of building such a church was partially provided by Willard. Samuel Ashe & Walter Clark, executors of the estate of W.H. Willard drew up a deed for the church property granting two acres and 94/100 of an acre... "being the church and burying grounds of Orange Factory with some additions. The said premises having many years ago been dedicated to most pious uses by the late William H. Willard in his lifetime."²⁴ The deed states that the property is given:

"to have and to hold in trust that said premises shall be used, kept, maintained and disposed of as a place of divine worship for the uses of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church (South) subject to the discipline, assigns, ministerial appointments God's Church as from time to time authorized and deeded to the General Conference of said church and the annual Conference within whose bounds the said premises are situated to them and their successors on the use and trusts herein declared."²⁵

Samuel Ashe sold the Willard Manufacturing Company at Orange Factory to the Little River Manufacturing Company on August 10, 1906.²⁶ J.B. Mason was President and A.G. Cox was the secretary-treasurer for ten years.²⁷ A lot of changes

²⁴Deed, Durham County Courthouse, Durham, N.C.

²⁵Deed, Durham County Courthouse, Durham, N.C.

²⁶Deed, Durham County Courthouse, Durham, N.C.

²⁷Ibid.

took place within the community during the period and a few at the church. Many of the houses had porches added and other improvements. The Cox Family built an impressive house above the church. A school was established by the Durham Board of Education. It was an overcrowded one room structure of forty to fifty students and one teacher. Few children received more than four or five years schooling; most began working in the mill at an early age. The mill owners liked large families because of the work force and there was also the need of the family for the income. Wages were low and times were hard and even with a large family working, it was extremely difficult to have any luxuries. Children worked for ten and fifteen cents a day.²⁸

Ministers appointed to the Church during this period were J.B. Thompson-1901-1904 and 1909; G.W. Fisher-1905-1908; and J.P. Constable. In 1914 Orange Factory Church was taken off the Durham Circuit and transferred to a newly formed circuit called Rougemont. The first pastor of the new circuit was Rev. J.W. Bennet.²⁹ Proof that Orange Factory was transferred to this charge is evident through the listing of A.G. Cox as Sunday School Superintendent of Orange Factory Church of the Rougemont Charge in the Conference Journals.³⁰ J.W. Bennet was succeeded by B.F. Boone in 1915 and L.M. Hall-1916-1917.

²⁸Pasco, p. 3-4

²⁹North Carolina Conference Journal, 1900-1913.

³⁰North Carolina Conference Journal, 1914.

In 1916 the Little River Manufacturing Company was sold to J.A. Long of Roxboro and other businessmen in Roxboro and Durham and renamed the Laura Cotton Mill.³¹ In 1938 the factory was sold to the Roxboro Cotton Mill.³² During the period electricity was installed in the houses. Wages continued to be low and as the nation entered into the Depression work at the mill slowed to two or three days a week. The Federal Worker Progress Administration aided the mill families through this crisis only for them to face a greater one. Shortly after the Roxboro Cotton Mill purchased the factory it was closed down.³³ With the closing of the mill an era of history of a closely knitted community seemed to be ending. The community was expected to die but instead it continued to live. Prior to this time the community was centered around the mill. People who lived there worked in the mill. In 1928 there was a population of 121, twenty-four houses and fifty workers.³⁴ Those who worked and ran the mill were also the members of the church. Now that the mill was gone it was reasonable to expect all other aspects of the community to cease functioning. Yet, the community and Church remained alive and history continued.

The Church also was affected by changes during the period of 1916-38. D.A. Petty followed L.M. Hall as the pastor for a two year period. When Rev. R.E. Bittman became pastor in 1920

³¹ Deed, Durham County Courthouse, Durham, N.C.

³² Ibid.

³³ Flowers, John, p. 33.

³⁴ Ibid., p.31

he inherited not only the Rougemont Circuit but another Church, Mt. Tirzah was added to form the Mt. Tirzah-Rougemont Circuit.³⁵

This allowed less time for the minister of the charge to give to each church. Evidently the new circuit was not appropriate because the following year Mt. Tirzah was separated from the Rougemont Charge and J.F. Starnes became the pastor for the next four years followed by J. Bascon Hurly in 1925.³⁶ Orange Factory was hardly settled on the Rougemont Charge when it was placed on the recently formed Bahama Circuit for two years with W.F. Craven as the pastor. It was at this time that the present name of the church, Riverview, is mentioned. Presumably there is a mistake in the Conference Journals of 1926 because it lists a "Riverside" Church from the Rougemont Circuit to be placed on the Bahama Circuit. There was no Riverside Church on the Rougemont Circuit so it would seem that the journal was referring to Riverview. This is further supported by the entry in the 1928 North Carolina Conference Journal stating that Riverview was to be taken from the Bahama Circuit and returned to the Rougemont Circuit. The pastor of the circuit was V.E. Chalfant.³⁷ Being a small church made conditions unstable for Riverview as it was shuffled back and forth between circuits. Depending on the circuit and the number of churches on the circuit, Riverview received preaching services once or twice a month. For a while everything went smoothly

³⁵North Carolina Conference Journal, 1920 Appointment Sec.

³⁶Ibid., 1921-25 Appointment Section

³⁷Ibid., 1926-30

for the church. It remained on the Rougemont Circuit under the leadership of various pastors: J.W. Lineberger-1931-32, M.W. Warren 1933, E.H. Measomer 1934-35, and J.T. Green-1936,37 and 1939.³⁸ The year 1938 tended to be a tragic year for Orange Factory Community. The mill was closed which was tragic enough but even more tragic was the closing of the church. The North Carolina Conference Journal made the following recommendation: "Discontinue Riverview Church on the Rougemont Charge leaving the property in the care of the Quarterly Conference of Rougemont Charge."³⁹ Not only was the means of physical support taken from the community but also the means for Spiritual support was being taken. The people at Orange Factory were a united people and they would ^{not} let their Orange Factory Community die away. They struggled to keep the church and in 1939 it was reopened.⁴⁰

As the years passed the mill began to deteriorate and finally crumbled. The brick store came down as did a number of the mill houses. Many of the people moved away but some stayed. Those that stayed were people of strength and devotion. Through them the community lived on. The church was small in membership but strong in spirit and despite the lack of strong financial support it continued to serve the community as their place of worship. When the company store closed another store was opened and life continued. Those who remained raised their

³⁸North Carolina Conference Journal, 1931-39

³⁹Ibid., 1938- p.37.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1939.

families there with pride and dignity. As John B. Flowers states it: "It was a close community, and the strong bonds forged in hard work and adversity held. The quilting parties, taffy pulls, and church socials went on and the village baseball team was still strongly supported."⁴¹ Proof of this can be evidenced by the trophies won by the village baseball team, that stand in the church. A long list of pastors have served the church and life remained essentially the same until the late 1960's and the 1970's.

The list of pastors serving the church in the 1940's were: Kermit Wheeler-1940-42; W.B. Petteway-1943-45; W.G. Burgin-1946-47; and J.S. Donahue-1948-49.

In the 1950's the following pastors served: David Andrews-1950; W.W. Bass-1951-52; E. Ray Goodwin-1953-54; Allison Simonton-1955-58; F.E. Berry-1959-61.

Pastors serving in the 1960's were: R.S. Stead Jr.-1962; P.C. Gentry-1963-65; Stanley E. LaTorre-1966-67; D.K. Doyal-1968-69.⁴²

In 1968 Riverview's ties with the Rougemont Charge was once again severed. Riverview was taken from the Rougemont Charge and a charge was formed with Mt. Tabor Church to form the Mt. Tabor-Riverview Charge.⁴³ This is the last change Riverview has made in their charge status. The membership during the past twenty years has remained virtually the same with it numbering in the twenties. The financial condition of the

⁴¹ Flowers, p.34.

⁴² North Carolina Conference Journal, 1940-69

⁴³ Ibid, 1968.

church has been one of struggle but some relief^{has been granted} with the Flinton Estate., which was left to the church for maintenance of the property. These obstacles of small membership and limited finances have forced many churches to close their doors but not Riverview. While on the Mt. Tabor-Riverview Charge the church has done a commendable job of meeting their financial obligations. After D.K. Doyal served the charge for two years, Robert Flynn served as Pastor for four years. Milford Oxendine served as Pastor in 1974-75 and some changes were made.⁴⁴ A couple of new members were added and aluminum siding was placed on the outside of the church. It was during this period that the city of Durham began plans for a new dam, one that would flood the village.

I, Roger Crim, was appointed to the charge in 1976 and continue to serve. A few minor changes have taken place in the church such as new carpeting but more than anything else I have experienced the love and unity and struggles that have made up the history of the church. I find that it is impossible to write a history of the church apart from the history of the community. The two are entwined together and are inseparable. The mill provided the life-force of the community; The church the unifying force and the provider of strength and fortitude. A new source could be found to provide for the physical needs but through the church the community held together through faith, love and fellowship. Now what time has not been able to do the City of Durham may. On May 7, 1978 a meeting was held at Riverview United Methodist Church and formed the Orange

⁴⁴North Carolina Conference Journal- 1970-75.

Factory Preservation Society-a campaign to save the village by having it registered as a national historic site. The meeting received excellent coverage by the local media. Once again the people of Riverview Church face a struggle but this time will they survive? This is a question unanswerable at the present time, odds are against it. Church membership now stands at twenty-three. Average attendance is eight. Of those who attend the majority are elderly and live on a fixed income. The church and community face the most difficult struggle in their history. Yet, in this struggle their heritage stands out for all to see. A local television station in Durham, channel 11, did a human interest segment on the church and filmed a Sunday Morning Service. C.B.S. television network gave the story national coverage on the Sunday evening news program. In the face of adversity things continue to happen at Riverview and those who have spent their lives in service to the community and the church hope that whatever transpires will permit them to continue their lives just as they have done so for years. Pamela Pasco described it best when she quoted from Woody Guthrie's, Bound for Glory:⁴⁵

And I drifted off to sleep thinking about all the people in the world that had worked hard and had somebody else come along and take their life away from them.

⁴⁵Pamela Pasco, p.4.

Bibliography

- 1) Barrett, John G., Sherman's March Through The Carolinas, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1956.
- 2) Boyd, Wm. Kenneth, The Story of Durham: City of the New South, Durham, N.C., 1925.
- 3) Branson's North Carolina Business Directories 1-9 Editions
- 4) Brown, Wm. Garrett, The South at Work: Letters of Travels in the South to the Boston Evening Transcript, March-June 1, 1904.
- 5) Flowers, John Baxton III, Orange Factory, Durham, N.C. 1978.
- 6) Flowers, John Baxton III and Schumann, Marguerite, Bull Durham and Beyond: A Tourning Guide to City and County, Durham, N.C. 1976.
- 7) Grill, Franklin C. and Watson, Joseph W., North Carolina Historical Directory, Raleigh, N.C. 1976.
- 8) Lefler, Hugh Talmage and Newsome Albert Ray, North Carolina The History of a Southern State, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1954.
- 9) Pasco, Pamela, Orange Factory: A Mill Village, Durham, N.C. 1975.

Newspaper Articles

- 1) Timberlake, Carr Jr., "Orange Factory Village is Tumbling Down Around Pre-Civil War Mill", Durham Herald-Sun, Dec. 21, 1941
- 2) Dixon, Wyatt T., "How Times Do Change", Durham Sun, Durham, N.C. Fri., Nov. 7, 1969 and Fri. June 9, 1978.

Other Sources

- 1) Durham County Records, Deed Section, Durham County Courthouse, Durham, N.C.
- 2) Minutes of the Durham Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, Manuscript Room, Perkins Library, Duke University.
- 3) Minutes of the Durham District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, Manuscript Room, Perkins Library, Duke University.
- 4) Orange County Records, Deeds Section, Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N.C.
- 5) North Carolina Conference Journals