

OUR HERITAGE

So begins the history, as it has been told by some of our older members and people in the community, and substantiated by some early records, of what we know today as the Swepsonville United Methodist Church. Any inaccuracy in the following is due to lack of complete facts. We would appreciate factual corrections by anyone before this is made into a permanent record.

It has been said that "where there is a will - there is a way," and this was proved when a small group of men and women felt the need of corporate worship and began meeting upstairs in an old grist mill. This mill was located on the banks of Haw River just below the end of the Falls of the Neuse Cotton Mills (later renamed Virginia Mills) close to the site of the old bridge that crossed the river there. Mr. Stanford Murphy, grandfather of George Bason, Sr., was the miller at that time.

All denominations in this area - Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian - met together in the old mill. Other early church records show that prior to this time in 1755 Presbyterians had organized a church four miles to the east of us at Hawfields; Christians organized a church in Graham which they named Providence in 1763; and Methodists organized Salem Meeting House in 1809, leading us to believe that Salem is the oldest Methodist church in Alamance County. The Swepsonville Baptist Church is thought to have been an outgrowth of the grist mill group, too. It was related to us by two different sources that when the group outgrew the upstairs of the grist mill they began thinking in terms of finding a site and building a church. The Presbyterian preacher from Hawfields, who ministered to the group from time to time, wanted it to be a Presbyterian church, the Swepsons wanted it to be a Baptist church, and Mr. John Newlin, one of this church's founding fathers, insisted that

it be a Methodist church. From the dates available we know that the group split. Baptists in this area are said to have organized in September 1883, building their first church in 1885.

Records are not available as to when the Methodists left the grist mill. It is believed by some that a small, one-room building was used at first possibly on the present site, and named Newlin's Chapel sometime between 1880 and 1887.

The leaders of this church in the early days, in addition to the appointed ministers, were known as Local Preachers. These were men without formal education or ministerial training but who had a deep conviction for spreading the Word of God to settlers of this and other communities. Also they felt a certain responsibility for the moral life of church members and were never hesitant to tell them of their erring ways. Several such Local Preachers have served this church from time to time.

Mr. John R. Newlin was one of the local preachers and his name is mentioned often by those who relate stories of our early church history. Mr. Newlin, together with J. S. Steele and Calvin Gibson formed the first Board of Trustees to whom the deed was conveyed to the tract of land on which the church stands today. The earliest church records are those of Newlin's Chapel, and, because of the prominent part he played in the life of this church in its infancy, it is believed that the church was named for him. Brother Newlin, as he was known by many, and "Uncle John" by some, was a builder and land owner, as well as a lay preacher. He is thought to have lived nearby as his land bordered the tract of land deeded to the church (Methodist Episcopal Church - South) by donor, James M. Phillips on November 17, 1887. (Records are not clear as to when the name of the church was changed.)

Very little seems to be known of the Mr. Phillips who gave the land to the church other than he was one of this early group and a charter member of Newlin's Chapel. Many are of the opinion that Mr. Newlin gave the tract of land on which the first church was built, but official records in Graham do not bear this out.

As mentioned before, Mr. Newlin was a builder and instrumental in the design, if not the designer, of the structure erected in 1888. Photographs of the church built then show the church to have the basic shape of a one-room sanctuary, as it is today. It had two outside entrances, the one on the left side having been enclosed in later years and used as the pastor's study. This entrance included a covered porch with banister and palings along the left side, and extending down several wooden steps in a gracefully curved manner. On the right side the other entrance (where it is today) had steps extending down to what was known then as the Hillsborough Road, with the same curved banisters and palings on either side. One of the early ministers is said to have remarked that it was one of the finest architecturally designed churches that he had ever seen.

This church from its beginning was a member of the North Carolina Conference and subject to its discipline and ministerial appointments. The first appointed minister that we have record of was Rev. John Tillet. He served the church from 1880-1884. Rev. L. L. Johnson was the first minister of the newly built church and witnessed the signing of the deed transferring the one-half acre tract of land from Mr. Phillips to the trustees mentioned before. Mr. Johnson was moved on before the end of the year, having served from 1884-1888, and Rev. J. B. Martin was the next one. He served from 1888-1892. Records show the succession of ministers to be as follows:

M. J. Hunt - 1892-1896; B. C. Thompson - 1896-1900; J. A. Dailey - 1900-1902; J. C. Hartsell; N. C. Yearby; M. M. McFarland; G. W. Vick; C. M. Lance (married Mr. Charlie P. Thompson and Miss Maggie Newlin in 1908); W. F. Galloway - 1913 (built first parsonage during his tenure); N. B. Strickland 1915-1919; W. R. Hardesty - 1919-1923; L. M. Chaffin - 1923-1924; F. A. Lupton - 1924-1927; J. W. Autry - 1927-1929; J. O. Long - 1929-1930 supplied for 3 months; J. L. Rowland - 1930 finished the year; J. W. Dimmette 1930-1931; E. G. Overton 1931-1933; J. A. Tharpe 1933-1937; T. B. Hough - 1937-1941; Ivey T. Poole - 1941-1945; D. A. Petty 1945-1947; John R. Poe - 1947-1951; Francis Robinson - 1951 (Nov. - Feb.); W. K. Babington - 1951-1955 (first family to live in present parsonage); W. G. Brogan - 1955-1958 (church left charge status and went station); K. E. Beane - 1958-1960; J. D. Stott - 1960-1963; Rufus H. Stark - 1963-1967; R. W. Pritchard - 1967-1971; A. B. Falls, Jr. 1971-.

PARSONAGE

In the early 1900's up until 1912 the ministers more often than not resided in other sections of the county. Travel by horseback or horse and buggy was slow, and often there were families in the church who expected and welcomed the preacher and sometimes his wife and children as overnight guests on Saturday night preceding a "preaching Sunday." The trustees of the church saw a growing need for the minister to be nearer his work and live in the community. They approached Virginia Cotton Mills, who had bought out Falls of the Neuse Cotton Mills in 1884, and asked them to sell the church a tract of land for a parsonage.

On April 3, 1912, a deed was drawn up and signed by A. L. Baker, President of Virginia Mills, conveying one acre of land for the sum of \$50.00

to trustees W. C. Kirkpatrick, Dr. J. J. Barefoot, J. A. Askew, R. N. Cook, and John R. Newlin. The tract of land joined the church property on one side and Virginia Mills property and J. M. Crawford' on the other.

A five-room frame house was built on this tract of land. Expense of this building project was shared by the other churches on the charge at the time. They were Phillips Chapel, Clover Garden and Saxapahaw. Rev. W. F. GALLOWAY was the first minister to live in the new parsonage. It is also remembered by one of our older members, Mr. Eugene Kirkpatrick, that while he was here he bought one of the first motored buggies in this area. He used it primarily to go around to the other churches he was serving on the charge and to take sick people within his parish to the doctor.

This parsonage served its purpose well until 1950, when the Swepsonville congregation decided to go station - that is, one minister to a church. We bought out the other churches parts, sold the old structure to Coy and Ruth Ray who moved it to a lot next door, and constructed a nine-room, two-story brick house on the church-owned lot, which is the parsonage we have today. The parsonage is basically furnished by the church, and a parsonage committee is appointed and serves in an advisory-planning capacity.

Another tract of land bought from Virginia Mills became an addition to the present church lot. It extends from the left side of the church to the unpaved road N. 2162, and back to Mr. Lacy Clark's property line. This deed is dated December 15, 1943, and trustees for the church at this time were Walter C. Neese, C. M. Ray, John R. Nicks, R. D. Farrall, and Charlie P. Thompson.

This is, as you can see, by no means a complete history of our church. We hope that it is a beginning, however, toward a record to be printed in a

permanent form some time in the near future.

Areas of our heritage that we have not touched on in this brief account are: the part organized women have played in this church, the men's work, the youth work - beginning with the Epworth League, later Christian Endeavor Society And now known as Methodist Youth Fellowship. The Sunday School that the church's journal mentions in the late 1880's should certainly be included. Music has played such an important part in our christian heritage with John and Charles Wesley being renown hymn writers, and this church has had its share of talented musicians. Early organists, we are told, include Miss Julie Bette Payne, Mrs. Jewel Askew Long, Mrs. Alice T. Neese, Mrs. Susie Teer, Mrs. Alease M. Ray, often times this duty would be inherited by the pastor's wife. Mrs. Mary Hough was one whom many members today remember.

How many ministers and full-time christians workers have gone out from this church? We know of two - Lawrence Loy and Neil Thompson. Do you know of others?

We hope that what we have gotten together, with the aid and interest of many people, will be a blessing as it helps all of us realize the rich heritage of which we are a part.

It is good to look back and learn about beginnings and struggles in the early days. While we are proud of our endeavors and achievements, embarrassed and ashamed of our short sightedness and failures, we should be humbled in the awareness of the great task represented in the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. To this end we must dedicate ourselves this day!