A HISTORY OF
EPWORTH METHODIST CHURCH
EPWORTH, GEORGIA

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In writing this brief history of the Epworth Methodist Church we should begin with Indian times for a background.

Most of the mountains and streams of North Georgia were given Indian names by the Cherokees who were the first settlers from time immemorial. They were moved west by the government in 1838; however, some had hidden in the mountains until a later date as several of the older people remembered them well. They were quite friendly and traded with the white settlers. My grandmother, Mrs. Amanda Waters, told us how Indians came to her Father's mill and traded baskets for corn. They also exchanged moccasins and dried deer hams for clothing.

The swift-flowing stream, a mile away, was called Fightingtown Creek so the little village of Epworth was first known as Fightingtown. It is located in North Georgia, Fannin County, about three miles from Copper Hill, Tennessee, and ten miles from the county seat, Blue Ridge, Georgia.

It is a beautiful location, with a grove of lovely old oak and maple trees, also a big spring with an abundance of sparkling, cold water which furnishes the parsonage and the other building on the church property. It also supplies water for the Grammar School and High School buildings, situated on the hill where Epworth Seminary once stood.

The school ball ground is the same, except it does not
extend as far as the one first used by the Indians, who were said to be splendid players.

The following account of the acquirement of property is given by Mrs. W. H. Patton.

"Soon after the war Mr. Harbert McCay deeded five acres of land, lot No. 105, to the church which was being started here at that time. This lot of five acres includes the Methodist Church, and lies mostly north and west of the church extending to the top of the hill in the cemetery. The first arbor stood about the dividing line of lots 105 and 106 and south of the church; the tents were erected around it. The arbor and tents were badly crowded. Because of this crowded condition, Col. Tom Trammell donated another five acres from lot 106 adjoining on the west, including the present site of the spring. The spring was formerly farther west on private property but during Camp Meeting days, providentially in a storm, it moved to the lot belonging to the church."

In Pre-Civil War Days as well as Post-Civil War Days camp meetings were held on the present church grounds. After the Indians were removed, white settlers began coming in to Fannin County which was named by Col. Elijah Chastain, an early settler and member of Congress, for Col. John Fannin, who had distinguished himself as a gallant soldier in the Mexican War.
The immigrants were mostly from North Carolina. They held their religious meetings in school houses, brush arbors, and homes. The Methodists soon decided that the old Indian ball ground was an ideal place for campmeeting. They began work building an arbor or tabernacle just across the road from the cemetery and there established Fightingtown Camp Ground, known far and wide as a spiritual center.

These meetings were held annually from about 1845 until 1896, except a few years preceding 1875 when the camp was reorganized. There were about thirty tents or cabins on the ground. Many camped in covered wagons. The trumpet called the people to worship at 8:00, 11:00, 3:00 and at night. It also sounded at 6:00 a.m. for prayers in the tents.

At night the campground was very beautiful. Wagon loads of rich pine knots were hauled to the grounds. Log heaps, covered with dirt, were made and the pine knots placed on these. When they were lighted it was almost as bright as day. Tallow candles were used to give light under the arbor.

Some of the tent holders were John Henry Dunn, Charles, John, and David Waters, Tom Wilson, Frazier Galloway, David Ash, Cyrus Cook, Joe Rutledge, Neut Stepp, Jim McCoy, Johnny Beaver and Thomas Millsaps.

In describing some of these meetings before the war Miss Lura Goss is responsible for the following, "One among the fore-
most of the tent holders was John H. Dunn who lived across in Tennessee. His house, the only one near, stood about where the Copper Hill Methodist Church now stands. He owned the farm up and down the river. He was a devout Christian and a loyal Methodist."

This comes from the pen of Dr. R. H. Robb. "In the great revivals that occurred there were many souls saved and many preachers refer to it as the place of their spiritual birth but after many gracious meetings the wave that struck so many campmeetings and swept them from the field, struck hard here and this famous campmeeting was swept away. Only one in ten is left in the Georgia Conference after fifty years."

The following account is also by Dr. Robb. "Rev. A. Haren was the key man in the new order of things on Fightingtown after the Civil War. He lived on his farm west of the Ellijay and Ducktown road, what is now the Mrs. King farm. His dwelling stood near the old M. C. King house. The Flint-Hill School House stood on a knoll farther removed from the road and near the preacher's residence. The place is now a part of Dr. Gilliam's orchard.

By the preacher of '65 is meant the Rev. Alexander Haren who organized at Flint-Hill school house in what is now Epworth Community, the first Methodist Episcopal Church of the reorganization in Georgia on June 25, 1865.
Rev. Haren was born and raised near Asheville, North Carolina. When a boy on his way to campmeeting, apparently by himself, he felt himself to be a lost sinner and went aside from the road to pray. After a season of prayer he felt the burden of sin removed and went on his way to campmeeting rejoicing. He felt called to preach and joined the Holston Conference that then had circuits not only in East Tennessee, but also in North Carolina, Virginia and Georgia. He traveled in all these states.

The war ended and he was anxious to see the organization spread into Georgia. To this end he had an appointment to preach in the local school house at Flint-Hill on June 25, 1865. Then and there he organized the first church of the reorganization in Georgia."

The following were among those who united with the church:
The preacher's family, Mrs. Margaret Cochran, mother of Rev. F. L. Cochran, his brothers and sisters, Charles Waters and wife, Amanda Waters, Elizabeth Pierce, David Waters and wife, and probably some children.

Later Bro. Haren sold out and settled in Hemptown. He lived to a good old age, died in great peace and was buried in the cemetery at Bethel Church.

Since the Epworth Methodist Church and Epworth Seminary were so closely connected, it seems appropriate to consider
something about the Seminary. Perhaps more than to anyone else, the church and community were indebted to Rev. R. H. Robb, D. D., for the seminary. He worked, prayed, sacrificed and encouraged the people who rallied to him in the great effort.

Very close to him in labor and sacrifice was Rev. F. L. Cochran, who, as a boy, was converted on the campground and called to preach. He was a life long member of the Georgia Conference after 1886, when he joined. He was president of the board of trustees of the seminary for years. He also served as Fannin County School Superintendent for two terms. A more loyal man to his church never lived. He was faithful and conscientious in his service to the Master. On December 10, 1947, in his 84th year he passed away to the Heaven he enjoyed talking about.

With a donation of $2,000 from our Southern Educational Society our people pledged an equal sum but paid $5,000.

From about 1877 to 1897 school was taught in the old M. E. Church on Fightingtown Camp Ground.

In the year 1897, the Rev. J. H. Dunn being pastor, and Dr. R. H. Robb presiding elder of the Blue Ridge district, a movement was begun to build a Seminary. Rev. Dunn had lived near Attalla, Alabama, and so named the post office of which he had charge, Attalla.
There was some discontent about the name because mail would often be missent to Attalla, Alabama. A meeting was called to change the name of the post office. Dr. Robb had in mind Rugby, after Arnold Rugby. When arrived Rev. S. D. Tuttle had already suggested Epworth which met the approval of all.

The Seminary was erected by the local community adjoining the old M. E. Church and was known as the Attalla High School. The building was the present Methodist Church. It was put on Church property with little thought about it. There was some dissatisfaction so a deal was made, the old church, just across the road from Vestal’s store, being used for a dormitory, and the church trustees paying some for this building. Before the close of 1904 we collected our books and made a triumphant march to Epworth Seminary on the hill.

The Rev. F.L. Cochran was the first principal from 1898 to 1899. Other principals, after moving to the new building, were Rev. W. D. Stephenson, Rev. C. M. Rogers, Rev. M. R. Eastlack, Dr. R. H. Robb, Miss Dora Willingham, Rev. L. A. Wilsey, Rev. W. A. Parsons and Prof. W. H. Patton who was principal for several years. With few exceptions the pastor of the church was principal of the school.

Many young people were better prepared for life because of Epworth Seminary. We have teachers, business men, and ministers who received most of their education in the Seminary.
The following are students who entered the ministry: Arthur and Bishop Chastain, Mr. and Mrs. Moses Goss, Willard and Harold Cochran, A. F. Ledford and William Allen, who is of the Missouri Conference, and also William S. Hamilton, now of the Ohio Conference.

The following was written by Mrs. Ella Ray for one of the church anniversaries. "Our Sainted Principals—Rev. S. D. Tuttle was born at Erie, Pennsylvania, and as a young man was an employee of the railroad. He was a very efficient worker. His father was a soldier in the Civil War and fought in the battle of Kennesaw Mountain near Atlanta. He was wounded but not fatally.

His son decided he would like to visit the battle ground where his father had braved the battle, and also other points in the South. So he gave up his position with the railroad. He also wanted to equip himself for the ministry and learning of the Theological School at Chattanooga, he entered school there.

It was very common for the people of Chattanooga to have summer homes, so when Dr. Newcomb found S. D. Tuttle he gave him the use of his summer home.

One of Tuttle's chief enjoyments was riding his wheel. He was very courageous and would stand for no injustice. Once while out riding he passed a man and wife quarreling. Jumping from his wheel he gave the man a good thrashing."
Sometime later Dr. R. H. Robb met Brother Tuttle, approved of him and made a way for him in our church and school at Epworth, then known as Attalla. He served as pastor and Principal from 1899 until 1901.

Brother Tuttle was a small man with black hair and dark eyes. He was very spiritual, had good revivals, also did faithful school work. He had occasional hemorrhages from the lungs and hoped to improve in health while here. He moved near Chattanooga where his two children, Bessie and Otis went to the University. His health grew worse and a hemorrhage ended his life.

He and his good wife were very strict in teaching small children the ways of honor, truth and unselfishness. They were very kind and always did the best they could for those in distress. Once when one of his fellow-workers and family were stricken with fever, Brother Tuttle and wife carried their infant son to their home, keeping him and caring for him seven weeks, until his mother was able to care for him again.

Wellwood Dewitt Thompson was born in Canada May 14, 1875. In July 1900 he came to Epworth. In December 1900 he was admitted to the Georgia Conference and appointed to Tallapoosa. He was united in marriage to Miss Ethel Bernard of Tallapoosa, Georgia. In 1903 he was elected principal of Epworth Seminary. He had just begun preparing to move to Epworth when taken with
typhoid fever; in four weeks he was called from the home of his wife's parents at Tallapoosa, to his reward in Heaven. In his last conscious moments he sang, "Nearer My God to Thee" and "Jesus, Lover of My Soul".

Prof. Thompson was a robust man with keen, black eyes and a very cheerful disposition. He was a veteran of the Spanish-American War.

John L. Anderson was born in Overton County, Tennessee, May 25, 1879. In 1902 he was received on trial in the Georgia Conference and was appointed to the Epworth Charge. In his kindness he won his church people to him, and in his efforts for a revival at Epworth he met with great success having about eighty conversions, but whatever his success he never forgot to give God the honor.

In 1903 he was elected as principal of Epworth Seminary and soon married Miss Della Brown. In a short time he asked to be released from the school as he wished to devote his whole time to the ministry. So being released he was sent to the Ellijay Charge, but was later persuaded to teach on Cartecay for a short time until a teacher could be secured. But alas, on February 20, 1904, when on his way to school, he rode his horse into Owltown Creek which was swollen by recent rains, and was drowned. His body was found sixty nine days later and laid to rest with gentle hands and many sad hearts in the Jarret Graveyard.
Prof. Anderson was a rather spare built man tall with dark hair and blue eyes. He was a hard worker and a friend to all. He was always found ready and alert to be on his duty for the Master in whom he fully trusted.

Rev. W. D. Stephenson was pastor of our church and principal of the school two years. He was a good man and one we respected very highly. He was a small built man with high cheek bones, blue eyes and sandy mustache with side burns. A very industrious man, he believed in doing things as they should be done. We are glad to have the memory of Prof. Stephenson and the many good things he taught while among us, to remain with us through life. He was a splendid disciplinarian and usually closed his sermons with a thrilling talk on Heaven where his happy soul soon found rest.

Prof. C. E. Atkinson came to Epworth in September, 1920, and served two years. He was a man of high ideals and lived the straight, honest life. He lived a sacrificing life that he might help some worthy boy or girl to a better education. He bought the Quintrell house and presented it to the Seminary to be known as the Atkinson Home for the president. He loved the children and young people of the Blue Ridge mountains and was always ready to make any sacrifice to help them to better ideals for life's work. He died at the Methodist Hospital, Indianapolis, Indiana, August 3, 1928, and was buried at Fairmount, Indiana, with impressive services."
According to the information available, it seems there had been a Sunday School as long as the church has been established. Some of the superintendents were Rev. John H. Dunn, J. T. McCoy, J. M. Waters, and M. C. Goss. Some more recent ones are H. C. Burgess, Broughton Stillwell, Theodore Holt and the present one, W. H. Patton.

It is not certain just when the women's work was organized but years ago the Ladies' Aid was active which became W.S.C.S. in 1940 with Mrs. H. C. Burgess as president. Some of the Charter members were Mrs. Adrian Warwick, Mrs. Naomi Fletcher, Mrs. Dwight Waters, Mrs. Bass Haren and Mrs. H. C. Burgess. At the present there are thirty members with Mrs. Earl Arp as president.

The Women's Society of Christian Service has been a great help to the local church financially, as well as in other ways. During the years 1948, 1949, 1950, the W. S. C. S. raised the amount of $1065.42, which was used for church improvements and other financial obligations.

As a rule our pastors have been very splendid, consecrated men of God.

We have had very gracious and fruitful revivals, sometimes as many as eighty conversions in one series of meetings.

Some of the evangelists were Bros. Zepp, Fatten, Owen, Shadden, Gentry, Brashear, Sphere and Hampton.

The membership of the Epworth Methodist Church as present is around 150, not so large as in Seminary days. However, it seems that there are brighter days ahead for the church under the leadership of our faithful young pastor, Rev. C. C. Hendrix.

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