1972. Griffin Duke

HISTORY
of
THOMASTON HIGHTOWER METHODIST CHURCH
The work of the committee in the preparation of this manuscript has been the collection of the data required for the formation of this history. The manual labor and the assembling of the facts into something that will in some measure resemble a historical paper have been the work of the Pastor, Ernest C. Swetnam.

The early history of the church is shrouded in mystery, and fraught with legend. As we studied the facts brought forward, it was sometimes quite a task to decide where actual historical data left off, and where the line should be drawn between fact and fiction. But the statements we have to offer, meager, though they may seem, are all of unquestioned truth as far as our records go, as are agreed upon by the older members of the church. The first pastor came in 1917.

Rev. J.R. Turner seems to have been the earliest resident pastor to begin an organized effort to lead the Methodists of East Thomaston, for that was the name under which the church labored until the arrival of Rev. B.L. Betts, in 1936, when the church agreed upon the present name. Brother Turner undertook the task of leading a very small but very loyal people. A careful examination of the original record shows about thirty-five men, women, and children to have been the nucleus with which he began his work. His two years added quite a goodly number, so that at the coming of J.E. Cline, the little colony had begun to be noted for the vigor of its endeavor. But the real activity began a year later, in 1920, with the coming of Rev. Claude Hendrick. This pastor was not only a vigorous worker, but also a man of real leadership. During his three years labor more than one hundred were added to the rolls of the church, the greater number by profession of faith. During the year 1922, under the pressure of Brother Hendrick's persuasion, the East Thomaston Cotton Mill Company began to take interest in the work of the resident ministers. A large building was erected for
purposes of worship by the different denominations. It was built on the plan of the ordinary camp meeting arbor and was called "The Tabernacle." It is still in use for meetings of various sorts. Its sides are enclosed and the Company has furnished large coal heaters, and the coal for the heating. The floor was covered with shavings, and there began, in the year 1923, under the leadership of Brother M.M. Walraven the organization that exists today. The two year pastorate of Brother Walraven was a time of great ingathering. It almost duplicated the figures of Brother Claude Hendrick. He was followed in 1925 by Rev. L.P. Huckaby. Although the church had a prosperous and fairly successful year under his administration, there is recorded no activity of church life worthy of note. He was followed in 1926 by Rev. Grover Knowles, whose pastorate was also only one year. In 1927 Rev. B.P. Read began a very outstanding three year pastorate. Space is lacking to relate all of the achievements of this period, but if we may judge by the number received during that period, Brother Read is another who passed the hundred mark in the number received, and the church records indicate a united, peaceful fellowship during his pastorate. John Tate arrived in 1930, for a one year pastorate, and accomplished as much in one year as most of the pastors had done in two, or some of them in three years. He, in turn, was followed in 1931 by Rev. William H. Gardner, concerning whose administration very little has been written by those keeping the records, but the words of the older men and women of the church indicate a very good year's work. Rev. G.H.C. Stone labored with this church for one year, and Rev. J.M. Tumlin supplied for the last three months of the year. In 1933 Rev. Maclowery Elrod began a three year pastorate from which the reverberations are still felt. He was both very popular and very successful, and the spiritual uplift of his endeavors are felt today. Brother Elrod was followed in 1936 by Rev. B.L. Betts, who did some rather spectacular work in the advancement of the church but only stayed one year. He was followed by Rev. J.A.
Langford in the fall of 1937 with a pastorate of three years. Following brother Langford, Brother Fred Ray, now deceased, began a four-year pastorate in 1940. An outstanding event in the administration of Brother Ray was the moving into the new church building. At that time the home-day was changed to June. Rev. V. L. Bray followed Brother Ray for a one-year pastorate. The writer has heard many people say that this year was outstanding in many respects. J. K. Kelley followed Brother Bray for two years, 1945-46. He in turn was followed by Brother Bray, who returned for a two-year stay. This pastorate of Brother Bray was hindered by a long siege of illness and hospitalization. In the Summer of 1948 Rev. H. G. Obryant was the pastor of Hightower Memorial for one year. The present Pastor following him found that he had done an outstanding bit of work in the revising of the records. In 1949 The present Pastor Rev. Ernest C. Swetnam became the pastor and is still on the job.

Timidity has caused the author to refrain from any mention of the work of this period.

Lack of space does not permit us to make much comment on the work of the Sunday School, or the Women's Missionary Society, as it was named up to the time of the union of the churches. However, both the roster of men who were Sunday School Superintendent, and the list of those who served as steward, together with the Young People's workers and the Women's Society of Christian Service would fill equally as large a volume as that which has been written. Doubtless, it is these rather than the pastors listed, that have been the factors in keeping the altar fires burning. Hightower Memorial is steadily marching forward. Her progress, at times, is hindered by the forces of evil that interfere with the endeavours of all consecrated Christian work, but so far there have always been those who were willing to stand the storm of the assaults of sin, and who will ever be in the forefront of the battle for Christ.
Throughout the entire life of this church, Hightower Memorial Methodist Church has the privilege of the fostering love of the Hightower family for whom it was named. At one time, in its early history, when there were indeed few upon whom the financial burden might rest, the Thomaston Cotton Mills, owned and operated by the Hightower family, even went so far as to subsidize entirely the salary of the Methodist pastors, and were always helpful to every minister of the village of East Thomaston. It was by their generosity and through their help in financing that we have the two churches to-day that stand facing each other upon the knoll. To them we gladly express our appreciation, and to their sincere generosity, and to them personally we dedicate this history of Hightower Memorial Methodist Church.