

THE HISTORY OF ST. JAMES METHODIST CHURCH

When, or by whom, St. James Methodist Church or "class", as it was called then, was organized is not known. However, there is a church register that was revised in 1886 with a list of forty five members that were received into the class before the building of the first church, stating that Dr. E.L. Perkins a local elder joined in 1837 under Rev. G.W. Langhorn and Sarah A. Perkins in 1852 under Rev. J.B. Martin. They were the two earliest members of the church that we have a record of. Many of those that were members between 1837-1886 were parents, grand-parents and great grand-parents of our members today. It is anybody's guess where services were held during this time.

On May 13, 1886 the church building site - the lot that joined on the western side of the present Educational building - was purchased for the nominal sum of one dollar. Construction of the first sanctuary began in 1879. About half of the lumber was given and sawed by Mr. McCain. The lumber was sawed at W.S. Bell's mill which was located near the Newport River railroad trestle below the Haskett house. This lumber was hauled to the mill and back to the site where the church was to be built by members using oxen and carts that had large wheels.

The corner stone was laid in 1886. In the stone were placed a Bible and several books, all of which had decayed to dust when the building was torn down in 1964. Written on the outside of the stone are the words, "St. James Methodist E. Church, South."

The first lights were oil lamps. There were four small lamps in the auditorium with a lamp on each side of the pulpit. These lights were eventually replaced by six carbide lights suspended from the ceiling, three on each side. Then in 1927 electric lights were installed.

The benches were made by the carpenters at their homes. The seat and back were made from a single piece of lumber about fifteen and twenty-four inches wide respectively. The benches were stained the same dark color as the woodwork of the windows, wainscoating, and ceiling. The walls were plastered.

The windows were high and narrow with a triangular top, the panes were small and of clear glass. These windows were replaced with beautiful stain glass ones given as memorials to loved ones. This was done while Mr. John R. Poe was pastor.

The first carpet was red striped grass fibre, woven in cotton. After this wore out the church went many years with out a rug. At the same time the memorial windows were installed a nice wool rug was put on the floor. The first heating system was a big wood stove with a great long pipe that connected to the chimney at the front of the church. Eventually the wood stove was replaced by a coal stove. Still in cool weather the congregation was cold. About 1940 a new chimney was built, a Duo Therm oil heater was installed. However in cold weather it was still not too comfortable. The last thing tried was two floor furnaces in the center aisle. This worked better but the women often caught their high heel shoes in the grate.

A bell was installed in the steeple and rang for the first time in 1906. Later it fell and was cracked. It was never replaced.

There was no organ for several years. The first organ was bought by each member taking turns in selling cakes, having festivals, and making fancy quilts. It cost \$200. In 1929 this was replaced by the first piano. In 1952, the church purchased a Hammond organ.

In 1886 the preaching points were either called by the name "class" or "Society". At the time the church was first used, beside Newport, there were 5 other preaching points. Then in 1892 three more were added, and another in 1902. The circuit remained with all these ten preaching places until 1912. In 1926 we became the Newport-Harlowe Circuit. This time we had eight churches: Newport, Harlowe, Havelock, Riverdale, Oak Grove, Tuttle's Grove, Merriman and Core Creek. This was entirely too much for any one man even though he was driving a car by this time. It seemed the conference was never satisfied with the charge as it's makeup continuously changed. Up until 1954 St. James was a Charge with many other Methodist Churches.

The month that became a red letter month in the history of Newport Church came in August 1954, when Rev. J.H. Waldrop, pastor, and the official board approved a recommendation of the trustees to become a station church; which made it a church served by its own minister, who was not responsible for other churches.

St. James could rest awhile, NO! The need for a new church building was too great, once again St. James began talking building fund. The building fund was mounted on December 8, 1957, the trustees made a resolution to borrow money for the new church. Three months later, Feb. 27, The bids were in.

The ground breaking ceremony for this new contemporary design sanctuary was held on March 30, 1958. Rev. Ralph Fleming Jr., minister, and Dr. A.J. Hobbs, New Bern District Superintendent led the service. The opening service was held Nov. 9, 1958. Even though the church was designed with a capacity of 300 it was crowded. It was estimated there were between 400-450 that attended. Two and a half years later the final payment was made. The Service of Dedication was held June 18, 1961 with Rev. Fleming presiding. Dr. Hobbs introduced the speaker, Dr. Paul N. Garber, Bishop.

In the spring of 1965 the frosted glass in the gable end windows were replaced with stained glass and an outer protective storm window. These have reduced the glare and added much to the setting of worship. As improvements were made many meaningful items have been kept as memorials. The communion table and lectern from the old church are being used in the Educational Building. The communion set, cross, two collection plates with two added, the two vases are being used in the new church. Four of the benches were, until recently, used in one of the classrooms, now they have joined the memorial windows and baptismal font in the attic. We hope these things will be used in the near future in the new fellowship hall when it is built.

The building cost about \$70,000. The oak pews alone cost \$4186. The carpet covered all the church except for under the pews. The Sanctuary was attached to the existing Educational Building that was brick veneered to match the new structure. There were many memorial gifts given, such as: Hymnals, pulpit and communion table scarves and baptismal font.

If St. James had not grown, it would not have needed to build so much. In 1922-23 the whole charge of 4 churches paid the pastor a salary of \$1000. Newport's part was \$475. Does that sound bad? Wait until you learn Newport paid only \$286. The complete budget at St. James that year was only \$783.28, and they didn't reach that amount. There were 217 members on the whole charge and we do not know how many were members of St. James. In 1930-31 Newport's part of the pastor's salary was \$735, and presiding Elder's (today the district superintendent) was \$50. The charge of four churches and 325 members paid both of them together that year \$775.25.

It was no wonder that the preacher had to do some carpenter work on the side. In 1939-40 things began to look some better, the depression was receding. With 5 churches the pastor's salary was to be \$1600. Newport's part of the pastor and district superintendent was \$677, and they paid \$644.37. They became a station church in June

1954, the membership for the fiscal year was 231 and the total budget was \$5952. The fiscal year 1966-67 the membership stood at 464 a 101% increase in the 12 years. The church budget was \$16,657 and the building fund \$10,000 making a grand total of \$26,657.

We have seen the growth of the church worship area, now let us look at St. James Educational outreach. We can only guess when the Sunday School was organized. There was a marble plaque in the sanctuary that states, "In memory of Dr. E.L. Perkins, the beloved organizer and former superintendent of this Sunday School." We do know Dr. Perkins was superintendent in 1891. All classes were held in the Sanctuary until 1920-21. Finally it was decided to build a Hut. A one story square building with very small windows with no partitions. The Hut housed the younger children for some 25-30 years.

In the next 25 years beginning with the influx of population caused by the building of the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station. The church grew much more than it had in its first hundred years. The Hut was full and running all over the grounds and parsonage. The church was bursting at the seams. Something had to be done.

Dec. 1, 1947 when Rev. Jolliff was here a committee called "Finance" was appointed to organize and plan a proposed continuous program for securing funds for an Educational Building during the calendar year of 1948. Things began to happen when Mrs. E.E. Herrington, in 1948 gave the lot for the first Educational Building to be built onto St. James. Mr. John Haywood Jones, of New Bern gave the corner lot next to St. James, in memory of his father Mr. John Amos Jones. The state gave dirt to fill the ditches. Duke Endowment gave us \$1500. Mr. Ivey Haskett dug an eighty-one foot deep pump when St. James bought the pipe. U.S. Government gave logs. Mr. Needham Garner cut, hauled, these logs to the mill and back to the church site. The lumber consequently, cost about \$30 a thousand instead of \$70-75. The members had work days and many would hire someone in their place if they couldn't be present.

Because the Hut was now filled beyond its capacity St. James started using the new building as soon as possible. On Aug. 30, 1964 homecoming Sunday, Rev. Ralph Fleming brought the morning message and at two o'clock Rev. Dawson preached the dedication message.

It was decided in 1968 that an addition to the educational facilities was needed. Ground was broken Nov. 18, 1969 and the additional new building consecrated on Oct. 11, 1970 with Bishop William R. Cannon leading the service. This beautiful building will be paid for in Jan. 1978.

During the building of the church plant St. James also sought to care for parsonage needs. After much work and planning it was possible in April 1963 for the parsonage family to move into a new one story brick and stone dwelling with 4 bedrooms, two and a half baths, living room, family room, dining room, kitchen, utility room with a large garage and storage room attached.

During the history and growth of St. James Methodist Church it has had 45 Methodist ministers serve as its pastors. Listed below are the ones who have served in the past 25 years.

1952-1956	Rev. J.H. Waldrop
1962-1963	Rev. Wallace T. Green
1970-1975	Rev. P.D. Midgett
1976-	Rev. Horace L. McLaurin
1956-1962	Rev. Ralph L. Fleming, Jr.
1963-1970	Rev. Irving E. Cook
1975-1976	Rev. W.D. Wise

St. James has always not only met its local needs but has had a great compassion for others. In the field of missions it supports, The Rev. Bill Harrison in Brazilia, Brazil, and many other mission programs, including the Yokefellow Ministry at the Newport Unit of the N.C. Dept. of Correction. It also assists Homer Morris with seminary expenses and Tom Kamau with college expenses. St. James has had two of its members go into full time Christian work, Mr. C.J. Rogers, and Miss Betty Jo Hill. Homer Morris will enter the North Carolina Methodist Conference in 1978 as a full time Pastor.

An example of growth of St. James is the financial goal of this congregation for 1977-1978. Total budget is \$69,262 which includes 20,000 for building and \$15,000 for missions. Our membership is 625. St. James still has visions of completing a fellowship hall and a new chapel on our church plant. St. James has visions of continual growth and mission outreach.

Compiled from records of: Mrs. Stanley Mann, Mrs. D. Ira Garner, Mrs. Leona Garner, Mrs. Claire Mann, Miss Nina Garner, Mr. Harold Chartley and Rev. Horace McLaurin.

