Seventy-seven years after John Wesley preached his first sermon at Savannah and ten years after Milledgeville was founded, a little church was born in Baldwin County, some ten miles northwest of the state's capital.

One can visualize the group of earnest Christians who gathered to found a church of the Methodist faith, then little more than three-quarters of a century old in the United States. In their Sunday best and with reverent hearts, they met to plan for serving the Lord and honoring Him with a house of worship.

There is no record of the names of those who founded the church that was to be called Bethel, but there is reason to believe that they were the forefathers of those who now live in the Merriwether Community of Baldwin County and the ancestors of some who still worship at Bethel Church.

Establishing the date of the building of the first church at Bethel are the words of James D. Myrick, written in his own hand on the fly leaf of the church Register, in 1907. He wrote: "The old church building at Bethel was erected about 1813, as Mr. William Green says it stood 40 years and the present building was completed in July, 1853 and dedicated the following November."

Descendants of that William Green are now communicants of Bethel Church, unto the fourth and fifth generations.

A deed recorded by the Clerk of Court in Milledgeville, May 28, 1883, tells of the gift of the land on which the church stands, the deed signed by Samuel H. Hughes in 1872. One can only guess at why the church stood for so many years on "borrowed land". But the deed tells why Mr. Hughes gave the land for the building. It says in part:

"For and in consideration of the love I bear for the cause of Christ and from an earnest desire to promote His heritage on earth, I do give and do by these presents convey unto L. M. Moore, R. H. Harper, C. R. Harper, William I. Harper, C. W. Snead, William Green, and T. J. Barksdale, Trustees"
of Bethel Church, a certain parcel of land situated and lying on the road leading from Butts Cross Road to Napier's Mill—"

That deed, giving ten thousand square yards to the church and including the right of way to the spring in the valley below, was recorded just one year before the first century of Methodism in the United States had ended.

During the decades before and after the turn of the century, Bethel church was the center of a prosperous rural community and religious and social gatherings, they were attended by people from far and near; the quarterly meetings with dinner on the ground, the Sunday School, the regular church services every third Sunday. Even as far back as October 7, 1887, there was an article in THE UNION RECORDER referring to the fourth quarterly conference of the Baldwin charge being held at Bethel on the first and second Sundays of October. Rev. W. P. Lovejoy preached two able sermons on these occasions.

On August 25, 1884, THE AUGUSTA CHRONICLE carried an article on a Barbecue at Bethel Church which evidently marked the christening of a new Organ.

First served by ministers from Milledgeville and from the Putnam County circuit, Bethel Church was placed in the Baldwin Circuit, formed in 1867, with the Rev. J. V. M. Morris serving as the first pastor, 1868-69. He served the four churches of the circuit, Bethel, Pleasant Grove, Montpelier and Hopewell.

From the church register with its lists of baptisms and members received, the following list of ministers were compiled:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James V. M. Morris</td>
<td>Nov. 1867</td>
<td>Nov. 1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John W. Stipe</td>
<td>Nov. 1869</td>
<td>Dec. 1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter R. Branhan, Jr.</td>
<td>Dec. 1872</td>
<td>Dec. 1873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W. Hardaway</td>
<td>Dec. 1873</td>
<td>Dec. 1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter L. Yarbrough</td>
<td>Dec. 1874</td>
<td>Dec. 1875</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
William R. Foote, Jr.  Dec. 1875 - Dec. 1877
Ed A. Gray  Dec. 1877 - Dec. 1879
Jno. C. Davison  Dec. 1879 - Dec. 1882
T. H. Gibson  Dec. 1882 - Dec. 1884
F. D. Cantrell  Dec. 1884 - Dec. 1885
T. H. Gibson  Dec. 1885 - Dec. 1886
F. P. Brown  Dec. 1886 - Dec. 1887
Geo. W. Griner  Dec. 1887 - Dec. 1889
J. J. Ansley  Dec. 1889 - Dec. 1891
J. V. M. Morris  Dec. 1891 - Dec. 1895
J. M. Lowry  Dec. 1896 - Dec. 1898
Crowford Jackson  Dec. 1898 - Dec. 1899
W. T. Caldwell  Dec. 1899 - Dec. 1900
F. P. Spencer  Dec. 1900 - Dec. 1901
J. A. Quian  Dec. 1901 - Dec. 1904
E. H. Wood  Dec. 1904 - Dec. 1908
B. P. Sparcy  Dec. 1908 - Dec. 1911
S. H. Dimon  Nov. 1911 - Nov. 1914
W. O. Butler  Nov. 1914 - Nov. 1915
A. A. Tilley  Nov. 1915 - Nov. 1919
L. W. Browder  Nov. 1919 - Nov. 1923
F. H. Farr  Nov. 1923 - Nov. 1929
T. L. Rutland  Nov. 1929 - Nov. 1930
G. B. Henderson  Nov. 1930 - Nov. 1933
R. C. Shea  Nov. 1933 - Nov. 1936
G. S. Shell  Nov. 1936 - Nov. 1940
A. E. Silvey  Nov. 1940 - Nov. 1942
Loran Parker  Nov. 1942 - Nov. 1946
O. J. Withrow  Nov. 1946
The following is a list of Presiding Elders:

H. H. Parks 1884 - 1886
James E. Evans Last two quarters of 1886
Jesse Boring Dates not recorded
W. P. Lovejoy 1887 - 1890
Geo. W. Yarbrough 1892 - 1894
J. F. Mixon 1895 - 1898
J. R. King 1899 - 1902
John W. Heidt 1903 - 1906
C. E. Dowman 1907 - 1910
J. W. Gulliam 1911 - 1914
B. F. Fraser 1915 - 1918
Henry B. Mays 1919 - 1928
W. G. Crawley 1923 - 1926
Elam F. Dempsey 1927 - 1930

Within the past few years a stirring of interest has brought new life to the old church. Extensive repairs have been made to the old building, with new paints inside and out, the adding of electric lights and a gas heating system and Venetian blinds. Two new Sunday school rooms have been built and the grounds have been landscaped. A new wrought iron roadside marker has, also, been added giving the name of the church to those that pass by.

At present the church has sixty-eight members, fifty-four Sunday School members and can boast of having had thirty-nine soldiers who served in World War II. They can, also, boast of a very active Woman's Mission Society formerly the Woman's Society of Christian Service.

The present Sunday School Superintendent is Mrs. Blanche Green Lumpkin and the Stewards are the following:
The present Trustees are as follows:

- W. C. Green
- Mrs. Ollie Little
- J. L. Owens
- Roy Nelson
- Joseph Stiles