A HISTORY OF

Mossy Creek
United Methodist Church

Established 1821
When the Annual Conference met in Milledgeville in January, 1826, and sent Rev. Nathaniel Rhodes to Habersham County as pastor of Mossy Creek, Zion, Nacoochee, and perhaps Mt. Pleasant and Loudsville Churches, Mossy Creek Meeting House was already five years old, probably the oldest Methodist Meeting House in what is now White County. So the history of Mossy Creek United Methodist Church is long, and the deeper we delve into the past, the more interesting it becomes.

We know that when the white settlers began to move into what was then Habersham County, they settled in the valleys along the streams. This is evidenced by the many communities that take their names from the streams, such as Mossy Creek. As they built their houses they built their meeting houses for their religion was a very vital part of their lives.

Mossy Creek Meeting House was established in 1821. The first building, constructed of hewn logs, was built on the property of Mr. Clement Quillian about 4 miles southeast of what is now Cleveland, Georgia, and was situated somewhat to the southwest of the present church. A few years later, on October 31, 1825, a deed was made by Clement Quillian (as it was spelled in the deed) to the Trustees of Mossy Creek Meeting House and their successors in office. The consideration recited in the deed was Six and One Fourth Cents, and the property is described as being in the Second District and part of Lot No. Seventy-Eight and including the Methodist Meeting house, called Mossy Creek Meeting house, together with the spring and burying ground butting and bounding as follows: etc., and containing by estimation eleven acres, be the same more or less, further stating that was for the proper use and behoof of them the said trustees and their successors in office forever provided they continue a house of worship for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The deed was signed by Clement Quillian and witnessed by D. Killian and H. K. Quillien, and is recorded in the Habersham County Deed Records. The Trustees named in the deed were Frederick Davidson, Isaiah Askew, Thomas Bird, Hezakiah Chandler, Henry Parks, Andrus Dorsey and Daniel Quillien.

William Jasper Cotter, a Methodist preacher in Georgia from 1845 to 1907, and pastor of Mossy Creek in 1849 when it was part of the Clarkesville Circuit, takes us back in his autobiography to the year he spent on this circuit by writing the following:

"Clarkesville was the county seat of Habersham County. The county contains quite a number of creeks, rich valleys of land, Mount Yonah, a noted mountain not connected with any range, the noted waterfall Toccoa (the Cherokee word for "beautiful"), the great Tallulah Falls (meaning "terrible"), and Nacoochee Valley, one of the most beautiful valleys to be found.

"The Methodist Church was strong. Mossy Creek was thickly settled by intelligent people--the Askews, Dorseys, Pitchfords and others. The Mossy Creek Camp Ground was well attended, and here the presiding elder baptized twenty seven children." Parts that pertain to Clarkesville and Nacoochee are skipped. Then he writes on:

"The Quillian family was a very numerous one in the county. I have been in touch with six generations of them, from the oldest grandsire down to one of the youngest babies. There were three brothers contemporary with my father. Clement, a man of fine intelligence, rather tall and slender, with a swarthy complexion; James, not so slender, about five feet ten inches, of fine intellect, well balanced and a local preacher; and Daniel, a stout blonde with red hair. From Clement and James the multitude of Quilians came, and of them there have been more preachers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, merchants and statesmen than of almost any other family. Many of them were well-to-do in the world and were liberal supporters of the church."

From this account we can draw something of a picture of Clement who gave the land for this first church and of his brother, Daniel, a trustee at that time.

Although we have not been able to determine at this time who the very first pastor of this church was, we know that Reverend Nathaniel Rhodes was here in 1826 and that Reverend William Jasper Cotter was here in 1849, and we do know that there are at least three preachers buried at Mossy Creek. They are: Reverend George Phillips (who lived from between 1753 and 1755 to 1839), Reverend Wiley Warwick (1771-1856); and Reverend F. A. Quillian (1824-1864). There is a good possibility that these men may have preached at Mossy Creek. After the year 1860 we have a complete list, compiled by Reverend Ralph E. Harris, of all of the other pastors who have served here up to the present time. In the hundred years from 1868 to 1968, Mossy Creek had 67 pastors.

In 1844 the Methodist Church was split over the question of slavery. The church remained divided for nearly a hundred years or until 1939. During this time most of the Methodist churches in the county were known as Methodist Episcopal Church South; only two, Bethel and Macedonia were Northern Methodist.

From the studies that have been made of the old Charge Conference Minute Books which are kept at the Cleveland Church and which commence with the year 1867 while Mossy Creek was a part of the Cleveland Charge, and from other sources, we find that the old log church was used by the congregation until the late 1870's. In 1871 a committee was appointed to form plans, estimate costs and take subscriptions to build a new church. The new frame church was completed and moved into by the congregation in 1876. It was also located to the Southwest of this present church down in the woods and to the Southeast of the first old log church. At that time Reverend J. R. Faye was the pastor. The sills of this second old church are still there.

As many of you know, in the early days the churches were often the organizers of the schools and the preachers were many times teachers also. In Alfred M. Pierce's "A History of Methodism in Georgia", along with the list of Methodist colleges such as Young Harris, are listed several high schools and one Academy - Mossy Creek. Established February 11, 1889, the school opened under the management of Professor A. F. Johnson with 47 students and quickly grew to 128 by the end of the first term. Better known as Mossy Creek High School, it was a 2-story boarding school with Departments of Business, English Grammar, Geography, Orthography, Vocal and Instrumental Music, a Literary and Debating Society and a Teacher's Department. The school building was located on or near the site of the first old church down by the spring. The dormitory for the school was situated at the bend in the dirt road leading down to the old church sites and was served by a well. The dormitory was later moved and became a part of the home now owned by Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Dorsey, being the first house on the left on the paved road South of this present church. The school continued to operate for some 30 years or so, the exact closing date being unknown to the writer at this time. Members of the present congregation who were either former students or teachers in the school, to the personal knowledge of the writer, are: L. Q. Meaders, Marvin Hamilton, Fred Black, Mrs. Leona Palmer. We know that there are probably a good many others and after our registration on this anniversary, we will add other names to the list. L. Q. Meaders has an original brochure or catalogue of the Mossy Creek High School, printed in 1889, the year the school opened. (The following two pages contain facsimile reproductions of the pages of that brochure.)

A poem entitled "Mossy Creek - May 1890", written by Molly Jarrard, expressing her great pride and joy in "our new college", the church and the worship of God on that site in years gone by, is preserved in the church copy of this history as will be other items of interest.
The spiritual condition of the church from the 1860's through 1900 is recorded in the Charge Conference Minutes of the Cleveland Circuit. In 1868 they described the church as being "in a very unhealthful state, being destitute of the life and power of the Holy Spirit and not only so but to some extent not only tolerating but engaging in the evil practices that are prevalent among us, such as Parties, Dancing, Drinking, and such like. These meetings have been universally abandoned and prayer meetings entirely left off. As a consequence there exists a universal delinquency."
The members of the conference resolved to do everything possible for a revival of religion.

Then in 1875 they record a very good period with revivals throughout the circuit, receiving 142 new members since the last quarter. The Sabbath schools and the religious instruction of the children were considered of great importance to them.

Also from these old records located at the Cleveland Church we have copied several Mossy Creek membership lists all of which will be preserved in the church copy of this history and which you may look through today. We have one list dated 1912 to 1915; one dated 1922 to 1925, and one dated 1940 to 1941; and from our own church records, we have a current list dated 1971. And so that this day's attendance may be recorded as a part of this history, we want you to be sure to sign the register before leaving today. Mrs. Algene Pardue is in charge of the register.

From 1860 through 1873 Mossy Creek Church was in the Dahlonega District; in 1874 and 1875 in the Gainesville District; from 1876 to 1900 back in the Dahlonega District and after that back in the Gainesville District, of which it is a part to this day.

By 1947 the congregation of Mossy Creek had worn out or outgrown another church building and our present red brick church was constructed. Many hated to leave the old familiar church in the woods which had been so much a part of their lives, but soon the new church with its lovely stained-glass windows became home to them. It was built during the pastorate of Rev. J. F. Rollins on an additional piece of ground purchased from White County. The new church was dedicated by Bishop Arthur J. Moore on April 22, 1949.

For many years the Cleveland Charge consisted of Cleveland, Zion, Nacoochee, Mossy Creek, Chattahoochee, Loudsville and Mt. Pleasant churches. Then in 1953 Cleveland Church went full time and thereafter Mossy Creek, Trinity, Bethel in White County and Bethel in Hall County made up the Mossy Creek-Trinity Charge. In 1961 Trinity went full time, leaving Mossy Creek and the two Bethels to make up the Mossy Creek Charge. Then in the year 1968 Bethel in Hall was taken off the Charge, leaving Mossy Creek free to have 11:00 a.m. worship services each Sunday.

In 1961, during the pastorate of Rev. James M. Dale (1961-1962), Mossy Creek built its own red brick parsonage on ground deeded to the Trustees by Mrs. Albert Dorsey. It is situated adjacent to the church on the South, and was dedicated on May 16, 1965 by Bishop John Owen Smith.

The church has come a long way from 1821, with its old log church, to 1971 to this brick church with its lovely sanctuary, stained-glass side windows and the scene of Jesus in the Garden in stained-glass behind the pulpit, its red carpeted pulpit area and isles, its sturdy oak pulpit furniture and pews, its nice piano and electric organ, its full basement and 4 church school rooms, dining-assembly area, kitchen equipment, rest rooms and new floor covering (a recent project of the ladies), its shady, well sodded lawn and graved parking area, many of which improvements have been made in the last 8 years under the pastorate of Rev. Ralph E. Harris.

Mossy Creek is an active church with an average Sunday School attendance during the past year of 84 and an average morning worship attendance of 115, both services being held each Sunday, and a membership of 176.

The budget of the church has continued to climb during the past 150 years. In 1821 we do not know what the pastor's support was, but in 1868 it was $15.25 from Mossy Creek and a total of $145.85 for the year from the whole Charge for the support of both the pastor and the presiding elder; in 1963 the pastor's support from the Charge was $2,100.00, and in 1971 the pastor's support from Mossy Creek alone is $6,570.00, with total support from the 2-church Charge of $7,200.00. The total budget for Mossy Creek alone for 1971 is $11,271.96. A copy of the 1971 Budget is included in the church copy of this history for the record.

After lunch, which will be served in the basement, if you like, you can take a pilgrimage back down to the sites of the two old churches and the Academy or school. The area has been cleared with a pathway to follow. The first site you will reach is the second old church; and to the Northwest of it, within the pasture fence, you can see the raised area where the old log church and later the Academy stood. We know that you will enjoy this walk and the many memories it will bring back for a lot of you.

This brings the present chapter of this history to a close. But there is so much more that we want to uncover and record that we feel we have only just begun. Please continue to give items that you feel will be of interest to your historian and especially anything that you find on the years before 1860 where there is so little recorded. But more than anything else, we pray that this Church will be led by the Holy Spirit to do the will and work of the Lord with such true spirit and enthusiasm that the next chapter of this history will write itself in the minds and hearts of all God's children.

Mrs. Kenneth R. Keene
Church Historian

Sources of Information

3. Harris, Reverend Ralph E., Pastor, Mossy Creek United Methodist Church
4. Etheridge, Reverend Roy E., Retired Pastor, Nacoochee
5. Minutes of Quarterly Conference for Cleveland Circuit, 1967 and 1875
6. Church Registers for Cleveland Circuit, 1911-1915; Mossy Creek Church, 1971
7. Members of Mossy Creek Congregation and friends of the church, for lack of space, too numerous to mention.
8. Mossy Creek High School brochure - L. Q. Meaders; Map - Whelchel Meaders.