HISTORY
of
INDEPENDENCE Methodist CHURCH
Tignall, Ga.

H.B. Duling, Jr., Pastor

By

Mrs. Charles B. Wright, Chairman
Mrs. H.M. Wansley
Mrs. Jack Rhodes

1953
"I am the best friend of mankind.
"I live in the hopes of the young, and in the dreams of the old.
"In the minds of the greatest men on earth I find constant dwelling place.
"I safeguard men with a friendly hand.
"I am the essence of good fellowship, friendliness and love.
"I give gifts that gold cannot buy nor kings take away.
"I bring back the freshness of life; the spirit of youth.
"I meet you with outstretched arms and with songs of gladness.
"I am your comforter and your best friend.
"I am the CHURCH."
Foreword

Among all who think rightly, the CHURCH looms large in the list of indispensible things. The love, loyalty and faith that save mankind from destruction have come out of the places where hymns are chanted, prayers are said and sermons preached.

This was true with our forefathers when they came as hunters and traders to settle in Wilkes County. When homes were established there were soon those institutions which go with homes—the church and school.

Each of us needs in his heart's treasury the memories of some yesteryear to weave into the pattern of his present life. We have attempted to bring to you some of those memories.

It is with humility that we try to put into words the life of this church of Independence whose sacred walls hold so many memories.

It is with regret that we realize there is so much that could be written about the history of this church but there are so little of the actual facts available.

We are truly grateful for those people who have helped us by giving to us some of the things they remember or were told by another generation and we, in turn, pass them on to you.

Mrs. Charles B. Wright

Historian
The Methodist Church of Tignall, Georgia is situated in nearly the center of Wilkes County, ten miles from Washington, Georgia.

It was given the name INDEPENDENCE because it was an independent organization built for all denominations. The Methodist were the only denomination that organized a membership and they claimed the church. The matter was carried to the courts for adjudication. General Robert Toombs represented the Methodist and won the case.

The exact date or time that this church was organized is not known. Mrs. Rebecca Gore Wright remembers her mother attending the Centennial of Independence Church in 1883. She was a girl of about twelve years when members of the Wright family went up to Chattooga County to visit and her mother returned to Wilkes County with them for the purpose of attending the Centennial. Her mother, Sarah Wooten Gore was the daughter of Thomas L. Wooten, who had given the land on which the church then stood, and Bathsheba N. Wooten, who had been a faithful member of Independence Church for forty years until she moved to Chattooga County in 1849 after the death of her husband.

We do not know how long the church was interdenominational but General Toombs was a lawyer from 1820, so the Methodist took over after that time. Those people who remember some of the tales handed down, say that the church and school were here when there was nothing in Tignall but three homesteads, the Ruling place, now the home of Mrs. A.S. Crook; the Poole place, now the site of the Jim Sayer home, and the Jordan place, now owned by William Sayer. The school was located near the spot Mr. Roderick Hinton now has a blacksmith shop and the church was nearby in a grove.

Camp Meetings came early to Georgia, usually one to a county. Eliza Bowen mentions in her "Story of Wilkes County" that the young people always enjoyed going to Independence Camp Meeting. These meetings were interdenominational at first. We do not know whether the church developed from these camp meetings or whether they were carried on by the church already organized. Great times are told of these camp meetings beneath the brush arbors, where friends old and young met and enjoyed the social part as well as the spiritual revival.

In 1840 Thomas L. Wooten deeded the lot on which the old church was located to the trustees of the church, namely, William L. Wooten, Jarvis Sale, and J.T. Wooten. This deed also gave rights to the spring which can still be found on the property owned by Mr. W. N. Adams. The deed was witnessed by G.H. Wooten and Samuel Wooten. Five different Wootens were mentioned in this instrument. The Wootens held official positions in this church for more than a century.
Independence Church was the only church in Tignall for some time. The Baptist Church was built in about 1898. The colored people were allowed to come to services at Independence and sit at the back.

An interesting story is told of a slave who was owned by a Mr. Smith. The slave for some reason was forced to wear a bell which was fastened to an iron collar about his neck and extended on a frame above his head so that he could not reach it. The bell rang at his every move and when out of sight he frequently sat down to rest, never forgetting to move his head so that the bell would ring and his master would think he was working. One morning his master and family left home to attend services at Independence Church. After they were out of sight, the slave decided to go to church, too. He followed at some distance and soon the quiet stillness of Independence was broken by the clang of the slave bell as he entered the church and meekly took a seat in the rear. The preacher stopped his sermon to ask if that were a slave wearing a bell. Thereupon Mr. Smith hastily rose from his seat, motioned to the slave to follow. He carried him home, got hammer and chisel and soon freed the slave from his bell.

Aunt Sarah Pope Norman, aged 107, and better known as Aunt Pope, who faithfully served three generations of the Moss family, says she remembers attending Independence when she was ten years old. She tells of how Mrs. Eliza Wooten, on seeing her at church barefooted, bought her a new pair of shoes and gave her a one horse wagon full of clothes which she had collected from the ten girls who were staying with her then. Aunt Pope remembers the many times she brought baskets of food she prepared in the Moss kitchen, to the “dinners on the ground” at Independence.

In 1870 or some say it was 1865, the old church building was sold to the colored people and moved away. A nice building was erected by the contractor, Lud Green. An old negro and Mr. Dunaway sawed the timber to build the church.

In April, 1871, Bishop George F. Pierce, a most gifted pulpit speaker preached the dedication sermon. It was on this day that Mr. John Cooper brought a soda fount out from Washington and sold “Soda Pop” to the thirsting congregation. His “fount” consisted of two drums of soda water, one holding three gallons and the other five gallons. However, Mr. Cooper had competition for Mr. Bob Smith who was on the opposite side of the church selling lemonade. It was thought that the drinks were probably sold at ten cents per glass.

A band from Washington came out for the occasion. They met at the Dye home which was later the site of the Mike Williams home. The band marched from there to the church. The band remained on the outside as the church was small.

The church at this time had two doors, one for the ladies and one for the men. A partition about three feet high separated the two sides. There were three white columns at intervals reaching from this partition to the ceiling. Each side had an aisle with short benches on either side. The only difference being the earthenware spittoons placed at intervals on the men’s side. The church was lighted by kerosene lamps with reflectors. These hung on the walls. An old styled heater warmed the building and music was from the “Old timey”
organ. The preachers always stood in the little pulpit now used by the choir. Near the front to the side was a pillar or post with a bell of some kind which served as a hearing aid for the deaf. It was built for Mrs. M. Jordan but was also used by Mr. Willis Wootten.

Mrs. Eliza Wootten, widow of Dr. Wootten, was a faithful member of Independence. She had no children of her own but it is said that she reared sixteen children in her home. She is still remembered for her many good deeds.

The Wright sisters, Mrs. Sellie Wright Johnson, Misses Hattie and Fanny are remembered as faithful members of Independence. Mrs. Emma Anderson and Mr. and Mrs. J.A.Moss also helped to carry on the good work.

Mrs. Sam Wootten came as a bride, to Tignall in 1886 and joined with her husband in doing a wonderful work in the church. She became organist, a position held for many years. Her children grew up to contribute much to the singing in the church.

Miss Ellen Wootten, sister to Mr. Sam Wootten, organized one of the pioneer missionary societies in the seventies. Several young men, Mr. Sam Wootten, Mr. John Wootten and Dr. John Hill, joined the society and paid dues to help the cause. Mrs. Sam Wootten took her husband's place in the society when she came here and always took an active part. In more recent years Mrs. Wellborn Hill was president of the society for some years. Mrs. E.W. Wilkinson the present president has served for a number of years. The society has always been an active part of the church work.

Sunday school was organized about the same time. Mr. E.J.Wilkinson was superintendent for a number of years and his wife was teacher of the adult class. Others serving as superintendent were Mr. Sam Wootten, Mr. J.A.Moss, Mr. E.F.Boyd, Mr. Tom Wootten, Mr. M.A.Guil. Mr. Robert Blakey is the present superintendent. Most of these taught the adult class also. Others teaching were Mrs. Sam Wootten, Mrs. E.F.Boyd, Mrs. Mary Talkington, Mrs. Stanley Roberts, Mrs. E.C.Matheson, Mrs. Norman Hawes, Mrs. H.M.Wansley and Mrs. J.B.Ferguson are teachers now. Miss Lalla Cooper and Miss May Harwell both did wonderful work in teaching the young people. Miss May also served as secretary-treasurer of the church for many years until Mrs. Jack Rhodes took her place last year.

Independence was at first on the charge with Hill's Chapel, near the Gus Anthony place, Eureka Church, in Oglethorpe County, and New Erie Church on Long Creek. Each church had only one Sunday a month. These churches were abandoned and Independence joined the Broad River Circuit with Pope's Chapel and Rock. We then had two Sundays a month as we do now.

We used the parsonage in Washington until about 1888 when ours was built. In 1899 J.N.Wilkinson deeded the land for the Broad River Circuit parsonage to the following trustees; L.A.Wootten, J.W.Boyd, L.W.Latimer, E.J.Wilkinson, W.A.Genis, B.F.Barksdale and W.R.Smith. The same year additional land was deeded to the parsonage by J.A.Moss.
The parsonage burned some time in between 1899 and 1903 but was soon rebuilt. In 1935 part of this parsonage land was sold to the Tignall school and in 1917 part of the church land was sold to the school. Mr. J.A.Moss also deeded some land to the church joining the church property in exchange for that land across the road from the church. This joined his property and had the spring on it.

Reverend W.L.Wooten was a local preacher. He had an appointment at Pope's Chapel and Independence once a month with no salary. He never accepted pay for his preaching. He had a son, W.L.Wooten, Jr. who became a preacher. It is thought that he joined the South Georgia Conference.

There is no record of the preachers before Independence joined the Broad River Circuit. We list the following preachers with dates of service. We do not claim this list to be accurate.

Russell and Milligan from 1803 to 1805
W.M.Kennedy----------1806
James Russell---------1811 - 1812
Joseph Terpley--------1814
Abney P.Jones---------1815 - 1818
Jonathan L. Terry-----1819
Isaac Smith-----------1820 - 1821
Samuel K. Hodges------1822 - 1824
William Parks--------1825 - 1826
Benjamin Pope--------1827 - 1828
Lovick Pierce--------1829 - 1830
Stephen Olin----------1831
W.J.Parks-----------1832 - 1833
Isaac Boring---------1834 - 1835
G.W.Pierce----------1836
A.H.Mitchell--------1838
Alfred T. Mann------1839
Thomas C. Benning-----1840 - 1841
Josiah Lewis--------1842
John W. Knight-------1843
A.J.Leet-----------1844
James Jones---------1845
John P. Duncan-------1846
T.P.Pierce----------1847
Joseph H. echols-----1848
Adolphus Orr--------1849
W.H.Evans-----------1850 - 1851
John L. Dunn--------1852
Wesley P. Arnold-----1853 - 1854
Richard Lane-------1855
William Norman------1856
John Talley---------1857
Alfred T. Mann------1858
T.T.Christian------1859
J.M. Dickey --- 1860 - 1861
J.A. Reynolds --- 1863 - 1864
Lewis L. Ledbetter --- 1865 - 1866
Walter R. Branham --- 1867
John W. Heidt --- 1868 - 1870
J.H. Grogan --- 1871
William F. Quillian --- 1874 - 1875
J.F. Mixon --- 1876 - 1877
C.A. Mitchell --- 1878
C.W. Conway --- 1879 - 1882
J.W.G. Watkins --- 1883 - 1885
John G. Hammond --- 1886
M.J. Cofer --- 1886 - 1886
A.J. Hughes --- 1892
Crawford Jackson --- 1893 - 1894 - Mr. Crawford J. Cooper was named for him.
R.B.O. England --- 1895 - 1896
J.S. Embry --- 1899
Simon Shaw --- 1900 He had a tent and held big revivals.
W.H. Cooper --- 1901 - 1903
W.G. Crawley --- 1904
W.W. Brinsfield --- 1905 - He was an uncle of Mr. Bob Dyer who came here with him and made his home here.
J.W. Lowe --- 1906
C.W. Verdell --- 1907 - 1909 He was known as the 'walking' preacher. He walked every place he went, even as far as Elberton. He wore a Beaver hat.
L.O. Winter --- 1910
T.W. Benson --- 1911 - 1913
T.A. Simmons --- 1914 - 1915
F.S. Hudson --- 1916 - 1919
George W. Barrett --- 1920 - 1922
J.S. Hill --- 1923 - 1924
C.H. Bailey --- 1925 - 1927
W.A. Woodruff --- 1928
J.T. Rutland --- 1929
J.F. Ferr --- 1930 - 1933
J.A. Griffies --- 1934 - 1935
J.G. Lupo --- 1936 - 1938
H.A. McNiel --- 1939 - 1940
H.B. Landrum --- 1941 - 1943
B.C. Matteson --- 1944 - 1949
J.H. Cameron --- 1950 - 1951
H.B. Duling, Jr. --- 1952 - 1953 He is our present pastor.
The Presiding Elders were as follows:

Stith Mead ------------------1802 - 1805
Joseph Tarpley -----------------1815 - 1818
James E. Evans------------------1839 - 1842
George F. Pierce -----------------1845 - 1847
Josiah Lewis ------------------1848 - 1851
John W. Glenn ------------------1852 - 1855
John L. Dunn ------------------1856 - 1857
J. O. A. Clark ------------------1859 - 1862
R. W. Bigham ------------------1862 - 1864
T. F. Pierce ------------------1869 - 1871
V. W. Speer ------------------1872 - 1873
Thomas F. Pierce ------------------1874 - 1877
R. W. Bigham ------------------1878 - 1881
Jesse Boring ------------------1884
Simon P. Richardson ------------------1886 - 1889
H. H. Parks ------------------1890 - 1893
Lume Johnson ------------------1894
W. P. Lovejoy ------------------1895 - 1897
George W. Yarborough ------------------1897 - 1900
W. P. Lovejoy ------------------1901 - 1904
Sidney J. Byron ------------------1905 - 1906
W. L. Pierce ------------------1909 - 1911
B. P. Allen ------------------1912 - 1915
S. P. Wiggins ------------------1916 - 1919
G. F. Venable ------------------These men served in those years between 1926 and 1935
W. S. Robinson
J. L. Allgood
J. W. Westch
C. C. Jarrell

These have served as District Superintendents:

C. C. Jarrell ------------------1935 - 1936
H. L. Byrd ------------------1937 - 1938
M. M. Maxwell ------------------1939
G. L. Middlebrook ------------------1939 - 1941
J. H. Barton ------------------1942 - 1945
H. S. Smith ------------------1946 - 1950
J. C. Calloway ------------------1951 - in service now.

In the pulpit of this church some of the finest talent have stood and charmed the multitude with their matchless eloquence. Bishop George F. Pierce, Bishop A. G. Haygood, Bishop W. A. Goddler, Drs. E. W. Speer, J. E. Robinson and many other are among those who have preached in this church in years gone by.
The church has been remodeled several times. We now have only one door and the partition and columns have been taken out. The organ has long ago been replaced by the piano. The church is heated by gas heaters installed in 1949. In 1942 Mr. C.D. Bolton gave the beautiful hardwood floor and Mrs. Bolton the stand used by the preachers. New pews were bought by members in memory of some loved one.

A Homecoming Day was held April 23, 1950 while Mr. Cameron was pastor. Dr. W.A. Smart from Emory University was guest speaker. This homecoming was the first in the history of the church and was observed in connection with a program to build an educational unit at the church. Around $1400 was collected or pledged at this time. Many old friends registered and enjoyed the fellowship of kindred minds as well as the dinner on the ground.

A beautiful and impressive candlelighting service was held at the church the last Sunday night in November, 1951. Anyone who wished had the privilege of having a candle lighted in honor of someone still living or in memory of someone. There was a special lighting in memory of lives lost in World War II. The church was beautiful in the glow of two hundred and fifty lighted candles and rich with memories. The money collected from the candles was used to remodel the church.

In 1952 more work was done on the church under the able direction of Mr. W.W. Wilkson. The exterior was made to look very much as it did in days gone by. The steps were changed and the green shutters restored as they used to be. Inside the walls were replastered and other needed repairs done. The church was painted inside and out. The church grounds were improved, also.

Stained glass windows on either side of the pulpit were donated by Mrs. C.D. Bolton, Mrs. E.W. Ragsdale and Miss May Harwell. A beautiful carpet was donated and the chairs in the pulpit upholstered to match. Mr. and Mrs. Norman Jackson presented the church with lovely chandeliers.

Many weddings have been held in this historical church. The first to our knowledge was the marriage of Miss Moses Sutton and Mr. Ebb Harrison. This was during the time when the church was partitioned. White shoes were a rare thing but were worn at this wedding. It was raining and a special carpet was laid to protect the clothes of the wedding party. In 1925 Miss Janie Moss was married in the church. An interesting fact about this event is that the Elberton and Eastern railroad had just that year been put in operation and since the roads to Elberton were all but impassable, Mr. J.A. Moss, father of the bride chartered a special train to be ready and waiting at the crossing just a few yards from the church to start the happy couple on their wedding journey. Miss Jessie Moss followed in her sister's footsteps in about three years. In 1932 Miss Frances McNeill had a church wedding and she was followed by Miss Sophie Boyd in 1938 and Miss Dorothy Hill in 1937. Then Miss Lou Matteson married in 1949. In the year 1952, Misses Sara Fortson Bolton, Claudia Bolton and Barbara Lindsey all became brides in our church.

Memories of Independence have been sad as well as happy. Many faithful members have been laid to rest from the church and lie buried in the cemetery there. The name Independence is fitting for the quaint grave yard because it has been said that all classes of faith lie buried in Independence cemetery.
Acknowledgements

Much of our history is traditional. Mr. Harry Cooper told us what he knew about Independence before his death. We are also grateful to Mr. John Cooper, Mr. Charlie Heard, Mrs. Don Jordan, Mrs. Laura Wilkinson, Mrs. C.D. Bolton, Mrs. E.F. Boyd, Miss May Harwell, Aunt POPE and others with whom we talked.

We consulted The Story of Methodism in Georgia by Pierce, The Journal of North Georgia Conference, The Story of Wilkes County Georgia by Bowen and White's Historical Collections.

We referred to the History of Pope's Chapel for names of preachers.

We also used information found in a short history written by Mrs. C.W. Browning from newspapers she had collected.