

Three versions of
History for Soapstone
United Methodist
Church

The History Of Soapstone

Soapstone United Methodist Church has an incredible history filled with faith, perseverance, courage, and response to God's call. Ours is a story that forms a foundation as strong as our namesake stone, running rock-solid beneath us.

Imagine a conviction as strong as Soapstone. The original Soapstone Church site at 10301 Old Creedmoor Road served as the setting for camp meetings held prior to the church's chartering in 1837. People from miles around made their way on foot or by horse and wagon to enjoy fellowship and gather inspiration from the circuit riders. Early church structures were crafted of wooden logs, and served as a meeting and worship place. But as the years passed, membership declined, and the church was closed around the time of World War II.

In 1950, efforts began to reopen Soapstone Church. Electricity, gas heating, two Sunday School rooms were added, and the church officially reopened a year later with students from Duke Divinity School serving as student pastors. In the early 1970's membership declined prompting a handful of families and individuals, small but mighty in their efforts, to organize a community-wide home visitation in the area. Prayers were answered as membership again began to grow.

By 1986, thirty-five years after reopening its doors, Soapstone was a thriving church, and grants were given for a full-time pastor to be appointed. Soon membership swelled and the church quickly outgrew its facilities. The 102 members of Soapstone voted in 1988 to purchase 8.77 acres of land on the northwest corner of Norwood and Old Creedmoor Road. Ground-breaking for the new site was held two years later. An education wing with eight classrooms was added in 1995, and a parsonage was purchased in 1997.

With new facilities, a booming community, and a committed membership and staff, the Soapstone family has soared to more than 700. But God isn't finished with this congregation! The next chapter in Soapstone's history is being written based on the same rock-solid commitment of previous Soapstone generations. May we give the next generation of Soapstone a new example of faith and hope in times of opportunity and challenge.

**SOAPSTONE
U.M. CHURCH**

**History
1837-1990**

SOAPSTONE, an area of rolling hills and meandering creeks, got its name from the soapstone rock formations in the area. Soapstone was first a camp meeting site, but it is not known exactly what year this began, it is known that one acre on which a meeting house was already built on, was deeded by a Willis Goodwin on July 12, 1837. Trustees receiving this deed were, Nathaniel Warren, Anderson Page, John K. Moore, George Alston and Solomon Bledsoe, and the meeting house was officially named Soapstone.

According to Mrs. Ina T. Ayscue, this church building that stands here at present is the third building, the first two built from logs.

Soapstone Church was in The Raleigh District on the Millbrook - Rolesville Circuit from 1869 to 1927, Soapstone Church was taken from the Raleigh District as part of Andrews - Masseys Chapel Circuit. Later, these were placed with Dukes Chapel Church, forming the Duke Circuit. Sometimes after 1937, Soapstone closed. No records could be found specifying the date, but according to Kathleen Nipper, it was about 1939. The reason for closing is somewhat vague, but according to persons who were members at that time, it was closed due to the passing away of some faithful members, and some moving from the community.

In 1950, efforts began for the reopening of this church. Rev. Forest Neese and Rev. George Megill canvassed the community to see if there were people interested in Soapstone Church being reopened. James and Sadie Ayscue had moved to community, and were attending a Baptist Church. Rev. Megill hearing they were Methodist visited them to see if they would be interested in helping re-activate Soapstone. Being Methodist, they talked to some of the older members, much enthusiasm was expressed. The Ayscue's along with, Ina T. Ayscue, Elvis and Maggie Layton (Zula L. Poole's parents) attended Charge Conference held at Fletchers Chapel. At this time, Soapstone was put on the charge with Andrews Chapel and Fletchers Chapel. In 1955, Fletchers Chapel became strong enough for a full time pastor, Soapstone and Andrews Chapel became a charge.

Renovation began to improve the church building. The church building was wired for electricity, the pulpit was made larger, two Sunday School class rooms added, and the floor refinished. A wood stove had provided heat until this point, a gas heating system was installed.

The church membership began to grow. From the 1950's to the 1960's the church was active, providing spiritual growth in the rural community. During revival services, chairs were placed in the isle to accommodate people attending these services. Wednesday night prayer service, Womens Society of Christian Service, and Sunday School, were much a part of outreach in the community. Christmas pageant's with Santa giving out fruit and candy to all children, and Christmas Caroling to the shut-ins, made Christmas a memorable experience. Also, pounding the preacher was a custom in those days. (Cured hams and staple goods). The youth group, then called the M.Y.F. (Methodist Youth Fellowship) was the most active group in the church, with about 22 members and sometimes more attending. Total on the roll in 1960 was 62.

During the early 1960's these young people married, and left the community. Several families moved away. The death of some caused families to go in different directions. In the mid 1960's attendance began to decline, due to deaths and families moving and some leaving the church for various reasons.

The early 1970's the members struggled to keep Soapstone Church alive. Much love and devotion were evident during these years. Renovation continued, new windows, pulpit and center isle carpeted floor refinished, altar rails and curtains added. mobile class rooms, replaced roof, seasonal paraments and Guest Book.

The power of prayer was shown to members of Soapstone Church during the late 1970's. The Rev. Randy Wall, led a community wide visitation. Rev. Wall and church members, visited every home in the area. Seeds were planted, and prayers answered. In the year 1978 the church membership began to go up.

In the 1980's attendance continuing to increase. The area growing with various subdivisions, Soapstone attracted some of these families into its fellowship. Additional communion service, candle and vase set, well, coat of exterior paint, hand rail, airconditioning and heating system, pulpit furniture and pews and landscaping. Many improvements were made and all not mentioned.

SOAPSTONE, under the leadership of Rev. James R. Huskins continues on with growth and an eagerness to serve the surrounding area with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rev. Huskins held Bible studies, confirmation classes, visitation and worked with all the committees to move forward.

Rev. Huskins came to the Andrews - Soapstone Charge in the year, 1981. He saw the need and the possibility for Soapstone to become a church with its own minister and to become a part of the Raleigh District. He worked hard to see that this would take place and on March 30, 1986 a brief meeting conducted by the Rev. Wallace Kirby, Durham District Supt. was held. Soapstone would have a full time minister and be in the Raleigh District.

Soapstone was outgrowing its facilities. Surveys and studies were in progress to make plans for the future. Many ideas were presented and careful consideration of each one was important. The tension grew heavy for the right decision must be made in order to keep the church members in harmony and, also, serve the community in the best way possible.

Rev. Hope Morgan Ward, came to Soapstone in June, 1986. Rev. Ward continued on with the work Rev. Huskins had begun. A building committee was formed. On January 3, 1988, Charge Conference was held after worship service. The building committee presented an agreement to purchase 8.77 acres of land. The land located at the northwest corner of Norwood Rd. and Old Creedmoor Rd.. Twenty five voting members voted to purchase the land. An architect firm was selected and plans continued. The first phase site plan and master plan was presented on, April 30, 1989, and accepted with forty seven members voting. The building committee is working with the architect ironing out problems and hoping to break ground in the spring of 1990.

This year 1984, we continue to see many changes in Soapstone Church. The church continues to grow in membership. The present membership is 102. Confirmation classes are held each spring, bringing our children into the Church family. The area surrounding the Church is growing rapidly. From this growth we have gained members by transfer and baptism. Family names found upon the roll in 1984 include, Ayscue, Cable, Allen, Chatham, Johnson, Nipper, Fowler, White, Wahlen, Bair, Gadd, Fitch, Thomas, Moore, Backus, Kenney, Jackson, Howard, Fleischhauer, Needham, Barlow, Seagroves, Poole and Beck.

SOAPSTONE, is still a small church with a rural setting, smiles of children running happily in the yard, people with all different occupations, but one common bond of love for mankind. We are open for changes, who knows what the next step might be.

Sadie Ayscue

Jean A. Nipper

Church Historians - 1984

History of Soapstone

By Rev. Randy Wall

Preface

Somewhere I recall hearing the story of a mother who was going through the trauma of her only child leaving home to go out and face the world on his own. As her only child walked out the door, the mother told her son, "Son, don't ever forget where you came from." How important for we as people to remember where we have come from. It was this spirit of wanting to know one's past that led the writer Alex Haley from the Bureau of Archives in Washington, D.C. across the ocean to dark Africa as he searched for his own Roots.

It has been important since the beginning of Christianity for God's people to remember where they came from. In Acts 7, when the disciple Stephen preaches before the Jews, he reminds them and himself of where Christianity came from as he recites the Old Testament past. Yet, it is not just important for us to remember what God did in the days of Abraham and Stephen, but it is also important for individual Christians to remember what God has done more recently in the life and history of their own local church. ^{step} This importance of knowing where one's local church has come from has provided the motivation for this history of Soapstone Church.

I do not contend that this history of Soapstone Church is complete. Information contained herein is somewhat brief and sketchy because through the years the records and persons that ^{hold} much of the history of Soapstone Church have disappeared. The

resources that were available to help compile a history of Soapstone Church either were brief in the information they contained or they only covered a particular period of the church's history. Despite the incompleteness of this history, I do think it is significant because it is the first history ever written of Soapstone Church.

It is always appropriate to express one's gratitude to those persons that aid in an effort such as this. I wish to thank those persons in Soapstone Church that imparted to me the information they knew about Soapstone's past and gave me the time and expressed the interest that made this project possible. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wife and young daughter who suffered through my preoccupation with this project.

Rev. Randy L. Wall
August, 1978

Church Origin

Little can be said in a concrete manner about when Soapstone Church originated as a place of worship. Before Soapstone Church was affiliated with Methodism, it was a camp meeting place where Christians would come together for days and nights of religious worship and fellowship. The earliest church deed dates to the 1830s. That deed does specify that the church was Methodist at that time. There is the possibility, however, that the church can be dated back farther than the 1830s. Rev. Franklin Grill has done some study about early Methodism in Wake County. According to Grill, land in 1817 was deeded to a Stony Hill Meeting Place. One of the individuals signing as a trustee on this deed was a Mr. Bailey. Ironically, his name also appears on the first deed of Soapstone Church. The land described in the 1817 deed of Stony Hill Meeting Place is similiar to the land of Soapstone Church. Therefore, it is possible that Stony Hill Meeting Place is what was known in the 1830s as Soapstone Methodist Church.

It is not known when Soapstone Church became affiliated with the Methodist Church. Evidence points to Soapstone Church becoming Methodist sometime between 1828 and the early 1830s. This is based upon church records which state that in 1891 a Mary W. Jones, a member of Soapstone Church, died. Mary Jones is said to have been converted at a camp meeting at Soapstone 68 years before 1891, that year being 1828. Therefore, Soapstone was known as a camp

meeting in 1828 and must have become Methodist between 1828 and the early 1830's.

Interest is always expressed by persons unfamiliar with Soapstone Church about its unusual name. It appears that the name of the church was taken from the vein of soapstone rock that the church sits upon. Discussion has arisen in the Church's past about the possibility of changing the name of the church, but such action has never been taken.

Charges that Soapstone Church has been apart of

Records were not accessible to document what charges that Soapstone Church was apart of before 1869. From 1869-1926, Soapstone Church was apart of the Millbrook-Rolesville Circuit. From 1869-1894, this circuit was known as the Rolesville Circuit. In 1894, the Quarterly Conference recommended to the Bishop that the name of the circuit be changed from Rolesville to Millbrook. After 1894, this charge was known as the Millbrook Circuit. There were several other churches that were on the circuit with Soapstone Church, including Andrews Chapel Church, Pleasant Grove Church, and Millbrook Church.

In 1926, Soapstone Church along with Andrews Chapel Church and Pleasant Grove Church was taken from the Millbrook Circuit to form the Andrews-Pleasant Grove Circuit. However, Soapstone was only apart of this charge for one year because in 1927 Soapstone Church was again placed on the Millbrook Circuit. Later in 1927, Soapstone Church along with Andrews Chapel Church was taken from Millbrook Circuit in the Raleigh District and placed in the Durham District as apart of the Andrews-Masseys Chapel Circuit. Prior to 1927, Soapstone Church had always been in the Raleigh District. After its move to the Durham District in 1927, Soapstone Church has always remained in that district.

Masseys Chapel was taken from the Andrews-Masseys Chapel Circuit in 1928. During that year, Soapstone was apart of a circuit with Andrews Chapel known as Andrews-Soapstone Circuit. Masseys Chapel

Was again placed with Soapstone and Andrews Chapel in 1931 to form a circuit known as the Andrews-Masseys Chapel Circuit.

Soapstone Church remained apart of the Andrews-Masseys Circuit till 1934 when Soapstone Church, along with Andrews, was placed with Dukes Chapel Church to form the Duke Circuit. Soapstone Church only remained apart of this circuit for one year, for in 1935 Soapstone Church was again placed with Andrews and Masseys Chapel to form the Andrews-Masseys Circuit. However, in 1937 Soapstone and Andrews were again placed with Dukes Chapel Church to form the Duke Circuit.

When Soapstone Church was reopened in 1950, it became apart of the Andrews-Fletbbers Charge. In 1955, Fletchers Chapel Church became a strong enough church to support a pastor by themself. Therefore, Soapstone Church along with Andrews was taken from the Andrews-Fletchers Charge. Soapstone Church then became apart of the Andrews-Soapstone Charge, a charge it has been apart of to this day.

The Closing of Soapstone Church
1939-1950

No specific date can be documented about what year that Soapstone Church closed. No records contain any such date. According to Kathleen Nipper, a member of Soapstone Church, the year the church closed was 1939. Reasons for the closing of the church are somewhat vague. According to persons that were members of the church at the time, the main reason that Soapstone Church closed was because many that had supported the church faithfully in the past had either died or moved away from the community.

About 10 years later, efforts began for the reopening of Soapstone Church under the pastoral leadership of Rev. George Megill, pastor of Pleasant Grove Church, and Rev. F. G. Nees, pastor of the Andrews-Fletchers Charge. The community surrounding the church was canvassed, seeking to find persons that would be willing to be members of Soapstone Church if it was reopened. These efforts came to a climax in 1950 when Soapstone Church was reopened and placed on the Andrews-Fletchers Charge.

Pastors of the Church

Very little is known about the pastors of Soapstone Church as individuals. Certainly as ministers of the Gospel they ~~have~~ served the Church and its Lord well. Certainly it is through Gods use of them that persons have given their lives to Jesus Christ and joined Soapstone Church. Following is a partial list of the pastors who have served Soapstone Church since its beginning. Pastors before 1869 are not listed because that information was not available.

<u>Years of service</u>	<u>Pastor</u>
1869-1871	J. J. Renn
1871-1873	A. D. Betts
1873-1874	J. E. Thompson
1874-1875	T. B. Reeks
1875-1878	L. J. Holden
1878-1881	Lermon Shell
1881-1883	L. L. Nash
1883-1885	J. D. Byle
1885-1888	P. Greening
1888-1892	B. C. Allred
1892-1896	K. D. Holmes
1896-1898	J. M. Ashby
1898-1899	M. M. McFarland
1899-1903	N. L. Seabolt

Years of service

Pastor

1903-1905	G.R. Rood
1905-1909	G.T. Simmons
1909-1910	J.M. Marlowe
1910-1913	Philip Greening
1913-1914	J.W. Martin
1914-1917	L.E. Sawyer
1917-1921	J.C. Williams
1921-1922	H.H. Mitchell
1922-1924	M.G. Erwin
1924-1926	S.J. Starnes
1926-1927	P.H. Fields
1927-1928	to be supplied
1928-1931	D.R. Hunt
1931-1933	F.F. Loftin
1933-1934	A.C. Thompson
1934-1935	F.D. Hedden
1935-1937	M.C. Wiklerson
1937-1939	W.K. Barrs
¹⁹³⁹⁻¹⁹⁴⁷ Church is closed form 1939-1950	Haywood Barrell
1950-1952	F.G. Nees
1952-1953	Eben Taylor
1953-1954	Eben Taylor
1954-1955	Thomas Turman
1955-1956	John Reed
1956-1957	Nathan H. Byrd
1957-1959	Henry E. Riley, Jr.
1959-1961	W.R. Spears

Years of service

Pastor

1961-1963

Paul C. Gentry

1963-1965

Herman N. Ward, Jr.

1965-1968

C.S. Tyson

1968-1969

D.E. Earnhardt - Denny Wise

1969-1970

Larry L. Kimel

1970-1972

John W. Ruth

1972-1975

David B. Merriman

1975-1979

Randy L. Wall

1979-1981

Mark Nanney

1981-1986

James R. Huskins

1986-1997

Hope Morgan Ward

1997-

Leonard E. Fairley

Church membership

From the origin of Soapstone Church to 1900, membership at Soapstone Church was somewhat sizeable. According to church records, church membership in 1883 was 107. However, the pastor of Soapstone Church in 1882, L. L. Nash, reports that a large number of persons on the church rolls do not attend church "or do anything else religious." Rev. Nash also reported that family prayer is not as good as it should be in the church and that few male members pray in public. Rev. Nash reported in 1883 that some of the members of Soapstone Church drink liquor. Nash claimed that the drinking of liquor was "the worst evil with which we have to contend."

In the 1800s, several families were predominant on the rolls of Soapstone Church-- Thompson, Holloway, Moore, Bledsoe, Pope, Byrum, Lassiter, Tilley, Pool, King, Nipper, and Carpenter. One of the most interesting church members during this period was a W. C. Bledsoe. He served as a church steward in 1882 and as a church trustee in 1883. In 1883, W. C. Bledsoe, along with W. L. Bledsoe made a resolution at the Quarterly Conference to banish liquor from the church. That same year, W. C. Bledsoe helped lead a revival at Soapstone Church that brought 14 conversions.

Soapstone church membership in the early 1900s seems to be in a state of change. Church membership in 1904 was 63 members while in 1907 it was 45 members. Families that dominated the church membership from 1900 to 1932 include Thompson, Nipper, Pool, Wakefield, Brinkley, Ross, Layton, Blackwood, Watkins, and McGee.

Church membership in 1938 at Soapstone Church was 38 members. Common names found upon the rolls of the Church during this year include Byrum, King, Nipper, Layton, Thompson, and Ross. 46 persons were members of the church in 1956. Family names found upon the roll during this year were Nipper, Bunn, Watkins, Poole, Johnson, and Layton.

The peak of Soapstone Church membership in the 1900's was reached in 1960 when the church had 62 members. In 1978, the church has a membership of 51. Common names found upon the rolls in 1978 include Nipper, Ayscue, Gadd, Bunn, and Chatham.

Church Buildings

According to Ina Ayscue, there have been 3 buildings that served Soapstone Church for worship services. For some time when the church was only a place for camp meetings, no building was on the church property. The first building used by Soapstone Church for worship was a log church.

The second building to serve Soapstone Church was built by 1900. It was a wide building in which church pews stretched all the way across the sanctuary. As was the usual custom during that period, the men sat on the right side of the church and the ladies sat on the left side. As many churches during that period, Soapstone Church had an "Amen" corner which is said to be to the front of the church at the side of the pulpit.

The third church building was built with lumber taken from the church grounds. Heading that building project was a Mr. Turner.

Old church records make several references to the church building in several ways. Quarterly Conference records from 1890 state the Soapstone Church building was in good condition, free from debt, and worth about \$600. Records for the year 1891 state that the condition of the church building was fair and valued at \$500. In 1893, the church building is said to be in good condition and worth about \$500. Church records indicate that the Soapstone Church building was in worse condition in the early 1900s. At a Quarterly Conference held on October 13, 1907, it was voted to build a new church building at Soapstone. However, later records make no reference to a new building being built. The church building must have

still been in poor condition in 1908. No worship services were held in Soapstone Church during January and February, 1908, because the weather was too cold to worship in the dilapidated church building. Church records also state that the first church conference for 1908 was not held till June because of cold weather and the dilapidated church building.

Efforts to remodel the Soapstone Church building began in the later 1960s and early 1970s. In 1975, portions of the church were carpeted and the floor of the church was refinished. A steeple was added to the church in 1976. Later that year, a mobile home was given to the church through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Nipper. In 1978, altar rails were added to the sanctuary. Mr. Ernest Nipper has ably guided the church in these remodeling projects.

Church Giving

Nothing can make one more aware of inflation and the rising cost of living than looking at old financial reports. This is certainly the case in looking at the giving at Soapstone Church in its history. In the 1880's and 1890's, the conference assessment of the circuit ranged from \$140 in 1884 to \$104 in 1897. Pastors salary paid by Soapstone Church was about \$20 in 1882. At that time, Soapstone Church was one of the strongest churches in giving on the Rolesville Circuit. Pastors salary paid by the circuit in the 1890's ranged from \$725 a year in 1893 to \$600 a year in 1897.

In the early 1900's, giving at the church appears to have been somewhat lower. For example, Soapstone Church raised only \$101.51 in 1906. Conference assessments for the church in 1906 were \$39 while the church paid \$90 for the pastors and presiding elders salary that year.

In more recent years, the giving at Soapstone Church has risen. Amount paid the pastor insalary ranges from \$600 in 1960 to \$1219 in 1977. Total money raised ranges from \$1639 in 1960 to \$5337 in 1977.