

1972 *Atlanta Sw*

HISTORY  
OF  
BEN HILL METHODIST CHURCH  
BEN HILL, GEORGIA

In the year 1853 Methodism established a new field of activity known as Wesley Chapel, located near what is now known as the Niskey Lake section. Some members of Mount Gilead Church living some distance from their place of worship decided it would be more convenient to worship nearer where they lived. Mr. Sidney Robins donated a tract of land in this section and a log house was built.

Among the charter members were David Waits, John Waits, Sidney Robins, a Mr. Shirling, and a Mr. Grant. David Waits was famous as a great song leader. He was Chorister for the camp meeting as well as his Church. There were few song books at that time and it was the custom for the preacher to read two lines of the song, then the congregation would sing those two lines and this procedure was repeated until the song was completed. Mr. Waits reared a large family of children who became the best singers of their day. Death called for Mr. Dave Waits as he was walking between the plow handles and he fell in the furrow and his spirit went home to the God who gave it.

Little record is found of the work of this early Church, but we do know that its membership was composed of a small band of faithful and consecrated men and women devoted to the service of God and their fellowman and its influence is still felt in our community.

There seemed to be no Sunday School literature at that time, but some well informed Bible scholar selected a passage of scripture and commented on it, this being the extent of the Church School instruction.

This Church apparently was a part of a circuit composed of East Point, Mt. Gilead, Mt. Zion, and Wesley Chapel.

The following is a list of the ministers serving this church: 1853, L. J. Davis and M. M. Watts; 1854, James R. Irving; 1855, Thomas Boring; 1856, Claburn Trussell; 1858, T. S. Quillian; 1859, James L. Lupo; 1860, James R. Ainsworth; 1861, E. J. Harrell; 1862, D. Blalock; 1863, W. A. Leake; 1865, W. J. Myers; 1867, W. J. Wardlaw; 1871, B. J. Johnson; 1873, John W. Yarbrough; 1874, A. C. Dempsey.

These men were paid a very small salary, but their compensation never lessened their devotion to the Church and the things for which it stood.

In 1875 we find there was a shift in the center of population to the cross roads - now Ben Hill - which led the members of this Church to discuss the matter of a change of location to a more convenient locality. By this time Mt. Gilead Camp Ground had become a great religious shrine and it was decided to erect a building on the Camp Ground property where it now stands. This change of location was not accomplished without dissension among the congregation and some of the older members transferred to other churches, but a number of people from Mt. Gilead Church moved their membership to the new Wesley Chapel.

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The first activity of these people was to establish a Sunday School, which was first held in a school house located where the Camp Ground Hotel now stands. Many of our ancestors learned the three R's in this school which existed long before the church was located here.

A house of worship was erected in 1877. Among those on the building committee were Larkin Baker and James Barrett. Mr. Barrett with the help of others constructed the building on the same spot where the present edifice now stands - a very good building for its time, facing the east and about the same size as the present structure.

A deed was later made to three acres of land from the Camp Ground Trustees to T. K. Waits, W. G. Bryant, T. J. Holbrook, L. P. Baker, and Pleny Robbins, Trustees, approved by John A. Reynolds, Pastor, August 12, 1896. A tract of land adjoining this was purchased in 1950, giving the Church about five acres of land.

During the period from 1880 to 1890 we find much progress being made, particularly in the work of the Sunday School. By this time the Methodist Publishing House was sending out literature better suited to the needs of the various age groups.

The earliest official record of Sunday School enrollment we are able to find is 35 in 1898 and by 1904 it had increased to 66. Space will not permit naming all the Superintendents of the Sunday School. Brother John M. Wallace served from 1906 to 1925, the longest period of any Superintendent and to him should go a great deal of the credit for its growth and efficiency during this period.

In 1906 The Women's Missionary Society was founded with Mrs. L. P. Baker as its first President. This organization now known as The Woman's Society of Christian Service has rendered a great service through the years both at home and abroad.

The Senior and Junior Guilds of much later origin have played an important part in the same type of service as the W.S.C.S.

These three organizations working together have been a tower of strength to the pastor and people of our Church.

About 1910 the young people's organization, known as the Epworth League, was instituted. It too has done a wonderful service in training young people in Christian service. It is now known as the Youth Fellowship, a great character building organization. All these institutions of our Church have enjoyed a steady growth through the years. The Sunday School has a present enrollment of 288, The W.S.C.S. - 62, The Senior Guild - 19, and the Junior Guild - 20.

The growth and progress of our Church can perhaps be best illustrated by noting its moving from a four point circuit

to a station. From its origin to 1906 it was on the East Point Circuit with East Point, Mt. Zion, and Mt. Gilead, with the parsonage at East Point. From 1906 to 1910 it was composed of Hapeville, Mt. Zion, Mt. Gilead, and Wesley Chapel, with the parsonage at Hapeville. From 1910 to 1917 it was composed of Oakland City, Mt. Zion, Mt. Gilead, and Wesley Chapel. In 1918 the Ben Hill Circuit was formed, consisting of Mt. Zion, Mt. Gilead, Owl Rock, and Wesley Chapel. During this year a parsonage was built on Compbellton Road by the four churches. In 1935 the Church became a half station with Mt. Zion. In two years Mt. Zion decided to become a station, leaving our Church by itself. This was a critical time in the life of our Church. It was necessary to go forward or to go backward. In 1937 after much discussion, prayerful consideration, and sympathetic understanding from the District Superintendent, Dr. C. C. Jarrell, we moved forward to a station. We built a parsonage that year which was occupied by Rev. Y. A. Oliver, our first full-time minister.

The present building was erected in 1922 under the pastorate of Rev. P. A. Kellett. The building committee was composed of H. U. Baker, I. C. Bryant, J. M. Wallace, W. L. Roberts, and T. J. Powell.

In 1930 the basement was dug and Church School rooms added. In 1928 the name was changed from Wesley Chapel Church to Ben Hill Methodist Church.

The following are the names of ministers serving the church at the present location: 1876, O. A. Thrower; 1878, W. R. Foote; 1880, L. P. Neese; 1882, W. W. Oslen; 1883, F. A. Gray; 1884, W. C. Dunlap; 1885, W. W. Lampkin; 1887, T. J. Richardson; 1888, W. D. Selay; 1890, H. L. Embry; 1892, C. V. Weathers; 1893, J. M. Tunlin; 1895, W. T. Hamilton; 1896, J. A. Reynolds; 1898, W. A. Dodge; 1902, O. C. Simmons; 1906, M. M. Walraven; 1910, P. A. Kellett; 1913, H. W. Joiner; 1914, M. L. Underwood; 1918, W. T. Darnell; 1919, E. L. Hillman; 1920, L. W. Neff; 1922, P. A. Kellett; 1923, J. Fred Sparks; 1925, R. P. Etheridge; 1927, J. V. Jones; 1928, A. E. Silvey; 1933, C. S. Forester; 1936, H. L. Wood; 1937, Y. A. Oliver; 1940, C. D. Read; 1943, Frank Quillian; 1946, W. T. Hunnecutt; 1947, D. H. Maxey; 1950, J. R. Phillips.

The Church now has a membership of 425 and has outgrown its present facilities. Plans have been approved for the erection of a modern church plant capable of meeting the needs of the Methodist people in this community for years to come.

written by  
 W. O. Suttler, Sr.,  
 Rt 4  
 Atlanta, Ga.  
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