

HISTORY OF THE WELDON METHODIST CHURCH

The early history of the Weldon Methodist Church is best described by quotations from the memoirs of Mrs. Ida Wilkins, one of its most active early members.

Mrs. Wilkins wrote: The Methodist Church in Weldon was organized in 1845 with seven faithful members. They were Mrs. W. T. Whitfield, Capt. James Simmons, James Simmons, Jr., Mrs. H. T. Wyatt, Mrs. Mary Allen, and two others whose names are unknown. These consecrated people managed to erect a small wooden chapel on a grassy square between where the Weldon Hotel now stands and the banks of the Roanoke canal.

Captain James Simmons was class leader for the little group, and as long as he lived was faithful and interested in the services. Although in later years he was feeble and totally blind, when no minister was available he would call the people to the little church and hold services for those who were interested enough to attend.

Since no regular minister was assigned to the chapel at this time, preachers of the Roanoke Circuit supplied its services. Among those remembered from these years were Rev. William Grey, Rev. John N. Andrews, Rev. J. Hunt, (who was sent here to preach to the negroes, many of whom were members of the M. E. Church), Rev. Oscar Brent, Rev. Marcus Thomas, Rev. T. B. Kingsbury, Rev. J. G. Gannon, and Rev. W. P. Simpson.

Rev. Robert O. Burton, D. D., who lived near Weldon at Poplar Grove loved this little church and has been called its Founder. He often filled its pulpit.

Through Dr. Burton's influence, Bishop John Early, while on his way to Goldsboro to conference, stopped in Weldon in 1858 and preached. People came from miles around to hear him. One of his hearers was so impressed at the Bishop's eloquence, he remarked "Why, he just opened his mouth and the preach poured out!" Bishop George F. Pierce stopped the next year. As the little church was so small, it was decided to use the largest assembly hall in town, and he preached in 1859 in the dining room of the old Whitfield Hotel, which was filled to capacity.

Dr. William J. Closs, Ira T. Wyche, and a Dr. Moran of New York, were Presiding Elders during these years.

The first Sabbath School ever taught in Weldon was organized in the little church on the canal by Rev. John N. Andrews in the winter of 1856. Its superintendent was a Presbyterian lady, a Miss Ricker, who had come to Weldon from the north to teach a secular school, also held in the little Methodist Church. The same children who attended this fine school five days during the week also attended Sunday School there on Sunday. Mrs. J. L. Pair was one of the assistant teachers. This school was kept alive by Mrs. Sallie Burton Long and Miss Bettie Evans after the Civil War.

Albert Mabry was the first Sunday School Superintendent. He was followed by Capt. T. F. Anderson who served in this capacity for 17 years, after which W. A. Pierce - "Mr. Eekie" - served for nearly 35 years.

In 1861-65 during the War between the States, the benches were removed from the little church and it was used as a hospital for the Confederate soldiers wounded in the Battle of the Crater near Petersburg, Va. Many of these men died and were buried in a small cemetery near Chockoyotte Creek. After other hospitals were built, the church was again used for religious services.

In 1874 at a quarterly meeting held in Weldon, Dr. L. L. Nash was licensed to preach.

As soon as possible after the War ended, a few faithful members led by Miss Bettie Evans, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Wilkins and others undertook to build a new church in a better location. Under the leadership of Dr. Burton, Major T. L. Emry and a "few scattered and impoverished members," the new building was begun on Third Street. Mrs. Wilkins writes that the corner stone was laid in 1874 and part of the framing of the church blew down before the money was in hand with which to complete even this much. She said "After many hardships and much self denial, it was gotten to a habitable condition but with the roughest furnishings and it was offered for dedication on Feb. 6, 1876". Rev. Dr. Charles F. Deems of The Church of Strangers of New York City, a personal friend of Dr. Burton's, preached the dedicatory sermon. Dr. Deems also raised (by personal subscription) the small balance (\$500.00) due on the church.

The new church was a frame building and consisted of a vestibule, sanctuary, and upstairs gallery around three sides where the negroes sat for services.

For the dedication, since the Methodists had no regular choir nor organ, Mrs. Wilkins says "the ladies and gentlemen from the Episcopal church brought their organ in to the gallery of the new church and took charge of the music, which was very fine and inspiring."

According to Mrs. Wilkins, "Everyone was very poor at this time and the large extent of the circuit prevented having regular services. At this time Dr. Burton rendered invaluable service and his preaching was powerful and effective".

In or about 1876 the first organization for women in this church, called The Ladies Aid Society, was started by Mrs. Bettie Evans Mabry and Mrs. Sallie Long. Misses Molly Alston and Maggie Sledge (Mrs. A. J. Groves), Mrs. T. F. Anderson, Mrs. J. L. Pair and Mrs. Ida Wilkins were active members. Mrs. Mabry was president until her death when Mrs. Wilkins succeeded her.

In 1877 a very remarkable series of services was held in the new church by Rev. Charles Cook of Warrenton. Called ever since

"The Cook Revival", these meetings began in October and continued for six weeks. Mr. Cook used the same text every night but gave different sermons. He preached with "power from on high and great interest was manifest" and many were converted. Among the converts were Dr. Dallas B. Zollicoffer, James B. Tilghman, Major T. L. Emry, and J. L. Judkins, all of whom gave the church outstanding service for the rest of their lives.

A great flood occurred on the Roanoke River during this meeting and both bridges over the river washed out. Many Methodists who came over from Northhampton County to attend the services had to stay at the hotel until boars could be obtained to carry them back across.

Dr. A. R. Raven was pastor at this time, 1877-1879, during which he also edited and published The Missionary Herald, a paper devoted to Missions, one of the first ever published in North Carolina.

The children's work in the church began in 1878 as a little "Sewing Circle", also under the direction of Mrs. Bettie Evans Mabry, Miss Maggie Sledge, and Mrs. Long. The members were Eva Potter (Mrs. Willie Bishop), Mamie Wilkins (Mrs. John W. Sledge) and Willie Bass (Mrs. M. S. Mountcastle). In 1880 the children took the name of "Bright Jewels" and became active in connectional work. Since no woman was able to take charge of the children's new work, Mr. H. C. Spiers, who had come to Weldon when quite a young man and had shown an immediate interest in the church, was elected "Lady Manager" until someone else could help. When he married, his wife was elected manager. She served in this capacity for many years. Mr. Spiers also served as secretary of the Sunday School for around 25 years, and was a steward until his death. Miss Laura Powers, (Mrs. Wilkins' sister), was treasurer of the Bright Jewels and was often the leading spirit in holding it together.

In 1878 Mrs. M. A. Inge of Weldon joined the Woman's Missionary Society at nearby Smith's Church, organized by Dr. Burton. She thereby became Weldon's pioneer member of the Missionary work.

At the conference of 1879, Rev. J. M. Rhodes was sent to Weldon which was put on a charge comprising Enfield, Halifax, & Weldon, with the parsonage in Enfield. With great energy and great executive ability, Mr. Rhodes completed the church building. He had a platform and pulpit built, and an altar railing installed. The pulpit was dedicated to "Rev. Robert Oswald Burton, D. D., under whose ministry this church was built". Mr. Rhodes rearranged the interior of the church so that it would be more comfortable in winter, bought a large stove and a church bell, and "had all painted". As soon as possible the women bought three chancel chairs and a Bible stand.

In the early 1880's, during Dr. Jesse Cunniggim's pastorate, Dr. W. H. Milburn, "the blind man eloquent", came to Weldon and gave four of his inimitable lectures and preached two sermons.

Rev. John C. Garlick, who was a circuit rider for the Virginia Methodist conference which then extended into Northampton County sometimes filled the Weldon pulpit.

In 1881, Rev. J. E. Mann was Presiding Elder. He held the first District Conference ever held in Weldon. Rev. Braxton Craven, president of Trinity College, preached at the Sunday morning service. Mrs. John Sledge recalls that his text was: "What Shall We Do with The Man Called Jesus?"

Through the early years a single decanter and chalice cup had been used by the congregation for communion services. In 1884 two communion plates were purchased which continued in use until 1958.

Succeeding Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Cunnigim were many preachers who stayed one year each, such as Rev. W. B. North, Rev. T. Page Ricaud, Rev. B. B. Culbreth, and Rev. L. J. Holden who was here in 1888-1889. As there was no parsonage in Weldon, Mr. Holden lived in Littleton to be near Littleton College, but he instigated the building of a parsonage in Weldon. Through his leadership and the earnest efforts of the ladies of the congregation, a comfortable parsonage right next to the church was made ready for his successor, Rev. J. B. Carpenter, who served here in 1890.

In the passing years, Mrs. Wilkins writes, "the following influential Methodist families came to Weldon and helped the church grow in many ways -- P. N. and A. L. Stainback, Dr. A. B. Pierce, A. S. Allen, W. T. Parker, C. G. Lynch, Capt. George Hawks, and others. Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Shaw were a couple who came a little later and were faithful and liberal members for many years. Mrs. Shaw was the church's earliest trained choir director. Mr. Shaw served as a steward and trustee for many years.

A reed organ, played usually by Miss Laura Powers and by young Annie Musgrove (Mrs. W. C. Ellis) provided the first music for the church. Mrs. Ellis, who began playing while a member of the Bright Jewels, remembers that Miss Laura always sat right beside her when she played and very often Miss Laura would reach down and pull "Annie Mus'" foot off the pedal because she thought "Annie Mus'" was pumping too loud. The old reed organ was used in later years in the Baraca room of the new church on Washington Avenue.

In 1888, Rev. Jesse Cunnigim was made Presiding Elder of the then Warrenton District and he came to Weldon to live in March, 1889. In that year, Mr. Holden and Mrs. Lucy Cunnigim met at the church and organized the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society with around thirty members. Of these, only two -- Mrs. John W. Sledge and Mrs. George D. Hawks -- are living today. Mrs. W. T. Whitfield was first president, Miss Laura Powers, first treasurer, and Mrs. H. C. Spiers first director of Children's work. Mrs. O. W. Pierce took the presidency of this group from 1904-1910, followed by Mrs. Spiers from 1910-1913.

Following Rev. J. A. Lee in 1891 was Rev. J. C. Green, 1892-1894,
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Rev. R. P. Troy was sent to the Weldon charge in 1894, coming from Murfreesboro College of which he had been president.

In 1896, Mrs. E. E. Wiley, of Nashville, Tenn., a connectional officer of the Parsonage and Home Mission Society, came here to speak to a large congregation on a Sunday afternoon. The next day at the home of Mrs. Lee Johnson, Weldon's Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society was organized with Mrs. Johnson as president, which office she held until 1913. During her term, a chapel was built at South Weldon and social service work was begun for the people of that area. W. T. Parker served for many years as superintendent of this chapel. In later years, Mr. and Mrs. David Anderson and Mrs. F. J. Bounds, Sr. gave many hours to this chapel.

W. T. Parker also organized Sunday Schools at Garners School house. He was a faithful steward, his interest never flagging until failing health caused him to cease going to church. Mrs. Spiers says "People loved to hear Mr. Parker pray because they had so much confidence in his sincerity. He never failed his pastor or his church whenever and wherever he was called upon to serve."

Another servant of the Weldon church who will be long remembered was Rev. Peter N. Stainback. "Brother Peter", as he was affectionately known, was a local preacher and the regular pastor's faithful stand-in for holding prayer meetings or other services. According to Mrs. Spiers, no congregation in Halifax or Northhampton Counties ever objected to the pastor taking a vacation if "Brother Peter" was to fill the pulpit. He taught Sunday School for years, married hundreds of couples from Virginia and North Carolina, baptised babies, buried the dead, and faithfully performed any service his pastor or his church delegated to him.

Dr. Dallas B. Zollicoffer was the first conference lay leader in North Carolina. He is also remembered as having started the earliest Sunday School picnics. Capt. Tom Anderson, who was then head of the railroad office in Weldon, would charter a train to carry the crowd out to the picnic grounds which was just west of the Chockoyotte Creek area on the Bass farm. Led by Dr. Zollicoffer's enthusiasm, the all-day affair was the highlight of the church's social activities. In later years, the Sunday School picnic became an excursion by train to Ocean View Beach, Va. Still later, the Sunday School members held the annual outing at Tuscarora Beach on the Chowan River. At present, the picnic is held at the Weldon Community Center.

The first Week of Prayer observance ever held in our church occurred in November of 1896.

In 1897, Rev. J. A. Hornaday served the Weldon charge for one year. Rev. Hornaday's characteristic expression when preaching was "Hear me, now!" which he shouted in a loud voice. One member of his congregation visiting in Warrenton at a home near the Methodist Church some time later heard that familiar shout one Sunday morning and remarked, "That sounds like Mr. Hornaday is

preaching here today". And he was.

In 1897, Weldon was host to the annual meeting of the N. C. Conference of the Home Mission Society, which it invited back again in 1902 and in 1912. These meetings lasted anywhere from three to five days and were always well attended. Mrs. H. C. Spiers was elected president of the Conference Home Mission Society in 1898 and served until 1902. Mrs. Wilkins was elected conference corresponding secretary in 1899. Rev. J. E. Underwood, Presiding Elder at this time, and Rev. D. H. Tuttle were ardent supporters of all missionary society endeavors.

In 1898, Rev. Oliver Ryder was assigned to the Weldon charge. He was followed in 1899-1902 by Rev. J. D. Bundy.

In 1902, Mrs. W. A. Pierce who served as both church organist and Sunday School pianist for a long period was largely responsible for obtaining the first pipe organ for the church. Miss Laura and Annie Musgrove also assisted Mrs. Pierce at the new organ, which was operated by a hand pump. Many members still remember the day that the man hired to pump for Miss Laura dozed off during the services. None ever forgot how Miss Laura, upon getting no sound from the organ keyboard, stood up, marched around behind the organ, gave the man a shake, and then proceeded to pick up her hymn where she had left off.

In 1904, Rev. H. A. Humble came to Weldon, following Rev. W. W. Rose, who had been appointed to the charge of Central Academy, a school for boys located near Littleton. A clipping from the Christian Advocate of that time states that "Brother Humble" soon won the hearts of all the people, and in the early spring when he began a series of revival services, he announced that he expected to do his own preaching and did not wish a penny extra for his services. But if the people felt that they would like to contribute anything for the meeting they could pay it into a special fund for Mr. Rose who had suffered a nervous breakdown and was then in a hospital in Baltimore. The membership of the church was small and not many of those rich in this world's goods, and the pastor's salary had never exceeded \$800.00. Nevertheless, a purse was sent Brother Rose for about \$150. Brother Humble did the preaching, praying, and helped with the singing for 21 days. At the close of the services, a prominent lawyer who was a member of another congregation but had attended regularly said that Mr. Humble was the first man he had ever seen that could preach every day for three weeks and not preach a dry sermon in the lot."

The Advocate continues "The Weldon people have been used to good preaching. Nursed and nurtured in their early struggles for existence by Rev. Robert O. Burton, often termed the Prince of Orators in the N. C. Conference during his generation, their ears were tuned to the music of the higher spheres."

In 1908, Mrs. Ida Wilkins was appointed conference superintendent of supplies... a work which was dear to her heart. She was never happier than when securing help for needy preachers or packing

boxes for mission schools and orphanages. Mrs. W. L. Knight followed Mrs. Wilkins in this work.

During the early 1900's, the need was felt for new and larger church accommodations and plans were made to start a new building across town on Washington Avenue. In May of 1909, the last two special events held in the old church on West Third Street were the weddings of Miss Ida Virginia Stainback, daughter of Rev. and Mrs. P. N. Stainback, to C. D. Cherry, and of Miss Willie Lee Tilghman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Tilghman, to J. Wade Powell.

In the fall of 1910, there appeared a newspaper account of the last service ever held in the old church "of precious and hallowed memories". The farewell ceremony included a paper given by Mrs. Wilkins tracing the early struggles of Methodism from 1860 up to its "splendid possibilities" of 1910, followed by a paper by Mr. Spiers dealing with the financial progress of Methodism. Then followed letters from former pastors read by various members of the congregation. J. B. Tilghman and P. N. Stainback made appropriate talks on leaving the old church, and Mrs. Spiers read a poem entitled "Leaving The Old Church" composed for the occasion by B. F. Meacham, of Petersburg, a well known traveling salesman. The article stated that Rev. S. E. Mercer, pastor, closed the service with a short prayer and the congregation was dismissed on their knees. And thus the Methodists of Weldon go out from the old church forever, to continue the worship of the same God at the school auditorium until the completion of the new church."

After an advertisement was published stating that \$2,000.00 had been offered for the church, but that it would be cheap even at \$3,000.00, the following poem appeared in the newspaper:

THE OLD CHURCH IS FOR SALE

I've worshipped there for many a year - they never seen me fail,
But now they've come an' told me that the old church is for sale!
The auctioneer is ready, an' they're goin' to let her go -
The old church where we praised the Lord from whom all
blessin's flow!

I jest can't help the heartbeat - the mist that's roun' my eyes, -
For there I read my titles clear to mansions in the skies;
An' there, in years that had their tears, I found salvation free-
And knew that sweet, amazin' grace that saved a wretch like me.

I knowed the "amen corner" - I knowed the "anxious seat" -
An' when the organ shook the walls, or died in music sweet,
Like a little child a-dreamin', I closed my old eyes there,
An' my soul went up to heaven on the wings of love and prayer.

There was sweetest consolation in the holy, heavenly calm
That led us into Gilead, where we found the healin' balm
'Twas there we glimpsed the beauty of a better, brighter sky
That bent o'er Canaan's happy land, where our possessions lie.

But the old church now is throwed aside - they're buildin' of a new,
But the same salvation's in it - thank the Lord! for me an' you,
But no matter how they build it, my heart will always go
To the old church where we praised the Lord from whom all
blessin's flow!

The colored Baptists bought the old church, brick veneered it, and are using it today.

Another clipping dated Thanksgiving Day, 1910, gives an account of the cornerstone laying for the new church on Washington Avenue. With "Beautiful and impressive ceremonies at 2 o'clock p. m. on Nov. 24 in the presence of a large assemblage of Methodists and friends, the cornerstone of the handsome new Methodist Church was laid. The following is a list of the articles deposited in the box. A copy of the Raleigh Christian Advocate, names of all who in any way contributed to the building of the church, roll of officers and members of the church and the late history of the same, names of members of Woman's Missionary Society, names of contributors of the memorial windows to the memory of Dr. Burton and Mr. & Mrs. Whitfield, roll of the members of the Woman's Aid Society, names of members of Woman's Foreign Missionary Society and Bright Jewels, History of Methodism in Weldon from its earliest days down to the present written by Mrs. I. T. Wilkins, a photograph of old Methodist Church, Sunday School and Baraca Class, copy of ROANOKE NEWS of recent date, photograph of present pastor, Rev. S. E. Mercer, and some coins.

Ministers present at the ceremonies were Reverends S. E. Mercer, W. B. North, C. C. Jones and P. N. Stainback. That night at 7:30 at the Graded School Auditorium, Dr. North preached a strong and forceful sermon on the texts "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation."

Rev. Mercer led the building program of 1910, assisted by all the members of the congregation. Miss Laura is said to have watched every step of the construction of the new building with an intent eye. She and L. C. Draper personally supervised the moving of the organ from the old church to the new. Mrs. Sledge says they had the pipes taken down one by one, carried carefully across town, and reinstalled --- all in one night.

When the stained glass window panes came for the tall slender steeple windows, Rev. Mercer was very disturbed to find that they did not fit. Miss Laura promptly took a tape measure, in some manner measured the openings in the steeple, wrote the window firm about their mistake, and had the correct size sent immediately, to Mr. Mercer's great relief.

Miss Laura's niece, Mrs. Sledge, refers to her fondly as the "self-appointed" sexton of the new church, which position she shared with Henry D. Allen. Mrs. Sledge says if either of the two ever passed the church and saw a light burning, they went right in to inquire as to its use, or to turn it out.

The Home Mission Society subscribed \$1000.00 to the 1910 building fund, paid for the carpet, and the expense of moving and installing the pipe organ. The beautiful memorial stained glass windows in the sanctuary were given in memory of the following by their families: Ella Powers Hartman (sister of Mrs. Wilkins and Miss Laura Powers), William T. and Mary E. Whitfield, Thomas F. Anderson, Rev. Robert O. Burton, Lucy A. Cunningham, Elizabeth Evans Mabry, James L. and Julia A. Bass, James L. Pair, Sallie Burton Long, and Anna E. Shaw, Thomas A. Shaw, and Nora Shaw Kitchin.

E. G. Garlick donated the communion table in memory of his first wife, Alice Joyner Garlick.

One window in the men's classroom, called the Baraca class, was dedicated to Charles E. Bishop. Among the teachers of the Baraca class who served for long periods during the following years were Ovid W. Pierce for whom the class is named, Albert Oakes, Jr., Dr. W. G. Suiter, and James Tilghman.

One year after the cornerstone for this church was laid, the building was dedicated... in 1911.

The new church, a handsome brick building, consisted of a large sanctuary that sloped down to the chancel, to the left of which was the organ and choir loft. Opening from the sanctuary on the right was a large Sunday School assembly room with classrooms on three sides and on a balcony above.

The first service held in the new church was the funeral of "Brother Peter Stainback". Since no pews had yet been obtained, chairs were brought in to the sanctuary for the service. Oil stoves were set around the sides for heat.

The first wedding solemnized in the new church was that of Miss Mazie Stainback, daughter of Ashley Stainback, to Hiram Wall. No steps had yet been built and the wedding guests had to enter the church by walking up improvised plank steps. When teased about having the first wedding in the church, Miss Stainback had laughingly boasted that she was going to have such a big wedding that the church would burst at the seams. To everyone's amazement, her prophecy came true in part. After the wedding reception, the bridal party returned to the church to pose for pictures, only to find that a large section of the ceiling on the right of the sanctuary had fallen just after the ceremony.

Shortly after the church was dedicated, the Mite Box Brigade among the children, led by Mrs. W. T. Shaw, raised enough money to pay for the central chandelier that hung in the sanctuary from 1911 until 1958.

As stated earlier, in May of 1912, the North Carolina Conference of the Woman's Home Mission Society held its 21st annual meeting in Weldon. Miss Mabel Head came to this meeting and spoke to a large crowd on Sunday night. Rev. J. A. Hornaday had returned to Weldon in 1912 for a second pastorate here. He remained until

1915.

In 1913, at the conference held in Wilson, the Foreign and Home departments united as the Woman's Missionary Society of the Weldon Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Mrs. Lee Johnson was elected first president, which office she held from 1913-1915. Following her as president through the years were: Mrs. H. C. Spiers, 1916-1920; Mrs. Lee Johnson, '20-'22; Mrs. H. C. Spiers, '23; Mrs. W. L. Knight, '24-'26; Mrs. S. B. Pierce, '26-'28; Mrs. H. C. Spiers, '28-'30; Mrs. H. V. Bounds, '30-'32; Mrs. Lee Johnson, '32-'35; Mrs. S. B. Pierce, '35-'37; Mrs. W. L. Knight, '37-'39; Mrs. A. W. Oakes, Jr., '39-'42 (now called Woman's Society of Christian Service); Mrs. Pierce Johnson, '42-'44; Mrs. A. W. Oakes, Jr., '44-'45; Mrs. W. L. Knight, '45-'47; Mrs. W. G. Suiter, '47-'49; Mrs. S. B. Pierce, '49-'51; Mrs. Pierce Johnson, '51-'53; Mrs. J. W. Brown, '53-'57; Mrs. P. F. Newton, '57-'58; and Mrs. M. A. Garriss, 1958----

Rev. J. D. Bundy came back to Weldon around 1915 as Presiding Elder.

Rev. and Mrs. F. M. Shamburger --- known affectionately all over the state as "mammy and pappy", the names they called each other---came here in 1915 for a four year pastorate.

Around 1915, Mrs. C. E. Williamson inaugurated the first Vesper services ever held in the Weldon Methodist Church, which were continued for several years.

Rev. E. M. Snipes lived here as Presiding Elder from 1917-1921.

Among memorials placed in the church during these years were the Christian flag given by Mr. and Mrs. H. V. Bounds in memory of Mrs. Bounds' parents, Mr. & Mrs. J. A. Musgrove; and the American flag, given by Mr. & Mrs. F. J. Bounds, honoring the World war veterans.

The Bright Jewels presented memorials to two of their deceased members, a Bible, in memory of Minnie Blucher Pierce, young daughter of Mr. & Mrs. O. W. Pierce, and a collection plate in memory of Dallas Augustus Zollicoffer, small son of Mr. & Mrs. John Zollicoffer.

The children of the Cradle Roll gave other collection plates.

In 1918, Mrs. Lee Johnson was instrumental in organizing a Young Woman's Missionary Society with the following charter members Misses Addie Williams, Ruth Webster, Ruth Clark, Katie Parsons, Martha Commack, Kate Tilghman, and Fannie Mae Shearin. No records exist regarding this group, however the following are remembered as having been among its presidents: Mrs. H. G. Laster, Mrs. M. B. Craven, Mrs. Foster Jennings, Mrs. Harry Johnson, Mrs. W. G. Suiter, and Mrs. Pierce Johnson.

In 1921-22, while Rev. S. E. Mercer was Presiding Elder here, Mrs. Lee Johnson served as secretary of social service work for the conference missionary society.

In 1921, while Rev. L. D. Hayman was pastor, a bulletin board was erected on the front church grounds listing the scheduled church services and the name of the minister. Mr. Hayman also appointed Weldon's first woman steward... Mrs. E. L. Hayward.. who served in that position for 18 years, from 1923-1931. Mrs. Hayward also was assistant church treasurer for many years.

Mr. Hayman also directed the completion of the basement floor of the church which was put into immediate use as the children's department and as a kitchen. Mrs. Charles E. Williamson directed the Cradle Roll, Beginners, and Primaries in the basement and under her guidance the children saved their birthday pennies, and with a donation from the Missionary Society bought a piano for their department for \$100. Mrs. Williamson also gave many years of service as organist and as choir director during these years. Mrs. W. S. O'B Robinson was another choir director of this period.

The Missionary Society also gave \$1,000.00 toward completing the kitchen in the basement. Mrs. J. A. Musgrove, Mrs. C. J. Owen, and Mrs. George Hawks chose the china, silver and glassware for the kitchen.

In 1923, extensive repairs were made to the church parsonage, toward which the women again donated liberally. The new minister Rev. George W. Perry, and his family were delayed until Jan. of 1924 in moving into their new home due to this work.

C. J. Owen, who served 42 consecutive years as a steward, J. I. Wyche, for long years the treasurer of the Baraca class, and E. G. Garlick, for many years chairman of the board, were among the faithful servants of the church during these years.

In 1925, the Missionary Society, answering a plea from Mrs. W. L. Knight, raised \$100 for shrubbery and improvement of the church grounds. Throughout the years, Mrs. Knight has given tireless hours of service in supervising the care of the church grounds. In 1925, Rev. S. A. Cotton was appointed here as Presiding Elder. His daughter Maude assisted at the organ and the choir. In August of 1926, Mr. Perry appointed Mrs. S. B. Pierce as chairman of a finance committee to raise a \$1200.00 deficit on the church debt. The ladies liquidated this debt in two weeks.

In March of 1927, the Young Woman's Auxiliary took the name of the Minnie Bomar Society honoring Miss Bomar, a missionary who had served 34 years in China, was now retired and living in Weldon.

Rev. J. H. Shore served as our minister from 1927-1931. A gifted preacher, Mr. Shore always spoke in deliberate tones... and us-

ually preached lengthy sermons. On one occasion, upon noticing a church member fidgeting after hearing a good portion of his message, Mr. Shore interrupted himself to announce that he had "prepared a generous quart measure of a sermon for the morning service and he intended to give it, but anyone whose little pint cup was full was certainly free to leave". Not a soul moved.

Mr. Shore's daughter, Mary, served as organist during these years.

In the next few years, additional chairs, tables, and other equipment were added to the children's department in the basement.

Rev. L. B. Jones came here in 1928, as our last presiding Elder to live in Weldon. The post was moved to Rocky Mount thereafter.

During these years, W. L. Knight served the church on many levels. He was lay leader of the Rocky Mount district, and a member of the Board of Education of the N. C. Conference. In 1931, he attended the convention of the World Wide Baraca-Philathea Union in Asheville; in 1931 the 6th Ecumenical Conference in Atlanta; in 1934 he was elected from the General Conference as delegate to the Susquicentennial Observance in Baltimore, in 1939 he was sent to the Uniting Conference in Kansas City, and in 1940, to the Jurisdictional Conference in Asheville. He and Mrs. Knight also attended numerous meetings of the general conference.

Locally, Mr. Knight served as church treasurer, a steward and a trustee much of his life, and he taught the woman's Sunday School class for many years, which bore the name of the Wm. L. Knight Bible Class for a long period.

Around 1928, Mrs. Alice Hudson, serving as choir director, led the members in purchasing the first choir robes. Her group was the first vested choir. Mrs. Foster Jennings followed Mrs. Hudson as choir director.

Organists during this period and into the '30's, included Mrs. Jesse Johnston, Mrs. Frank Moore, Mrs. Jeff Lassiter, and Mrs. J. S. Selden.

In 1929 repairs were made to both the church and the parsonage, and in 1931 the church was redecorated on the interior.

Rev. E. H. McWhorter, one of Weldon's most beloved pastors, served this church from 1931-1935. The following excerpt from a personal letter from Mr. McWhorter to Mrs. Spiers written 2 years before his death, speaks eloquently of him. He wrote: "Now, if after my last days work and last supplication has been made, my Father shall see fit to welcome me into their company in that new church of the First and the High-born, it does not matter much to me how long or short the time I may wait, for I meant to be ready and eager to enter that assembly... and to hear the words of welcome and to meet my Saviour face to face.

Upon the death of Dr. Dallas Zollicoffer in 1931, Dr. W. G. Suiter became lay leader, which post he held until he became Sunday School Superintendent in 1943. D. W. Seifert became lay leader in '43 and served faithfully until 1951 when he resigned and Dr. Suiter resumed the post. W. B. Joyner had just succeeded Dr. Suiter in this office.

During the 1930's Mrs. W. G. Suiter gave 11 years continuous service as head of the children's work in the basement. Mrs. W. W. Selden rivaled this record by serving 10 years in the same position in the '40's. Since leaving the basement, Mrs. Suiter has served as teacher of the Woman's Wesleyan Class for almost as long a period. Miss Laura Powers and Mrs. S. B. Pierce were earlier teachers of this class who also gave long years of service.

In 1931 a tonsil clinic was held in the church basement with 48 children being operated on.

D. R. Anderson succeeded W. A. Pierce as superintendent of the Sunday School in 1932 and served in that post loyally for a long period. In the same year, a mother and daughter team started a 13 year period as pianists for the Sunday School when Mrs. J. S. Selden when only 13 years old, and played until she entered college in 1950. Her mother resumed the place then and served another six years, resigning in 1956.

In 1936, a Junior Missionary Society joined with the other society to become the Mary Pierce Johnson Missionary Society, honoring the memory of Mrs. Lee Johnson. The group gave a pulpit light as a memorial to Mrs. John Carter (Fannie Mae Shearin). In the ensuing years, the Missionary Society formed seven circles, naming them in honor of Kate Hawks, Nannie Spiers, and Laura Powers, and in memory of Elmer Weathers, Ben Houston and Alice Hudson.

A new electric pipe organ was purchased and installed in the sanctuary around 1936. Mrs. Alice Hudson sang the first solo after its installation, and sang her last solo before her death at its dedication. The Missionary circle which later took her name honored Mrs. Hudson shortly after her death in 1938 by presenting a baptismal font in her memory.

In 1938, Mrs. W. B. Joyner, daughter of Mrs. Hudson, organized a youth choir which sang regularly for the evening services. When Mrs. Joyner resigned that position, Mrs. Sterling B. Pierce took over the direction of the group and for several years directed a 60-75 member young people's choir that gave outstanding musical programs. Mrs. J. W. Pierce gave untiring support as "choir mother" for this group. Mrs. Sterling Pierce also directed the adult choir, with Mrs. Marcus A. Garriss as organist. Annual candle-light Christmas concerts by the combined choirs were begun under Mrs. Pierce's direction and are continued today.

In 1940 under the pastorate of Rev. Ben. P. Robinson the congregation again contributed toward making extensive repairs and

painting the church.

A severe storm occurred one Wednesday afternoon during Mr. Robinson's ministry here, during which a window was broken in the home of Miss Laura Powers, who was always badly frightened by any disturbance in the weather. That night Miss Laura was one of the faithful few attending prayer meeting. When Mr. Robinson announced as his text the passage regarding the "storm and tempest", Miss Laura straightened up in her seat on the front row, pointed a finger at Mr. Robinson, and said, "Now listen to me, Brother. I've had just about enough storm for one day! You've got a Bible full of texts to pick from. You take another one tonight!" Mr. Robinson grinned, and did just that.

F. H. Clark became church treasurer in 1938, a position he still holds, having just completed his 20th year of service.

Around 1938, the Epworth League became the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Mrs. D. W. Seifert, Miss Katherine Hardison (Mrs. Tommy Boone) and Miss Hazel Neville (Mrs. Donald Moody) both gave long periods of service leading these young people.

In 1941, when Rev. and Mrs. Elmer D. Weathers arrived in Weldon, the parsonage was being repaired and refurnished. They spent their first weeks in Weldon in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Pierce Johnson. Mrs. Weathers was choir director during her stay here.

In April of 1943, the Methodist Men's Club of Weldon was organized with Ben Wyche as first president. Due to wartime conditions, the club met for only one year.

On Christmas Eve, of 1943, after a brief illness, Mr. Weathers who was loved by his entire congregation, died suddenly of pneumonia, leaving our church membership stunned and grieved through out the Christmas holidays and for many months to come. Funeral services were held for Mr. Weathers on Dec. 26, 1943, and he was buried in the Weldon Cemetery. His wife, and little daughter, Rebecca Ann, remained in Weldon until the end of the school term.

In February of 1944, Rev. and Mrs. Dwight L. Fouts came to Weldon. During Mr. Fouts ministry, a weekly church bulletin was begun, and a project started to raise a \$20,000.00 building fund for additional educational facilities. The little chapel in South Weldon was sold at this time to benefit the building fund. During Mr. Fouts' pastorate, the children of the Primary Department, under the leadership of Mrs. James Johnson, presented a picture, Christ At Twelve, to the Sunday School in memory of John William Brown, Jr. who died July 11, 1945.

During the ministry of Rev. Benjamin H. Houston, the console of the organ was moved to the left side of the sanctuary to make room for enlarging the choir stall.

In 1949 chimes were installed in the church as the gift of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Armfield, III of Greensboro, in memory of Mrs. Arm-

field's parents, Mr. & Mrs. Henry D. Allen, who were devoted members of this church for a lifetime.

The church was redecorated on the interior again in 1949, and under the direction of Mrs. T. S. Dickens, choir director, new choir robes secured. Mrs. Naff Capel, Miss Lois Turner, Mrs. M. A. Garriss, and Mrs. Dickens served as organists in this period, and up to the present time.

Sunday School superintendents during these later years have been Pierce Johnson, Dr. W. G. Suiter, Dr. Marcus Garriss, Milton Humphreys, and W. B. Joyner, who is serving at present.

To the distress of the entire congregation, Rev. Houston who was beloved by all, became seriously ill during 1949. Although he remained in Weldon until his death in 1950, Rev. Henry G. Rhuark was assigned here as pastor in 1949.

During this period, A. C. Sledge assumed the responsibility of supplying copies of the Upper Room, not only to his fellow church members, but to the congregations of three colored churches in town, and to the patrons of a local coffee shop. He continues this practice today.

A gold cross was presented the church for use in the chancel by W. B. Joyner around 1950.

In September of 1950, the church membership voted to use the funds accumulated on the proposed building project to secure a new parsonage. A large brick resident located on Elm Street was bought for the new parsonage and furnished under the direction of Mrs. W. N. Gregory, Chairman of the Parsonage Committee. The old parsonage was converted into use as an education building.

Miss Jean Penny was employed in 1953 as director of music and educational assistant. She remained here one year.

In 1956, Mrs. Pierce Johnson, long a loyal leader of Missionary Work in Weldon, was elected president of the N. C. Conference of the Woman's Society of Christian Service for a term of four years, an office she is still holding. Our minister's wife, Mrs. P. F. Newton, is also serving as a conference officer, as secretary of Literature and Publications. Mrs. J. W. Brown at present is Secretary of Promotions in the Rocky Mount District.

During the pastorate of Rev. P. O. Lee, 1953-1956, the church membership again expressed a long standing need for more space for all church functions, and plans for another building program were begun.

In the fall of 1957, the Methodist Men were reorganized. The group met monthly with Sunday night supper meetings, with W. O. Davis serving as president during this first year. W. N. Capel served the second year, and Dr. M. A. Garriss is present president of the group.

When Rev. P. E. Newton followed Mr. Lee, an every member canvass for building fund pledges was undertaken in January of 1957, and plans were formulated for enlarging the sanctuary and adding a modern education building. Under the guidance of Mr. Newton, blueprints were drawn by Charles C. Benton and Sons of Wilson for the desired accomodations and a building program begun in September of 1957, at which time the congregation moved the regular Sunday services to the Weldon Primary School Auditorium.

During the building program, D. W. Seifert served as chairman of the building committee, with Miss Nettie Cuthrell as secretary, Malvern King as treasurer and chairman of the construction committee and with the following members: Dr. W. G. Suiter, Mrs. J. W. Brown, Dr. Marcus Garriss, Mrs. T. A. Buck, W. A. Pierce, Rev. P. F. Newton, F. H. Clark, H. V. Bounds, W. B. Joyner, Mrs. R. E. Vick, Mrs. W. J. Edwards, Mrs. James Johnson, Allen Pierce, J. W. Maddrey, and Ben Wyche. Walker Campbell served as chairman of the building fund, and Pierce Johnson was chairman of the Board of Trustees.

During the period of one year, the old sanctuary and Sunday School department were thrown together to compose a larger sanctuary with a choir room, several classrooms, and small chapel.

The kitchen was modernized in the basement, a ladies parlor furnished, and the fellowship hall redeccorated with most of the work done there by the men of the church. With the generous assistance of Dr. & Mrs. M. A. Garriss, a small electric organ was purchased by the Sunday School for the fellowship hall. The pastor's study was modernized, a church office equipped, and a connecting passageway built to the new two story education plant, which housed spacious classrooms for the nursery, kindergarten, primary, junior and intermediate departments, the men's class, and the young adults. Recently, under the leadership of Mrs. J. U. Vaughn as president, and Mrs. J. E. Johnson, as teacher, the young adult group took the name L. C. Draper Class, honoring the memory of Luther Clifton Draper, who gave a lifetime of service to the church.

Under the presidency of Mrs. M. A. Garriss, the Woman's Society of Christian Service raised \$5000.00 for the building fund, part of which was designated to be used for the church carpet. In addition, the women also provided funds for the kitchen utensils, the chairs and tables in the fellowship hall, the furnishings in the ladies lounge, the drapes and cornices throughout the basement, and the blinds in the educational building. The following members composed the committees involved: Mrs. M. A. Garriss, Mrs. J. S. Selded, Mrs. S. M. Pierce, Mrs. W. J. Edwards, Mrs. R. E. Vick, Mrs. J. W. Brown, Miss Nettie Cuthrell, Mrs. Allen Pierce, Mrs. W. W. Selden, Mrs. J. C. Garner, Mrs. George Keeter, Mrs. D. S. Browder, Mrs. W. A. Pierce, Jr., Mrs. Edgar Bounds, Mrs. James Johnson and Mrs. W. A. Travis.

The kitchen was dedicated by the women of the church to Mrs. George Keeter, who in addition to teaching a kindergarten class for many years, has been a faithful member of the kitchen staff,

helping to serve countless suppers.

On the first Sunday in October of 1958, the congregation returned for the first service, a communion celebration, in the new building which was not yet quite complete. On the 4th Sunday in October, the formal opening of the church was observed with many former members and relatives of former pastors present. Dr. W. C. Ball, Superintendent of the Rocky Mount district, delivered the sermon at the morning service, and Mrs. Charles A. Dukes, the former Becky Weathers, daughter of the late Rev. Elmer Weathers, sang "The Twenty Third Psalm" as a solo. In the evening, the pastor, Rev. P. F. Newton gave the sermon and Mrs. Newton sang "Open the Gates of the Temple".

Announcement of all memorial gifts were made at this time, including the following:

ALTAR AND ALTAR SET, in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Henry Allen, by their daughter, Elizabeth Allen Armfield.

REREDOS, in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Lee Johnson, by their daughter, Eleanor Johnson Howard.

CHOIR STALLS, in memory of William Alexander and Saddle Grainger Pierce, by their grandchildren.

PULPIT, in memory of Reverend Elmer Weathers, by his family.

PULPIT BIBLE, in memory of Charles J. Owen, by his family.

PULPIT SCARF, in memory of her grandmother, Mrs. Etta L. Hudson, by Ida Hayward Vick.

LECTERN, in memory of Robert Purnell Allen, by his wife, Lillian Ellerson Allen.

LECTERN BIBLE BOOKMARK, given by Mrs. Bertha A. Zollcoffer.

LECTERN FOR OVID W. PIERCE CLASS, given by Mr. & Mrs. W. O. Davis, in memory of their son, Lt. Wilfert O'Dell Davis, Jr.

PULPIT CLOTH AND BOOKMARK, in memory of Rev. & Mrs. F. M. Shamburger, by their daughter, Myrtle Shamburger Taylor.

ALTAR RAIL, given by Dr. & Mrs. M. A. Garriss.

ALTAR CLOTH (white and gold) in memory of Mrs. Lucy Overstreet.

ALTAR CLOTH (red and gold) in memory of their parents, Mr. & Mrs. W. T. Shaw, by Foster S. Jennings and Anna S. Marlowe.