The Bi-centennial Edition of the History of Hephzibah United Methodist Church states that the Sunday School was organized in 1885 and lists as early superintendents A. R. Napier, Walter A. Clark (author of A Lost Arcadia) and Rev. W. I. Delph (a lay pastor who gave outstanding service to the church around the turn of the century). It is from this date that the Church School became permanently established, and so it rightly marks the origin of our present Church School of the Hephzibah United Methodist Church. However, the minutes of the Quarterly Conferences of the old Richmond Circuit record several earlier attempts to establish “Sabbath Schools” in the area, though apparently they were short-lived. In June of 1857 the pastor reported that the school at Brothersville had 15 scholars and 5 teachers, and in August of that year there were 15 scholars and 3 teachers. While this school may have continued for several years, it evidently did not survive the years of the Civil War. In 1869 apparently another attempt was made, but the reports of the pastor, J. M. Armstrong, were not encouraging. In May, 1869 he reported: “Brothersville Church has a small school of about twenty pupils and while we entertain hopes of its usefulness, we feel that it may be improved. There is great indifference in many places respecting this important field of operation.” The minutes for September state: “Brothersville School has 1 Supt., 3 teachers, 15 pupils and is not very prosperous.” Since this school is not included in the list of those in operation in 1870, it clearly did not survive the winter.

Apparently a third attempt was made in the 1870’s since the minutes for August, 1874, report “one Sunday School at each church, and six besides.” However, in January, 1878, R. A. Seale, the pastor, reported: “We hope to see the school at Brothersville reorganized at an early day.” In November that same year he reported 20 scholars on roll, 2 officers and teachers, and an average attendance of 10. Perhaps it was to strengthen this struggling school that on October 7, 1878, a Sunday School Convention was held at Brothersville Church, but in spite of the effort it had ceased to function by the following year.

Although the minutes for March 24, 1887, report that there was school at Brothersville, at the next meeting of the Conference on June 30th C.S. Owens, the pastor, reported: “The S. School at Brothersville is doing perhaps the best work of any on the circuit.” Thus we can date the founding of the Hephzibah United Methodist Church School to the spring of 1883.

Throughout much of the eighties the reports on the Brothersville Church School are favorable, but in August, 1888, Rev. A. T. Mann, pastor, reported: “We regret very much that at Brothersville we have not been able to keep up a Sunday School since the Superintendent left the community.” Apparently in the interim the children attended Sunday School at the Hephzibah Baptist Church, for the minutes for April 1889 report that while there was no school at Brothersville Church, “The children go to Hephzibah.” This, however, fortunately proved to be only temporary, since in 1890 the church too was moved to Hephzibah, Samuel R. Clark became the Superintendent, and evidently the Church School flourished and has continued to do so uninterrupted to the present day.

For brief periods in the nineteenth century members of the Brothersville Church conducted Sabbath Schools of their own at various locations in the community. In 1857 there were 2 teachers and 17 scholars at ”Bro. Malone’s School.” William T. Malone, for many years a trustee and steward of the Brothersville Church and evidently one of its spiritual pillars,
conducted for a short period a Sabbath School, probably at his home, which still stands in the large field at the junction of Miss and Peach Orchard Roads. From time to time members of the church also held Sunday School classes at Houghton's Chapel (or Horton's Chapel), probably located near the present junction of Windsor Spring and Willis Foreman Roads. The original inscription in the Church's pulpit Bible records that during 1852 the Brothersville congregation met there until the present building was completed in 1853.

The minutes also reveal some interesting facts about Sunday Schools in the 19th century. In the 1850's they were called "Sabbath Schools." In the 1860's and 1870's this term interchanges with "Sunday School" until this becomes the principal designation after the 1880's.

With few exceptions the Sunday Schools in rural circuits in the 19th Century suspended during the winter months. In the case of Brothersville, in the period before 1865 this in part reflects the nature of the community as primarily a summer home of well-to-do planters from Burke County. However, the pattern clearly continues throughout the rest of the century. The minutes often refer to the schools' being suspended for the winter because of the weather, and as late as 1880 the Brothersville Trustees report that the church building has no stove (though several others in the circuit did have them). One pastor recommended that the schools be conducted in homes during the winter months, but apparently even this suggestion did not help remedy the situation. Evidently the problem was as much rural transportation in the winter as it was unheated buildings.

The minutes report that the Sunday School at Brothersville was for Children. Adults participated as superintendents and teachers. There is no record of adult classes before the 20th century.

A number of references appear to the literature used in the schools, the scripture papers, "libraries and requisites." Both in 1857 and 1859 applications were made and funds were received from the Sabbath School Society of the Georgia Conference for the purchase of literature for newly-organized or struggling schools. In 1862 the pastor reported a need for "testaments and Scripture questions."

Over and over again the pastors appeal for superintendents and teachers and for the support and interest of the entire congregation in the Sunday School. Often they comment on the large number of children who would like to attend such schools if only dependable and consistent instruction could be provided. The Sunday School throughout its two hundred years has been primarily a lay movement within the church. Schools have flourished where one or two lay people have caught the vision of the need to educate children in the Christian faith and have dedicated themselves Sunday after Sunday, year in and year out, to this essential ministry of the church. Every year by far the largest number of new members in Methodist churches are those who have come through the ranks of the Church School. As one of Brothersville's pastors observed in 1863, the Church School has been the Nursery of the Church. We owe a great debt of gratitude to so many teachers and officers, both past and present. THANK YOU!! And a very special congratulations on your 200th Birthday!
The Sabbath School reports of Rev. John A. Reynolds, pastor in charge of the Richmond Circuit during the years 1866-1869, are little gems of 19th century rhetoric, and, perhaps even more than the invaluable statistics which the Quarterly Conference Minutes preserve, they give a firsthand impression of both the hopes entertained for the Sunday School movement and the problems besetting it in the period immediately following the Civil War and in the first years of the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

John A. Reynolds (September 24, 1827 - April 10, 1921) was 53 years old when he was appointed to serve the Richmond Circuit and had been a member of the Conference only seven years. A printer before entering the ministry, Mr. Reynolds had most recently been associated with the publication of the Temperance Crusader, and he was one of the pioneers of the prohibition movement in Georgia.

Rev. G. W. Duvall, who wrote the memoirs for Reynolds for the Journal of the North Georgia Annual Conference (1921, pp. 97-98), noted three characteristics of this man’s ministry, which also appear so clearly in those Sunday School reports: his unique literary style, his unswerving loyalty to Methodism, and his courageous attacks on what he considered the evils of the day. Often he was the one who “opened the fight and... he did not know how to retreat.”

A gifted preacher whose style differed from most, he “had his own way of thinking and expressing his thoughts to secure the attention of his congregation.” Departing from the homilies of conventions of the day, his sermons were original and “always interesting.” He thought for himself and expressed that thought in an “attractive way.”

“He was thoroughly orthodox, and did not have any patience with those whom he thought were not. His views were fixed and so clear to him that he would not understand how a Methodist could be honest and not be loyal to the doctrines of the Church.” This aspect of his personality comes out clearly in the attacks on Methodist participation in interdenominational schools.

Mr. Duvall grew up in the Bethesda (now Gracewood) Church and was a Sabbath School student there when Reynolds was pastor of the circuit. It was from that church that he joined the conference. Quite likely the “Sister Duball (Duvall), whom Reynolds commends for her work as co-superintendent of the Sunday School, was his mother.

August 4, 1866
The Sabbath School commends itself, as the natural adjunct of a preached word; and next to that, when conducted decently and in order by Christian men and women with Christian motives, it has been blessed as a means of grace. It therefore has legitimate and irresistible claim upon us.

Notwithstanding the truth of this assertion however and its general admission we have to deplore the great indifference of our more competent and influential brethren and sisters to the responsible and noble offices required by the school.

We are happy to report the continuation of the schools reported at our
last meeting with the exception of that at Pierce's Chapel.

It is a pleasure to mention the names of Bro. Burch and Sister Duval, joint superintendents at Bethesda S. School, who successfully and unflaggingly labored together.

Nor is our good brother Bartlett in Union less worthy of notice in the same capacity. Would to God some one equally competent and willing were at our School: then might we hope for better church music; doing away with the present necessity for instruments at least, if not choice.

Yea verily instead of the sickly and we may say ungodly strains bunged from the piano and thrummed from the guitar, their unsanctified strings might be an accompaniment to the praise of God as in the days of the Wesleys, when they set and sang and sang and rejoiced.

The Schools at Barton's Chapel and the Factory with Bro. Tabb at the first and Bro. Sessions at the latter as superintendents, are accomplishing some good though suffering from lack of books.

January 26, 1867

The Sabbath Schools on this circuit have generally suspended for the winter. An exception exists in the case of the school at Union under the Superintendence of Bro. Bartlett, whose persistence and success are deserving of praise. It would be difficult to report specialities even in this school as the winter months are proving unprecedentedly severe.

A partial exception is also due the school at Bethesda which has recently revived under the Superintendence of our worthy Bro. Burch and Sister Duval.

Our other schools only sleep; they are not dead. We rest in the hope that they will come forth at the earliest day, expanding as the impatient buds of winter into protecting foliage and inviting fruit.

May our schools only sleep; they are not dead. We rest in the hope that they will come forth at the earliest day, expanding as the impatient buds of winter into protecting foliage and inviting fruit.

August 2, 1867

We have eight schools of different degrees of activity. Considerable prosperity marks some of these, while others are of a more sober character and one or two neither hot nor cold. Unparallel and almost universal sickness accounts for our deficiencies in large measure; although the characteristics beginning in the spirit and ending in the flesh - abatement in zeal - is too prevalent. Upon the whole however the present year indicates a firmament in the Sabbath school cause within the bounds of the circuit. Instruction to children pastorally has not been altogether neglected tho' much more in this way might be done than is doing.

February 8, 1868

The number of S. Schools is the same as formerly reported; some in a flourishing condition, others living, while several have suspended until the return of mild weather.

It may be safely asserted that the S. School Interest has an abiding place in the hearts of our people, which like the bud, only requires genial rays to burst that it may bring forth the blossoms and the fruit. The Pastor in Charge avails himself of every suitable opportunity for recommending and visiting these Nurseries of the Church, as well as for sowing the good seed in the young and tender mind in a more tender way; although he is not insensible of his incompetency compared with others nor of the con-