

HISTORY OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN SWANSBORO

We know that there have been Methodists in Swansboro from the beginning of the Methodist Movement in America, because both secular and non-secular history bear witness to this fact. Many of the early leaders of the Methodist Societies visited eastern North Carolina and left an indelible imprint on the lives of those who heard them preach. These men were dedicated to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and were matched by few as far as their fervency and dedication were concerned.

As early as 1739, according to Dr. Hugh Lefler's History of North Carolina, George Whitfield, one of the Eighteenth Century's greatest evangelists, preached in North Carolina several times making "hell so vivid that one could locate it on the map." Yes, Swansboro United Methodist Church is steeped in the religious heritage of America. Few communities can lay claim to activities of Methodist people even before the church was officially founded in Baltimore at the Christmas Conference in December 1784.

It was on May 21, 1776 that the first North Carolina Circuit was established. Edward Dromgoole, Francis Poythress and Isham Tatum were some of its ministers. By 1783 there were ten circuits in North Carolina. Francis Poythress was North Carolina's first Presiding Elder and his territory covered the area from the Cape Fear to the Virginia line.

The New River Circuit was formed in 1785 and Onslow County was included in this area. In 1786 the New River Circuit was combined with New Bern and Wilmington. This district had The Reverend Lee Roy Cole as its Presiding Elder. Other men who preached on this circuit were Willy Beaufort, William Beaufort, Thomas Easter and William Ormand (born at Kinston). The New River Circuit was later divided, because of the heavy work, into two circuits, Goshen and Trent. Onslow County was in Goshen Circuit.

The formal Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States took place in Baltimore in 1784. The first Annual Conference of the new church was held at Green Hill's house near Louisburg, North Carolina, on April 20, 1785. Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, later known as Bishop, were both present at that meeting.

Francis Asbury, first Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, is said to have preached at least two sermons a day for over forty years. He covered his vast territory on horseback and in his latter years had to be assisted in mounting his horse because of his infirmities. This first Bishop of the Methodist Church visited in Swansboro at least three times. He recorded the visits in his

now famous journal—how he organized a Society in April 1785." In December of that same year he spent two days, December 24th and 25th, "in Swansbury and held Quarterly Meeting." On January 27, 1791 he recorded that he "preached at Swansbury—the people were attentive—O that God may bless his Work to them". It is thrilling to know that those great Christian Souls of our early church actually preached and organized a church right here in Swansboro.

There have been several churches in Swansboro which are not now standing. The Northern Methodist Church, organized by a minister from Marshallburg, North Carolina, some years after the Civil War with a Mr. Burnette as pastor was located approximately where the Webb and Forehand homes now stand. This church was sold to the Unitarians in 1907. Diagonally in front of this church had been an earlier church, a free church used by all groups. This building was a simple frame structure with two front entrances, one for women and one for men, as was the custom, and a gallery for slaves or free colored. There was a small cemetery on the church yard but the church sat on a rather steep incline going down the north side. The graves were on the south side and in front. This building was used for school as late as 1884. There was probably another church in Swansboro which predated that one but no one seems to know anything about it. We do know that there was a cemetery of some size which was located in the area where the homes of Earl Woollerotn, Claud Chadwick and Harry Hamilton now stand. It was not a family burying ground and graves dating back to 1778 still remain as a reminder of the past. It is generally thought that Asbury may have been referring to this site when he entered in his Journal that he preached "in sight of the sea."

The minutes of the Methodist Church placed North Carolina in the Virginia Conference until 1837, at which time the North Carolina Conference came into being and Onslow was placed in the Wilmington District. Little is known about the ministers who served Swansboro during the period from 1837-1871. We do know that Erasmus Hill spent his summers here at the home of his in-laws, the John Starkeys (Mr. Fitzhugh Morris mentioned this in his research on Onslow County). Lorenzo Dow, Elijah Grinade (early Onslow name), Dougan Johnson, George Hardison, F. B. McCall and John Mattocks (last four married Onslow County girls), Bowie, Robertson, Perkins, Stephenson were all pastors of Tabernacle Church during the 1837-1872 period. These preachers also served Swansboro. Mr. Jimmy Coston and "Uncle" Ike Henderson, Tuttle, Bell and Petteway were also active in the pulpits during the latter part of this period.

The present Methodist Church was organized on March 1, 1871. The congregation included everybody living here at that time (about 15 families in the village and a few from the adjacent area). They worshiped in the Old Brick Store and in a house which was also used as a school, located approximately where the First Citizens Bank parking lot is at present, until they could get their church

built. The church at the corner of Church and Elm Streets was built around 1880. All of the townspeople had a part in the building of this church for it was the only church until 1897 when the Baptist church was built.

Until about 1908 the minister lived at Palo Alto (Belgrade Area) and later in Maysville. These men were busy men preaching in as many as six churches, some churches once a month and others twice, etc. Preachers traveled slowly then and spent the nights wherever they preached last. The homes of George W. Ward, Jr. and John A. Pittman were the usual stopping places in Swansboro.

The Swansboro Circuit was formed in 1908 with W. E. Brown its first pastor. The circuit consisted of Bethlehem Church, Oak Grove, Queens Creek, Tabernacle and Swansboro. Later Midway Church at Stella was placed on the circuit and Tabernacle was placed on the Maysville Charge.

Mr. J. M. Lowder with his large family of grown and near-grown children came to the Swansboro Charge in 1913-1916. Two of his daughters, Miss Rosa and Miss Mary became missionaries and spent their lives in foreign service in the Far East. In 1917 Mr. W. C. Benson came for two years.

In 1920 Mr. W. B. Humble came here for two years. In 1922 when Mr. T. W. Siler was here the Wilmington District Conference met in Swansboro using the Bloodgood lot at the corner of Church St. and Elm Street, diagonally across from the church, for a picnic dinner. Almost every home in the town housed ministers for this occasion. Mr. Siler was a preaching man and the old church was filled to overflowing during his revivals.

Mr. D. A. Futrell came to us in 1923-24 to close out more than 40 years in the Methodist ministry, this church having been his first pastorate.

Then came L. R. Gains, M. F. Hodges and "Bill" W. H. J. Winstead. Mr. Winstead would have fitted well into the life of today's youth. He loved music, played the guitar, and was evangelistic in his approach. His ministry was short, however, due to health problems. He was forced to give up preaching and lived only a few years longer. During his ministry in Swansboro, he had two Duke student preachers here one summer. One was Stanley Lowell and the other Paul Root, who was later to become Dr. Paul Root, head of the Duke Divinity School.

T. Bryan Hough, Mary and little Mary Jane, arrived in 1929 and led us during the time we purchased the Emmerton School property for our church plant. This building was to house both parsonage and church for many years to come. At this time our parsonage was the house that the Andrew Masons live in now. We sold both the church, corner of Church Street and Elm Street, and the parsonage when we purchased the Emmerton School. This was Mr.

Hough's first church. He has had a long career in the North Carolina Conference and expressed on one occasion the desire to finish his ministry here where it began. Mary Jane has blessed them with six granddaughters.

The first preacher to live in the newly acquired parsonage and preach in the church was Ernest B. Bell and his family, including two sons. Mr. Bell was a musician, as well as a preacher, and took a great interest in the choir. He planned and executed our opening services in the new building. This was a great day in our Church.

S. S. Ellington was here for two years. He performed the first wedding in the new sanctuary before the carpet was laid. This was June 19, 1933, the wedding of Alvin E. Smith and Mary Ward. He also married Mary Privett and Olai Underseth. Mr. Ellington's health failed and he later left the conference.

Mr. and Mrs. Herman Finch served this church for a short time after the Ellingtons left. They had served a mission in the Chicago slums and were anxious to return to this work.

Mr. C. W. Barbee was sent at the next conference to serve us well for two years. He loved children and old folks and all loved him. Mrs. Barbee, being a musician, found plenty of places to use her talent. These were days when Minnie Jones, Mattie Tolson, Nettie Merritt and Lulu Hatsell were names known to all.

These were depression years but Swansboro Church never had trouble borrowing money or raising money to buy and rebuild much of the new building which had been purchased in 1930 for the sum of \$4,000. We equipped a new kitchen and served full turkey dinners once a year for \$.25 each. The Methodist Women were busy then, as now, raising funds by having quilting bees and bazaars.

The depression continued for several years and Mr. Charles B. Long and his family spent four of those years here in Swansboro. There was never a family more loved by a Community. Where there was sickness, one could find Mr. Long in the wee hours of the night keeping vigil by the bedside. The town turned out to see them off with many tears shed when the good-bys were said.

In 1940 Mr. G. C. Wood spent part of a year here. He was in ill health and died shortly. In 1941 Warren Petteway was sent to us, a mere string of a boy. One could see in this boy the makings of a great servant of the Church. Time proved this to be true and today he is Pastor of Duke Memorial Church in Durham, one of the largest churches in the North Carolina Conference.

In 1943 we were to get another young single preacher. This time it was Charles H. Mercer. Shortly after having been assigned here, he married Florrie Smythe, from South Carolina, who had recently graduated in Nursing from Duke, and they spent three years with us. These were happy years and much was accomplished by these

two hard working young people. Mr. Mercer had the gift of knowing what to say and how to say it at just the right time. We reluctantly gave him up when he was sent to Wilmington's Sunset Park Church.

Harry Lee Rogers and his family of two boys spent the next two years with us. Extensive repairs were made to both parsonage and church sanctuary during his stay. Mr. Rogers had been in the Chaplain Corps before coming to us. He was followed by J. K. Worthington. Mr. Worthington was along in years when he came and the feeling at first was that the Conference had really forgotten us for Mr. Worthington had been very near death a short time before. One only needed to hear him pray to know he was on speaking terms with the Lord. Though he was weak in body and along in years, he took on a super-human strength when he went into the pulpit. His voice was loud and clear. No one doubted from whence his strength came. He spread the Christian Gospel in this community for six years, until he no longer could walk without fear of falling. He said he would retire when the Lord retired him and indeed he did for his life was not to last long following his ministry here. He knew no race, creed or color. Those who followed were to reap the harvest of the seed he had sown. We were to experience real growth for some years to follow.

In 1953 Russell Johnson was sent to us with his family of five children. It was during his stay that the Charge built a new parsonage. The Johnsons only got to live in the new home a few months before they left.

Swansboro Church was having growing pains and needed new facilities. Our pastor was dividing his time five ways. We needed a full-time minister and we knew it. In order to have this, we would need to accept a budget now being carried by five churches, and perhaps even more. After considering the problem, it was decided to ask for station status. This meant raising our present budget (1956) from \$2,600 to \$8,500 in one year. The Official Board met with Jack Sinclair as its Chairman and, after praying on our knees, the eighteen members of that Official Board pledged over \$4,000 of that \$8,500 budget. We knew then that we could count on God and the congregation to do the rest and they did.

In 1956 station status brought to us Edgar and Mary Shuller and their family. They were to spend the next four years with us. Mr. Shuller got us off to a good start for he excelled in his ability to carry on church business. We wanted desperately to begin a building program but the conference didn't see eye to eye with us and had not sent Mr. Shuller here to build. We did get a building committee set up, however, and from this beginning the Building Committee began to function.

Mr. David W. Charleton and Sister Charlotte were to spend the next three years with us. It seemed that we just couldn't get

building off our minds and I'm sure we tormented Brother Charleton to death for he, too, had not been sent here to build, a fact which we were not really aware of at the time. He fitted in well and was loved by all. He visited all the people in town and was greatly missed by the shut-ins when he left. He was a scholar who spread the Christian Gospel through the printed word. Many of his articles appear in church papers as well as having several books in print.

We needed a site for the new church and explored this subject at length. When Mr. Carl S. Ward offered us the site on which we later built, we were delighted. Mr. Ward said that he had envisioned a church on that hill and we could go up there with him and step off the amount we needed and he would give us a deed for it. The Site Committee did this and, knowing the value of this property, tried to be as conservative as possible, taking only as much as they thought we needed. Mr. Ward lived only a short time after this.

Mr. Ward's family, two daughters and a son, were brought up in the Swansboro Methodist Church, though he was not a member of the church. The beautiful building site will always be a reminder of his generosity.

In the meantime as we struggled with building plans, we were informed that the Conference Building Sites Committee had raised the minimum size and would not approve our site unless we acquired more property. We also had a change of pastors and the delay of acquiring additional land slowed things down considerably. Mr. Ward had died and his heirs needed time to settle his estate. Along with prior delays and interruptions, things began to drag and much enthusiasm was lost. What has happened to the building program? When are we going to begin? These were questions constantly directed toward the Building Committee. Answers were not always satisfactory and the Church in general suffered from this dilemma. One cannot hasten the settling of an estate and nothing concrete could be started until the deed was in our hands.

In 1963 Jack Mansfield came to us full of energy, vision and inspiration. He seemed able to shoulder the program and carry it through. He was a tireless worker. On one occasion he said to the Official Board, "If you will just back me up, I have faith enough for all of us" and many think he really did. He didn't visit people but he preached to a full house, it was uncanny. Holy Communion was a highlight of his short pastorate for one was truly transported to the Higher Realm during this experience. The experience of real worship was keenly felt by those who attended services; his personal magnetism was matched by few.

Mr. Mansfield's stay with us was to be brief, for Governor Sanford was looking for someone to direct the North Carolina Fund. Mr. Mansfield had had legal training, and social service was his

primary interest and service in the North Carolina Conference, in addition to his pastoral assignments, so when Governor Sanford asked Bishop Garber to recommend a man to fill this post, Jack Mansfield was chosen. He had to make a quick decision for the post needed to be filled at once. It was a sad meeting when he announced to the Official Board his decision to leave without finishing the one year. More had been accomplished during his 10 months than during the several years previous and now we needed only to secure a loan. Surely we could go on without him! For the next two months we had a Navy Corpsman serve us, Paul and Polly Evans and family. They stayed with us until Conference. Mr. Evans was retiring from the Navy and would continue in the Methodist Ministry.

In June 1964 David and Martha Moe and family came to spend four years with us. David was born in China to Missionary parents and was eight years old when he came to the United States. David found us without a deed to our site and a building program which seemed to have been drifting for some months. Some felt that perhaps we had undertaken too much. These were interested people who had not gone through the several years of step-by-step planning, meeting after meeting, with one delay after another. They could not understand that the battle was about won. Before we knew it, a whole new building program was undertaken. Some thought that we would be spending too much money, \$150,000; that it could be done for much less. A figure of \$104,000 was set and a new architect was employed. There were those who could not understand the need of more land for the building site. These problems were worked out and Mr. Ward's two daughters, Mrs. E. L. Milsted and Mrs. Ronald Ipock, gave us the extra land we needed with a deed for the whole plot.

Building plans were now underway again from scratch. After two more years of inflation, the savings which we had hoped to realize had flown out the window. There was no end to the cuts which had to be made, but finally, in April 1968, we moved into our beautiful new church which already had \$100,000 invested in it, with a debt of \$58,000 to be paid.

There was one great lesson to be learned during this long ordeal of bringing a building to fruition; that, when Swansboro Methodist Church wants and needs something, its members are equal to the challenge.

The very first service to be held in the new church was a funeral. It was during moving week when Miss Josie Moore died, and having been an invalid for fifty years and unable to attend church, she was the first one to use the new sanctuary.

The first service was on Communion Sunday with the official opening the following Sunday. These were two great experiences for the congregation.

In June 1968, Mr. W. H. "Bill" Hopkins, all 250 lbs. of him, came with his four ladies. Mr. Hopkins spent much time working with the youth of the community. He assisted in organizing a Sea Scout Troop. He also organized a Teen Club where youth could go to play games and dance. The American Legion allowed the use of their building and for a while this project flourished but for lack of enough responsible backing had to be discontinued. It had been hoped that under the direction of a new pastor all would join hands in closing gaps which had developed during the building program but this was not the case. In June 1970 Tommy Faggart was lifted from a neighboring church to see what he could do with us.

One thing we needed desperately was a business-like organization of our official family. At unification when we became The United Methodist Church many changes had been made in our official business structure. Too few were familiar enough with the new set-up to make it work properly at first try.

Mr. Faggart lost no time in setting our house in order. He knew the official workings of the church and was patient but persistent in seeing that others learned the responsibilities of their offices. We now have most areas of the business of the church on sound footing and look forward to some very fruitful years ahead.

Mr. Faggart, Billie, Sabrina, Scotty and Toby have been welcomed to our hearts. This is a wonderful parsonage family. Mr. Faggart gives us spiritual food in abundant quantities. His work here will be concrete, for already the spirit of the people seems to be taking on a warmth and glow. There are good things ahead for Swansboro United Methodist Church.