HISTORY

OF

LAWRENCEVILLE METHODIST CHURCH

El Bethel Church
The early history of the Lawrenceville Methodist Church is somewhat shrouded in mystery, and if any records were made concerning the activities of the church during the early years of its existence, they have long since been lost or destroyed, as the county courthouse was burned, together with many records, in 1871, and the church building (the third built by this congregation), was burned February 13th, 1902, probably other records being destroyed then.

The town of Lawrenceville was chartered in 1822, and at that time a number of "Circuit Riders" were making their rounds throughout this section of the state, and it is very certain that some of them had preached here many times, whether or not they had a regularly organized church at this place.

However, one old record which has been preserved reads as follows: "At the session of the South Carolina Conference in 1823, Rev. W. J. Parks was appointed to serve the 'Gwinnett Mission', (in Gwinnett County, Georgia), and he remained here through 1824. His first sermon was preached in the county court house, which was then a log house. He also served this 'Mission' (or Circuit), again in 1829."

At that time it was the custom for the Circuit Riders to make their rounds on horseback, and Rev. Parks probably had to ride his
horse from South Carolina, or else come over on the old stage coach
and buy a horse after he arrived in Gwinnett County. The route of
the stage coach led by the "Hog Mountain House", on down through
Lawrenceville, then to Five Forks, on the Stone Mountain Road, on to
the mountain; then on to Augusta, or change to other coaches for
other destinations. (Atlanta was of very little importance at
that time).

It is not known when the first Methodist Church was erected
here, but it is stated in the minutes of the "Lawrenceville Sunday
School Society" that a meeting of that body was held in the Methodist
Church, in Lawrenceville, on July 25th, 1847. This building was
located about a half mile from the courthouse, on what is now the
Athens Highway, and its grounds included the "old cemetery", where
many of the early settlers of the county were buried, and where
burial grounds were also provided for the colored people.

The second building was located on the hill one block north­
west of the court house, built in 1854, this land having been granted
to the trustees of "Lawrenceville Academy" to be used for religious
and educational purposes only. This second building was torn down
about 1891 and replaced by a larger and better one, built of heart
pine, and on February 13th, 1902, this building was destroyed by fire.
Lawrenceville's school building, which had been built nearby, was also
burned, and a strong wind from the northwest endangered the entire
town of Lawrenceville. Many fires were started, some as much as a
half-mile from the hill, to the southeast, but persistent work by
volunteer fire fighters extinguished them all.
There was no insurance on this building, but the membership immediately began to lay plans for a new structure. A lot was soon purchased at the corner of East Pike and Chestnut Streets, and a substantial brick church building was erected thereon. This building proved ample for the needs of the congregation until 1920, when it was remodeled, a three-story Sunday School annex added, and many other improvements made.

A parsonage was also built on this lot, which served its purpose very well until about 1932 or '33, when it was so badly damaged by fire that it became necessary to practically rebuild it. It was then that it was brick veneered and otherwise improved, and was made a really desirable home for the pastors of the church.

After the burning of the building on the hill, the congregations of both the Baptist and Presbyterian churches of Lawrenceville very graciously tendered to the Methodists the use of their church buildings, and of this the Lawrenceville News-Herald, of February 20th, 1902, had the following to say: "The Baptists very generously tendered the use of their churchhouse to the Methodists for three Sundays in each month, and they are now worshiping there. The benches which were saved from the burned church were placed in the Baptist Church, and that building appears to a much better advantage with the benches in it." (Note: It was stated that the offer of the Baptists was accepted on account of the more central location.)
As already stated, the early history of this church is very vague, but it is known that Rev. W. J. Parks was pastor during 1824, also in 1829, then for several years no records can be found until the year 1837, and the best list obtainable from then on is as follows:


PRESIDING ELDERS


(Since early days of childhood many of the names in the two lists above have been familiar to this writer; many of them were lifelong friends of his father and often visited him, and it has been a pleasure to be reminded of these good men, a majority of them now gone to the land they looked forward to).
SUPPLY PASTORS

In 1885, Rev. M. D. Turner, appointee, died at Conference time, and Rev. T. S. Lewis was appointed to serve as Supply for that year, which he did.

In 1904, Rev. F. P. Spencer was taken ill in October and was unable to complete the year's work. He was taken to an Atlanta hospital for treatment, brought back to Lawrenceville and later moved to Atlanta, with his family, where he died. During his illness services were held regularly, with preaching by Rev. T. J. Warlick, Rev. J. L. Hall, of Norcross; Rev. Turner, Missionary to Japan; Presiding Elder W. L. Pierce, and others.

In 1915, Rev. Dunbar's health failed, and Rev. W. W. Brinsfield, of Atlanta, who was on the retired list, took charge of the work here and served very acceptably during the remainder of the Conference year. The church purchased a residence on Jackson Street for a Retired Pastor's Home, and Rev. and Mrs. Dunbar lived in it for some time, but when it was no longer needed for them it was sold, as the church was in debt, and the money was used to pay off that indebtedness.

THE WOMEN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The time of the beginning of the Women's Missionary Society of the North Georgia Conference is not known to the writer, but it was probably about 1878, and very soon after that a society was organized in the Lawrenceville Methodist Church.

At first there was a "Home" department and a "Foreign" department, and a member could belong to either branch, or to both branches. After many years, at a meeting of all the Southern Conference...
ferences, the two departments consolidated and continued their activities under the name of "The Women's Missionary Society". This name was later changed to "The Women's Society for Christian Service", which name it now bears.

The present members take much pride in the established record of the Society, saying that it has never died out, or needed to be reactivated, but has been active from the day of its beginning. Among the Charter Members who have long since passed away but are still remembered were Mrs. Tyler Peeples, Sr., Mrs. S. J. Winn, Mrs. T. K. Mitchell, Mrs. W. E. Simmons, Mrs. E. M. Melton and Mrs. Mary L. Pentecost.

The names of all the Past Presidents are not now available. Quite a number of the wives of pastors serving the church have acted in this capacity, and among this number were Mrs. J. E. England, Mrs. W. R. Branham, Mrs. C. H. Branch, Mrs. William Dunbar and others. Mrs. C. U. Born, a lifelong member, served as president, and in more recent years Mrs. C. S. Strong, Mrs. W. R. Hurst, Mrs. Clara Ezzard and Miss Minnie Peeples. Also Mrs. C. R. Ware, Mrs. D. M. Byrd, Mrs. J. D. Teague, Mrs. Lillie Camp, Mrs. Ernest Craig, Mrs. Henry Sams, Mrs. Sam Martin, Mrs. John Houston, Mrs. Marvin Allison, Mrs. Noble Tanner, Mrs. R. F. Duncan, Mrs. Hope Stark and Mrs. Clyde Roberts have all presided.

This society has occupied an important place in the life of the Lawrenceville Methodist Church all through the years, and is still doing a great work for the advancement of Christianity.
The "Sunday School Society of Lawrenceville" was organized and the Constitution read and adopted at the Lawrenceville Methodist Church on July 25th, 1847. Article I reads as follows: "This society shall be called the Sunday School Society of Lawrenceville, auxiliary to the Sunday School Union of the M. E. Church, and connected with the Quarterly Meeting Conference of The Lawrenceville Circuit."

The little book containing these words is quite interesting. It is one hundred and four years old, written with a goose quill, and contains many "Rules and Regulations" governing officers, teachers and scholars. Where it has been all these years is not known, except that it came into the hands of this writer about a dozen years ago with an injunction: "Don't let it get lost or destroyed".

Under "Duties of Teachers", the third paragraph says "To make all possible exertion to promote the general interest of the school, and especially to secure the advancement of the scholars, both in knowledge and in piety".

Among the duties of the scholars are these: "To rise and stand during singing, and to kneel and preserve perfect order during prayer". "To avoid all whispering, laughing, or other improper conduct". "... after the school shall be dismissed, to attend public worship, or to retire to their respective places of abode, and in no case will they be permitted to stand around the church doors or windows".

Rolls of several classes are copied in the book, giving the names of teachers and scholars, and among these are many who have been prominent figures in the history of this county and of Georgia.
LAWRENCEVILLE CAMP GROUNDS

Before the organization of Bethesda Methodist Church, located about four miles west of Lawrenceville, there had been a camp ground, known as Bowen's Camp Ground, there for some years, but after the church was built, in 1827, this camp ground was moved to a new site, north of Lawrenceville, and the name changed to Lawrenceville Camp Ground. Annual meetings began at the new location in 1833, and have been held there continuously since, except for a few years including those in which the War Between the States was in progress.

These grounds are the property of the Lawrenceville Methodist Church, the fifty-acre tract having been purchased in 1832 for a consideration of $1.00 per acre. It is said to have been bought by Elisha Winn, William Maltbie, Isham Williams, Buckner Harris and George Brogdon, who gave it to the church. In the past much religious activity has been centered around this historic old meeting ground, and thousands have looked back on their experiences there with reverence and gladness.

Each year plans and preparations for the annual meeting began soon after the crops were "laid by"; for many years the closing date was the third Sunday in August, the camp lasting for ten days. Lawrenceville was then practically deserted for the ten days, and this writer preferring not to spend another night sleeping on the sheet, straw and boards at the camp ground, came into town and spent probably the most lonesome night of his life; for near two hours not a person could be seen on the streets, no light of any description, except that of the moon, anywhere in town, and no one but himself on the hotel property throughout the night.
THE CHURCH SCHOOL

The Church School of Lawrenceville Methodist Church is quite an active institution, having had its beginning further back than anybody now living can remember. The Roll includes 393 names, these being divided into three divisions, as outlined by the authorities of the Methodist Church. There are four adult classes, M. Y. F. classes for those twelve, thirteen and fourteen years of age, then the children's classes, a total of twelve. The M. Y. Fs. also have weekday evening activities. It is expected that some will attend Camp Glisson this summer.

Vacation Bible Schools are held each year, and it is expected that the one for this year will be a full two-weeks session. This is really a worthwhile project for vacation time, and those who lend their aid to it are to be commended very highly.

The Nursery Department, working with children up to four years of age is another branch which is very important, and gives a splendid opportunity to help mothers and to make impressions for good upon the minds of these little children.

THE MEN'S CLUB

The Men's Club, composed of officers and members of the church, is another active group of church people, and has meant much to the work of the church by the projects they have sponsored and by fostering a fine fellowship among the men of the church.

Meetings are held the First Monday evening in each month, and usually a splendid meal, prepared by ladies of the church, is served. These meetings are both a pleasure and a benefit to those who attend.
BISHOP MARVIN FRANKLIN

Rev. Marvin Franklin, now Bishop Franklin, came to Lawrenceville Methodist Church in the Fall of 1922, and served as pastor here during the Conference years of 1923 and 1924. In each of those years revival services were held in April and a number of members were added each year. In the first year the pastor did the preaching, while Rev. William Greenway led the singing. The attendance was very good, the church being well filled at most services, and the meeting was believed to have done much good.

In the second year of Rev. Franklin's pastorate here, Rev. Pierce Harris was the visiting minister, being at that time pastor of the Methodist Church at Buford. This meeting also proved to be a real blessing to the people of the community and is yet well remembered by many who attended.

Rev. Franklin was very active in his work during his stay here, was a leader in everything that was for the good of the church or the town, and those who knew him in his work here are well pleased, and not surprised, that he has attained to the high position which he now holds.

The Pipe Organ, which has added so much to the church services, was installed in 1938, and a bronze plaque bearing the names of those who contributed to the purchase price and the date of its installation is attached to the wall near the organ.
The Lawrenceville Ministerial Association, which was organized here near six years ago, is composed of the pastors of the several local churches, and these gentlemen have worked together in many matters pertaining to both the spiritual and material advancement of the people of Lawrenceville.

They have been in charge of all plans and arrangements for the "Simultaneous Revivals," which have been held in the early spring for several years. Each year one of the larger church buildings is selected for the holding of the morning services during the week, in which all the congregations join, while in the evening each holds services in its own church house, with its pastor, and often with visiting evangelists and singers, in charge. The Association also administers certain charities and leads in many matters tending to better conditions in general here, and it is an organization worthy of the commendation and support of all the people of the community.

PROMINENT VISITORS

Among the prominent visitors to the church have been, among many others through the years, Bishop W. A. Candler, who preached and took part in the dedication services of the present church building. He was then well advanced in age and had become very prominent in Southern Methodism, and the church felt honored to have him as a visiting speaker.

Another prominent visitor was that really great Evangelist, Rev. Sam P. Jones, who spent many years preaching and fighting the liquor traffic. He once preached in a large circus tent, which he had erected in his home town (Cartersville), and, as remembered by this
writer, (who was then a small boy), it was said that the liquor dealers loosed the guy ropes and allowed the tent, poles and all, to fall on the great crowd gathered under it. He later erected a large tabernacle near his home and held meetings there annually for many years. It seems (to the writer) that he died on a train while traveling from one preaching date to another.

Dr. David C. Barrow, Chancellor of the University of Georgia, spoke to a large congregation in the Lawrenceville Methodist Church on Sunday evening, October 26th, 1924. He was a great and good man, and someone said this of him: "Chancellor Barrow is probably the best loved man in Georgia, and has touched more lives among the young people than almost any other man in the state."

THE CHURCH TODAY

As this church nears the close of the Conference year 1950-51, the membership is approximately four hundred and thirty, and the budget, which was set at $5,500, will all be paid by Conference time.

This church did not become a full time charge until the year 1901, prior to that time services having been held only two Sundays in each month. Until recently, the pastors of this church have also served McKendree Methodist Church, located a short distance west of Lawrenceville.

Rev. G. W. Griner was the first pastor to serve here under the full-time setup, and he remained only one year. The Parsonage was then located on "Stone Mountain Street", now South Perry Street, diagonally across from the old "Lawrenceville Academy" building, now known as the Masonic Hall.

In 1900 Lawrenceville was quite a small town, the limits extending only one-half mile from the courthouse in all directions,
and the U. S. Census gave the population as eight hundred and fifty-three, (in 1890 it had been only 566), and within the town limits a certain tract containing about thirty-two acres had only four citizens living upon it. Nearly all of the old homes had very large lots, with plenty of room for gardens, barn lots, orchards, etc., and some cotton was grown within two blocks of the courthouse. At that time nearly all of the citizens were old settlers, and a surprising number of them related, either by blood or marriage.

Sources of information:

Miss Bettie Juhan, whose parents were among the early Methodist families of this section, has made a hobby of filing and saving many facts and dates concerning the local Methodist Church, and the writer is indebted to her for much of the foregoing information. Other sources have been the files of The News-Herald; Gwinnett Churches, by Flanigan; interviews with many long time members, and things remembered by the writer, during his forty-six years as a member of this church.

Compiled by Paul M. Christian, Sr., Lawrenceville, Ga.
Dated, May 19th, 1951.

P.M. Christian
* A F T E R T H O U G H T S *

In looking back over the years covered by the foregoing pages, there comes into the picture the lives and helpful influence of a large number of faithful and useful members, and of many able and consecrated pastors, who we will not see again; but as they have gone, others have come to take up the work, and their influence will live on and on.

May this church never cease to be an influence for good in the community it has served so long, but may it stand as a monument to those who have loved it and labored for it, and as a beacon to guide men onward and upward.

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The Board of Stewards is now operating under a Rotation System, and any member having served for two years must then retire and not be on the board again until at least two years have passed. There are twenty active members on the board, and three retired or honorary members. The Board of Trustees of the church has nine members, and the Camp Ground has the same number.

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Lawrenceville now has six churches for white people. They are The First Baptist, The Second Baptist, The Christian Church, The Church of God, The Methodist Church and The Presbyterian Church. For the Colored people there are four churches. Two of these are Baptist and two are Methodist.

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