Comer United Methodist Church

HISTORY

1881 - 1983

Compilers: Mrs. W. H. Strickland and Mrs. W. C. Strickland
The Methodist Church of Comer, Ga. Athens-Elberton District, beginning 1880-1881 and covering to the present year 1951.

Looking back over the years we find that the Rev. Eli Smith was sent as pastor to the Danielsville Circuit. He found such a large area in the southern part of the county without church facilities that he began holding services in a vacant dwelling across the road from the Townes Comer residence. After using this building for sometime and seeing the need for a more suitable house of worship, aid was solicited and many generous donations of money, material and labor started a building on the northwest side of the community called near the place called Honey Pond. Those staunch Methodist Messrs., Fulcher Comer, Townes Comer, Tom David, and Jim Bryant built the building. The name of the church was South River to distinguish from the North River area. There the Rev. Eli Smith continued to hold services. Its membership would not have exceeded fifty.

This same little church was being used when the Seaboard Railroad came through the county; the town of Comer was started in 1889. The year 1892 with the Rev. N.E. McBrayor as pastor found that a more convenient building was necessary; so a new site was selected within the incorporate limits of Comer. Mr. Townes Comer gave the lot and Mr. Jim Comer, and nephews Austin and Brandt gave the lumber for the second building. A plain, pine frame structure with the same architectural design of most of the little churches of that day. The walls were unpainted and some of the older members tell how, when they were small children, would count the knots in the pine paneling to stay awake during the long discourse (sermon). We often wonder how little folks behaved so well sitting uncomfortably on hard benches with little dangling over the edge many inches above the floor.

This church was connected with the Danielsville Charge as a mission church until 1898 when Liberty Church at Ft. Lamar was taken off and put on the Carnesville Charge; Comer was added to the Danielsville Charge as a self-sustaining church.

In November of 1905, just before Conference met in Newman, a small group of women of the church, under the leadership of Mrs. Zedekiak Speer, wife of the pastor serving the charge, organized the Woman's Society; it was then called the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Comer. There were five charter members; they were Mrs. Zilla Hutcheson, Mrs. M Mary Tucker, Mrs. J.B. McWhiter, Mrs. J.T. Comer, and Mrs. H.T. Comer. To get the missionary society going on a strong footing a local church member was elected president; they elected Mrs. Zilla Hutcheson. As other women became interested and joined, the society grew. During all this time, this society has been active; and very few times, if at any time, has this society failed to pay its pledge. In 1910, while Mrs. J.W. Gholston was president, the Missionary Society sponsored a bazaar and realized $100.00, this money was used to put two handsome stained glass windows in the front of the new BRICK church.
In 1914 while the Rev. T.M. Sullivan was pastor, the present brick structure was built at the cost of $7000.00. Funds were raised by voluntary subscription. A small loan of $500.00 was secured from the Church Extension Board; this was afterwards repaid. Building material was furnished through Gholston Hardware, who in turn made it available to the church at cost, which was a great help. A dollar in those days went much further and bought more than a dollar today. It is almost impossible in these high priced times to think that a church, a brick structure, could be built for so small an amount. The cornerstone gives the names of the building committee. They are The Rev. T.M. Sullivan, Pastor; H.P. Sorrells, Chairman; W.E. Henslee, Treasurer; C.H. Barnes; J.B. McWhirter; T.C. Hutcheson; W.C. Birchmore Sr.; W.C. Sorrells; W.A. LaNoir; J.V. Stephens; H.T. Comer; S.J. Carmichael. Of these only two are living: the Rev. T.M. Sullivan, who is now the pastor of Mary Brannon Memorial in Sylvan Hills Atlanta; and Mr. H.E. Henslee who moved to Blue Ridge, Ga. a few years ago and was almost immediately elected Sunday School Superintendent there. He served in the same capacity here for many years before moving to North Georgia. Always regular in his attendance at Sunday School he has recently been awarded the honor badge of twenty eight years consecutively, a perfect attendance record.

The Matron's Sunday School Class, Mrs. Jim Comer teacher, raised most of money for new pews in the church. Mr. A.L. Comer's family gave the chairs that are on the pulpit (1949). The Birchmore family gave the first communion set used by this church. The silver collection plates were given by Mrs. Coles Gaithers in memory of her mother and father. The Rev. T.M. Sullivan was the first pastor in the new church. He came to Comer as a bachelor and married while he served this charge. His wife was the former Miss Eddie Rampley from Carnesville. He and Mr. S.J. Carmichael planted the trees that shade the parsonage. The parsonage was built on a portion of the church property. Mr. Townes Comer, Mr. Tom David, and Mr. J.B. McWhirter were largely responsible for its building.

The aisles of the church were carpeted with dark maroon carpets. This was done through the efforts of the Missionary Society. We know it today as the Woman's Society of Christian Service.

One stormy afternoon in 1947 our beautiful stained glass windows were blown out and crushed. After the disaster of losing these windows, a committee was appointed to replace them. Mrs. J.W. Gholston was chairman. For about eighteen months the committee kept the studio aware of our need. Only one artist in the southeast does this type of work. So while the front memorial windows were being made, other members of the committee became interested until all ten windows of the church were replaced with memorial at an approximate cost of $1500. The following are the donors of the windows: the Birchmore window by that family; the Barnes Family in memory of Mrs. C.H. Barnes; Mrs. S.J. Carmichael and daughters in memory of husband and father; the Townes Comer Family in memory of father, mother, and sister; the David Family in memory of father and mother; Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Gholston in memory of daughter Dorothy; Mr. J. Knox Gholston in appreciation of Mr. Vic. Stephens; the McWhirter Family in memory of father and mother; the D.W. Porterfield window by self and wife; Mrs. G.W. Whitehead in honor of the W.S.C.S.

Beginning under the pastorate of the Rev. L.G. Cowart and later under
the Rev. J.W. Eberhardt. The dream was realized. The windows were dedicated on May 29, 1949 with an appropriate service. Invitation were sent to all former pastors, members, and friends to join in a day of fellowship and service. Dinner was spread on long tables under the trees on the church grounds.

These walls resound to the echo of the saints but they are not so fervent as those of the mother church, the church that sent forth her sons and daughters into the harvest. We look to the East and to the West, to the North and to the South; in every direction we find those who have gone from the Comer Methodist Church. There is Ralph Porterfield, District Superintendent of the Americus District. Ralph grew up in Comer; he is the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Tom Porterfield and was a member of this church. Interested in music he went out as an evangelistic singer before he became a minister. Dr. Harry Comer, after special training, served as the Y.M.C.A director at Chapel Hill, N.C. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. H.T. Comer. Miss Mabel Hinslee, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W.E. Henslee, is an outstanding musician and a young woman of many talents, which she is using in her work as a director of young people. Her father's record is already mentioned in another part of this history. Mrs. Hugh L. Hopkins, née Fannie Ruth David, is the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Tom David; they have also been mentioned in the early church history. Fannie Ruth is now giving time and talent as organist of a large city church. The list could go on and on naming singers, musicians, Sunday School workers, etc. All turn to Comer Methodist Church where their faith is grounded fast in the heart of the mother church and whence they have gone to bear the Christian Banner of love and service high and unsullied.

The Rev. Pierce Harris was supply preacher in Comer in 1917. He said, "Music has power to stir the human soul and lift it on wings of song until man's heart beats in time with God's heart, heaven seems real and the brotherhood of man becomes something more than a far off dream."

We feel the true meaning of his words when Miss Lucille Sasser is at the console of the beautiful electric organ in our church. In 1945 the church members launched out with faith and loyalty to provide the church with more and greater music. Time marched on and so did the efforts of those who labored to get the organ. Through freewill offerings and memorial gifts the cost was met and installed for $2,211.60. The dedication of the organ was on July 28, 1946; the service was led by the pastor J.S. Hill.

Selected from the history compiled by Mrs. W. H. Strickland

History of the Parsonages of Comer United Methodist Church-- 1909-1970

At one time Comer Church was on the Danielsville Charge with other churches. About 1909 Comer withdrew from this circuit and joined Colbert Center, and Nicholson in forming the Comer Charge; it was at this time that the Comer parsonage was built on church property next to the existing church building. Mr. Jim Comer gave the lumber; the members gave their labor; other needs were supplied by at cost by Mr. Will Gholston and Mr. Knox Gholston. The total spent was about $1000.00. Mr. Tom David; Mr. Townes Comer, Mr. Jim Comer, Mr. Bezan McWhirter, Mr. "Toby" Sorrells,
were largely responsible for the building of the parsonage. Mr. Stoney Carmichael planted the trees and the beautiful rose garden was a project led by Mrs. Tom Neell. As best we can determine, it was completed in the fall of 1910 and occupied by the Rev. and Mrs. J.R. Jones and daughter. The following year a young batchelor Mr. T.M. Sullivan was assigned to Comer. Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Birchmore and son Henry Gerald moved into the parsonage to keep house for him. In 1914 he married and brought the first bride to the parsonage where they spent their honeymoon! According to Brother Sullivan they no money for such things then.

In 1917 another batchelor Pierce Harris was sent as a supply pastor and he used a different approach to parsonage living. He tells that he lived in one room until it got dirty and then moved into another until the whole house needed cleaning. At that point he called in some of the good ladies of the church for help with the chores. After Mr. Harris we find the parsonage filled with pastors and their families large and small.

In 1942 the parsonage was renovated and modernized and modernized again in 1951 with work being done in the kitchen. Through the years the original furniture had been refinished or replaced. In 1956 the termite problem hit with full force necessitating extensive repairs. The job took longer than expected; so an apartment in the new Federal Housing Project served as temporary parsonage for the Rev. Pleman Folds and his family.

In July of 1963 Comer Church became a station church. The parsonage was in bad need of repairs of all kinds. After much discussion and several Board meetings a committee was appointed to present the idea of building a new parsonage to the members. A lot was given to the church by Mrs. G.W. Whitehead; it was located three lots down from the church. When the figures and plans were presented, the congregation voted approval.

The dream was realized when the three bedroom home was completed. It contained 2300 square feet of space and was valued with the furnishings at $28,950.00. An open house was held on 12 December 1965. The Rev. Laverne Mobley, pastor of the church at that time and a man to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for his help and counsel. District Superintendent W.R. Ruff led the service of consecration. And now more than four years later we are to attend the service of dedication and the burning of the note, signifying the paying off of our $15,000.00 debt plus a little more than $1800 in interest. This occurs in a shorter time than originally planned--three years earlier in fact. The dollar-a-week club which was the biggest reason we were able to pay off the note as soon as we did, was the brain-child of Henry Snelling, Jr. He was the chairman of the board in 1965 and is now chairman of the Administrative Board.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the committee who chose the furnishings for the parsonage: Mrs. Will Gholston, Mrs. John Birchmore Sr., Mrs. C.L. Adair, Mrs. D.W. Porterfield. This same committee was called to action again last week when new furniture was purchased for the family room. The total was $441.00 of which $400 was given by Mrs. Joe Whitehead. The gift of a beautiful lamp by Miss Charlotte Birchmore was also deeply appreciated.

Another gift is that of additional acreage given by Mrs. Hiram Whitehead: this property lies at the back of the first lot. The entire lot is now 250 feet across the front, 250 feet deep, and narrowing to 230 feet at the back.
To quote our pastor the Rev. John Ozley "It is a time of real thanksgiving and praise to God for this privilege of dedication, and to those who have assisted in its realization."


Some Key Dates in Comer Church 1950-1969

About 1950 the need for more educational space became apparent. Through various money-raising projects, personal pledges, and gifts about $7000 was collected. This amount was matched by Mr. Knox Gholston. The Educational Annex was completed in 1954. The building contained three classrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and large fellowship hall. The Rev. H Harold Braswell was pastor during the building program.

In 1957 work was begun on remodeling the sanctuary using plans drawn by the Rev. Pleman Folds. Pews were removed, cleaned and lightened. The heart of pine floors were sanded and finished natural to match the new chancel woodwork. The walls were replastered and painted; new carpeting was laid; and a combination furnace and air conditioner was installed. The previous five lights were replaced with by eleven lights which gave adequate lighting for the sanctuary. New choir space was provided behind the center altar and there is now a divided chancel. The total cost was close to $15,000.

In the last 15 years several tokens of love and appreciation have been given to the church to honor members who have given years of service to the church or in memory of loved ones. Among these are outdoor chimes, organ chimes, a piano, a completely equipped study for the pastor, and two sets of altar brass. Recent renovations include carpeting in the Sunday School rooms and hallways, paneling in two of the rooms, carpeting in the choir, and some painting.

Presented by Mrs. W.C. Strickland at Homecoming on 27 April 1969

A copy of the old remodeling of the chancel follows this page.

More Dates in the Life of Comer Church 1969-1983

The roof in the sanctuary leaked and leaked. Regardless of the work done to it the roof leaked. Finally a drastic remodeling project was undertaken. In spite of the many changes to the church the exterior had remained the same since its construction. But 1976 saw many changes. First the roof was change to a gable and the rain began to remain outside. Then a steeple was added with a carillon to remind the community that God is present and has a claim on their lives. A ramp has been installed to help open up the church to all persons. Air conditioning and central heat was
installed in the annex. In the events leading up to the new central system one stands permanently etched. One of the nursery workers came running up stairs and hurriedly got her father. Next several other men also left. The service went on the minister not knowing what in the world was happening. A few minutes later the men began to return. Gradually the story came out that a child had dropped a crayon into one of the space heaters. The smoke convinced the workers that the room was on fire. Fortunately no serious damage was done. But the work began to replace the old space heaters with something safer. In 1982 we celebrated our centennial. We had now served God and his church for one hundred years. In the next account we have some more reflections on the church.

D. Alan Smith

The bricks of this church, so skillfully placed, inset with jeweled windows that the sun shines through so beautifully today, the rich woods so artfully shaped-- this is a visible gift of love to us from its founders whose dreams and prayers we share in love this day, approximately one hundred years later. We hold in sacred trust the treasure given by those who served God in this place and in the other buildings of worship from 1881 to 1914.

But I know you all realize that there's more to the history of any church than mere facts. A church can have an intangible history; one that exists in the hearts and minds of its members: some sad, most of them happy memories-- baptisms, weddings homecomings, funerals, the programs with children, fund raising suppers, installation of new officers. For instance I remember one year when the pastor gave out slips of paper during the week to members of the W.S.C.S. who were to be installed in the Sunday service. Each had a paper with an answer to the pastor's question, "What is in thine hand?" All went to the chancel rail, holding up symbols of the different offices and answering the question until the pastor came to the Secretary of Children's Work. Her answer to the question, "What is in thine hand?", came loud and clear. "Tain't nothing, preacher, I left it at home on the kitchen table!" That was "Miss Willie" Porterfield who has been a working member of this church for almost 60 years.

You all remember what the R's stood for-- Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmatic. Let our criteria for the rest of today be our own three R's -- Remembering, Rejoicing, and Recommitting ourselves so that we can make what happened here 100 years ago come alive so that we can come alive again in gratitude for the labors of all who have loved and served this church. May the work that we do be a source of strength and grace to another generation and we hold in loving remembrance those who finished their course and be grateful for the heritage that inspires us to continue God's work in the Comer United Methodist Church.

Presented by Mrs. W.C. Strickland at the 11:0'clock worship service on 17 May 1981 in celebration of Centennial Sunday

Now another page is being written at Comer Church. This day we come to remember and dedicate these memorials and chancel to the glory of God. May he continue to bless us as he so richly blessed us in our past.
Following this page are a list of memorials dedicated, a list of pastors, two letters regarding early life in Comer, and a copy of the first page in the original church register.

D. Alan Smith
Dedication Sunday the Third
Sunday After Pentecost 1983
List of Memorials
1976-1983

Undesignated Gifts

Mr. Clifford Lanier
Mrs. Alice Comer LeNoir
Mrs. George W. Whitehead
Dr. Floyd Harper
Mr. Henry B. Snelling
Mr. and Mrs. John Birchmore Sr.
Mrs. Betty David
Mrs. Ida Strickland
Mr. Willis C. Birchmore Sr.
Mrs. Mattie Belle Gholston
Mr. Felton McConnell
Mrs. Ida B. Sanders
Mrs. Jessie Smith
Mr. Norman Snelling
Mrs. Jessie Scarborough
Mr. Comer Latimer
Mr. Wade Grant Jr.
Mrs. Roy Jordan
Mrs. Mary Ettie Huff
Mr. Roscoe Pyron
Mr. Paul David
Mr. Alex Latimer
Mrs. Frankie Fleming

Gifts Directed Toward Building Fund

Mr. Elmer McConnell
Mr. Alex Burousas
Mrs. Wade Grant Jr.
Mr. John Birchmore

Paraments in Memory of Johnny Birchmore

Altar in Memory of Mr. and Mrs. John Birchmore

Pulpit in Memory of Henry B. Snelling Jr.

Offering Plates in Memory of Elmer McConnell

Song Books in Memory of Mary Ettie Huff

Choir Chairs in Memory of Mr. and Mrs. John Birchmore

Choir Robes in Memory of Johnny Birchmore

Permanent Flower Arrangement and Urn in Memory of Charles Strickland
List of Pastors

Eli Smith 1881
O.B. Quillian 1882
Frank Rutherford 1883-1884
T.J. Edwards 1885-1886
L.P. Winter 1887
J.M. Sewell 1888
J.N. Wall 1889
W.E. McBrayer 1890
J.M. Sewell 1894 (?)
L.D. Coggins 1895-1897
F.R. Smith 1898-1899
J.F. Bailis 1900
H.F. Branham 1901
Frank Quillian 1901
E.W. Jones 1902-1904
Zedikiah Speer 1905
A.F. Nunn 1906-1907
H.L. Embry 1908-
G.W. Tumlin 1909-1910
John R. Jones 1911
T.M. Sullivan 1912-1914
T.H. Maxwell 1915
Sam L. Hagan 1916
Pierce Harris 1917
W.D. Spence 1918
B.L. Betts 1919-1920
W.H. Speer 1921
Marshall Patillo 1922
W.A. Wells 1923
O.B. Tally 1924
F.E. Crutcher 1925-1926
W.L. Jolly 1927-1928
J.A. Griffes 1929-1931
R.W. Allison 1932-1935
Y.A. Bailey 1936-1938
A.D. Whittemore 1939
H.L. Hendrix 1940-1941
H.G. Walker 1942-1944
J.S. Hill 1945-1946
L.G. Cowart 1947-1948
J.W. Eberhardt 1949-1952
Harold Braswell 1953-1955
E.M. Nelson 1956
Pleeman Folds 1957-1958
E.D. Carlock 1959-1960
J. Leroy Smith 1961-1964
C. Lavern Mobley 1965-1967
Wesley Thomas 1968
John Ozley 1969
Oscar Crosby 1970-1971
Ben Sorrow 1972
Rance Welborn 1973-1974
Jamie E. Jenkins 1975-1979
D. Alan Smith 1979-1983

This year conference was changed to June
May 19, 1951

Mrs. Howard Strickland
Comer, Georgia

Dear Mrs. Strickland:

How about a game of tennis this morning? Well I am sure that I could not do much on the tennis court. Do not know how well you have fared over the years, but I rather suspect that neither you nor Howard could get about as spryly as you once did in the yesterdays.

Now in regard to the questions or the information desired, I fear that I will not be able to help you too much. I was assigned to Comer in the fall of 1911, and when I got there in December the parsonage was new. It had been built in the first part of 1911 or perhaps the last of 1910, but the pastor who served just before I went there had lived in Danielsville, his name was Rev. J.R. Jones. Now I do not know who was on the building committee, but the Quarterly Conference record of either the later part of 1910 or the first of 1911 should give you this information and I am sure that these records have been preserved.

I called Mr. K.W. Carrington, who was my neighbor, when I first went to Comer and he is of the same opinion that I am that the parsonage was built on the church property. The garden was new, the well was new and no house had ever existed on the present site of the parsonage. I am sure that the church had owned the land from the beginning of the church. However, the deeds of the parsonage should make this clear. I imagine that the parsonage cost around $1000.00 when built. Much of the labor was done by members of the church, everything was cheap then. It is almost impossible in these high price times to think that a house could be built for so small amount, but you know the church was built for between six and seven thousand dollars. I secured most of the subscriptions for building the church single-handed. We had a very large committee as you know from the corner stone, but only a few were active. However, no contractor offered to build for less than around ten thousand ($10000.00) We contracted in sections. One group had the stone and brick work, another the plastering etc. With voluntary labor we did the excavating and a lot of other work.

Mrs. Sullivan was Eddie Rampley of Carnesville, Ga. We were married in 1914, April fifteenth. We came directly from Carnesville with Will Sorrells and Uncle Stony Carmichael in Will Sorrell's car. We spent our honeymoon in the parsonage, no money for trips and tours in that day for a young Methodist preacher. We were in our thirty-seventh year of married life when Mrs. Sullivan slip away. She was an excellent preacher's wife, made many friends wherever we served. In the last years of our married life she had visited with me a great deal and now I miss her so much. We have two sons and they are both good boys and getting along very well. The older, Edwin, has two children, the younger one, Marvin, has no children.

I am sorry that I can not give you more definite information. Use any of the information as you please.

With best wishes and highest personal regards I am very sincerely T.M. Sullivan.
HARRY F. COMER
POST OFFICE BOX 175
ABINGDON, VIRGINIA
March 25, 1949

Dear Mary:

I have your letter about the Church over the past. All that I can tell about South River Methodist Church, and then the frame building that stood on the site of the present church will be largely speculation, but I do remember both distinctly. Father Ben or Joe should remember more about South River than I because they were older than I, and all of us went there with Papa and Mama every fourth Sunday and the Saturday preceding. Look Comer should also tell you about it.

South River was on the Danielsville charge, along with Wesley Chapel, Jones' Chapel and another church up near Ille. It was named South River to distinguish it from the North River community area. South River church stood on the Danielsville road just above the Sue Russell place and about fifty yards this side of where the old Colbert road turned to the left off the Danielsville road. It was a little frame building, very comfortable, that would seat about 75 or at 100 people. Its membership consisted mainly of the Comer families, old Asbury Carouth's and a few other country people. Its membership I think would not have been over 50. When built there were not many people South of it. This was before "Comer" was named. The village's former name was "Honey Land", which centered round Old Wolf's store that stood just about across the road from the present Roper house. The Post Office was in Wolf's store, and a blacksmith shop stood near by. The Seaboard Railroad came through about 1909 and when they finished building the station, named it "Comer" for Papa and Uncle Fulch who did so much to help the RR get the right-of-way through the country. Kinch Wrickland and a few others tried to keep the road from coming through. Then the little town started growing after the RR came in, and built up round the depot, and soon had a bigger population further to the South. So, they need both a bigger church and one nearer by. Papa and uncle Fulch put up most of the money for the big frame church on the present site, and papa did most of the building. Uncle Jim helped on it too, of course other members gave to it. Uncle Jim had not then moved to Comer but was interested and also thinking that he would move there. I remember well when it was built. It stood for years, and finally became not too safe, as some of the windstorms were causing it to lean a bit, so then you can remember when they tore it down and built the present brick church.

I was too small to remember who the preachers were at the South River church, but if some one will look back into the Conference minutes round that date you will find it. Or, I think the records of the church at Danielsville will give it. I don't know who built South River, but it was not a NEW house in 1890, but I expect the Methodists built it.