MT. BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Church History 1833 - 1983
United Methodist Women 1926 - 1983
Historian: Harold R. Rodgers, Sr.
May 15, 1983

TRUSTEES:
Pettis U. Bledsoe
Wesley J. Miller
A. M. Wilkerson
Bobby A. Miller
Floyd N. Bailey
Jack F. Daniel
B. Dean Kelley
Stanley F. Davis
Tradition bequeaths to us a legend of a little log church with mud daubed walls and a dirt floor built on Indian land. This territory was ceded by the Creek Indians to Georgia in 1821.

On August 10, 1833, one acre of land near the Southwest corner of Lot 140 in the Eighth District of Henry County was deeded by Henry Winderweedle to Trustees Drury Flowers, (ancester of descendents who founded the Flowers Baking Company), Christian Lewis, John Hunt, Hillery Philips and Levi H. Turner for the purpose of instituting a school and establishing a Methodist Episcopal Meeting House. Further, Henry Winderweedle granted in the deed the "privilege of his Spring for the use of the teacher and scholars and the congregations that may at any time assemble as said meeting house". Also he directed, "there shall be no fencing put up nor no other obstruction that may hinder a free intercourse from the said school or meeting house to the Spring".

Deeded on December 19, 1848, by John S. Hunt, "for and in consideration of the love and goodwill he has for the church", to Trustees Solomon Odel, D. Couch, R.J. Harper, G.W. McMullen and William Hooten and their successors in office was "a certain lot or piece of land" measuring approximately one-half acre in size.

A second church is believed to have been a building of hand planed lumber with split boards to cover the corners, mortised and penned together with pegs. It is recorded that this pioneer church in 1865 had a rule that a young couple could not sit together in church and, if they did, they were asked to either leave or separate. The men sat on one side of the building and the ladies on the other side.

During the 1850-1900 period the church seems to have been in a high spiritual state. Enthusiastic prayer meetings were held at the church building on Sunday nights with group prayer meetings held in the members' homes on Wednesday nights. On March 10, 1885, with Rev. J.C. Davison as pastor, a church conference showed the assessment of $80.00 as pastor's salary. During 1885, Mt. Bethel was in the South Atlanta District and in 1902 with W.F. Glenn as pastor and J.B. Robins as Presiding Elder,
Mt. Bethel was placed in the Griffin District.

Around 1891, encouraged by the study of the scriptures and reassured by the leading of the Holy Spirit through Rev. D. C. Brown, Mt. Bethel became discontent with its building and a third and larger church was built. The new church was a frame building with the dimensions of 36 x 58 feet. The trustees of the church passed a resolution that there should be no smoking in the building or on the church grounds and that people should not go in or out of the church unnecessarily while the service was being held.

The oldest Sunday School record book available to the writer is dated "Jan. 3th, 1897" and is authored by "William Asbury Hooten, Superintendent Mt. Bethel Sunday School". In "Little People Class No. 1" under Teacher George Spinks were the following students: Lizzie Hooten, Ruffus Spinks, Jeffie Hay, Ras Hunt, Jim Austin, Jonnie Jones, Lieze Willingham, Otis Cowan, Ray Lane, Buck Lane, Paul Lewis, Fred Jackson and Carlton Hayes.

In the "Illustrated Lesson Paper No. 1" class under Teacher W.A. Hooten were students Willie Austin, Robert Wynn, Emery Cowan, Clark Hunt, Claud Hunt, Walter Wynn, Lim Austin, Howard Hays, Green Capps, Chick Willingham and A.O. Huckaby.

The "Illustrated Lesson Paper No. 2" class under Teacher Iva Willingham was composed of students Mamie Hooten, Lonnie Willingham, Lenora Bledsoe, Emma Capps, Fannie Capps, Itira Cowan, Cora Jackson, Annie Jeffare and Cora Lane.

"Little People Class No. 2" under Teacher Lizzie Hooten consisted of students Willie Wynn, Cora Cowan, Susie Capps, Lilla Jackson, Daisy Lewis, Ammie Hooten (Miss Ammie's aunt), Nettie Jeffare and Eula Lane.


The record for Sunday, March 12, 1897 is very revealing: "Religious Services by: W.A. Hooten, Supt. Opening Song: "Building On The Rock"

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Officers & Teachers present: 7, absent 1
Scholars present: 26, absent 17
Scripture Lesson: Acts 10:1 to 12 and 17 to 20
Subject of Lesson: Saul the Persecutor, Converted.
Collection: 13¢ Weather: Pleasant
School Closed by: "Step Out On The Promise"

Our ancestors obviously were not "well heeled" for Superintendent Hooten remarked in his report of April 23, 1899, "collected 395 cts. since October up to April the first", (6 months).

On January 15, 1899, when the Charge consisted of Locust Grove, Philadelphia, St. Paul and Mt. Bethel, Pastor R.A. Seale recorded, "Dear Brethren, I am sorry to have to report that the Sunday Schools of this Charge all went into Winter Quarters except at Mt. Bethel. I learned from Bro. Myers that there is no School at St. Paul. This does not speak well for the Sunday School cause. There are no Epworth Leagues. The outlook for establishing any is not atall flattering. Pastoral instruction of children is being observed". (Exact quote, mispelling included).

In August, 1910, Mt. Bethel had a membership of 206, and in 1919 the membership numbered 243. The membership list was revised through Order of Conference in 1920 by B.F. Grant, Secretary, to 205.

The church membership became discontented with the old top-heavy building in 1937. Rev. Jesse Warwick appointed a committee to examine the structure as to what repairs would be necessary and the committee condemned the building as beyond repair. A vote was taken to tear it down and build a more adequate building. It is common knowledge that the members financed the new church building with butter and egg money!

On April 10, 1938, the congregation moved into the new brick church for Sunday School. Butter and egg money terminated the indebtedness in 1939.

An interesting report was filed by Pastor E.F. Martin to the First Quarterly Conference of the Locust Grove Charge on February 15, 1941, only nine months prior to the beginning of World War II. There were four churches in the charge at that time.
Mt. Bethel led the way with 198 members while Philadelphia had 152, New Hope 119 and Locust Grove 93. He reported that Mt. Bethel held their Church School and Church Services in the afternoons on the First, Third and Fourth Sundays.

Rev. A.E. Purviance served Mt. Bethel from September 1, 1942 until July 1943. At that time the "Locust Grove Charge" consisted of four churches, Locust Grove, Mt. Bethel, Philadelphia and New Hope. His report to the "Fourth Quarterly Conference, Locust Grove, dated October 24, 1942" states: "The pastor took over the work of this Charge on September 1. Rev. E.F. Martin, the former pastor, left the work in fine shape. An increase in church membership is reported at this time, due largely to the splendid revivals which he conducted during the latter part of the summer. Since we have been in charge, we have received splendid cooperation from all four churches on the charge. Attendance has been good as a whole. Two showers have been given us, one by Mt. Bethel and one by Locust Grove. We not only appreciate everything that was so generously given to us but the spirit which has been shown.

The pastor has not yet visited in every home but hopes to do so in the near future. Since September 1 we have made 250 calls. Orphan's Work Day has been or will be observed in all 4 churches. World Wide Communion Sunday with special love offerings was observed at Philadelphia and Locust Grove on Sunday, October 4. Both churches gave generously to this cause. Also we are making use of the free literature which is ours merely for the asking, put out by the Board of Missions. During this quarter two such pamphlets will be put into the hands of each member, one entitled, "Black Reflects The Light"; the other one on prayer by China's Madame Chiang Kai-Shek.

Respectfully submitted, A.E. Purviance"

It is interesting to note that J.E. "Johnny" Miller signed the Minutes of Quarterly Conferences as Secretary for many years during the 1940's, and served Mt. Bethel faithfully as Treasurer, Sunday School Superintendent and song leader during that period of time.

On June 11, 1959, Pettis U. Bledsoe, in love and devotion to Mt. Bethel and its membership, deeded one acre in Land Lot 148 to Trustees Wesley J. Miller, Robert S. Wynn, T.J. Rivers and Pettis U. Bledsoe for the maintenance of a place of residence for Methodist ministers serving our church. On May 10, 1960, J.C. Callaway, D.S. of the Griffin District authorized Mt. Bethel to borrow $7,000 to complete our parsonage which was under construction. Christmas Eve, 1961, this parsonage home was destroyed by fire but was quickly rebuilt by our faithful membership.

More space was needed in the church building. After much prayerful work the membership came to the conclusion that timidity and fear should be done away with and agreed with the writer of the Psalm who bids us "worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness" and were led to accept the responsibility and fulfill the tasks demanded of them without fear -- and in 1965 a program of remodeling was planned and executed. The building was extended; more classrooms provided; two bathrooms added and the sanctuary remodeled.

In 1973 our membership recognized the need of additional church school rooms, pastor's study and fellowship hall. This need was quickly met and the debt terminated.

In 1978 Rev. Richard C. Long, who served as pastor at Mt. Bethel in 1977 and 1978, recognized the need of a men's organization within the church and with the help of Bill Barr, who served as President, initiated plans to begin Mt. Bethel Men's Club. Nineteen men became members at this organizational meeting. Presently we have twenty members serving the needs of our church and community.

Rev. Al Key and his wife, Betty, began their ministry at our church in June, 1979; and he continues to serve as our pastor. During the time that he has served, our spiritual and membership growth has been exceptional; at the Annual Charge Conference held in October 1980, he reported an increase of 31 members at Mt. Bethel during the 16 months he had ministered to us. On April 19, 1981, they departed on a 10 day trip to the Holy Land, which was sponsored by the members of Mt. Bethel. While they were away, the entire sanctuary floor was carpeted and was dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Lena Bledsoe.

For the comfort of our pastor and his family, in January 1983, we added a great room to our parsonage and the debt
has been terminated.

As of Homecoming Sunday, May 15, 1983, we have 188 church members on roll at Mt. Bethel. Also, our Church School has 71 active students. Under the guidance of our pastor and his wife, Betty, ours is a close-knit membership with much love and devotion to each other.

Results have proved that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for here is quiet and beauty.......an atmosphere of spiritual refreshment by all who come to worship".

Harold R. Rodgers, Historian

Miss Ammie Hooten, Original Historian

MINISTERS AT Mt. BETHEL SINCE 1848

1848  John Hunt
1880  C. C. Spence
1881-2  G.W. Thomas
1883  J.C. Davison
1884  J.H. Timmerson
1885  J.W. Loopo
1886  C.M. Wright
1887  J.D. Mailton (best read)
1888  A. S. Adams
1889  J.W. Baley
1890  C.C. Davis
1891-2  D.C. Brown
1893  J.A. Thurman
1894  L.P. Neice
1895  J.T. Lorral
1896  Thomas Kendall
1897  R.R. Sibley
1898  J.N. Myres
1899  R.A. Seal
1900  J.M. Fowler
1901-2  Sanford Leake
1903-4  J.D. Lewis
1904-5  A.E. Sansburn
1906-7  C.V. Weathers

1908-9  A. F. Ward
1910-11  W. J. DeBardelehem
1912  F. R. Smith
1913-14  L. L. Landrum
1915-16  J.J. Copelan
1917-18  H. L. Byrd
1919  D. A. McBrayer
1920-21-22-23  D. P. Johnston
1924-25  W. E. Brown
1926-27  J. L. Varner
1928-29-30  R. H. Timberlake
1931  H. M. Strozier
1932-33-34  H. A. McNeil
1935-36-37-38  Jesse Warwick
1939  R.C. Shea & J.H. Hager
1940  J. W. King
1941-42  E. F. Martin
1942-43  A. E. Purviance
1943-44  Nath Thompson
1944-45-46-47  E. T. Drinkard
1947-48-49  J. B. Ward
1950  Warren Hamby
1951  Clyde Blackstock
1952-53  Wilton Holsten
1954-55-56  Harold Tucker
1957-58  Grant Hinshaw
1959  Ed Murfin
1960-61-62  Renfroe Watson
1962-63  John Underwood
1964-65-66  Al Griffis
1966-67-68-69  James Rutherford
1970-71-72  Layne Jenkins
1972-73-74  David Bowen
1974-75-76  Tony Swanson
1977-78  Richard Long
1979-80-81-82-83  Alfred L. Key