HISTORY

Of

LAFAYETTE, FIRST METHODIST CHURCH
FIRST METHODIST CHURCH, LAFAYETTE

A Methodist Church must have been established in the county seat of Walker County soon after the forming of the County in 1833.

According to information handed down from older inhabitants, the first church, a log cabin, was called New Town District and was probably a mission of the Holston Conference.

The late Rev. W. J. Cotter, of Newman, wrote the following about this early church for the "History of Walker County" published in 1932: "Annual Conference met in LaFayette in 1836 (the writer attended). Bishop Morris presided, D. R. Cumming was presiding elder and W. H. Rogers, pastor. At this Conference the name was changed from New Town to LaFayette Circuit". Years later it became LaFayette-Rock Springs charge, then the LaFayette First Methodist Church.

The second building near the site of the present Court House, was used as a stable by Union soldiers during the War Between the States. All Bibles, song books and church records were destroyed. Worship was resumed in this building after the war, (Bishop) Atticus Haygood serving as presiding elder in 1868.

A new building was erected on a new site, in the early 1900's, during the pastorate of Dr. S. P. Wiggins. In 1924 this building was practically razed and the present one erected. The Rev. J. W. Brinsfield was pastor at this time. The most widely-known member of this congregation was the late Dr. Hector Park, who went out from here as missionary to China in 1882.

The church has a present membership of around 400 and the Rev. Frank E. Crutcher is serving his third year as pastor.
As early as 1835 the Methodists here worshipped in an old log cabin church on the site of the Fortune home on South Main Street. At that time LaFayette was called New Town District, and in this church Clement A. Evans and other famous pastors preached.

The next Methodist Church was erected some years later, a large one-room frame edifice that stood just southwest of the present Courthouse. During the War Between the States the church was used by the Union troops as a livery stable, the benches being turned together for feed troughs.

Brother Cotter, of Newnan, who died recently, states that he attended the Annual Conference in LaFayette in 1836. At that time the LaFayette church was in the Holston Conference of Tennessee. There was no railroad at LaFayette then and people came on horseback and in wagons and buggies. At this conference Bishop Morris presided; D. R. Cumming was the Presiding Elder of the district and W. H. Rogers was the pastor of the church. The Conference at this session changed the name of the church from New Town to LaFayette Circuit, and the Mission was called Cherokee. It was later changed to LaFayette-Rock Springs and then to LaFayette Methodist Church.


During the pastorate of S. P. Wiggins in 1901, a new church was erected on Cove Street, where the present church edifice stands. The building committee was composed of T. A. Jackson, H. P. Lumpkin and J. D. Fariss. In 1924 the building was almost completely torn down and a new church built at an approximate cost of $25,000, with adequate Sunday School facilities. The building committee of this new church were I. H. Holleman, E. P. Hall, T. M. Quillian, T. A. Jackson and C. W. Bledsoe.

Dr. Hector Park went to Soochow, China as a medical missionary from this church in 1882, and served there until 1927, when he returned to his native land, broken in health. He died in Florida in 1928. He was a promoter of the Soochow College and Hospital, the largest in his day on the Methodist mission fields.

The Woman's Missionary Society was organized in this church in 1883, the first president being Mrs. Amelia McWhorter. Among those who have served as president of the Society are Mrs. S. J. Shaw, Mrs. H. P. Lumpkin, Mrs. J. H. Hammond, Mrs. John A. Shaw, Mrs. D. R. Thurman, Mrs. J. C. Cavender, Mrs. E. P. Hall, Mrs. W. L. Stansell, Mrs. John Ogle, Mrs. R. A. Wardlaw Jr., Mrs. G. L. Roberts, Mrs. J. T. Rhyne. Mrs. E. P. Hall is the president of the Woman's Society of Christian Service at this time.

During the pastorate of the Rev. Floyd Walden, the church has been remodeled and beautified inside, a new, attractive choir loft built, and a large assembly room tastily arranged, and the church boasts of one of the most modern and attractive church auditoriums anywhere. A Wurlitzer organ has been installed, and
all departments of the church are going forward under the dynamic leadership of the pastor.

The church has a membership of 400 and over 200 are enrolled in Sunday School. A large men's Bible Class and Men's Club are strong forces in the service of the church.