

During the Colonial period the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was interested in establishing churches in America and several chapels were erected in the country prior to the Revolutionary War.

But for over thirty years after 1775 there is no record of a church in the proper sense existing in the county. This does not indicate, however, that there was a lack of interest in spiritual things. The withdrawal of the aid that the English societies had given to the Established Church caused religious activities to come to a standstill. People were at a loss as to how to proceed. There were some societies, however, and a few persons who met for religious purposes.

Francis Asbury planted Methodism in Gates County. He came and worked among the people. Although no churches were organized, Methodism was being established. Societies were organized and services were held.

Zion Methodist Church grew out of these circumstances. A series of protracted services were held under a brush arbor built approximately one quarter of a mile south of the present church site. Since there are records listing ministers for the years 1811 through 1819 it is reasonable to assume that these meetings took place for eight years until the church was fully organized in 1819.

On the sixth day of October of that year a deed for one acre of land was granted to Timothy Walton, Jonathon Lassiter, Samuel Brown, John B. Walton, John Walton, Richard Bond, Sr., and John Davis as Trustees of the church. Said acre of land being obtained from Samuel Brown and his wife, Sarah Brown, for the sum of five pounds.

Construction of a building was begun and a small one room church was completed in the year 1820.

Gates was first reported in the Conference Minutes in 1821. There were four and possibly five churches in the area at this time. They were considered worthy of recognition and were placed on a charge with Edenton. The circuit was reported with Edenton until 1825 when it was placed with Murfreesboro. In 1826 Gates became a separate circuit. During these early days the county was in the Norfolk District and was given a preacher every year except 1830 -31 when it was united with Bertie.

Each of the Methodist Churches in the county had preaching once each month. Sometimes services were held on a week-day for there were more than eight churches on the Gates Circuit.

A new, larger Zion Church was built and dedicated in the year 1881. This, too, was a simple wooden structure but having a pulpit and more floor space than the one preceeding.

Five Church School classes were taught simultaneously in the one room, much akin to the manner of the one-room school of that day.

In 1890 prominent lawyer and devoted Methodist, Leroy Lee Smith, was quite instrumental in bringing about the transfer of the portion of the state between the Roanoke and Chowan Rivers to the North Carolina Conference. Four years later the remainder was transferred, now making the state line the boundary line between the two conferences.

Zion Church membership now had increased until in the year 1899 there were almost one hundred officers, teachers, and students listed in its records.

On November 25, 1924, for the sum of one dollar, title was acquired by trustees J. B. Hathaway, Rufus Blanchard, J. H. Hofler, C. W. Hudgins, and J. W. Hudgins to an additional half-acre of land adjoining the Zion property and formerly belonging to Rufus Blanchard, G. H. Rountree and wife Rebecca M. Rountree of Gates County, and C. W. Hudgins and wife Sue B. Hudgins of Nansemond

County in Virginia. Following this transaction, a structure consisting of sanctuary, choir, and seven classrooms was built and completed in 1925.

Zion Methodist Church had been organized as Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, but following the controversy which developed over the slavery question in 1845, a protesting Conference had been held by the Southern delegation and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South formed. In 1939 the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church reunited to form The Methodist Church.

In 1956 an addition of education building consisting of kitchen, two classrooms, two restrooms, and a fellowship hall was planned, and work was begun in 1957. Due to lack of funds, this addition was only partially completed when tragedy struck.

During a violent thunderstorm on Sunday, July 26, 1959, the church steeple was hit by lightning and all of the original building was destroyed by fire. Only through the efforts of very able firefighters and the will of God was the incompleting section saved.

The days following the fire were sad ones, but the church members and many friends met and removed the debris and cleaned, as much as possible, that part of the building which was still standing.

Plans were made and the education building was completed in a short time. At the present these quarters are serving as sanctuary and classrooms, and as a meeting place for other church activities.

An architect, Walter C. Burgess of Raleigh, was hired, and on October 9, 1959, he presented the preliminary drawings to the church for its consideration. On October 25 the church officially accepted the plans for the new building. Blueprints were drawn and bids submitted by contractors. Tinkham Construction Company was awarded the contract for construction to begin on April 4, 1960.

On April 3, 1960, members of Zion Church and many friends gathered in the church yard to break ground for the new church building.

Dated June 9, 1960

Mrs. C. H. Green  
Church Historian

Zion church was completed in 1960. It consists of a beautiful sanctuary, a beautiful education plant with a large fellowship hall and kitchen.

Dated November 1, 1965

A.W. Winstead, Pastor