

*For your records, Rev. Gill, and
for publication in "The Advocate."*

ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
RICHMOND COUNTY
ROCKINGHAM DISTRICT

was The beginning of Zion Church is lost in antiquity but the authentic history goes back to the Presbyterian Meeting House, possibly so named because the Presbyterians built it but *it* used by all denominations. The Presbyterian Meeting House was located approximately one mile North of the present Zion Church building on the old Wall's Ferry road. It stood between the old Stephen Wall house and the "Uncle Billy Covington house built in 1826. The first court held in Richmond County was at the Presbyterian Meeting House on Monday, December 27, 1779 just 47 days after the county was sliced from Anson on November 10, 1779. The first Society of Methodists did not build a church of their own until around 1800 but their ministers came long before then. Two pioneer Circuit Riders, Hope Hull and Jeremiah Masten, preached at the Presbyterian Meeting House in 1786 and it is believed that they and other Circuit Riders did much for the beginning of Methodism in the Zion Community. Bishop Francis Asbury preached to the Zion Society in 1798 at the Presbyterian Meeting House and again on January 21, 1801 and he records in his Journal that "a goodly crowd came upon short warning to attend upon the Word." By this time, the Presbyterian name had about been abandoned and ZION was the more accepted name.

We are told by our ancestors, but we have no written record of it, that Rev. Benjamin Stealey built a church in the area and preached the first sermon in it. There is a record that Rev. Stealey owned land in the Zion Community 1794-1817. We know there was a Zion Meeting House and Camp Ground prior to 1829 because reference is made to it in a deed given by William Covington to Robert D. Thomas and his wife, Ann, in which he excludes one acre around the Zion Meeting House and Camp Ground which is reserved for use of The Methodist Society. ¹

The present church building was started in 1847 and took several years to build because in those days building was by hand and ^{thus} slow. Much of the work was done by members of the church.

In order for the new church to have assurance of a clear title, William Covington and William Turner Nichols in 1857 executed a new deed for the Zion Acre because "It being understood or believed that a deed executed many years before by William Covington for

the same piece or parcel of land hath been lost or destroyed, this deed is made in lieu there-of".²

The present Zion Church building started in 1847 has been continuously used by members of Zion Methodist church. At the North Carolina Annual Conference Session at Rocky Mount, North Carolina on June 13-16, 1966, the Historical Society of The Methodist Church awarded Zion Methodist Church a certificate for being the oldest continuing congregation in the Sanford District. Since 1972 with formation of the new Rockingham District, ZION has been in that district. Many improvements and additions have been made through the years. A Sunday School Annex, an Educational Building with modern equipment and furnishings, paved parking lots, a ramp for use by the handicapped, a beautifully decorated Sanctuary with modern heating and air conditioning systems and much more but ZION has always striven for preservation of its heritage. Each generation of members, many of whom are descendants of William Covington and William Turner Nichols, still continue to work with love, zeal and the same determination as did their fore-fathers!

Elizabeth Nichols Moore
Archives & History
Zion United Methodist Church

May 10, 1984

References:

- | | | | |
|---|--------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Book N | Pages 203 & 204 | Richmond County Register of Deeds |
| 2 | Book Y | Page 30 | Richmond County Register of Deeds |