Preface

The Bethlehem Methodist Charge in the Gainesville District, North Georgia Conference, is the largest circuit in the conference. It consists of seven churches, comprising a membership of 1350 persons. The pastor has an assistant at this time, the Rev. Mell Simons, of Social Circle, Ga., who has charge of Old Pentecost and Providence churches.

The present pastor, L. G. Marlin, is in his fourth year of service here. He has had more than 40 years experience in the ministry as a pastor, teacher, and evangelist. He is happy in his ministry, as any pastor should be, who has the privilege of serving such a group of loyal and devout people. The property in this charge has been estimated conservatively to be worth at least $61,800.

The Bishop and Conference are urging that every church prepare a reliable history. This has been done at considerable effort. The reader may depend upon the reliability and authenticity of these accounts. They constitute documentary evidence in every case where assertions are made.

L. G. MARLIN, A.B., A.M.
HISTORY OF BETHLEHEM METHODIST CHURCH
R. L. Harrison, Historian

The Bethlehem Methodist Church is thought to be the oldest church in this section. It was organized soon after the revolutionary war and services were held in a little log house about two miles northeast of the present site, on what was known as the Monroe-Jefferson road, near the Bailey Chandler home place. They worshiped here for three years and then erected a small church on the Bethlehem-Jones road near the Howard Thomas homeplace. Here they worshiped for several years.

No one knows by whom the church was organized or the names of the charter members. However, we know they came from the families of Fredrick Thompson, William Holloway, David Smith, Thomas Camp, Eli Whaley, Harvey Treadwell, W. M. Williams, the Thomas and Clack families.

Fredrick Thompson, a revolutionary soldier, is buried about two miles from the present church. David Smith, another revolutionary soldier is buried about two miles from the old church. The D.A.R. has recently erected monuments to their memory.

The exact date is not known when the church was moved to the present site but the first deed was made to the trustees in 1847. The
deed called for about six acres including the campground and the land on which the church then stood. The land was given by the Rev. John W. B. Allen who served the church in 1848. The trustees at that time were Eli Whaley, David Thompson, Abner Camp, Harvey Treadwell and David Smith. We have the names of two other preachers who served the church in that day. They were the Rev. J. H. Echoles who was pastor in 1846 and the Rev. Andrew Davis in 1847.

Nathan Harrison, a circuit rider, who withdrew from the Blackstone conference of N. C. in 1837 and moved to Georgia, held services in this old church about 1850 as a visiting preacher.

They held camp meeting at this place before the church was moved and continued to have camp meetings until 1894. The campground was incorporated by the Georgia Legislature in 1851. It was used as a mobilization center during the war between the states. Two companies were mobilized here and several young men from this community enlisted. They marched to Social Circle where they left by train for Virginia. Some of them never returned. The ladies of the community met at the arbor day after day to sew for the soldiers. The old arbor burned down in 1878 and the present one was erected in 1879. It has recently been repaired at a cost of approximately $1,200.00 and is used frequently during the summer months. The community is justly proud of this old landmark.

It was under this present arbor on that long remembered night, August 31, 1866, the last night of the camp meeting, when the Charleston earthquake came. The Rev. Simon Peter Richardson had just
finished one of his able sermons and was giving an invitation to come to the altar for prayer, when the earth began to shake. It is said that the altar was filled and all those who did not have religion got it that night, but we don't know how many held out faithful. One member of the congregation, Buck Willis, called out, "Oh Lord Shake 'um again" but the level heads felt that they had had enough.

In 1878 the old church was torn down and a modern church for that day was erected. From this date until the present time the following preachers have served this church efficiently:

D. F. C. Timmons  George Gary  M. B. Sams
The Rev. Reece  Dr. Marks  Dr. J. L. Harrison
The Rev. Cox  M. K. Patillo  J. J. Lovern
D. M. Edwards  F. R. Smith  C. A. Reece
The Rev. Bond  J. H. Miller  O. E. Vickery
C. V. Weathers  C. T. Ivey  B. C. Matteson
W. B. Dillard  G. W. Tumlin  R. E. Lyle
C. A. Jameson  J. W. Bailey  J. S. Hill
Ford McCree  D. S. Patterson  L. G. Hendricks
A. M. Pierce  J. W. Brinsfield  Clyde Smith
Albert Maxwell  J. B. Gresham  L. G. Marlin

This church has furnished many outstanding leaders in business, professional and civic circles. Among these are Amicus W. Williams and Howard W. Odum. Amicus Williams united with the church in early boyhood, preached his first sermon here at the age of eighteen. He joined the conference about 1870 and preached throughout North Georgia. At one time he was pastor of the Winder church. He was Presiding Elder of the Augusta District in the late 90's. Howard W. Odum united with this church in 1893. He is now associated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of North Carolina.

We have the names and dates of two men who joined this church more than a hundred years ago. Abner Camp in 1808; Robert Moore Sr., in 1844; T. K. Smith joined one hundred years ago in 1850.

We note with pride how our financial reports have improved since the 90's. Below is a copy of the minutes of a church conference held in 1895.

Bethlehem, Ga., March 3, 1895

Church conference met at Bethlehem church Sunday evening, March 3, 1895, L. F. Harris elected secretary, and the following business transacted.

Report from preacher called for. No written report.
Relief of poor. Nothing at present.
Collection for missions. Nothing doing.
Church Lit. Some being used.

Improvement in church and Sunday School work.

Prayer meeting to be held at the church every Sunday evening at 3:30 o'clock and cottage prayer meeting Sunday night.

On motion a committee of four was appointed by pastor to examine church book and have secretary to correspond with members out of reach of church and do not attend. J. N. Thomas, W. P. Odum, T. K. Smith and S. L. G. Beddingfield, names of committee.

C. A. Jameson, Pastor
L. F. Harris, Secretary

The fifth and present church as erected in 1949 as a memorial to Guy Lee Thompson. Mr. and Mrs. D. H. C. Thompson, better known as Uncle Dave and Aunt Puss, willed their entire estate of $15,000 to be used in erecting a brick church in memory of their son. All specifications of the will, such as metal ceiling, memorial windows, etc., have been carried out by the building committee.

This church as erected at a cost of $22,000 under the able leadership of the Rev. L. G. Marlin, pastor. He not only is an eloquent preacher and saintly man but a tireless worker in the erection of churches and the promotion of God's Kingdom here on earth.

The church was dedicated on Sunday afternoon, Dec. 4, 1949, with a large group of members, former pastors and friends attending the service. Rev. J. Foster Young of Augusta, Ga., pastor of the St. James Methodist Church and former District Superintendent of the Gainesville District, presented the dedicatory message.

The church membership has grown until we now have about 350 members.

The present Trustees are:


The Stewards are:

G. L. McDonald, Chairman; E. C. Harrison, H. R. Thompson, Duel Ridgeway, Jasper Wages, J. C. Holloway, J. L. Lackey, W. J. Hosch, Howard Thomas, Mrs. Pauline Moore, Miss Martha Sue Harrison, Mrs. Clara Bell Pruett and Mrs. Lee Harrison.

E. C. Harrison, Supt. of Church School.
Mrs. G. L. McDonald, Pres. of W.S.C.S.
Miss Rachel Thompson, Pres. Youth Fellowship.
Mrs. Clara Bell Pruett, Pres. of the Wesleyan Fellowship.

This Wesley Fellowship group under the leadership of Miss Ruth Hosch and Mrs. Clara Bell Pruett has done some outstanding things for the church. When there is work to be done they are always on
the job. During the last year they have raised about $800 for the church. The fellowship they have and the joy of seeing their church go forward is all the pay they get.

Our oldest member, Brother W. D. Hendrix, was almost 92 years of age when he passed away, Friday morning March 9, 1951, at the Walton County Hospital. He had attended three of these churches mentioned, and assisted in the rebuilding of the arbor and in the erection of two of them. During his membership, three Bishops, George F. Pierce, Atticus C. Haggard, and Warren A. Candler have preached at the old arbor.

The members of Bethlehem church have a rich heritage and a deep Methodist loyalty. For one hundred and fifty years Methodism has been at work here. The church marches on courageously under the banner of Christ to whom is given the praise for every worthwhile achievement.

We are very much indebted to Mr. J. W. Buchanan of College Park, Ga., who furnished us some of this information.