

Historical Sketch  
of  
Salem United Methodist Church,  
Garland Charge

The beginnings of Methodism in North Carolina predate the Revolutionary War. The first mention of Methodists in the state, in The Colonial Records of North Carolina is not a very complimentary one, however. Rev. James Reed, an Anglican, writing from New Bern in 1760 to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in London; speaks of them as "ignorant, censorious & uncharitable." Again in 1761, "The Methodists of late have given me a good deal of trouble ... by preaching up the inexpediency of human learning & the practice of moral virtue & the great expediency of dreams, visions & immediate revelations." The intemperate nature of Reed's remarks may be explained by the unfavorable attitude toward all dissenters on the part of the established church of that time. It might also be noted that George Whitefield later maintained that the particular enthusiastic sect to which Reed referred were not followers of himself or John Wesley and were therefore improperly called Methodists.

The first Methodist preachers sent out by Wesley reached the state in the early 1770's, having been preceded by the Quakers, Church of England, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Moravians. Joseph Filmoor preached the first Methodist sermon in North Carolina at Currituck Court House, in the northeastern corner of the state, in September 1772.

After American independence and the severance of other ties with the mother country, the preachers in connection with John Wesley who had been travelling up and down the colonies felt the need of a separate church organization. In a conference convened in Baltimore on Christmas Eve 1784 and lasting ten days, they formed the Methodist Episcopal Church.

By 1800 the church was subdivided into formal regional conferences with most of the churches in North Carolina assigned to the Virginia Conference. In this year there were 27 circuit riding preachers in North Carolina and an estimated 150 local preachers. Revivals and camp meetings abounded, membership grew, and by 1810 Methodists outnumbered other denominations in the state.

Bishop Francis Asbury, more than any other man the father of Methodism in the United States, travelled and preached extensively in North Carolina. His Journal records several visits to Sampson and Duplin counties. The entry for February 27, 1787 reads:

"We then rode to H\_\_\_'s on Island Creek [in nearby south Duplin Co.] I went alone into the woods, and had sweet converse with God. At night we were poorly provided against the weather; the house was unfinished; and, to make matters worse, a horse kicked the door open, and I took a cold, and had the toothache, with a high fever."

Having survived these adversities, on March 1, two days later:

"I had more hearers, and they were more attentive than I expected; I trust it was a profitable time. Rode to Brother Johnson's -- without the labour of slaves he manages to have abundance for man and beast."

On February 17, 1788 Asbury preached at the Sampson County courthouse to 500 persons and later to a crowd of 800. In December 1795, while travelling from Virginia to South Carolina, he crossed and recrossed Sampson County.

Whether or not Asbury ever preached in the Salem community itself is not recorded in his Journal, but the church was apparently formed during the period of his travels through the state. D.C. Geddie, who was pastor in charge from 1893 to 1896 on the Magnolia Circuit, to which Salem belonged for over 50 years, wrote a brief history of the circuit around 1895. In his sketch he states:

"Salem was organized about 1800. The building now used is the third which has been built. The membership was greatly increased in 1886 while Rev. W.A. Forbes was pastor."

The most interesting and comprehensive accounts of the early years of the Magnolia Circuit and Salem Church come from Edgar L. Perkins. He preached at Salem in 1843 and 1844 when the church was part of the Duplin Circuit. Perkins was an intelligent and literate man with a curiosity about the past. He obviously enjoyed sitting down with the old-timers and talking about earlier days. Fortunately he recorded some of these conversations. In 1876, in response to a request from Miles P. Owen, another Methodist preacher who served in the northern part of Sampson County, Perkins wrote:

"Dear Brother, your letter asking for information concerning the rise and progress of Methodism in the bounds of Magnolia Circuit came to hand this morning, and I hasten to answer.

"About twenty five years ago [1851?] I had a long conversation with Brother John Mallard of Island Creek settlement in Duplin County. Brother Mallard was then in the neighborhood of eighty years old. He said that when he was a boy about nine years old [1780-85?] his father lived near the road leading from Hallsville [central Duplin Co.\*] to Kennansville [sic] about four miles above Hallsville. That Bishop Asbury with a Mr. [Reuben?] Ellis as his travelling companion called at his father's one evening late and informed the family that he was a Methodist preacher, as was also his companion, and if the family would allow him he would stay and preach for them after supper. This suggestion was acted upon. A runner was sent out to inform the neighbors, a small crowd collected, and Asbury preached. An appointment was left for the return trip, when there were many people present and some joined the church, and a society was established. Some children were baptised and Brother Mallard, then nine years old, was also baptised. Soon after this regular meetings were held in the neighborhood at a log building erected for the purpose on the side of the road on the first hill of any note after leaving the river, four miles above Hallsville. The ground is now under cultivation where this building stood, and a dwelling near the spot. This was the first introduction of organized Methodism in Duplin County. Persons came from all parts of the county to these meetings and many came from other counties. The Mallards moved over into the Island Creek neighborhood, and there with the Carrs originated the society at Charity Chappel [sic]. The Carltons, finding it rather far to go to the first place of worship mentioned, constructed a log building in the Steward's Creek section, known as Carlton's. Thus two distinct churches, or societies, grew out of the first, while the first preaching place after a few years was abandoned. Providence Church seems to have arisen from the influence of the two societies that grew out of the first, as did also the society at Goshen, first known as Dark Branch School House, since as Wesley Chapel.

"The society at Salem in Sampson Co. seems to have originated from a wave of influence coming in from southwards from the Cape Fear section. Bishop Asbury sometimes travelled that road and lodged among the Johnstons [Johnsons?] and preached for them. Other bishops travelled the same route. Bright Johnson, a man of clear memory and sound piety, informed me about thirty years

\* between present-day Beulaville + Kennansville

ago [1846?] that when he was a youth, he heard Bishop [Robert R.] Roberts preach in the log building that stood about thirty yards west of the Salem Church where it now stands. The present building is the third that has been erected upon that ground for church purposes. The first two were log buildings. The church at Bryans arose from two waves of influence meeting, one from Salem and one from Carltons.

"The churches at Kennansville and Magnolia are the result of surrounding influences, not traceable to the direct influence of any one congregation. I should be pleased to dwell on the character of some of the families. The Mallards and Carrs of Island Creek, the Turners of Providence, and the Johnsons of Salem -- names precious in the memory of old Methodist preachers. The Johnson family were noted for their industry and deep piety, and in your own piazza I conversed with good old Brother Samuel Johnson a few weeks before his death, when he remarked that his work was done and he had nothing to do but to die. Whereupon I gave a metrical shape to the sentiments and published them in the Clinton Independent. The lines were as follows:

Father, all my work is done,  
Now I'll gently lay me down;  
Gladly leave this world of strife,  
Sweetly languish into life.

Father, I have suffered long,  
And endured temptation strong;  
I have struggled long to be  
Welcomed into life with thee.

Now in my declining days,  
Let my life show forth thy praise;  
While my head blooms for the grave,  
Savior spread thy arms to save.

Visions bright enchant my view,  
And joys fill my heart anew:-  
As from earth I shrink away,  
Breaks the light of endless day.

I would here no longer stay,  
Angels beckon me away:-  
I am drawing near the throne,  
Father, speak, and let me come.

"These old primitive Methodist[s] did not have many books. The Bible, hymn-book, Discipline, and Wesley's sermons constituted their libraries. They read and reread and practiced what they learned. I love to dwell upon this memory.

"I have given you but a brief outline of those waves of influence that resulted in the formation of Magnolia Circuit. It is but a fragment of the Duplin Circuit as I travelled it in 1843 & 4. At that time the Duplin Circuit included all of Duplin, a slice of New Hanover [probably a section which is now in Pender County], the lower half of Sampson [Salem was the westernmost point of the circuit], and a part of Wayne. Magnolia was simply a wood-station on the railroad almost without a name, though generally called Strickland's. Few of the congregations had emerged from the old log buildings where they first

learned to pray and praise. I sincerely hope that the progress of Methodism for the next thirty years may be equal to the past thirty years, that the songs of Methodism may roll in one unbroken strain from earth to heaven."

In other historical reminiscences written for the Raleigh Christian Advocate in 1887, Perkins recalled that at the time of his pastorate, 1843-44, "Salem was an old log building, the second of the kind that had been built on that ground. Bishop [Enoch] George once preached in the first building, so I was informed by Brother Bright Johnson who was present on the occasion." Referring to a member of the church who entered the ministry, he wrote, "From this place went Enoch Johnson into the Virginia Conference."

Not only was Perkins a competent historian, but apparently a good minister and evangelist as well. (The qualities of versatility and resourcefulness would also have to be added to his catalog of virtues. Having lost his voice in 1848, he was forced to retire from the ministry, whereupon he returned to school, studied medicine, and became a doctor. In addition, he edited the Clinton Independent for two years and earlier built Richlands Academy.) During his two years on the Duplin Circuit he added about 300 members to the church. Concerning this period he wrote:

"There was a tremendous revival during the years 1841 & 42 and on down to 1846 in that section of country lying between Fayetteville, Wilmington and Newberne. Henry Gray of the N. C. Conference was the principal conductor of these revivals. Under his ministry during the years mentioned and in the section described thousands were added to the church. I attended many of his meetings and preached for him very often. It was a common thing to begin a meeting and continue it through the week, and then receive from 50 to 60 and sometimes 100 members into the church as the fruits of the meeting. These revival meetings included Cumberland, Sampson, Bladen, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Jones & Carteret. There was one remarkable feature connected with these revival meetings of Gray's. In numerous instances a mob would gather to break up the meeting, but in no case did they ever interfere. Whenever they approached Brother Gray would call the congregation to prayers and, while he besought heaven for protection, the mob dispersed, some leaving the place, others joining the penitents at the altar. Such things, having so often occurred, it became a saying among the wicked that they 'dreaded the old man's prayers'."

Most of the ministers who followed Perkins for the remainder of the 19th century on the Duplin and Magnolia circuits must almost inevitably have been a  
*more prosaic group.*

'been a more prosaic group. Their accounts of the progress of the circuit as given in the "Records of the Wilmington District Conference 1886-1889 are less picturesque and sometimes less favorable than those of Perkins.

Several excerpts follow:

1874. "The Magnolia Circuit being called Rev. J. W. Randle, the pastor, reported the spiritual interest good and improving. The attendance upon public worship good. Some revival interest in the circuit. Prayer meetings are kept up, but no class meetings. Little family devotion. Financial state not very good. The Sunday School interest is not doing very well. Not much interest manifested in the cause on the circuit. Some have suspended for present. The uniform lessons are not used. There are 25 teachers and about 160 scholars in attendance....."
1876. S. M. Davis, pastor. "Six church houses valued at \$5500. \$578 raised for church building and repairing. 18 members received. Total no. of members 461. 2 infants and 14 adults have been baptized. Spiritual condition of church reasonably good. 3 Sabbath Schools with 23 officers and teachers and 178 scholars. Literature of M. E. Church South used. \$104 raised for S. S. purposes. Pastor's salary \$400; \$170.72 cts. Paid (as of about 2/3 of the way through the conference year)..."
- 1885 M. M. McFarland, pastor. "Spiritual condition tolerable good and improving. Congregations fair and increasing. Family worship conducted by some, but not a large o/o..." McFarland mentioned Sunday School at Salem which he said had been in existence for 20 or more years. He also reported there were no more "union" Sunday Schools on the circuit.
- 1889 John R. Sawyer, pastor. "Spiritual condition...good...remarkable improvement in church building... In the main our people are trying to educate their children in the common schools, but very patronize our colleges... Have no Womans Missionary Society... Have but little trouble about infant baptism." A. J. Johnson, lay delegate "reports assessment plan used at his church; have trouble collection the money. Church buildings in good condition. No parsonage."
- 1891 R. L. Warlick, pastor. "Spiritual condition moderately good. Have had to deal with a few for taking too much intoxicating drink--also for dancing. Have 11 appointments, hold prayer meetings where convenient. Have 6 S. Schools..Have not as many S. S. scholars as church members. Getting lumber together for building a new church. S. Schools all use Methodist literature."
1893. D. C. Geddie, pastor. Still no parsonage.
1896. D. C. Geddie, pastor. "Spiritual condition fair and improving. Two accessions. Infant baptism sadly neglected. Lord's Supper fairly well observed. Interest in S. S. improving. Membership 62% of church membership... No Epworth League. Little interest in education... 1/3 salaries paid...\$85 spent on parsonage. Churches in fair condition, parsonage needs painting."
- 1898 L. S. Etheridge, pastor. "I fear the majority are negative in life. There are very few who attend dances, drink or indulge in worldly

amusement, but on the other hand they do not live a positive Christian life... The Sabbath services are well attended. Not much interest taken prayer meetings... Church conferences in the week are poorly attended. Baptism of infants is observed by many, some few do not believe in it... The houses of worship are in good condition except one... The Sunday School interest is very poor. We have only one school at present.. My people are not thoroughly awake on education.. We have one or two high schools, but these are not under our control. The common schools are tolerable well attended."

In the 20th. century Salem Church has registered a modest growth. contrasting figures extracted from the Journal of the North Carolina Annual Conference are partially representative of the gains in selected areas:

	Church members	S. S. members	Church value	Pastor's	Total expenditure
1930	34	26	\$1500	\$80	\$186
1960	56	55	\$12,000	\$700	\$1485

Two changes in the circuit or charge, have come in this century. In 1923 Salem was moved from the Magnolia to the Ingold Charge, and in 1931 the name was changed to the Garland Charge. Following is a list of the ministers since 1900. The dates of those of the annual conferences at which the ministers were appointed. Until 1952 the conferences were held in November or December (after the crops were in and churches would be more able to "pay out"), so that the year following the date given represents the main portion of the minister's pastorate. In 1952 the date of the conference began to be moved up and since 1955 has fallen in June.

Compiled by  
 Mary H. Dawson  
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1900	J.W. Wallace	1950	H.L. Harris
1901	C.C. Brothers	1951	"
1902	J.W. Martin	1952	J.W. Goodwin
1903	"	1953	J.B. Young
1904	"	1954	R.F. McKee
1905	W.E. Brown	1955	W.H. Montgomery
1906	"	1956	W.M. Ellis
1907	"	1957	"
1908	Y.E. Wright	1958	"
1909	J.C. Whedbee	1959	"
1910	C.T. Rogers	1960	"
1911	"	1961	C.A. Young
1912	E.C. Sell	1962	"
1913	H.M. Jackson	1963	S.L. Wood
1914	R.F. Munns	1964	"
1915	"	1965	"
1916	"	1966	V.A. Lewis
1917	"	1967	"
1918	J.W. Autry	1968	"
1919	to be supplied	1969	W.B. Gregory
1920	S.E. Ragland		
1921	"		
1922	W.E. Hocutt		
1923	E.W. Hurst, Jr.		
1924	A.E. Brown		
1925	"		
1926	F.B. Noblitt		
1927	"		
1928	W.F. Hodges		
1929	"		
1930	"		
1931	R.G. Dawson		
1932	"		
1933	"		
1934	"		
1935	T.W. Lee		
1936	W.B. Cotton		
1937	"		
1938	O.C. Melton		
1939	"		
1940	"		
1941	M.W. Warren		
1942	"		
1943	"		
1944	"		
1945	J.D. Young		
1946	"		
1947	C.B. Harris		
1948	D.C. Boone		
1949	J.D. Stott		



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