The History of Liberty Methodist Church
Greene County, Ga.

"A History of Methodism is Preserved Here"
FOREWORD

The history of the Liberty church is one that any church in Methodism would be proud to claim as its own. As you read the various pages of this compilation, you will not only see the past of the Liberty church alone unfold, but also the whole drama of Methodism will begin to take shape.

Many names of the pioneers who helped organize and maintain this church will be familiar to you. It is hoped that by your reflection upon these persons and events, we too, might respond with a significant contribution in the present for the glory of our Lord.

The data contained herein is the result of research undertaken by Mrs. T. W. (Smith) McKinley. This information was gathered in 1953 and was submitted as field work at Georgia Women's College, in Milligeville, where Mrs. McKinley was graduated.

Truly the history and the church which command this ground present themselves as a shrine to all Methodism.

Larry D. Powell, Pastor

2/7/64
The following information is copied from the historic marker located in front of the Liberty church. The marker was placed here in the year nineteen hundred and fifty eight by the Georgia Historical Commission. It reads as follows:

LIBERTY CHAPEL

"About 1786, John Bush built a brush arbor as a community center for camp meetings at what was then called 'Crackers Neck'. From this grew Liberty Chapel, cradle of Methodism for this section. In 1797, Reverend James Jenkins, leader in the early days of Methodism, and at that time, on the Washington Circuit including Greene, Taliaferro, Wilkes, Lincoln, Elbert, Hart, Franklin, Madison, and Oglethorpe counties, preached here and reported in his journal that after a 'firey exhortation', a man in uniform came down the aisle and fell at his feet, crying for pardon. Others followed and, according to Rev. Jenkins, then at Liberty Chapel, began the Methodist custom of 'going to the altar'. The meeting became so noisy, he continued, that it was a wonder the horses did not take fright.

Most of the great men of early Methodism were identified with this church. Bishop Francis Asbury preached here several times and in 1808 when the South Carolina Conference met here, he and Bishop William McKindree attended. At Liberty Chapel Reverend Lovick Pierce was ordained an elder and Bishop William Capers was admitted as a preacher on trial."
At the close of the American Revolution in the year 1781, there were only eighty Methodist ministers and fifteen thousand members in Methodist societies in the United States. In 1785, there were in Georgia, only twelve churches: three Lutheran, two Presbyterian, one Congregationalist, three Baptist and no Methodist in this number. It was into a field such as this that Methodism was to enter and contribute its part toward the transformation of this unchurched wilderness.

In 1786, two young Methodist ministers came to Georgia to organize the first Methodist Circuits. They were Thomas Humphries and John Major. At this time, all of what is now Greene County was thought to have been occupied only by the Indians. At the rear of the home of Mrs. B. P. Kimbrough, two miles Southeast of Greensboro, a handmade brick, bearing the date of 1782 was found, which would seem to indicate that white people were living in Greene County at that time. If there were white people, it is not unreasonable to assume that they would have provided themselves with a place to worship.

All of this leads to the question, "when was Liberty church organized?" The exact date is not known as there are no records dating back to its origin. In 1797 there were a number of church buildings erected. Among them was old Liberty church in Greene County but even this was not the beginning of Methodism here!

Among the early converts of Humphries and Major was John Bush of this county. With the help of others, he erected a 'brush arbor'
on the land now owned by Mr. Reid Merritt in sight of the present Liberty church. Great revivals were held in this crude establishment and out of them grew the first Methodist church organized in Greene County and one of the first in the state of Georgia. This church was to be called 'Liberty Chapel'. The brush arbor became the community center for the periodic camp meetings when people came from miles around to have a week of worship and fellowship.

G. G. Smith, in his book "A HISTORY OF METHODISM IN GEORGIA AND FLORIDA", relates that "the old Liberty, White Oak, Richmond and Sparta Camp Grounds have been the scenes of great battles and great victories."

Bishop Asbury makes a reference to a Conference held in the home of John Bush and to another 'brush arbor' camp-meeting in the records of his visit to Georgia.

In 1797 at Liberty Chapel, the Reverend James Jenkins exhorted following Bishop George Jenkins, and a man in uniform came forward falling at his feet begging him to pray for him. Others came likewise and this, says Jenkins, was the beginning of public profession of faith or "going to the altar" in Methodism. Jenkins said, "the meeting was such a noisy one, I wondered why the horses did not take fright".

On December 25, 1805, Bishop Asbury dedicated the new Liberty church mentioning that it was the second building on this site. The building measured forty by sixty feet and was located a short distance back from the present location. Bishop Asbury took for his text for this service, I Peter 4:4-6.

About this time, the circuits were divided and named after the
rivers of this section and all the churches in Greene County became part of the Appalachee Circuit, which included a part of Oglethorpe, Greene, Clark, and Warren Counties. In 1808, Henry Bass came to the Appalachee Circuit and built the first Methodist parsonage in the state of Georgia.

In 1807, Lovick Pierce, later ordained Bishop, was living in Greensboro. Liberty church was on one of his earlier charges. The Reverend James Statham in a pamphlet on the Greene County Circuits, told of a young man from Greene County, Thomas Stanley, who was recommended to the Annual Conference to be licensed for the ministry at that Conference. He requested of Bishop Pierce that his name not be submitted to the Conference but later repented and hastened to the seat of the Conference riding one horse down and almost killing another. He arrived in time however, and his name accepted.

The site which Liberty church stood upon was owned by Reuben Smith, who deeded to the trustees of Liberty the present tract of land comprising 7.14 acres, on July 27, 1827. The Plat and Deed are recorded in the Greensboro Courthouse in Book 7, pages 90-91. The first trustees were Gilly Moore, Joseph Baldwin, Zebulon Wright, Amacy Palmore, Gray Credille and William Smith.

The Methodist Conference met at John Bush's home in 1808 with Bishop Asbury presiding. Reverend William Capers was admitted on trial at this Conference and here began his ministry, which for fifty years was a benediction to the world. Also, it was here that the first Methodist missionaries were appointed to Alabama to sow the seeds of Methodism in that state.

At the present (1953), there are thirty white churches in our
Greene County: Baptist, Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, and the Church of God. Altogether there are nearly thirty-five-hundred members. Two other churches besides Liberty, a Baptist and Presbyterian, were established in the county prior to 1800. Raper states (ON GREENE COUNTY), "It is claimed that the first mourners bench in the country was at old Liberty church!"

We have no records as to the events that happened during the latter part of the eighteen-hundreds. We do know however, that throughout the Civil War, Liberty was in active service.

Toward the end of the Nineteenth Century, the people felt that a new church building was needed at Liberty so they worked together and had the new building completed and ready for services by 1903. In this year, Reverend J. H. Farr, the new church's first pastor opened its doors and dedicated it to the on-going of God's Kingdom here on earth. The superintendent of the Sunday School at the First Methodist Church in Milledgeville (1953) is the son of Reverend Farr. This is the same building which is standing today in 1964. It is located in front of and extending beyond the site of the original structure. The parsonage stands in the right corner of the lot but hasn't been in use for many years except for a community house.

THE PULPIT BIBLE

The history of Liberty church would not be complete without relating something of the history of the Bible which graces the pulpit. This Bible is a large, black-bound volume and was presented to Liberty by Mr. & Mrs. Roy Smith, March 24, 1940. This Bible was inherited by Mrs. Smith from her father and mother, Dr. and Mrs. William Preston Hardin. Honorable Alexander H. Stephens was a frequent visitor in the Hardin home, and it was his
custom to read passages from this book. The family altar was an institution in the Hardin home as well as in most homes in older days; Mr. Stephens would read passages from this book and join in family prayers before retiring.

Down through the years, time has brought about many changes in the community of Liberty. It has changed from a thickly settled community to a small rural community. The cities have drained away much of its early population. The school building which stood just in front of the church, is no longer in use. The post-office has been abandoned and the mail is delivered from White Plains. The children are transported by bus to Siloam (White Plains in '53) and eventually to Greensboro to high school. Liberty church no longer has a full-time pastor but is on a circuit with White Plains, Siloam (and Knowles Chapel in '64). Preaching services are held only twice a month; on every first Sunday morning and evening.

Church membership has dwindled from over three-hundred members to one-hundred and fifteen at the present time (note again, this was compiled in 1953). Sixty-five is the Sunday School enrollment.

In September, 1953, our dreams were finally realized with the dedication of three Sunday School rooms at the rear of the church. The floors were covered with a beautiful red carpet; the windows with venetian blinds. The old, out of date piano has been replaced by a new one and the old stove replaced with a new heating system. The most recent improvement was the addition of an iron fence around the cemetery.

These improvements show the esteem which all the members hold in their hearts for old Liberty church; God willing, she will continue to be a living, growing monument to Methodism.
H. M. Quillian 1883-85
C. A. Conaway 1885-87
R. A. Seale 1887-88
T. S. L. Harwell 1888-89
J. V. M. Morris 1889-91
T. W. McCleskey 1892-93
T. H. Gibson 1893-94
Britton Sanders 1894-95
J. S. Askew 1895-97
T. P. Graham 1897-98
J. M. Sewell 1898-99
W. C. Davis 1899-1900
D. B. Cantrell 1900-01
L. H. Green 1901-02
J. H. Farr 1902-06
C. F. Hughes 1906-08
J. H. Pace 1908-09
J. W. Taylor 1909-10
G. T. Sorells 1910-11
Q. L. Morgan 1911-12
V. A. Roark 1912-15
W. R. Kennedy 1915-16
W. H. Spear 1916-18
J. E. Russell 1918-20
L. M. Davidson 1920-21
J. E. Statham 1921-23
A. P. Foster, Jr. 1923-24
Robert Stewart 1924-25
J. E. Cline 1925-27
R. F. Elrod 1927-31
George O. King 1931-35
M. R. Chambers 1935-37
H. G. Garrett 1937-39
W. A. Woodruff 1939-41
W. C. Bowen 1941-43
B. A. Petty 1943-44
T. B. Davis 1944-45
R. L. Walker 1945-47
R. O. Brown 1947-48
Warren Pittman 1948 (6 months)
E. E. Cadle 1948-51
C. W. Davis 1951-53
Gordan Gale 1953-54
Cecil W. Page 1954-56
L. E. Scott 1956-57
F. N. Newsome 1957-61
Jim Farr 1961-63
Larry D. Powell 1963-66
Chester Weatherford 1965-67
Tracy McLafferty 1969-71
Oscar C. Lyneke 1971-