THE METHODIST CHURCH IN MILLEDGEVILLE

The County of Baldwin was organized in 1805. The town of Milledgeville had been settled possibly a year or two earlier. It had been decided to make it the capital of the State in 1804 and the Legislature first held a session in the new town in 1807. The country was a frontier section of the State and at that time, having been but recently occupied by Indians, who, under an agreement with the U.S. Government were gradually being deported across the Chattahoochee.

How soon the Methodist itinerant put in his appearance is not indicated by the records, but at the South Carolina Conference held in Charleston in January, 1806, the Milledgeville Circuit was formed, so that the approaching Annual Conference meets on the Centennial Anniversary of organized Methodism in this section of middle Georgia. In 1810 Milledgeville was set apart as a station, Thomas Y. Cooke in charge, being then the largest station in the State, with 102 white members, Augusta next in importance having only 64.

The Church register for the years 1811 to 1814 is still preserved among local records and indicates a membership stationary for the time indicated, save a considerable falling off at the last. The "official members of the Milledgeville society 1811" were "Hubbard Runolds and John Matthews, stewards, and Francis Jeter, Robert Wynn and Henry Johnston, class leaders." The classes met regularly at specified times. On the roll appear the names of Lovick Pierce, Sr., Lydia Pierce and several members of the family. The names of fifty or sixty "Blacks" are also presented on the roll. That all early Methodists were not as exemplary in life as we are accustomed to believe appears in the specifications of offenses for which various members were expelled from the society at that time, though this also indicates
care for the welfare of the church. Samuel W. Meek was pastor of the Church in Milledgeville in 1812, during which time the first Methodist Sunday school in Georgia was established. In 1813 Lovick Pierce as stationed in the capital though he did not finish out the year, being drafted into the militia and serving as chaplain of it in the city of Savannah.

Many preachers notable in Georgia Methodism have served the charge or been associated in various ways with Milledgeville. Jesse Lee spent the year 1807 in Georgia being nominally in charge of the Sparta circuit but in reality having a roving commission. Much of the time he was in Milledgeville making full proof of his ministry not only in public preaching but in attendance upon the sick and dying. In 1823 and 1824 Wm. Capers was in charge of the Church, and also took much interest in the Creek Indians near by. During his stay in the town he lost one child and was threatened with the loss of another concerning which incidents a pathetic story is related in his Life. A parsonage was secured for his occupancy in 1824, being the third in the State.

William Arnold was Presiding Elder of the Milledgeville District in 1827. It was determined to make a special effort for the salvation of the little city. James O. Andrew came from South Carolina to assist, and with him were associated Lovick Pierce, James Howard and Stephen Olin. A large brush arbor was built, a four days' meeting was held and over one hundred were converted. How often has so much pulpit ability and consecration been brought together?

Among distinguished ministers of later years, who have served the charge may be mentioned. A. T. Mann, E. H. Myers, R. W. Bigham, H. H. Parks W. R. Branham, Sr., H. J. Adams, W. J. Scott, G. G. Smith, A. J. Jarrell; and others as worthy of mention who belong to a third generation.

The congregation has occupied but two church buildings in the hundred years of its history. In 1809 the first structure was erected, being situated in the present cemetery. In 1822 the Legislature of Georgia grant...
permission for the erection of a building on the capital square, with the use, for church purposes, of a half acre of ground. Soon thereafter the house was built and thus been in use for eighty years. It was somewhat improved in 1888 during the pastorate of Rev. J. R. King. It is a plain frame structure, but furnished a comfortable auditorium, seating, with the gallery, some six hundred people. During the year just passed a movement for a new building met with enthusiastic support from a large part of the membership. Within a few weeks between $12,000 and $15,000 was subscribed, no gift being larger than $500, and many friends having indicated no definite amount which could be expected from them. Owing to a diversion of sentiment as to the location of the building, the completion of the enterprise has had to be postponed for another year.

The approaching Annual Conference is the fourth which has been held in Milledgeville. The first was in December, 1814, before the formation of the Georgia Conference and was presided over by Bishop Asbury on the occasion of his last visit to the State. The Bishop "was suffering much with his cough and could barely preach but tried to do so, and for the last time spoke to the church in Georgia and to the preachers who loved him so well and who now wept most of all that they should see his face no more."

This Conference was the first attended by Jas. O. Andrew though at the close of his second year in the ministry. In his reminiscences he remarks that the stumps were still in the streets of the town.

The next Conference was held in 1842, Bishop Waugh presiding. Nothing of special importance has been recorded concerning it. The third is within the memory of a majority of the present members of the body, having been held in 1888, Bishop J. C. Keener in charge.

The century the record of church life in which is here barely given has witnessed many changes of conditions in church and State. Great men have come and gone, but the same spirit presides over the destinies of men and moves forward to the conquest of the world.