

## HISTORY OF ZION METHODIST CHURCH

Zion is one of the oldest Methodist churches in North Carolina. It was at first believed that it had been organized as a Methodist Society in 1800 by Bishop Francis Asbury, but later research has led us to believe that there was a congregation at Town Creek as early as 1785. We quote from a recent edition of Asbury's Journal: "Sat., March 19, 1785 - After preaching at Town Creek, I rode in the evening to Wilmington ...". Several later references indicate that he also preached at Town Creek in December, 1796, when he wrote: "Dec. 23, 1796 - At last we came to Rolk's on Town Creek." Also, he wrote: "Feb. 12, 1799 - I preached at Sullivan's on Town Creek, from Gal. VI, 9: the house was crowded with people; and there were many children to baptize; ...". "Feb. 23, 1801....rode to Edward Sullivan's at Town Creek, 18 miles...". "Feb. 24, 1801 - I preached: my subject was Luke IV, 18. We had a full house. I baptized three adults and as many children." "Feb. 25, 1801 - I dined with Gen. (Benjamin) Smith. We came to town...". "Jan. 17, 1802...We came up to Town Creek and housed with Charles Gause: we made our Sabbath Day's journey, 30 miles (from Lockwood's Folly meeting house) and yet had time to dine in the woods. "Jan. 18, 1802..Hearing of an appointment for the circuit preachers we did not lose time but rode down to New Hope. We both spoke and then went to Rolk's (Rooks today) where we lodged for the night." "Feb. 11, 1804 - At Rork's, at Town Creek, Brother M'Caine preached: I also spoke, enforcing, 'Be Thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,' A late camp meeting upon Town Creek has given a revival to religion amongst both white and black".

At that time Zion was on the Brunswick Circuit, later the Smithville Circuit, Camden District of the South Carolina Conference. The South Carolina Conference included all of South Carolina, Georgia, and a considerable part of North Carolina.

The church has had two locations. According to an old deed, the first was on what is known as the old Walker place (now the Watkins place), and the second at the present location. On September 27, 1851, Miles Potter deeded this four acre plot to Zion, and soon thereafter a church was built. It had a gallery where the slaves sat. The main auditorium had two isles with long pews between the isle and short pews to the right and left under the balcony. The men sat on the left side and the women on the right at all church services.

The trustees in 1851 were Daniel B. Evans, Francis W. Potter, Thomas G. Drew, Christopher C. Mercer, William H. Walker, John J. Drew, and Ezekial Skipper.

There were twelve churches on the Smithville Circuit in 1851, and the total amount raised was \$534.41. Zion and Smithville were the strongest churches and had equal apportionments of \$103.00. W. I. Langdon was pastor. Christopher C. Mercer was quite active during this period and was granted a license to preach in 1853. At the same conference T. G. Drew and P. L. Sellers were licensed to exhort. (Because of the large circuit and poor transportation the preacher in charge needed help in the various churches, hence exhorters, local preachers and class leaders were chosen. The 1857 Quarterly Conference admonished one of the exhorters to "exercise his gifts more than heretofore !")

In 1859 the stewards reported: "Disciplinary allowance for preacher \$375.00 and \$325.00 for family expenses." In the early years mission funds and conference claims were raised by taking special collections.

Rev. A. D. "Uncle" Betts came in 1858 and again in 1905, and was one of the most loved of all the pastors. He always closed his quarterly conference reports with this: "The Pastor is preaching, praying, and circulating literature." He also carried an alphabetical roll of all the churches in his pocket. His church rolls are the most complete of all the records.

Sunday Schools had to close during the winter months because there were no heating facilities. "Uncle" Betts in 1859 reports seven Sabbath Schools, including Zion, eight superintendents, forty teachers, 190 pupils, and 270 volumes in the library. In the early days the official members were requested to attend the Quarterly Conference. Should they fail to do so and could not give a satisfactory excuse, they were reprimanded or displaced and others put in their stead.

Zion Sabbath School in 1861 had one Superintendent, five teachers, and thirty pupils.

The Civil War period was a trying one, but the church carried on valiantly. Pastor A. D. Gates, in 1862, reports: "Some members are taking deep interest in the affairs of the church, while others have their mind, heart and bodies so taken up with the world that the church seems to be forgotten, but amidst all of our trouble and anxieties, some churches are still prosperous and the others striving to keep above the tide of desolation now sweeping over our country. Class meetings and prayer meetings are being held." In 1864, Pastor Gates reports twenty subscriptions to the Advocate and \$37.00 collected to send the Advocate to the soldiers within the bounds of the Cape Fear Area.

Rev. Betts served as a chaplain in the Civil War. In November, 1862, the pastor reports: " I have failed to reach some of my appointments on account of family afflictions and the yellow fever which has been raging in some parts of the Circuit."

In 1863, Thomas Durant, Peter Sellers and Abram Pounds were trustees at Zion. George W. Pugh, local preacher, was examined and received a recommendation to the Annual Conference to receive deacon's orders. He was made a deacon at the Annual Conference and later served the circuit as pastor. In November, 1864, the pastor reports: "Brethren, we have much cause to be thankful, that in the midst of the terrible excitement of war, and the actual presence of an army in some parts of the Circuit, so few have grown cold, and so many are still clinging to the church, trying to glorify God, and secure their salvation." Despite the war \$1,397.00 was reported raised for pastor and presiding elder in 1864.

In 1865 the Quarterly Conference could not be held because of occupancy of the territory by the Federal troops.

Pastor J. T. Smoot reports in September, 1866: "105 have been added to the churches. A goodly number in the beginning of the year joined as seekers. During the last quarter forty have been received as believers."

Smithville was made a station in 1866 and the rest of the county churches formed the "Brunswick Circuit." Neither seemed to make much progress, so at the Annual Conference of December, 1868, were combined again as the Smithville Circuit.

In 1872 Thomas G. Drew, E. W. Taylor and William H. Drew were elected Circuit trustees. E. W. Taylor served as Quarterly Conference Secretary and Superintendent of Zion Sunday School for a number of years.

In May, 1874, Pastor Avant deplored the sad neglect of the membership to partake of the Holy Communion. He states: "In 1874 Twenty-four have been added to Zion, one I. G. Hall by letter and twenty-three from the world'----".

In 1891 George H. Cannon, Sr., was Sunday School Superintendent, Steward, Trustee, and was active in all phases of the church until his death in 1908. In the early days members were expelled from the church on account of their misdeeds, and some were later reinstated.

An Epworth League, now called the M. Y. F., was organized at Zion in 1906, the only one on the charge. Officers were: President, Miss Bessie Pulliam; 1st Vice President, Miss Susie Cannon; 2nd Vice President, W. S. McKeithan; Sec. & Treas., Miss Ada Walker.

In June, 1908, Pastor C. T. Rogers reports: "We hope the spiritual condition is ever growing more Christ-like, and I think we can safely say it is, using Brunswick County's fight for prohibition as a proof. We are glad that the Cape Fear disconnected us from New Hanover County and her wayward ways!"

The church made great progress under the ministry of W. R. Royal.

Mrs. Nellie B. Walker came to the church in 1911, and was a devoted active member until ill health made her give up her church work a few years ago. However she remained interested in all the activities of the church until her death in April of 1960. She had served as Sunday School teacher, President of the Woman's Society at various times, steward, and anything else she was asked to do. Mr. E. C. Woodbury was Sunday School Superintendent, Charge Lay Leader, and Steward during the 1920's and 30's.

Rev. Walter Pavy, a native of England, came in 1940, and was truly a circuit rider -- not on horse back, but on his bicycle. He held services in all the churches each Sunday, did splendid work with the young people, and stirred the people to more active service. He conducted religious services regularly at the Bolivia School and died on his way to one of these services. In his last report, February, 1943, he said, "We believe there is a greater need than ever for the distinctive emphasis of Methodism, and we see a growing consciousness of the function and responsibility of a Christian Church in a community, especially in view of war conditions and the defiant presence of the drink evil."

Much progress was also made under the ministry of Rev. Russell Caudill in 1948-1951. One hundred four members were added and the preacher's salary raised from \$850.00 in 1947 to \$2,150 in 1951. The parsonage was remodeled at a cost of \$1,100.00 and improvements made at all the churches.

Rev. Clarence Warren was pastor when the new educational building was constructed and worked tirelessly for this and every phase of the church work.

Zion has had numbers of consecrated ministers who carried the message of Christ through the years. They were supported in their work by many faithful Christian men and women. We are sorry that so few records were kept of their names and work, but will give as many as we have been able to gather through various sources: Rev. J. H. Tart, J. T. Browning, J. T. Kendall, D. A. Watkins, Z. T. Harrison, H. M. Eure, R. L. Warlick, J. B. Thompson, Daniel Reid, R. F. Taylor, J. A. Rouse, J. J. Porter, A. D. Betts, F. A. Lupton, W. R. Royal, C. T. Rogers, R. L. Carroway, E. W. Glass, W. J. Freeman, C. P. Snow, M. D. McLamb, E. C. Sell, Z. V. Faison,

E. H. Measemer, D. D. Traynham, J. C. Harmon, Walter Pavy, David Conyers, W. B. Gregory, Russell Caudill, Clarence Warren, John Phfister, Alden Hemingway, Charles Eakin, Allen Richardson, and the present pastor, David McKay. Some of the laymen are listed: John J. Knox, Supt. of Sunday School and Steward; Oscar Durant, Supt. of Sunday School and Steward; Dr. E. G. Goodman, Sr., Lindsay Walker; J. B. Evans; M. B. Watkins, Sr., Supt. of Sunday School and Steward; D. R. Walker; A. H. Evans; W. E. Knox; Mrs. Sudie Walker Richardson; Mrs. Sallie E. Taylor; Mrs. Minnie Drew Knox; Mrs. Maria Goodman; Miss Kate Evans; Mrs. Jennie Walker Cannon; Mrs. Sophia Jane Taylor; Mrs. Alice McKeithan; Mrs. E. C. Woodbury; Mrs. Susie Zibelin; Mrs. M. B. Watkins, Mrs. Dora Knox. Mrs. Hansie Evans has probably been a member of Zion longer than any other living member, having joined October 2, 1890. C. Ed. Taylor was active in the church as a young man and retained his membership in this church a good many years after he moved away.

The present church was built in 1928 and dedicated in 1930. In 1947 Sunday School rooms were added to the back of the church. In 1956 a modern Educational Building was completed, which gives the congregation a complete modern church plant. In 1959 the sanctuary was enlarged and redecorated under the supervision of Rev. Charles Eakin. Lee Wescott was in charge of the work, and both he and the pastor worked faithfully until the work was complete. Plans for landscaping the grounds are being formulated and it is hoped that this will be done within the next year. Enlarging the sanctuary necessitated the cutting down of the large old cedar tree that had stood in front of the church for many years. Wood from this tree was used to make the cross which hangs over the altar.

The parsonage was built in 1911, and has been modernized, redecorated and refurnished in recent years.

Today the church membership stands at 200; the Church School membership is 146, with an average attendance of 106 this past conference year. The Church School, church services, Woman's Society of Christian Service, and Methodist Youth Fellowship are all well attended, very active and doing splendid work.

The present church officers are:

Trustees: J. H. Mills, Jr., A. V. Phelps, Jr., W. A. Smith; R. H. McDougall; W. L. Clark; and G. R. Barnes  
Stewards: G. R. Barnes; F. L. Galloway; J. J. Knox; W. S. McKeithan, E. E. Tharp, W. L. Wescott, and James Rich.  
Church School Superintendent: J. H. Mills, Jr.  
Church Treasurer: Adrian Phelps, Jr.  
Church Lay Leader: D. M. Sellars  
Communion Steward: Mrs. E. G. Goodman  
W.S.C.S. President: Mrs. Grady Barnes  
MYF President: Margaret Goodman

1962 -- Carl Knox gave a pump and water sprinkling system for the church lawn.

1963 -- A central heating system was installed in the parsonage.

Two life members were lost in 1963 - Mr. Claude McKeithan and Mrs. Sudie Zibelin. Mrs. Zibelin was a devoted worker and gave generously of her time and finances. For years, and until her death, she supplied flowers for the altar. She also developed the new part of the cemetery.

The above history was compiled by Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Cannon, with additional information by the Historical Committee composed of Mrs. E. G. Goodman, Mrs. Charles Eakin and Mrs. Lee Wescott.

This history was given by Miss Sallie Knox as a program at the May meeting held in Winnabow. At the same meeting, Dr. B. Frank Hall, pastor of the Pearsall Memorial Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, spoke on the causeway over Eagles Island. There will be information about the causeway in our next newsletter.

Shown below is the Mount Zion Church as it appears today.

