

Whitakers United Methodist Church 1917 – 2017



Celebrating 100 Years

A Faithful Past

A Hopeful Future

The Journey Continues

Whitakers, North Carolina • May 7, 2017

Our Story: Whitakers United Methodist Church 1881-1981

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this brief history of the Whitakers United Methodist Church, the writer has secured invaluable assistance and information from Dr. Ralph Hardee Rives. The Conference Journals of both the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Protestant Church hold a wealth of facts. Along with the records of the two branches of Methodism are bound volumes of the United Methodist Church through 1966-67. The Rives Room at North Carolina Wesleyan College contains the materials mentioned above as well as many other books of great historical importance.

The citizens of Whitakers have supplied through their reminiscences human interest flashes to liven the dull listing of dates. To these people, the writer wishes to express gratitude and to seek forgiveness for the use of some individual names.

— Lucy. N. Payne

The beginnings of the present United Methodist Church were closely linked with the settlement and growth of the area. Richard and Elizabeth Whitaker, for whom the town is named, settled on a grant along Fishing Creek about 1740. In the same year, Whitakers Chapel, then an Anglican Church, was established, probably serving as a place of worship for the Whitaker families. At the time of the Revolutionary War, the church affiliated with the Methodist Reform Movement.

In September of 1827 the Methodists of Edgecombe met in the town of Whitakers to select delegates for the General Conference which would be held in Baltimore in November of 1827; however, the building in which the meeting was held in Whitakers was not mentioned. Whitakers Chapel was the assembly point for the founders of the Methodist Protestant Church; this meeting in 1828 was the first Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. As settlements grew and the population increased, new churches were established.

The Temple, often referred to as the Old Temple, is an integral part of the history of the present church. Although the date for recording the deed is 1869, people who attended that church told of assembling beneath temporary structures, such as "bush arbors" prior to the construction of the building. Also, from the diary of James McGilbra Cutchin, the date of his marriage to Miss Cornelia Wheless is established as January 30, 1866. Family members state that the couple had become engaged at the church before he left to serve in the Confederate Army and that the wedding occurred at the Old Temple after his return from the war.

The Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant

Church met at the Temple on November 30, 1870. A. W. Lineberry was president of the conference and A. C. Harris served as secretary.

In 1879, Speights Chapel branched out from the Temple. Also, Whitakers Mill Church, renamed McTyeire in 1894, was established in Nash County. Both of these churches have affected, to some extent, the story of the Whitakers Methodist Church.

The Deed Book of Edgecombe County contains an entry dated August 10, 1881, recording a lot deeded by Joseph Henry Cutchin and his wife, Ella L. Cutchin for \$1.00 to James M. Cutchin, John H. Burnette, James M. Johnson and Timothy Hunter, trustees of the Whitakers (Temple) Methodist Protestant Church.

From *Our Church Record* for June 23, 1898 was included a picture of the frame church along with the following article:

Whitakers Church

"This church is the offspring of Old Temple Church which stood two miles in the country. Some of the old and true members were:

Cofield Knight	Martha Dunson
L. Deberry	Mrs. M. A. Braswell
L. F. Wheeless	Mrs. Hardy King
T. H. Cutchin	

It was during the pastorate of Dr. W. H. Wills when the Whitakers Church was built. A year or so later Old Temple Church was sold and torn down, most of the members transferring their membership to the church in Whitakers.

J. M. Cutchin
J. I-I. Burnett"

The first pastor, Dr. William Henry Wills, was one of the most distinguished men who ever advanced Methodism in North Carolina. He was serving as the minister of the Tar River Circuit in 1880-1881, also in 1883-1881. The Reverend W. Harris was his assistant in 1883-1881.

By 1889-1890, the Whitakers Church was a part of the Tar River Circuit. The Reverend C. L. Whitaker was assigned the pastorate; his address was listed as Whitakers. April 26, 1887 is the date given for recording the deed to land on which the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was built. From the Nash County Book of Deeds, Page 212 of Book 67, the sentence quoted below gives evidence that the structure was already completed. "M. J. Battle of Edgecombe County to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, April 26, 1887, for \$1.00 paid through a Board of Trustees a parcel of land in the town of Whitakers, Nash County, on the West side of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, on which the Methodist Episcopal

Church building now stands, and grounds at the corner of Pippen and White Streets adjoining Garrett's line. The said premises shall be used as a place of divine worship for the use of the ministry and the membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South."

The M. E. Church Conference Journal lists a Whitakers Mission served by G. W. Callahan in 1888. In 1889, G. T. Simmons was assigned to Whitakers and Battleboro, although he was still on a trial basis. By 1890, G. T. Simmons had been admitted into full connection; he continued to serve both Battleboro and Whitakers. At this time, the minister's salary wage was set at \$600, but the amount paid to him was approximately \$50 less.

By 1891, the Whitakers M. E. Church had been changed to the Wilson District; G. T. Simmons remained as pastor for a third year. H. B. Anderson came to Battleboro in 1892; he also ministered to the Whitakers congregation. The pastor remained with this work for two years.

In 1891 the church became a part of the Warrenton District. G. W. Fisher was sent to the two congregations. The salary of the preacher dropped to \$500 and then to \$400 annually by 1895; yet these amounts were not paid in full. S. T. Moyle was assigned to the two churches for 1896. Then E. E. Rose was the pastor during 1897-1898.

Prior to 1893, Whitakers Methodist Protestant Church had been placed on the Roanoke Circuit, but in 1893 Whitakers (Temple), along with Speight's Chapel, was attached to the Tar River Circuit. The Reverend J. D. Williams, who lived in Whitakers, was the pastor for 1893-1894.

In 1897, the two churches again became a part of the Roanoke Circuit. The Reverend R. M. Andrews was assigned as minister of the circuit; Reverend J. D. Williams was the pastor from 1898 to 1900. As late as 1899, Whitakers Church paid the minister \$75 annually; the total church budget was \$125.19.

The Roanoke Circuit bought a residence for the minister in 1900. It was probably located in Enfield. For 1900, the circuit was left unsupplied; however, G. W. Holmes, whose address was Enfield, was assigned as minister for 1901-1903. The Reverend G. H. Austin was the pastor in 1905 and 1906; Reverend Holmes returned for 1906-1907. From 1913 to 1915, Rev. Thomas E. Davis was the circuit minister. During 1915-1916, Rev. C. J. Edwards served the Roanoke Circuit. Rev. Edwards walked with a decided limp, caused by an artificial limb. The story is told that he permitted boys to stick pins in the cork of which the leg was made.

The frame structure on Cutchin Street was damaged by a summer storm, presumably in 1915. Lightning struck the church steeple and left rafters swinging in mid air, a beautiful stained glass window, known as the Braswell window, was untouched by any broken timbers. It was removed and is now installed in the wall of the present building, facing Pippen Street.

For a few months the congregation met in the local movie hall (theatre). Mr. W. T. Braswell, Jr. recalls the enjoyment young people had from assembling in a building so different from a church. For the older members, there was a determination to erect a new house of worship.

To raise the necessary funds, men contributed as liberally as they felt able; women began a number of projects for making money. An empty store building on Railroad Street was used for putting on bazaars and serving meals. Brunswick stews, made from chickens and vegetables donated by various women of the church, were sold by energetic ladies who went along the streets offering the stew for sale.

The untiring efforts brought results. Finally, the way was open for the construction of the brick building which is the present United Methodist Church location. The Nash County Book of Deeds, Book 220, page 299, records that on March 25, 1916 W. H. Bond and his wife, Sarah L. Bond, deeded to J. M. Cutchin, H. A. Braswell and Dr. J. H. Cutchin, Trustees of the Methodist Protestant Church, lots at the corner of Pippen and New Streets, 80'x80', containing 6,400 square feet. An indenture, dated January 22, 1917, showed that a loan of \$3,000 was made to Whitakers Church for the purpose of constructing a new building.

Mr. J. M. Cutchin was the lay delegate to Annual Conference in 1903; Mr. Henry Braswell served in this capacity in 1913 and again in 1918; Dr. Henry Cutchin attended as lay delegate in 1916 and Mr. W. H. Bond in 1921.

Dr. R. M. Andrews, President of the Annual Conference in 1918, recommended that the Boundary Committee approve the detachment of Whitakers and Speight's Chapel from the Roanoke Circuit. The two were known as the "Whitakers' Mission" and were to receive financial aid from the Board of Church Extension. The word "mission" was soon dropped.

The Reverend Roland Stubbing came to serve both the Whitakers Church and the Roanoke Circuit. However, Reverend J. Clyde Anman, later a missionary to Japan, was assigned to the church in 1919 and again for 1919 - 20. Rev. H. Freo Surratt was the pastor from 1920-1923.

Lay delegates to Annual Conference at this period were J. M. Cutchin for 1920, 1925-1928, 1930, 1932, 19314, 1936, 1938; Henry Braswell in 1937; Mr. J. M. Cutchin in 1931; B. H. Neville in 1931, and Mrs. J. H. Cutchin in 1935.

The Centennial Celebration of the Methodist Protestant Church was held in Baltimore in 1928; Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Cutchin attended.

J. M. Cutchin, Jr. served as Superintendent of Whitakers Sunday School for many years, listed in official records for 1920-1926. Mrs. J. H. Cutchin was president of the Foreign Missionary Society in 1924-1925. For several years, the Whitakers Church was credited with doing special work in foreign mission efforts by the annual payment of \$90 for a Bible woman in India.

Organizations for the young people were known as Christian Endeavor Societies.

Listed as secretaries for the Whitaker Christian Endeavor Society were Mrs. W. T. Braswell, Miss Margaret Draughan, Miss Margaret Braswell, Miss Helen King, and Miss C. Cutchin.

Rev. Fred W. Paschall, a student at Westminster Theological Seminary was assigned to the Whitakers Circuit in 1923. Other ministers from within the conference supplied on certain Sundays until May, 1924 when Mr. Paschall completed his seminary work. He served the Whitakers Circuit

from 1923 to 1927. During his pastorate, the town had its first Vacation Bible School. This was a cooperative affair with other local churches participating. The Bible School ran for a month and did an excellent job of instructing in Bible study. Rev. F. W. Paschall married a local church worker, Miss Spencer Cutchin, in the early fall of 1928. The young couple moved to a new assignment.

The lot on which a brick parsonage was erected was deeded to the Trustees of the Methodist Protestant Church of Whitakers by C. E. Hines and his wife, Mattie L. Hines, on December 22, 1927. As the record described this site, the area consisted of 13,666.65 square feet lying on the east side of New Street. The purchase was made for \$250.

No minister was sent to Whitakers for 1927-28. Dr. T. M. Johnson arrived in 1928 and remained until 1931. During 1932, Whitakers, Speight's Chapel, Enfield, and Whitakers Chapel were all served by one minister. Rev. E. O. Peeler came in 1932 and remained until 1936. The Reverend D. R. Williams was the pastor for 1936-1938.

With the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, one man continued to preach in both Battleboro and Whitakers. In 1909 the Minister was Rev. G. S. Beardun; in 1910, Rev. J. W. Frank was assigned to the charge; he remained through 1911. At this time, Mr. O. D. Mann was Superintendent of the Sunday School.

Rev. E. N. Harrison, another young preacher, came to the work and continued through 1913. Mr. O. D. Mann held the position of Sunday School Superintendent through the year 1914.

In 1915, the Reverend M. W. Dargan was sent to the Battleboro-Whitakers area; in this same year, Mr. O. K. Taylor became Sunday School Superintendent and served in this capacity for several years. Youth groups were organized as the Epworth League.

Rev. L. B. Pattischnall came to the Whitakers Church for 1916-1917; then 1918-1921, W. G. Rowe was assigned and had his residence in Battleboro. At the conference for 1921, the name of the district was changed to the Weldon District.

Rev. J. C. Humble served as pastor for 1922; he was followed by Rev. B. F. Boone, who continued the work through 1925. Rev. B. D. Critcher was given the assignment for 1926-27. From 1928-30, the Reverend H. A. Chester was the pastor for the two churches.

A change was made in 1931; Enfield and Whitakers were placed on the same charge. The Reverend S. E. Wright served for one year; he was followed by Rev. C. S. Womack, who remained until 1935. At that time the Reverend R. L. Jerome was assigned to Rocky Mount and to Whitakers. Again, Enfield and Whitakers were placed on the same charge in 1936 with Rev. R. L. Jerome as the pastor.

The Reverend O. I. Hinson served during 1937. At a Wednesday night prayer meeting, early in the year, the minister was engaged in prayer. Some of the members present began to smell smoke; a fire that had started from the stove was filling the ceiling with a circling cloud. One member, said to be Mrs. Q. F. Tucker, quietly approached and tugged at the preacher's coat. "Mr. Hinson, the church is on fire," she whispered. The fire burned rapidly, and with no fire truck in

Whitakers the building was a total loss before help from Enfield could arrive. Only a piano and a few small pieces were saved. Miss Annie Lee Cutchin, now Mrs. B. H. Neville, Sr., recalls the brilliant glow of the leaping flames. Mr. Neville, in attempting to save items from the burning building, collected the melted material from the red hot church bell; the dripping of the metal landed on a new outfit he was wearing that night.

This disaster produced a combining of the two Methodist groups. The Methodist Episcopal congregation used the Methodist Protestant building for meetings; first on an alternating schedule. Rev. W. L. Loy was sent to the Enfield-Whitakers charge for 1938. The merger of these two branches of the Methodist Church occurred in Whitakers one year earlier than it did elsewhere in North Carolina. The special arrangement was described in a report by Dr. J. E. Prichard, President of the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference, in the *Journal* of 1938. The following excerpt is Dr. Prichard's account:

"On October 6th I was called to Whitakers to meet with our congregation and the congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the two pastors at Whitakers and the presiding Elder of the Rocky Mount District of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, relative to working out some plan for one congregation for the two churches there next year. Early in this year the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Whitakers burned and since then the congregation has used our building.

"The matter was first discussed in a joint meeting, and later the two groups separated and discussed the matter as denominational groups. When the vote was taken in the separate meetings it was found that it was the unanimous opinion of those who were present to have one congregation next year. The matter was then left to Bishop Clare Purcell and me to decide which conference should furnish the pastor. Inasmuch as our people were furnishing the church and the parsonage and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, would be furnishing more than half the salary, it appeared to me that it would be more of a cooperative movement for them to furnish the pastor, hence I wrote Bishop Purcell that I did not think there would be serious objection on the part of this Conference to his supplying this joint congregation. But there again I reserved the right for our Conference to ask our part of the congregation for our usual benevolences. This also will not make it more difficult for our Conference to find places for all of our men as the minister has been supplying two separate charges, Enfield and Whitakers, and Enfield can now have the all time services of a pastor."

The Reverend A. M. Williams became the pastor of the Whitakers Methodist Church in 1939. He continued with the work for five years. Rev. J. T. Greene preached during 1944-1945. The Reverend Henry B. Lewis came to Whitakers in 1946 and remained for two years.

The Reverend E. H. Measamer was appointed to the Whitakers Charge in 1948; his ministry continued until 1952. During this period, Mrs. J. H. Cutchin served as President of the Woman's Society (now United Methodist women). Her term of office ran from 1948-1952.

Other Methodist women who held offices were Mrs. Harold A. Braswell, first as Leader of the Halifax Sub-district and later as President of the Rocky Mount District of the Woman's Society. Mrs. Braswell, also, was Secretary of Missionary Education and Chairman of the School of Missions at Duke University, positions for the entire North Carolina Conference.

During the fifties, Mrs. S.W. Anderson became Secretary of Christian Social Relations and Local Church Activities, on the district and later on the Conference level. Mrs. W. J. Overman served as a district officer for a number of years. At this time of activity and growth, more space was needed. Members began to plan for an Education Building. The deed for the lot is recorded as follows:

"J. M. Cutchin to J. P. Hamilton, Harold A. Braswell, Mrs. Aleph J. Bradley, Dr. J. H. Cutchins Laura S. Denton, J. M. Cutchin, and O. DeWitt Mann, Trustees of Whitakers Methodist Church, July 28, 1952, for \$1.00 one lot on New and Pippen Streets, adjoining the present church lot."

Rev. H. L. Rogers served the Whitakers Church in 1953. From 1951-1958, Rev.

Richard Brownstein, a retired Army chaplain, was the pastor. He was followed by Rev. W. M. Jeffries who remained until 1961. Rev. J. F. Thompson preached from 1961-1964.

In 1964, Rev. David Beale, a student pastor, was assigned to the Whitakers Church. During the year, Rev. S. W. Anderson, Jr., a resident of Whitakers and recent graduate Of Duke Divinity School, filled the pulpit for several occasions. Our church records show that he received a person as a preparatory member on one of the Sundays. However, "Windy" as our members knew him, went on to Richmond and now is minister at the United Church of Christ on Long Island.

The Rev. C. M. Mitchell lived in Whitakers for a while. His work was with the Methodist Loan Fund; yet, he acted as a supply minister for the Whitakers Church during 1965.

The Reverend Julian M. Aldridge came to Whitakers in 1965 and remained until 1967. L. H. Dodson was pastor from June 1967-June 1968. Dr. Ralph Johnson, from the Michigan Conference, preached during 1968-69. In 1969 the Reverend Marion O. Stephenson, a retired Navy chaplain, became pastor for the Battleboro-Whitakers Charge. This arrangement included four churches; therefore, the conference provided ministers for two of the churches on alternate Sundays. In this manner, Whitakers gained the services of Dr. Thomas A. Collins, President of North Carolina Wesleyan College. In the event Dr. Collins was involved in other affairs, he secured a speaker for that particular Sunday. His wife, Anne, performed admirably as a supply person on two occasions.

The Reverend Jon Gulnac, on loan from the Pennsylvania Conference, served Whitakers and Speight's Chapel in 1973-74. Rev. Hobart Burnsides was pastor 1974-1975.

Rev. Vance Way began his pastorate in June 1975 and continued until June 1977. Rev. Wayne Grigg followed and remained until June 1979. Beginning with the last half of 1979, Rev. Harold T. Pickett has served as pastor. With his assistance, the members have used the Pony Express Campaign for improving the financial standing of the church with much success.

W. F. Overman, Jr. is preparing for the ministry. He is now a student at Southeastern Seminary.

August 9, 1981 is the date of the Centennial Celebration for the Whitakers United Methodist Church. A general homecoming is combined with the centennial observance. May the next one hundred years bring even greater chapters to OUR STORY!

Since then...

Since our Centennial in 1981, Whitakers United Methodist Church has had 11 more pastors, sharing them with the other churches now on the charge, Enfield and Eden. From 1983-1985 the pastor was Rev. Russell Blake, followed by Rev. Frances Browne from 1986-1989. Rev. Kirk Oldham served the church in 1990, followed by Rev. Dennis Levin from 1991-1992.

Rev. Levin was in the military reserves and was called up for duty during the 1991 Gulf War. The pulpit was filled during his absence by certified lay speakers, including Ken Ripley of Spring Hope, a newspaper publisher, and Mrs. Phyllis Jacobs of Rocky Mount. They continued to preach on a regular basis at Whitakers, eventually joined by another lay speaker, Mike Edmundson of Edgecombe County.

Edmundson went on into the ministry, but Ripley and Jacobs continued to preach at least once each month for years on a set schedule. They were assisted by two lay servants from Whitaker, Ben Neville and Sheila Lanier. Ill health forced Mrs. Jacobs to retire about five years ago, though she maintained close ties with the congregation until her death, but Ripley has continued to serve the Whitakers congregation to this day, working with the pastors and sharing lay speaker duties with Sheila Lanier, even though spinal problems have forced him to preach sitting on a stool. Lay servant Denise Wright is taking courses to become a certified lay speaker as well.

Following Rev. Levin, Rev. Ralph Hill served from 1993-1994 followed by Rev. Rodney Lane from 1995-1997. Rev. Joyce Reynolds came to Whitakers in 1998 and served the charge until 2002. She was followed briefly by Rev. Steve Castle from 2002-2003. Rev. Polly Taylor was the pastor from 2003-2007, followed by Rev. Charles Robl, III from 2007-2012. Whitaker's current pastor, Rev. Dr. Stephen Bradley, who retired to North Carolina from Virginia, has served since 2012.

The church remained in the Rocky Mount District until the North Carolina Annual Conference in 2012 reorganized itself from 12 districts down to eight and now the charge is in the renamed and realigned Heritage District, whose Superintendent is currently Rev. Randy Innes.

The congregation of Whitakers United Methodist Church has grown smaller as time and age have taken their toll, but its core of faithful members continues to persevere and look for ways to reach out into the community and grow. Our large attendance at Homecomings and Sundays like today are visible reminders of the spiritual impact the church has had on generations of Whitakers residents — and hopes to have in the years yet to come.

