"For an early history of the Church, we are indebted to the labors of our fellow-member of many years, the late lamented J. Howell Green. No man in the Church in past or present years has ever contributed more to the furtherance of the growth and development of our Church than Brother Green. As Chairman of the Board of Stewards and Trustees, as Sunday School Superintendent, and as a leader he exemplified the highest ideals of a layman. In 1920, he wrote a short history of our Church and we incorporate it herein as the most authentic data obtainable on the early days:

Unfortunately the records of the Church have been kept for only a few years back, and this history must be gathered largely from external sources, and, therefore, will be very incomplete, for my investigation convinces me that the Church has a rich history that has not been recorded. Perhaps it will be well to state in the beginning that much of the date upon which this history is based is gathered from Acts of the General Assembly of Georgia, and from a series of letters written in 1879 by Mr. Levi Willard, who came to Decatur in 1826, which were published in the local paper, and which I have had access to by the courtesy of the widow of the late Mr. Hiram J. Williams, who preserved these letters in a very interesting scrap book kept by him through many years.

I have not been able to determine the exact date of the organization of the Church, but we may safely conclude that it was during the period covered by the years 1823 to 1826, for we know that DeKalb County was organized in 1822 (see Acts of Legislature, 1822, page 21) and that the Legislature on December 10, 1823, located the County site in Land Lot 246 of the Fifteenth District and incorporated it as the town of Decatur, (see Acts of Legislature, 1823, page 169), the Inferior Court of the County having previously to it, July 28, 1823, selected this land lot for, and declared it to be the County site, named the town organized "Decatur," and ordered that all public business in and for the County should be held and done in said town, from and after the first Tuesday in September 1823, (see 1st Book minute Inferior Court, DeKalb County, page 3). Mr. Willard tells us that the Methodists had erected a Church building in 1826 on the same lot upon which the present Church building stands, on Sycamore Street. We, therefore, know that the Church was organized between 1823 and 1826. The erection of this house of worship is also referred to in an interesting preamble to an Act of the Legislature passed in 1832 (See acts, 1832, page 37), which runs as follows:

"Whereas, the Inferior Court of DeKalb County, did on the first organization of the County, offer to the several religious societies each, a town lot on which to erect Churches for their accommodation; and, whereas, the Methodist Society did comply with said condition and erect a Church," and the Act then proceeds to authorize the Judges of the Inferior Court to donate to the Baptist and Presbyterian Societies, each a lot, on condition that each erect a house for public worship. We thus know that the Methodists were to first to erect a house of worship, though I have not been able to determine which was the first Church organized, for Mr. Willard tells us that the Presbyterian Church was organized some time before it erected a house of worship."
The foregoing preamble also makes it clear that the title to our Church lot, (which includes the parsonage on Ponce de Leon Avenue, formerly Broad Street, and still earlier Rockbridge Road, the same having been erected on the rear of the Church lot, which formerly ran from Sycamore Street to Ponce de Leon Avenue), was derived direct from the State of Georgia, as the Judges of the Inferior Court, who donated the lot, held title to it for the State and made the donation by authority of the State.

It is fortunate that the title to our Church and parsonage lot is confirmed by the foregoing preamble, for we have no deed to the lot. Doubtless the Judges of the Inferior Court executed a deed to the lot to the Trustees of the Church as soon as the condition of the gift, to-wit, the erection of a house of worship, was complied with, and the same was no doubt recorded, but the record was destroyed when the Court House of the County was burned in 1842.

There is a tradition, which I remember hearing when I first came to Decatur, that the deed was in the custody of a member of the Church by the name of Diamond, who moved to Texas, and probably carried the deed with him. The writer has made diligent search of the County Records, and no such deed can be found of record, nor would we expect to find it as the record in which it should be contained was destroyed by the fire in 1842.

While the Church was organized some time prior to, or at least not later than 1826, it was not incorporated until 1830, when a Charter was granted by the Legislature (see Acts 1830, page 69). The Act is short and is given in full, as follows:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, in General Assembly met, and it is hereby enacted by authority of the same, that from and after the passage of this Act, the Methodist Church in Decatur, DeKalb County, shall be known and called by the name of Decatur Methodist Episcopal Church, and that Jeptha V. George, Jesse P. Jones, Robert Ward, Larkin Carlton, and Drury Fowler, and their successors in office, be, and they are hereby declared to be, a body politic and corporate by the name and style of the Trustee of Decatur Methodist Episcopal Church, plead and be impleaded, and shall be authorized to make such by-laws and regulations as shall be necessary for the Government of said Church; Provided, by-laws are not repugnant to the Constitution and laws of this State, and for the purposes aforesaid may have and use a common seal, appoint such officers as they may think proper, and remove the same from office for improper conduct or neglect of duty."

"Sec. 2. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that said Trustees shall be capable of accepting, and being invested with all manner of property both real and personal, all donations, gifts, grants, privileges and immunities, which may now belong to said Church or which may hereafter be conveyed or transferred to them or their successors in office, to have and to hold the same for the proper use, benefit and behoof of said Church."
"Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, that when any vacancy shall happen in said board by death, resignation or otherwise, the survivors or a majority of them, shall fill the same in such manner as shall be pointed out by the by-laws and regulations of the Trustees aforesaid."

I have been unable to learn anything of the personal history of the five men named as Trustees in the foregoing Charter, except Jeptha V. George. Mr. Willard preached and exhorted occasionally. On one occasion when speaking in the Methodist Church, in making a gesture, he knocked over the only candle that was in the house, leaving the audience in darkness till some one could go to a neighboring house and light the candle. Mr. Willard was evidently present, judging from the following language quoted: He said while we were in darkness: "It will be well, friends, if we never find ourselves in a darker place than this." When light was restored, he proceeded with his discourse."

In 188..., several members of the Church, evidently not knowing that the Church had been incorporated by the Legislature, undertook to incorporate the Church again under the provisions of a General Statute.

An incident not directly connected with this Church, but worthy of mention as showing the difficulties to be contended with and obstacles to be overcome by Methodist ministers of the early Church, is related by Mr. Willard. He does not undertake to fix the exact time, but as near as he could judge the time, the Methodist Episcopal General Conference met in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1829. I give the incident in his own language, as follows:

"One morning two delegates - Rev. S. K. Hodges, and I think the other was Dr. Lovick Pierce - drove up in their sulkies, and called at my store in Decatur. I had a partial acquaintance with Mr. Hodges, and I had heard Dr. Pierce preach in Eatonton. They had to ride nearly six-hundred miles in their sulkies, and one-hundred fifty miles of the way through the Cherokee Nation.

Mr. Hodges had the blues - was somewhat nervous and depressed at the thought of so lonely a journey.

I think their intention was to return through Virginia and North Carolina. I suppose they made the trip in safety, as their names were reported after their return."

Quoted from The History of the First Methodist Church, Decatur, Georgia, by J. Howell Green, written in 1920.