

History of New Holland United Methodist Church
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NEW HOLLAND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Gainesville, Georgia

New Holland United Methodist Church is the oldest continuing congregation in the textile village of New Holland northeast of Gainesville, Georgia. When the community was known earlier as Limestone Springs, a Baptist Church was located here from 1826 to 1830. The building was burned, presumably by Indians, and the congregation disbanded.¹

In the late 19th century visitors from Atlanta were attracted to the potential medicinal benefits of White Sulphur and Limestone Springs. Edmund W. Holland built a hotel near Limestone Creek as a summer health resort, and the community became known as Holland Springs. After his death, his widow deeded 560 acres, including Holland Springs Hotel, March 20, 1900, to the Pacolet Manufacturing Company (now Milliken) from South Carolina. Streets were laid out for the community renamed New Holland, and a textile mill was built. For about 50 years all dwellings and properties in New Holland were owned by the New Holland Mill.²

Informal Beginnings

For two years Methodists met informally for worship and prayer in the Holland Springs Hotel. In early spring of 1902 the New Holland Methodist Church was officially formed in the hotel. A few months later the New Holland Baptists were organized.² The New Holland Congregational Holiness Church was built in the 1930s.³

North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South authorized the mission at New Holland in 1900 to be attached to Gainesville's Myrtle Street Methodist Church. The first pastor, A.A. Tilly, recognized as an outstanding scholar, established an informal Sunday School. In 1901 the New Holland mission was assigned

to New Holland--Laurel Hill Charge. Reporting on the mission at the end of 1901 Tilly explained in his Directory of Methodist churches in Hall County, "The church at New Holland has Sunday meetings and Thursday night prayer services, but the church is not officially organized. It has no roll of membership."⁴

Enthusiasm among the Methodists increased in the autumn of 1901, when Jeremiah Sanford Brownlow, after harvesting his crops in White County, sold his farm and moved his family to New Holland, and became employed at the New Holland Mill. Brownlow met with the newly assigned pastor, R.O. Smith, and others to organize the New Holland Methodist Episcopal Church South. He and his family (wife Martha Missouri and younger children Enoch, Walter, Fannie, Lena, and Willie) transferred their membership from Zion Methodist Church near Cleveland. Although Brownlow continued to work at the New Holland Mill, he was a local preacher and was ordained by North Georgia Conference in 1910. His daughter Nannie often accompanied her father in his buggy to his preaching appointments outside Gainesville. In each succeeding generation at least one Brownlow has entered the ministry, including the great-grandson, Comer Brownlow, associate pastor of Marietta First United Methodist Church. Comer is the son of Parks, son of Archie, son of Jerry Brownlow and his first wife Mary.⁵

Early family groups in the New Holland Methodist Church were the G.B. Allison (who later also became a minister), J.S. Brownlow, G.T. Cheek, E.A. Gillespie, and Millard Jones families. The Allisons were believed to transfer from Chattahoochee Methodist Church near Robertstown, and the Jones family from Lebanon Methodist Church.

New Holland Church Building

New Holland Methodists continued to meet in the Holland Springs Hotel until the New Holland Mill in 1903 placed together two houses formerly for blacks,⁶ to be used for public school and religious purposes. The meeting place was known as as the "Shotgun Building," because the two houses fit together like a barrel of a shotgun. The New Holland Methodists and New Holland Baptists met in the Shotgun

Building until a church building was constructed in 1904. Both congregations were each given goals to raise funds for a new building. After they had completed their subscriptions for a new church building, the New Holland Mill paid for the remainder of the construction costs, and kept title of the building until the Methodist and Baptist congregations met separately.

The New Holland Church building was designed for Sunday services of Methodists and Baptists, and for public school during the week. Public school classes were held in each room, and assemblies in the sanctuary. Later the principal's office was located in what is now the church kitchen. Large chalk boards used for weekday school remain in the Sunday School room walls. The church building became part of a complex with clinic, recreation building, community auditorium, company store, and later a separate school, provided by the New Holland Mill for a model village community.

The New Holland Church sanctuary exemplifies late Victorian architecture, with high stairs, wide pews in the center, and slanted shorter pews on either side. Each stained glass window on three sides of the sanctuary blends a different motif of color. In the center of the three panels of each window is the design of four flower pedals in the shape of a cross. A bank of light bulbs in concentric circles are centered in the sanctuary ceiling, and side lights are on each wall. The ceiling in the form of a cross, radiating from the center circle of lights, tapers and curves to the sidewalls to match the cruciform floorplan. At one time lilies were painted within the ceiling cross.

Cooperation with Baptists

From the beginning of the New Holland Sunday School, Methodists and Baptists took charge on alternate Sundays. The combined Sunday School enrollment at the end of 1910 was 121. In that year G.T. Cheek was Methodist superintendent and J.S. Brownlow was secretary-treasurer. The New Holland Charge comprised New Holland,

Lebanon, Candler, and Carey's Chapel (Gainesville Mill).⁷

Methodists believed their evangelists excelled in the joint revivals. After each revival the converts could join either the Methodist or Baptist congregation.⁸ When W.H. Venable was pastor in the 1920's, Rev. W.J. DeBardleben was evangelist and Sam Jones song leader in the community auditorium adjacent to the church. Crowds were overflowing the building that could hold 500. Some people stood on tops of nearby chicken houses to hear the speaker. For emphasis DeBardlelben slapped the palm of his hand against the bottom of his shoe. He spoke in conversational tones and used many illustrations. About thirty persons of the 100 converts joined the Methodist Church. Rev. W.L. Brackman Sr., stated in his Quarterly Conference report in July 1932 that 307 people were converted or reclaimed when Carl Looney was visiting preacher.

When the union church of Baptists and Methodists in the New Holland Church building was discontinued in 1951, the Baptists constructed a new sanctuary on a site given by the New Holland Mill. The New Holland Inn built in 1919 was moved across the street and in 1962 attached as an educational building to the new Baptist sanctuary.

The Methodists were given title to the original New Holland church building and auditorium in 1953, received by trustees George Freeman, Lonnie Hamilton, and Otis Kinsey. The apartment building (formerly second school building) was transferred in 1960, the trustees at that time A.M. Brown, Hoyt Ledford, and John Arthur Webb. The Quarterly Conference (1959-60) authorized the sale of the community auditorium at public action, and it was torn down.

The New Holland Mill provided various homes for Methodist and Baptist pastors until in 1954 both congregations were given parsonages on Terrace Street. New Holland Baptists later provided for mininsterial housing in Gainesville, but Methodists have continued to use the parsonage at One Terrace Street.

Educational Outreach

New Holland United Methodist Church has recommended the following persons into the ministry: J.S. Brownlow, G.B. Allison, A.J. Kinsey, deacon J.M. Jones, George Elmo Crumley, John Strickland under the pastorate of W.L. Fosmire, and Phillip Fair during the pastorate of Ira Newton Scott.

Sunday School Superintendents have included G.T. Cheek, B..R. Turnipseed Jr., J.A. Webb, Early Noble, Otis Kinsey, Theron Webb, Louie Strickland, J.E. Strickland, and Neal Black, and Edna Brownlow.

In December 1941 the combined Baptist and Methodist Sunday School enrollment was 360. New Holland Methodists enrolled 128 in Sunday School in 1943. Records of 1947 show the combined Sunday School enrollment was 265. The Methodist membership in 1950 was 135.

After the Methodists and Baptists separated, Methodist Sunday School enrolled 150 in 1952. In 1958 the Methodist Sunday School enrolled 114; in 1961, 101 enrollment. The congregation was encouraged by Bishop Owen Smith's speaking at New Holland, December 10, 1961. The Sunday School enrollment in 1963 was 108 with an average attendance of 65. The church membership in 1963 was 128, but then began a steady decline. In the 1980's an adult Sunday School class meets regularly, and periodically a children's class.

Through the years youth have been integrated into congregational life. Presidents of Epworth League and Youth Fellowships have been A.J Kinsey and Otis Kinsey ('31), W.H. Ledford ('33), Janet Jones ('41-'43), Phillip Fair and Ann Ledford ('51-'53), Theron Webb teen club ('53), Scotty Strickland ('55-'56), Phyliss McGill ('57-'58), Larry McGill ('58-'59), Ann Freeman ('59), LouAnn Ryleel ('60-'61), Brenda Strickland ('61), Mark Staples ('61-'63). Barbara Chambers was youth teacher and advisor for New Holland Methodist youth activities. In the 1980's the pastor has met on Sunday afternoons with youth as could be scheduled. Participants have been Chad Kinsey,

Tracy Chambers, Nicki Taylor, Jason Brownlow, Jody Reed, Andy Clark. The youth have shared in Thanksgiving and Christmas programs of the congregation.

Since 1914 women have been organized, in Woman's Society of Christian Service, now United Methodist Women, sometimes with scheduled meetings, other times with meetings on call. WSCS officers in 1931 were Olive Smallwood, president; Mrs. S.L. Paterson, vice-president; and Hattie Jones, secretary-treasurer. Other presidents have been Hattie Jones ('32,'41,'43), Janet Jones ('44-'45), Mrs. John G. Lupo ('46), Mrs. W.H. Ledford ('47-'49,'52,'55), Mrs. Early Noble ('51), Mrs. Lonnie Hamilton ('54), Mrs. Bernice Webb ('56), Mrs. J.R. Childress ('58-'59), Mrs. Lloyd Kytile ('60-'61), Mrs. Jim Coffee ('62.) In the reorganization in the 1980's Mrs. Edna Brownlow has been president of United Methodist Women.

Musical Outreach

At the New Holland Church J.S. Brownlow organized All Day Singing Schools studying musical chords, sometimes called "Do-Re-Mi" Schools, whose students became musical teachers around the nation. Teachers have been J.S. Brownlow, Sam Jones, Gideon Jones, Arthur Kinsey, G.F. Shirley, Asbury Jenkins, James Landrum Webb, and his son John Wesley Webb. One of the most capable, James L. Webb, was chorister in the New Holland services as well as the first music teacher in the New Holland public schools. His father George J. Webb, had composed the familiar tune for Stand Up for Jesus on the boat when he was immigrating to the United States. John W., a noted soloist as was his grandfather George, returned to New Holland after racial unrest by his white neighbors toward his black employees caused him to close his saw-mill in Forsyth County.⁹

Charles D. Tillman, composer of "Life's Railway to Heaven," and Luther Bridgers, Methodist evangelist and composer of He Keeps Me Singing, spoke and sang in New Holland. Ailene Bridgers, his second wife, was a faithful pianist at the New Holland Methodist Church, and attended with a neighbor, Rena Light, who taught piano to Brenau College faculty children.

In the 1980s Danny Jones, a New Holland Methodist who has led choirs of Antioch

and other churches, has directed combined choirs for district and annual conference gatherings in Gainesville. John and Linda Freeland were part of the Romans 12 musical group, and John, son of lay leader John and lay representative Faye Freeland, is director of music at Skyland United Methodist Church in Atlanta. In 1976 during the pastorate of musical evangelist, Glenn Ray, his first cousin, Cheryl Pruitt, Miss Mississippi who became Miss America 1980, gave a musical concert in the New Holland United Methodist Church. Otis Kinsey and his son Gene have been members of several musical groups. Otis Kinsey was Methodist chorister in the days of the union church, and in the 1980s continues to spark enthusiastic congregational singing.

Congregational Fellowship

Homecoming services have been high points each fall. Under the direction of Barbara Chambers and others, the congregation has had several weekend fellowship events with Saturday morning study classes for children and youth, afternoon recreation, and an evening congregational meal. Congregational breakfasts are held the first Sunday each month, followed by a meeting of the Church Council. Fellowship suppers are a part of the Thanksgiving Sunday program annually, and the annual Christmas program. Weekday Bible Studies in homes of the congregation were held in 1987. Regularly Bible Studies are held Sunday evenings, sometimes during winter months in homes of shut-ins. With the aging of the congregation a ministry to shut-ins includes weekly sharing of tape recordings of Sunday worship services.

In 1985-86 the church building was used by the Girls Club of Gainesville and Hall County during the remodelling of the New Holland Recreation Building for their use. In 1988 the church permitted the utility company to maintain its equipment on the church property when new sewer and water connections were being installed in New Holland to tie New Holland into the Gainesville system

Pastors at New Holland

Pastors beginning with December conference year have been A.A. Tilly (1900);

R.O Smith ('01); A.B. Merck ('02); S.H. Braswell ('03-'04); W.I. Delph ('05); Frank E. Jenkins Sr. ('06); Lucien Roper ('07); T.M. Luke ('08); G.T Chandler ('09-'12); Marvin Swilling ('13); G.T. Chandler ('14); O.P. McDemment ('15-'18); W.H. Venable ('19-'23); I.J. Lovern ('24); Hosea Garrett ('25-'26); T.L. Noble ('27-'29); W.L. Brackman ('30-'32); A.J. Kinsey junior pastor ('31); Jesse Warwick Sr. ('33); M.M. Brackman; ('34-'35); J. Paul Smith junior pastor ('34); P.H. Stokes ('36-'38); S.H. Milsap ('39-'41); B.N. McHan ('42); John G. Lupo ('43-'46).

Pastor beginning in August was B.W. Kilpatrick (47-'50). Pastors beginning in July have been W.H. Lewis ('51); W.L. Fosmire ('52-'54); Dewey E. Bailey ('55); Harry Alderman ('56-'57); C.L. Pickering ('58); Ira Newton Scott ('59); Howard R. Staples ('60-'62); M. Julian Scott ('63-'66); Burton Blair ('67-'69); Larry Summerour ('69-'71); Richard Hogue ('71); Marshall Dale ('72); Brenda Carol ('73-75); Glenn Ray ('75-'77); Hamp Buffington ('77-'79); Dick Huycke ('79-'81); Virgil Megill ('81-).

Employees of New Holland Mill no longer live primarily in New Holland, and the village comprises many retired former workers at the mill. As New Holland Methodist youth have married, many have united with other congregations, and the New Holland United Methodist Church is a part of the larger Gainesville community. The legacy of music in the New Holland Church reaches out to other churches where its former members now live and worship.

¹Sybyl Wood McRay, This 'N That, History of Hall County, Georgia. November 1973.

²J.A. Webb, The History of New Holland, Georgia and Pacolet Manufacturing Company.

ROSWELL, Georgia: W.H. Wolfe Associates, 1985, p. 7.

³Ibid., p. 131.

⁴A History of New Holland Methodist Church. Compiled by E.F. Brownlow, Mrs. Willard Brownlow, Mrs. J.R. Childress, Mrs. Loyd Kytile, chairman, Miss Emo Strickland, March 1963.

⁵Conversation with Nannie Brownlow, daughter of J.S. Brownlow.

⁶Conversation with Nannie Brownlow, an eye witness of the construction of the Shotgun Building.

⁷Much of the historical information about the church life to 1963 was condensed from A History of New Holland Methodist Church, op.cit.

⁸John Strickland frequently repeated that whenever a Methodist evangelist would speak to the combined church, most of the converts would join the Baptist Church afterwards.

⁹Conversation with Mattie Webb Baugh, daughter of John W., sister of John Arthur Webb. John W. Webb gave funds to relocate into Gainesville one of his former black employees driven out of Forsyth County. He moved to East Main Street in New Holland in 1915, and when Victor Street was developed purchased the new home built by Pacolet at 13-14 Victor Street in 1917, where he died in 1936. He was employed two years by the mill, and then made horse collars for Allen's Collar and Shoe factory in Buford. One daughter lives in Buford. One of the granddaughters of John W. Webb, who retained musical interest, Marie Webb, was pianist at New Holland Church, and at Gainesville Mill Community Methodist Church. Two other granddaughters, Barbara Chambers and Ramona Davis, are active in New Holland United Methodist Church in the 1980s. John W. and his wife Mary M. are buried at Beaver Run Cemetery in Forsyth County (Cumming) near where they formerly lived.