FOREWORD

Why should we as God's people go to expense and energy to celebrate Mt. Zion United Methodist Campground's 150th Birthday? Why, for that matter, should we celebrate anything? 1984 is also the 200th birthday of the Methodist Church. Churches all across our world are creating many events to celebrate this special occasion. Why?! I think the answer lies partly in our theme, "Under God's Grace - 150 Years." It sounds contradictory, but we celebrate because we don't deserve to celebrate, yet we are allowed to celebrate. It is because of God's grace. His unmerited and undeserved love. Through the years, God has richly blessed the Methodist Church. John Wesley was a man of determined faith, courage, and thoroughness. His approach and interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ lives vividly today because of the grace of God. You will find in this booklet many diagrams, pictures and descriptions that will provide living proof of the many lives God has touched through Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. Our ancestors had a determined faith that was lived out courageously and intentionally. They must have loved the Lord or this great place of spiritual renewal would have ceased to exist.

We celebrate because this grace gives us hope for the future. The fact that God's spirit has moved in years past allows us to dream and believe that His spirit will move in the future. Lives have been touched; therefore, lives will be touched. We celebrate because places like Mt. Zion United Methodist Campground are necessary. Jesus made it a priority to move apart from the multitude to pray and commune with His Heavenly Father. If our Christ needs renewal and direction, how much more do we?

My prayer is that for years to come, we can celebrate. I hope that we will always remain under God's grace. To God be all the glory for our past, our present and our future.

Terry E. Walton
Sesquicentennial
Co-Chairman

On January 8, 1821, the U. S. Government sent two commissioners to conclude a Treaty with the Creek Nation of Indians, at Indian Springs. This released a broad area of land between the Ocmulgee and Flint Rivers for settlement by Georgians desiring more land. So, after the Treaty, the area was formed into several large counties and surveyed into lots of 202 1/2 acres, more or less, for distribution. On May 15, 1821, the Georgia Legislature authorized a lottery system whereby the lots could be drawn and occupied.

Among the first settlers to arrive in our area, about 1823, were a number of devout Methodist families from Jasper and Jones counties. Two of the most outstanding families were the Kendalls and the Morrises. The Kendalls took the initiative, in 1824, to get a church organized. Under the leadership of Rev. John Hunter, Mt. Zion Methodist Church was organized in the home of Isaac Kendall, with 13 charter members. Others who were settling in the area soon joined.

In the beginning, services were held in homes of the church members. On May 18, 1830, land was bought to erect a church building. It was built on Lot 4, just north of the present Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, and is believed to have been constructed of logs.

Membership in Mt. Zion Church had increased by 1834 to the extent that many desired a permanent campground for August revival services. August was chosen because farmers were at a low maintenance phase on their farms. On January 22, 1834, John B. Reid sold Lot 2 containing 202 1/2 acres, more or less, for $200.00. The following Trustees, John Simmons, James R. Callaway, William H. Simmons, Robert Bonner, and George Parker, and the successors of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Fayette Circuit, were responsible for establishing and maintaining the campground. This deed was recorded in Pike County January 23, 1834, witnesses being, I. B. Williamson and William Bethune, Justice of the Peace.

Deed of Mt. Zion Campground.
After 1850, the first church was abandoned and a second one erected on Lot 29, which had been bought from John B. Reid. It stood about halfway between the present church, which was built in 1892, and the hotel.

The first Camp Meeting Services on the Campground were held under brush arbors, but soon a small wooden tabernacle was erected and used until after the Civil War.

Membership at Mt. Zion Church continued to grow until 1860, when records show 110 white members and a considerable number of slaves. The Civil War took its toll on members from the church, but by 1885, the membership had increased to 200 members. It was not until after World War I that the membership began to decline. Society had begun to grow so mobile that many left this community for other areas.

During the 1860 to 1865 war period, no Camp Meetings were held at Mt. Zion Campground. Much deterioration to the Tabernacle and tents took place, as building materials were practically nonexistent. No saw mills were running; therefore, some tents were torn down and the lumber moved home for badly needed repairs on the farms. After the war, it became necessary to build a new Tabernacle and rebuild the tents. At the first meeting, William McKendree Blanton suggested that an attempt be made to raise funds for a new building. Rev. Sam Jones secured the promise of $3,000.00 as a beginning. Mr. Blanton requested the structure be patterned like the Tabernacle at Ocean Grove, N.J. Everyone agreed and Henry Williamson was sent to Hopewell, Virginia to secure blueprints. Mr. John Westbrook was employed as builder, and Mr. Blanton sawed the timber for the structure. The Tabernacle was dedicated in August, 1884, and was used continuously until 1959, when it was struck by lightning and burned. A large canvas tent was used that year for Camp Meeting. In 1960, the present Tabernacle held its first Camp Meeting services.
MOVING DAY

Unlike today, moving day in the earliest years was an awesome task. Tenters needed to bring stoves and wood, bedding, food, cooking utensils, dishes, kerosene, tables, chairs, clothing, linens, cattle, and chickens with them. In those days, Camp Meeting began on the Friday before 4th Sunday and went through the following Thursday. Moving began early Friday morning and was completed in time for the evening service.

WORSHIP

Before the advent of the automobile, the woods surrounding the tents would be filled with buggies and wagons. All roads leading to the Campground would be crowded from sunrise until the end of each day. The braying of mules, intermingled with the blare of a long copper bugle sounding service time, made an indescribable impression never to be forgotten. Today the sound of the old farm dinner bell has long since replaced the blare of radios instead of the music of braying mules and horses. Those who have seen the symphony of the night—the many voices of crickets and frogs.

In olden times, every tent holder was required by the rules of the Trustees to see that persons stopping at his tent attended worship services, even the one just after sun-up. Those not able to attend services were expected to remain quietly out of sight, so as not to disturb those who were worshipping.

Music has always been a vital part of Camp Meeting services. Records show that during the sessions, a piano was usually rented for five dollars. In 1914, the Trustees purchased a piano for $225.00.

CAMPGROUND STATION

In 1886, Southern Railway was given right of way through Campground property. The line ran about ½ mile from the Campground. A north and south bound morning and afternoon run was made each day. Each train stopped at the crossing, and large numbers of people used this as a mode of transportation to Mt. Zion Methodist Campground. Southern Railway added extra coaches to accommodate the crowds coming for services each August. On August 20, 1939, the trains were discontinued and the tracks removed some months later.

For many years Camp Meeting services began on the third Monday in August. In 1934, the Trustees decided to move the starting date to the third Sunday, thus encompassing all the August Sundays. Several years later, due to the early opening of school, Camp Meeting dates again changed, so it presently runs from the second through the third Sundays in August.
THE WATERING HOLE

For many years, the spring was the only source of water for the encampment. In the early
days the grand old spring with its wooden boxing furnished cooling drinks for man and
beast—hundreds of people and their horses could be supplied abundantly. However, it was
often dipped dry on Sunday, even though a frame was built around it and Negroes were there
to dip water and serve the crowd. In 1904, the wooden boxing was replaced by beautiful and
lasting stone work.

The spring as it looked in the early
1900's. The frame around it served
as a shelf for the Negro men to set
the buckets.

Most tents had a water boy, whose sole responsibility was to get the day’s water supply. In
the event additional water was needed, the water boys would be seen carrying their buckets
around the road behind the tents, instead of across the hallowed Campground.
The grounds were so crowded, it was easy for one to get separated from his group. If this
happened, the person would sit along the path to the spring and wait to be found, because
everyone eventually visited the spring.

August, 1934
Water Boy - Jesse Middlebrooks
(Jess)

THE PUBLIC TENT

The “Public Tent”, which was the largest one on the grounds, was purchased from W. P.
Horne in 1904. It was located in the vicinity of the present hotel. It was used to house and feed
the pianist and song leader, and others who wished to stay.

During the Depression, in 1930, all tents on the southeast side of the Campground, from the
pathway to the spring to the present hotel, were destroyed by fire. That year the Thomas Tent,
located beside the church, was repaired and enlarged to serve as the Public Tent. About 1931, a
rebuilding process of the tents began.

About 150 acres of Campground property were sold in 1945, to help build a hotel. It would
serve the same purpose as the Public Tent until 1973, when a separate dining hall was built. The
property remaining, after the sale, consisted of the present grounds, church, cemetery, and
timberland. The hotel remained until 1976, when the present building was constructed.