MT. ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

PREFACE

From the early days of the Old Testament to the present, Mt. Zion has been considered a spot very dear to God and to his people. Mt. Zion Church has gone through many changes during the one hundred and fifty years of its history, yet it remains a Holy Hill for us today. It began as Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church in 1828 and later became Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Still later it became Mt. Zion Methodist Church and is now Mt. Zion United Methodist Church.

It has sought to remain true to the faith and doctrines that it held in the beginning, just as it has maintained the original cornerstone, The Methodist Episcopal Church. It has had its high points and its low points. This is truly one of the high points in its life. Today we look at the past, the present, and the future. To some the future might look dim. To those of us who love Mt. Zion, the future is bright. New families are moving into our community; we have made provision for their coming to be with us.

We feel as Paul did when he faced very great difficulties but saw God placing before him an open door. We at Mt. Zion believe that for generations to come people shall still come to this Holy Hill of Zion to meet and worship God. We treasure our heritage; we glory in the present; and we face the future with great hope and expectation that the best years for Mt. Zion are in the future.

J. Douglas Gibson, Pastor
Mt. Zion Church is located on Rogers Bridge Road near Duluth, Georgia. This year we are observing the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of this Church, its having been founded in 1828. In so far as we know, it was first located on what is now Bell Road directly across the road from the Louvenia Bell home which was at that time in Indian Territory.

Due to changes in the status of this area, the Church has been situated in Indian Territory and in four counties: Gwinnett, Forsyth, Milton and now Fulton.

It was relocated to the present site in 1892. Land on which the Church is situated was given, for a very small sum of money presumably to satisfy legal requirements, by Robert N. Rogers and Anderson S. Bell. The deed was made on October 24, 1885 to A. L. Rogers, Jasper Boles, George Lowe, Washington Little and Robert N. Rogers.

John Rogers was one of the principal founders of Mt. Zion Church; regrettably, we do not have information on any others who may have been involved in the early founding of the Church. Mr. Rogers came to this area from Bulloch County, Georgia, probably in the latter part of the eighteenth century. He married Sarah Cordury, and they settled in a home one mile south of Suwanee Creek on an elevation overlooking the Chattahoochee River.

John Rogers was the son of an Englishman who was an American colonel in the Revolutionary War. John Rogers volunteered in the Army and served under General Andrew Jackson in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. General Jackson later spoke of him with great commendation as "the brave John Rogers".

Sarah Cordury was the daughter of Thomas Cordury whose people belonged to the French nobility but for political reasons made their home in England. The Cordury family came to America perhaps in the seventeenth century. When they landed in St. Augustine, Florida, the Spanish were in control, and the guillotine was in plain view. Thomas Cordury married a Cherokee Indian girl, and thus Sarah Cordury was part Cherokee Indian.

John and Sarah C. Rogers lived at their home on the Chattahoochee and reared a large family. In the early 1820's, Rev. William J. Parks conducted a wonderful revival of religion in the western part of Gwinnett County. John Rogers and his entire family were converted to the Christian faith and joined the Methodist Church. From inspiration of this
revival, the Rogers family and other pioneer families established Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church.

Rev. W. T. Lane (1878) wrote that, meantime, John Rogers had become a very wealthy man and had done so because of "energy, industry and good judgment." He also said John Rogers used his good fortune for "the education of his children, for the relief of the poor and needy, and for the advancement of religion."

The next information we have on Mt. Zion Church is in 1844. Those were "Circuit Riding Days," and Mt. Zion belonged to the Marietta Circuit which was part of the Cherokee District. The District included most all of North Georgia. Rev. Robert J. Cowart was senior preacher in charge of Marietta Circuit with one assistant. This Circuit had twenty-five or thirty churches. H. P. Bell described Rev. Cowart as a "powerful, eloquent, and charming preacher." Col. William Rogers and Col. H. P. Bell served as local preachers at Mt. Zion during those early years.

William Rogers, son of John Rogers, was chosen by the Cherokee Indians to serve as one of their agents to represent them after the United States Government had decided to remove the Indians to Oklahoma. Rogers opposed this action, but when it became inevitable, he helped to transact the necessary business in Washington, D. C. (1839). William Rogers was a loyal member of the Methodist Church, but said of his personal faith: "I am no sectarian. I believe in the religion of heart and not of creed."

At the time of his death, he was delegate-elect to the District Meeting of the Methodist Church. A committee of this body wrote a resolution on the death of William Rogers which read in part:

"His distinguishing religious characteristics were deep humility of spirit, unwavering fidelity to duty, and a present, living, active faith in the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ."

Colonel Hiram Parks Bell, Mt. Zion's other local preacher, was an attorney who lived at Cumming, Georgia. He was also an author, orator, State Senator, Confederate Colonel, Confederate Congressman and later United States Congressman. He preached at Mt. Zion at intervals spanning a period of years.

We have very little information on the women of the early Mt. Zion Church. Mary Vann McNair Rogers (wife of William Rogers) we feel sure was one of these, however. The Rev. William Jasper Cotter, a Methodist preacher in Georgia for 73 years, gives a brief insight in this regard.
He names these women, as well as the daughters of John Rogers:

Louisa Blackburn Rogers (Mrs. Henry C. Rogers)
Sarah Blackburn Rogers (Mrs. Jackson Rogers)
Louisa Ruede Rogers (whom William Rogers married after the death of Mary Vann)

He says that some of these women attended the Female Academy at Salem, North Carolina which was established and maintained by the Moravian Church. Louisa Ruede Rogers was a teacher there. Rev. Cotter says these women along with other good women of the community were a very active and intelligent group of church workers.

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY - TO PRESENT TIME

Following the founders of Mt. Zion Church, those who were active in continuing the Church were the Robert N. and Augustus L. Rogers families and the Anderson S. Bell family. However, this was a large Church in the late 1800's which is shown by Church records dating back to 1869. By the 1900's the membership had decreased which we think was due to the establishment of other churches and a shift in population. Though smaller, Mt. Zion remained an active Church.

On the fifth Sunday of September 1952, the Church held a special Homecoming Day which was attended by descendants of the founders and other early families and many other friends. Rev. Marcus R. Martin, pastor at that time, conducted the services and the late Rev. D. S. Patterson was guest speaker. This was a very special day for us. The late Rev. Patterson was pastor from 1921 to 1925 and was a friend of ours down through the years. Rev. Martin was our pastor from 1951 to 1954. During that time the Church gained new members, organized a chapter of the Woman's Society of Christian Service and started a Building Fund.

Rev. Dewey C. Bailey was our pastor from 1957 to 1960, and it was during this time that the original Church building at the present location was remodeled. Rev. Bailey was an inspiration to us in many ways, and he was especially helpful to us in this work. The renovation work was done by Tom Bell, assisted by George Bell, Wilbur Bell, Basil Bell, R. W. Thornton, Mark Bell, Michael Bell and others. A Dedication Service was held on Sunday, July 3, 1960, which was the one hundred and thirty-second anniversary year of the founding of the Church. Rev. Bailey conducted the service. Rev. N. O. L. Powell was the guest speaker, and Rev. Don Herndon provided special music for the service. Presentations made for dedication and those participating in the Dedication Service were:
Rev. N. O. L. Powell was our pastor from 1932 to 1935 and has at our request come back to Mt. Zion many times since then. Rev. Powell is our good friend.

In 1961 Mt. Zion and Warsaw Churches united to form the Warsaw-Mt. Zion Charge with Rev. Don Herndon as pastor. At that time we began having services every Sunday with Rev. Herndon preaching first at Mt. Zion and then going to Warsaw for services. Rev. Herndon was our pastor from 1961 to 1966 and again from 1969 to 1970. This was a period of many enriching experiences and numerous activities. Under his leadership a youth fellowship was organized which included both Churches with leaders from each church assisting. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Bell were the assistants from Mt. Zion. This joint organization continued until 1965. With funds raised through candy sales, a watermelon patch and other projects, the youth purchased one pew for the Church and the hand-rail at the Church entrance. For three consecutive years, we had Youth Sunday in which the young people had complete charge of the Sunday morning worship services.

Each fall for several years, we had a joint service with Warsaw at Camp Glisson, either in the Chapel or outside on the grounds. In 1967 under Rev. Herndon's leadership, a Men's Club was organized for the Warsaw-Mt. Zion Charge which met each second Sunday morning at the Shakerag Community Club House. This Club was later enlarged to include all the churches in the community and is now called Community Men's Club.

The Fellowship Hall was added to the Church in 1963. The Church was one hundred and thirty-seven years old when the first wedding was held here in 1965. Since that time there have been several weddings in the Sanctuary, and the Fellowship Hall has been the scene of numerous gatherings celebrating wedding anniversaries, birthdays, and the like.

In July 1970 Mt. Zion became a full-time church.

The Rev. Dr. J. Douglas Gibson became our pastor in 1974. We are indeed fortunate to have Dr. and Mrs. Gibson (Rachel). They are an inspiration to us and have provided a rich period in our history. We are especially grateful for the studio piano presented by Dr. Gibson to the Church in Rachel's honor. With Dr. Gibson's guidance, Mt. Zion's first choir was organized in July of 1975 with Mary Duncan as director and Jean Miller as pianist. Gwen Gustavson began serving as accompanist in February 1978. The choir
has presented cantatas at Christmas and Easter and has visited other churches to share in their musical programs.

During the past several years, students from Candler School of Theology have been assigned to Mt. Zion to assist the various pastors in worship services and to serve in teaching capacities in the Sunday School classes. Currently, Rev. Ron Brown and his wife, Joy, are assigned to our Church.

Down through the years Mt. Zion has had an active Sunday School. The superintendents in our immediate past were: J. Albert Boles, C. L. Chatham, Mrs. Louvenia J. Bell, Mrs. Wilbur Bell and Mrs. John Taylor. Our present superintendent is Mrs. Tom Bell.

A five-room addition was completed in 1976 and will be dedicated on Sunday, May 21, 1978 along with the dedication of the Fellowship Hall as we celebrate our one hundred and fiftieth anniversary. The recent building addition provides space for a choir room, nursery and Sunday School rooms.

In recent years Mt. Zion has belonged to Duluth, Suwanee, Rock Springs, Level Creek and Warsaw-Mt. Zion Charges and has been associated with the Gainesville and Atlanta-Emory Districts of the North Georgia Conference. At present Mt. Zion is in the Atlanta-Chamblee District (June 1977).

Because of the beauty of the Chrismon tree (a tree decorated with handmade Christian symbols) and the historical significance of our Church to this area, it was selected by the Joan Glancy Hospital Auxiliary to be included on their 1977 Christmas Tour of Homes. For this event, the ladies of the Church gathered and displayed many items to illustrate the historical development of the Church and decorated the interior with all natural greenery. Tom Bell furnished a beautiful cedar tree for displaying the Chrismons.

This is, of course, a very incomplete account of the history of Mt. Zion Church; but in looking at the past through what records are available, we have gained perspective and realize we are indebted to many people. We are deeply grateful to Divine Providence and to our predecessors, and we look forward in faith to the future.

In recalling our more recent past, each person associated with our Church brings to mind something special each one means to us. Among these were:

J. Albert Boles who joined this Church in 1908. He served as Sunday School superintendent and in various other ways over a period of many years.