Bethlehem Church

The early pioneers in this section of North East Georgia were too busy making history to record history - so we do not have the written word to show just when our church was organized.

Soon after these early settlers built dwellings for their families they felled the trees, hewed and split the logs and built a chapel in which to worship God. This church was first called Thompson's Meeting House.

Bishop Francis Asbury was sent to Georgia by the General Conference meeting in Baltimore in January, 1785. He arrived in Georgia, according to Bishop Asbury's Journals, in April 1786, crossing the Savannah River at Petersburg, second oldest city in Georgia, and at that time being second in size only to Savannah and Augusta, and having more than fifty stores and two newspapers.

The Bishop came to hold the first Methodist Conference in Georgia here in our church - but due to the illness of the Bishop's warm, personal friend, Judge Charles Tate, the conference was held in Judge Tate's home. This first conference consisted of eleven men, the bishop, six members and four probationers. They were Bishop Asbury, Richard Ivey, Thomas Humphries, Moses Parks, Hope Hull, James Connor, Bennett Maxey, Isaac Smith, Matthew Harris, Reuben Ellis, and John Mason. This first Conference convened April 9, 1788.

Some years later the church was moved to the present site and the name changed to Bethlehem. Tradition says that Mrs. Agnes Hunter gave land for the church. Mrs. Z. W. Copeland, who has made intensive study of early Elbert county history says the only recorded information concerning the purchase or gift of land to Bethlehem church is found in Deed Book 88, Elbert county court house, "July 25th., 1804", David and Ann Graham his wife, sold to James Walker and Andrew Walker and James Gilmore, Trustees for the church, two acres of land for the sum of six dollars.

There is a large and interesting old cemetery. Doubtless many of the charter members sleep in this sacred old church yard.