HISTORY OF
BETHESDA METHODIST CHURCH

(Bowman Charge)

...Hartwell, Georgia

1862 (?) ............. 1958

...by Mrs. E. W. (Mae C.) Harper
Route 3
Hartwell, Georgia
HISTORY OF

BETHESDA METHODIST CHURCH

Bethesda Methodist Church is located 6½ miles southeast of the city of Hartwell, Georgia. Today it can be reached from any direction via paved roads.

Through diligent search for official history, which was meager (and fire having destroyed some in one of the Church School Superintendent's home) the writer has had to depend on reliable traditions and the actual records as they transpired for the latter part of this history. We learned that Bethesda means "The House of Mercy." Then, too, Bethesda's people have been so busy doing, that not much attention has been paid to recording the church history.

We were told (by relatives) that the first Sunday school was held in the home of Mr. Thomas Teasley for some time (date unknown) before a church was organized. There was an urgent need and spiritual hunger for the people of the community, so for some time this community meeting continued. There were itinerant preachers traveling on horseback, stopping in homes and preaching to gatherings. Preaching in pioneer days was quite a hardship. They received a very small salary for their labors and yet they met it in faith undaunted. As they traveled across the country on horseback with their leather bags, they were often called "Carpet bag" preachers.

A site was picked out near where the present church stands. On file in the Hart County court house, the records show that deed from John G. McCurry was given to the following trustees, namely: Thomas J. Teasley, John E. Teasley, Jeptha M. Bradley, Reuben B. Thornton, and Rollin J. Brown. This was September 16, 1862. The plat was 3½ A.

Again, on file, at a later date, there is a deed from C. B. Brown to the following trustees: M. M. Mewborn, G. E. Herndon, L. M. Dickerson, W. B. J. Norman—3 6 A. This date was August 23, 1904.

The first church was a small unpainted frame building, which was used for many years.
In 1880, this building was torn down and the second one was built across the road from the first one. The structure was of the best forest pine and truly was a lovely country church. The spire could be seen for many miles. The sanctuary was most beautiful with high ceiling in panel design and arched overhead.

From the late Riley Carter's notes on the "Hundredth Anniversary of Concord Church," we find that the contractor Sam Hall (only one in Elbert County at that time) worked slaves and if any slave owner had slaves that could do carpenter work, they were hired to Mr. Hall to build Concord Church. He later built Bethesda, which is now on the same Charge. Up to this time Bethesda (being in Hart County) was at one time on Elbert Circuit and later with the Hartwell Church part time. About 1877, the Bowman Charge was formed with the Bowman, Concord, and Stinchcomb churches in Elbert County and Bethesda making the fourth church of the Charge. Today this Charge stands out in the North Georgia Conference. We feel sure that the histories from the other churches have given a list of all pastors and district superintendents, so we will omit a list.

In 1924, a two-story annex was added to the building previously described for extra Sunday school rooms. The Reverend J. C. Adams was instrumental in having this done. (Today he lives in Heard County and is known by all who hold him in esteem as the "Bishop").

One room was used for a library, and by having donations from members and friends, several hundred good books were on file.

The church was bequeathed $1,000.00 in 1933 by Mrs. B. A. (Fannie Norman) Thornton in memory of her father, the late W. B. J. Norman. The money was used to make the church more comfortable. A newer furnace was installed with blower, the base of the church was underpinned, outside painted, new equipment for rooms, and R. E. A. electricity added much, although a Delco system had been used for many years. A marker was placed in vestibule (a cut of Elbert County granite) on May 28, 1934, in memory of these two saintly people.
The members of Bethesda felt that they had a comfortable church, but unfortunately on February 2, 1941 about two hours after the morning service, the church was destroyed by an undetermined fire. It was estimated that it would cost a great deal to duplicate it.

Under the able leadership of the Reverend H.A. McNeil, pastor of the brick church, plans were being made before dusk of that day for the present church, which stands almost on the same site as did the stately wooden structure.

The Reverend C. M. Lapham drew plans for the present church, a modern building of brick that cost $10,250.00. It has a basement, social hall, kitchen, Sunday school rooms, and beautiful sanctuary.

The building was finished and dedicated on November 7, 1943 with the Reverend J. Hamby Barton, district superintendent of the Athens-Elberton District in charge. In the afternoon, the fourth Quarterly Conference for the churches was held and reports from all indicated one of the best years in history.

The Bethesda Woman's Missionary Society was organized on August 31, 1903, with Mrs. Carrie Mewborn as the first president, and fifteen members on roll. They sent to the District Treasurer about $4.10 per year. The men were invited to be honorary members, paying $1.00 per year. There were eleven men on roll in 1903.

When the Reverend R. H. Timberlake served as pastor, on August 7, 1949 the Woman's Society was changed to the Woman's Society of Christian Service in a beautiful ceremony. The ladies have always met monthly and have very good programs as prepared by Literature Headquarters. The pledges have increased over the years. Today we have 20 members and together with the Wesleyan Service Guild, paid $349.40 for 1958.

In 1955, since so many of the younger married ladies worked (away from home) there was a need for a Wesleyan Service Guild, so one was organized at the home of Mrs. J. I. Jenkins, with Mrs. W. L. Warner elected the first president. The Bowman "Yearbook" for 1954-55 records that these first officers were installed on May 18, 1955.

We are happy to have one of our W. S. C. S. members serving as
President of the Athens-Elberton District. She is Mrs. J. I. Jenkins. She also teaches the young adult class, serves as a steward of the Church, and is active on other committees in her community. Her husband, the late Dr. J. I. Jenkins, was most active during his life-time and contributed much to the ongoing and growth of the Church.

We are fortunate to have Dr. G. T. Harper, of Dewy Rose, Georgia, a retired country doctor to give his time and service as a steward, trustee, and district steward.

Bethesda was blessed to have had a saintly woman hear the call to the foreign field. In May, 1885, Miss Flora Herndon was born to the late Mr. and Mrs. George E. Herndon. At the age of ten, she joined the church, and from that day until her death, she gave to all who knew her that reflected light, which only those who are in touch with the Heavenly Father can give. She attended Young Harris College and later Belle Bennette before sailing for Soochow, China in September, 1912. After serving five years, she had to return home because of poor health. This was a disappointment to her because she dearly loved her work.

She was later married to Mr. Dillard Herndon in August, 1920. Three children were born to her and to these fine children she gave her time and talents with all the joy of a precious mother.

We would like to give a sketch of James L. Dickerson, son of Mrs. Mamie and the late Albert Dickerson. He was born and reared in Hart County and the eldest of six children. He attended Young Harris College and has an A.B. degree from Piedmont College, Demorest, Georgia, M. S. Ed. degree from the University of Georgia, and PhD from Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. He has taught in several High schools in Georgia and too, served as principal. At present, he is coordinator of Professional Laboratory Experiences (Student Teaching) College of Education at the University of Georgia. He is a member of First Methodist Church, Athens, and Chairman of the Commission on Membership and Evangelism of that Church. He married Miss Amber Mae Daniel, of Bowman, Georgia, June, 1939. She teaches at Athens.

Paul Hayward Brown, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher Brown, Dewy Rose,
Georgia, was born in Madison County. When quite young, his family moved to Hart County. He received his high school education in Hartwell, attended Young Harris College, and attended LaGrange College several semesters. At present, he works in the Lake Winfield Hospital in Heard County. He is a member of the Army Reserves and in October, 1958 will serve six months active duty. He plans to resume his ministerial work as soon as possible. Bethesda is proud of this young man, as he steps forth to become a minister.

In 1958, the Church has a membership of 269, while the church school has an enrollment of 130 and an average of 100 to 115 per Sunday.

Due to the crowded classrooms, the members of the Bethesda Church broke ground on March 17, 1957 for a new educational plant to house additional Sunday School classrooms at a cost of $6,500.00. Participating in the ceremony were the Reverend Jackson P. Speer, H. C. McColl, Chairman of the Official Board; Thomas E. Harper, Treasurer of the Building Fund; Archie Rice, Harold Teasley; M. C. Newborn (oldest member of church present); Joe I. Teasley; Roy A. Harper; J. W. Brown, Sr.; Clayte Teasley; H. S. Cook; E. W. Harper; Woodrow Sanders; and Mrs. J. I. Jenkins.

The annex is almost completed and no indebtedness is against it, as of June, 1958. We hope to have the dedication service with the fourth quarterly Conference later in the fall.

There have been some very beautiful weddings in all the churches as mentioned, and there have also been many, many sad times when people were separated from their loved ones. So this church holds sacred memories in the hearts of many Christians, far and near.

Each summer we have a Daily Vacation Bible School and have such a good attendance with such a good faculty. Many children feel the urge to join the church, from having attended the work.

Also each summer during first week of August our revival season is held. We have guest pastors to fill the pulpit and bring stirring messages.

This year we were fortunate to have a "Spring Revival" on our Charge. Our pastor, Reverend Jackson P. Speer exchanged visits with the Reverend
James J. McLendon of Rebecca, Georgia, who brought special messages at the Lenten season and the topic or slogan was, "Tell Georgia about Christ."

There has been an active young people's organization, first as the Epworth League and now the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Mrs. Archie Rice has served as counselor for the last few years. The young people have access to the Hartwell Youth Center for their summer retreats. (This was formerly known as the Old Hartwell Camp Ground, located a few miles southwest of Hartwell on Highway 29.

The church has a "miniature church bank" for the members to contribute pennies on their birthday, to be used for expenses for young people going to camp.

There are grandchildren and even great-grandchildren of the descendants of the builders of the "old churches" that have gone out into neighboring towns and other states to become active church workers. We have contributed to our church colleges and have had boys and girls attending who have studied for the ministry, medicine, teaching, and worthy men and women in all walks of life. We also have several young men in the armed forces. Several saw action in the Korean conflict. During World War II there was a service flag with 22 blue stars and one gold star. Also during World War I we had loyal members who served in Europe and thought, as many others, they were helping to fight the war to end all wars.

A prayer meeting has been organized a few months ago (1958) and meets twice a month at the church. Different classes (the men, the ladies, young adult, and the intermediates) take time about conducting it. Much good has been noticed in the short time, for there is an increase in church school attendance, with more Bible readers.

We are wonderfully blessed to have so much talent, whether musicians, singers, carpenters, doctors, teachers, home makers, and farmers. They all give of their time to make the church a better place for the oncoming generations.

As in the beginning of Bethesda's history, there were the Browns,
Teasleys, Harpers, Johnsons, Jenkins, and many others. Their descendents will probably march into the future, giving praise unto God, and praying for peace among men everywhere.
COPY OF MINUTES FROM CHURCH CONFERENCE, 1893, AS COMPARED WITH ANNUAL REPORT, 1957-58

For support of ministry .................................................. $215.00
For Foreign Missions ....................................................... 38.00
For Home Missions .......................................................... 21.00
For Conference Fund ....................................................... 27.00
For Church Extension ...................................................... 10.00
For Bishop's Fund ........................................................... 5.00
For Delegates (expense) .................................................... 3.00
For Education ................................................................. 4.00
For Missionary Debt ....................................................... 11.95
For Circuit Parsonage ..................................................... 6.50
For District Parsonage ..................................................... 2.00
For Sunday schools ......................................................... 4.00

For Ministerial Support ................................................ $1,166.60
For Pastor's Travel Expense ............................................. 194.04
District Superintendent's Fund ......................................... 87.52
Episcopal Fund ............................................................. 19.14
Conference Claimants' Fund ............................................ 155.60
Minimum Salary ............................................................ 29.16
Area Conference and District Work .................................... 29.16
Floral and Love Offering ................................................ 93.14
To building Fund ........................................................... 100.00
Spring and summer revivals, books, and piano tuning .......... 187.50
Janitor .............................................................................. 210.00
Literature and Supplies .................................................. 273.86
Insurance ........................................................................ 314.00
Parsonage Fund ............................................................... 80.00
Roof ................................................................................ 30
Methodist Children's Home Collection ................................ 57.00
Methodist Expansion ........................................................ 183.00
Benevolences .................................................................. 285.00
College Fund .................................................................... 115.00
Cemetery Eleaning ............................................................ 50.00
To Camp Gisson ............................................................... 15.00
To Hartwell Young Camp ................................................... 10.00
Communion Offering ........................................................ 4.65
To Superannuate Homes .................................................... 27.10

Total .............................................................................. $3,437.47

Mrs. Archie Rice, Treasurer
May 25, 1958