A History of
Newborn United Methodist Church
Including the Recollections of Many

Celebrating 175 Years of Ministry
1820 to 1995
In 1819 Rufus Broome of North Carolina and his wife Nancy W. Pitts of Warren County, Georgia settled in what was to be called Cross Road or Sandtown, now known as Newborn. His wife's brothers, John W. and Nestor Pitts, came to live with their sister and to clerk in Mr. Broome's store.

It is not hard to imagine what they talked about in 1819. James Monroe was President. Alabama was admitted to the Union as a state. Spain sold Florida to us for $5,000,000. People were beginning to migrate westward. Roads and bridges were being built. The ocean steamship Savannah became the first steam ship to cross the Atlantic. It took 25 days to go from Savannah to Liverpool with the help of some supplementary sails! The Indians had been pushed back to High Shoals in 1819 and the Apalachee was the Indian boundary. While the folks at the store talked about the events of the day they also talked about the need for a church. Most churches in that period began with services in homes. This is what probably happened here. But they soon began making plans for a church to be built.

1820 saw the reelection of Monroe. He carried every state in the Union. In Newborn the people organized the Methodist Church. On October 24, 1820 Richard Fretwell sold a tract of land in Newborn (which then was in Jasper County) to the following trustees: Jackson Harwell, Henry Fady, Washington Isaac Roper, and Benjamin Roper and Wiley Burge for the sum of $25. A small log church was soon built near where the present church stands. Log churches were not attractive and usually uncomfort-
able but they provided a place to preach and worship. The building served the congregation until it was replaced in 1847.

Prior to 1830 South Carolina and Georgia were one conference. The first session of the Georgia Conference was in Macon in January 1831 and the conference included Florida!

Records of the Newborn Church during this period are few. The Conference Journals are inadequate. Circuits in that early period sometimes had as many as twenty-eight appointments. Such large circuits were necessary because of the lack of preachers and the poverty of the people. These churches were often scattered over two or three large counties and the lack of parsonages made it necessary for the early preachers to be gone from home for long periods of time. The circuit riders rode great distances over rough roads that were often no more than Indian trails and often in the rain and cold. By 1820 the promised income of a circuit rider became $80 per year. No wonder he slept and ate in the homes of the church members when he traveled! Some of the preachers had a farm to supplement their income. (During the Great Depression of the thirties one of our pastors did some truck farming and another butchered beef!)

The 1820 log church was built near a spring which became known as the “Meeting House Spring”. A lay pastor named Jackson Harwell served the congregation as its first pastor. He had moved to Georgia before 1795. A devout Methodist, he served as a trustee as well as pastor. He preached in Newborn for thirty-five years. He was married three times and had fifteen children. Camp meetings were especially important to him. In the 1800s many churches had them. People came in covered wagons for miles around during “lay by” season. They often stayed several days. When Jackson Harwell had attended his hundredth meeting someone gave him the nickname, “Old One Hundred” and he was affectionately called that for the rest of his life. Another tradition says he was known as “Old One Hundred” due to his fondness for that hymn. Whenever he became particularly moved he would lead the congregation in that old hymn of praise.

1845 saw the division of the church in Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The issue that brought the separation was the ownership of slaves by Bishop James O. Andrew of Oxford, Georgia. Bishop Andrew had no choice. Mrs. Andrew had inherited the slaves and Georgia law would not allow slaves to be free. The slave “Kitty” refused to go north to a free state. Her cottage can be seen today adjacent to the old church at Oxford.

By 1847 the Newborn congregation needed a larger church building. This prompted the trustees to enlarge the property. On April 13, 1847 John W. Pitts and John A. Broughton, for the sum of fifty dollars deeded a tract of land to the Trustees of the Newborn Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to wit: Isaac H. Parker, James M. Finley and Thomas Burge and their successors in office. The deed describes the lot as going to a “post oak corner” then left in a straight line bearing just enough to the right to embrace the spring known as the “Meeting House Spring”! The deed is recorded in the Newton County Clerk’s office, Book I, page 184. Shortly after acquiring the land the second church building was erected. It stood on the site where the present church now stands. The new church was a frame building painted white. It was dedicated on Sunday, May 30, 1847, at the close of a three day meeting, by Bishop Andrew, Dr. Augustus Longstreet (President of Emory College) and Dr. Alexander Means of the Oxford faculty.

The names of the pastors who served the Newborn Church in that early period is not complete. It is unfortunate that so many of the early records have been lost. Here is the list as we have it:

1820 — Jackson Harwell; 1824 — James Hodge; 1835 — Anderson Ray; 1836 — Rev. Reed; 1854 — George C. Clark; 1855-56 — John W. Yarbrough; 1860 — J.W. Talley; 1861-62 —
Albert Gray; 1863 — William W. Evans; 1864 — George W. Yarbrough; 1865 — W. Knowles; 1866 — William W. Evans (for the second time); 1867-68 — Joseph Singleton Mallory; 1869-70 — Miles W. Arnold;
1871 — A.W. Rowland; 1872 — Miles W. Arnold; 1873-4 — M.F. Malsby; 1875-76 — Walter R. Branham, Sr.; 1877 — J.E. Rosser, 1878-80 — Sam P. Jones, 1880 — W.C. Dunlap; 1881 — W.W. Oslin, 1882 — Edward Gray; 1883 — W.A. Conoway; 1884 — W.A. Farriss; 1885 — Kaska Reed; 1886 — James L. Pierce; 1887-88 — W.A. Parks; 1889-90 — Walter R. Branham, 1891 — R.F. Eakes; 1892-93 — J.H. Daniel (1 1/2 years); 1893 — Robert Eakes (1/2 years); 1894 — O C. Simmons; 1895 — J.N. Snow; 1896-99 — A.C. Cantrell. It was during the ministry of the Rev. A.C. Cantrell that the present parsonage was constructed. Rev. Cantrell drew the plans and supervised the work.

J.J. Ansley served 1900-01.

Sterling P. Wiggins was pastor 1902-03. The third church building was constructed during his pastorate. It was built in 1902 at a cost of $3000. There was no electricity at that time. (Dr. L. J. Pharr and Cliff Childs built a generating plant in 1913 to supply electricity to the community). The church was heated by two pot-bellied stoves. The same building, with many improvements, continues to serve as our sanctuary today. The building committee was Dr. J.T. Pitts, R.F. Harwell, and N.P. Smith. The dedication of the church building on Sunday, May 24, 1903, was a great occasion. The Rev. Sam. P. Jones, who had once been pastor of the church, came back to preach and to dedicate the new building. He preached in an arbor built immediately adjacent to the new edifice to a crowd of two thousand.¹ (Covington, Georgia Enterprise, Friday, May 29, 1903.

His column written for the Atlanta Journal is quoted in the June 5, 1903 Georgia Enterprise. Sam Jones reported that while in Newborn he, his wife, and daughter, Mrs. Mary Mays, “were the guests of my old friend Bob Childs. He worthily bears the title of ‘Honest Bob.’ My friends Web and Talmadge of Monticello, the Pitts and the Adams and the Robertsons, the Shys and the Gaithers, etc. were at the service. It was a joy to mix and mingle with these good country people. I wish I could make a visit to my old circuits of Newborn and Jasper County annually. It was wonderful to see friends you haven’t seen in twenty-five years.” He did say that he preached in the new sanctuary on Saturday night prior to the Sunday dedication.

One interesting story is that just before he got ready to preach he asked if the building was paid for in full. One of the church official said, “Almost”. Sam Jones told them to circulate among the congregation and when they reached the desired goal he would dedicate the building “debt free”. They did and he then preached and dedicate the new building.


¹ Covington, Georgia Enterprise, Friday, May 29, 1903.
1920-21 — O.S. Martin; 1922 — J.T. Pendley; 1923-24 — S.H. Dimon; 1925-26 — G.W. Tumlin; 1927-28 — A.C. Baggerly; 1929-30 — W.B. Mills; 1931-33 — L.M. Davidson. The Davidsons were probably the largest family to live in the parsonage. There were 7 children. 1934-6 — J.H. Farr. Rev. Farr was a very devout person. He always knelt at the altar rail for the morning prayer. His favorite scripture was "I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psm 84:10). Charles Williams said, "He was most helpful to me when I decided to answer the call to preach: he gave me a Discipline, showed me his collection of worn-out Bibles — saying, 'You will wear out lots of these' and steered me to Young Harris College. In the summers he saw that I got lots of experience leading prayer meetings and preaching. I always felt Brother Farr being here in 1934 was Providential." J.H. Farr's daughter Ruth married L.S. Baugh in the parsonage at a sunrise service. Mr. Baugh had been principal of the Newborn School. He entered the Methodist ministry and served a number of churches in North Georgia with distinction.

1937-8 — H.O. Green. When Rev. Green died in July 1938 his son Oscar was appointed to finish out his father's year. He served until conference which then met in November. (In a rural economy churches could not "pay out" until the cotton crops were harvested.) Appointing Oscar pastor enabled his mother to continue to live in the parsonage and gave her time to make plans for the future. Oscar says, "I have always been grateful for the gracious way the people of the Newborn Church and charge received me as minister. I was a nineteen-year-old University of Georgia sophomore." Charles Williams, then a student at Emory, helped with the work of the charge. Shortly after sharing the preaching at a revival at Pennington, Williams was appointed pastor of the Shady Dale Circuit when its pastor Rev. J.A. Sprayberry died.

This enabled Mrs. Sprayberry to continue to live in the parsonage until November. There were six churches on the charge at that time.


1948-51 — H.B. Landrum. It was during his pastorate that the educational annex was added to the sanctuary. The building committee was H.C. Adams, G.A. Jones, Fred Williams, and Doyle Smith. The finance committee was Mrs. Gray Hinton, Mrs. Barron Davis, and Mrs. William Zeigler. Barron Davis was Treasurer. The annex consisting of five large classrooms and toilet facilities was dedicated on July 24, 1949 by Bishop Arthur J. Moore.

1952 — T.W. Taylor.
1953-55 — Walter Y. Murphy. Walter and Marianne's first child, Mary Clarice, was born while they were here and was the first baby born in the parsonage in a number of years. During the Murphy pastorate the stained glass windows were reworked with new lead and the broken pieces repaired. The beautiful new pews of North Carolina hackberry were installed and new carpet put down in the aisles and in the chancel area. A dedication service was held in May 1955, at which time Charles Williams preached.

Dr. Murphy, now President of LaGrange College writes, "We fell in love with Newborn — the children with their bright faces, the young people with their enthusiasm and energy, the young adults with whom we became very good family friends, and the older generation of dear, dear people who became like parents to us."

Robert A. Kerr served from 1955-57. The stained glass windows having been installed were dedicated August 19, 1956 with Walter Murphy preaching.

In 1963 James Thurman was appointed. He served until 1966. During his pastorate two beautiful memorials were installed in the sanctuary - a choir loft with new seats and carpeting and a pulpit rail matching the other furnishings. A new lectern was presented to the church and wrought iron railings were placed on both sides of the front steps. A new heating and lighting system was also installed in the sanctuary. Jimmy and Martha’s first child, Greg, was born while Jimmy was serving Newborn-Starrsville. He once said, “I always wanted to live in a house with a fireplace, and the parsonage had one in every room!”


From 1976-78 Randy Mickler served as pastor of the charge. This dynamic preacher reported, “My proudest moment during my two-year stay in Newborn was when we built the new Fellowship Hall.” It contained 2400 sq. ft. and was constructed at a cost of $13.50 per square foot, which made the cost total $32,400 excluding furnishings. The Building Committee members were: Sam Walton, Chairman, Albert Ozborn, Jr., Treasurer, Steve Polk, Gray Hinton, Bob Loyd, H. Thomas Newsome, and J.B. Rozier.

It was nearing completion when Randy moved in June. He never had the chance to enjoy it but he had the joy of helping make possible a building which greatly enriched the life and work of the Newborn Church.

When Luther Cooper came in 1978 the Fellowship Hall was nearing completion and he cherishes the memory of moving his office into the new study. It was built and paid for in two years, and dedicated by Bishop J. O. Smith on October 1st, 1978. “One of my best memories was the year we sent personal invitations to all the families in the community and wound up with an extraordinary large attendance. We had so many children we didn’t know what to do with them.” He also remembered that one year, as a fundraiser, they sold a “self-propelled grass cutter” sight unseen. It was a goat!

Floyd Wells (1980-81) was followed by Benjamin E. Sorrow (1981-83). Under his leadership Starrsville built a parsonage and became a station church. Since both churches wanted 11:00 a.m. worship services the charge secured a student from Candler School of Theology, Stephen B. Grantham, to serve as assistant to the pastor to help with the preaching and youth work. Ben and Steve alternated preaching at the two churches. Steve’s assistance made it possible for each church to become a station. Steve said, “Probably the thing I remember most vividly was the simple beauty of the Newborn Church. So often I would greet people who saw it from the highway and would turn off just to see it up close. While architecture isn’t everything, it is good when a building of worship attracts people’s attention and reminds them of God’s love.”

Ben Sorrow remained with the Newborn Church for a year after the division of the charges as the first full time pastor of the congregation. He always enjoyed the Men’s Fellowship Club and was amazed at the annual barbecue which serves over a thousand people each October. Tray Pope and Arden Davis have been excellent chefs. Steve Polk, Sam Walton and others have constantly improved the barbecue facility so that it is equal to the best.

The old weathervane that stood at the top of the steeple deteriorated so badly that it had to be replaced. It was then that the beautiful cross was placed on the steeple as a constant reminder of Christ’s suffering and love for all humanity. A Baldwin organ was given to the church in loving memory of Robert Smith Sams by his wife. Ben Sorrow wrote, “On September 13, 1983 I had a heart attack and was the first patient to be admitted to the new Intensive Care Unit of Newton General Hospital. I will never forget the congregation’s concern during the long years of my illness and have felt the effect of their prayers.” Ben’s bright outlook and keen sense of humor added joy to any occasion.
From 1984-87 the church was served by Elizabeth McClure. Having a woman for a preacher was a new experience for the congregation. She was a good preacher and soon endeared herself to many in the congregation. Her keen interest in counseling extended her influence far beyond the congregation and she was thus able to minister in a unique way to a larger area. In August of 1987 Betty began a prison ministry and was assigned to be chaplain at Central State Hospital in Milledgeville.

Charles R. Williams, who had retired in 1982, after serving churches in the conference for 43 years, and returned to live in his family home at Newborn, was appointed to finish out the year as interim pastor. He served the church ten months until conference met in June of 1988.

Having a full time pastor placed a financial strain on the church so that in 1988 the conference assigned a Candler School of Theology student, Jim Cabaniss, to be pastor at Newborn. Jim had been a Boy Scouts of America executive prior to being called to preach. He commuted to Emory for three years, as have all subsequent preachers. In 1989 Jim invited Charles L. Allen to come “home” to preach October 8 as our Homecoming preacher. He did two services, one at 11:00 a.m. and another at 5:00 p.m. While here he visited the parsonage to see the place of his birth.

On August 2, 1990, a strong storm, with tornado-like winds, hit Newborn. A huge oak tree in the church yard was blown over and completely demolished the Fellowship Hall adjacent to the church. A fairly large Building Committee was elected to plan for its replacement. The members of the committee were: Davis and Kathy Morgan, Sam Walton, Betty Polk, Beth Downs, Fred Snell, Ricky Schell, Jody Webb, Julia Ozburn, Bob Loyd, Charles Williams, Kay and Nona Clark. Jody Webb was elected chairman and Kay Clark was elected treasurer. Jody devoted almost full time to planning and supervising the building of the new Fellowship Hall. The replacement cost was covered by insurance. Through careful management and some extra contributions four classrooms were added to the building, the kitchen was enlarged, the pastor’s study improved and the ceiling raised a foot. The present value of the Fellowship Hall is in excess of $100,000. Many of the furnishings were given in honor of relatives or friends. One of the children’s rooms was in honor of Madge and Tommy Newsome, another in honor of Mary Hazel Johnson, and the adult classroom in honor of Bertha Porter. The building was completed in time for the October 14th, 1990, homecoming and barbecue. Bishop William R. Cannon was the preacher and George Beverly Shea thrilled the congregation with his wonderful singing. Bev Shea came to participate in the celebration of Mrs. Bertha Porter’s birthday. She had been a school teacher and an 85 year old former student was there whose children and grandchildren she also taught! The Fellowship Hall was dedicated by Bishop Ernest Fitzgerald on May 19, 1991. A beautiful stained glass window was installed in the narthex of the sanctuary, and shrubbery was planted on the grounds in memory of Steve Polk.

John Brolley (1991-94) followed Jim Cabaniss. John and his wife Teresa were both musicians and upon his called to preach he changed his life’s direction and enrolled at Candler where he made an outstanding academic record. Because of his unique personality and his enthusiastic nature, church services were lively and challenging. Teresa had a wonderful solo voice and added much to the music of the church.

Max Mayo, the present preacher at Newborn, was assigned at conference in 1994 and moved into the parsonage to begin his ministry July 1 of that year. He was born in Cumming, Georgia, when his father was a student pastor in that area. However, he is a native of Tennessee and is making plans to join that conference. He is an outstanding preacher and his sermons stimulating, well delivered and thought provoking. The congregation has worked hard and has made remarkable improvements both in the church and parsonage. Approximately $20,000 has been spent renovating and painting the sanctuary inside and out. A beautiful new
door to the annex has been added in memory of Mary Hazel Johnson. A computer and printer has been installed in the office, a new sound system has been put in the sanctuary with speakers in the Fellowship Hall, and a host of other improvements made. A challenge grant of $5,000 from the Frances Wood Wilson Foundation inspired the congregation to go the second mile in accomplishing this important task. Much of this was done under the direction of Albert Ozburn, Jr., Chairman of the church trustees. The October 15th Homecoming featured a rededication service led by Bishop Lloyd Knox, who was also the guest preacher. What a wonderful way for the church to celebrate its 175th birthday!

There are many interesting facts that ought to be recorded. For example, the tie rods that strengthen the church structure were made and installed by Mr. Green Mitchell. The first wedding in the new sanctuary was that of Dr. and Mrs. L. Pharr. The earliest history that I located was by Mrs. W. R. (Bertha) Porter assisted by Mrs. Fred (Maggie) Williams, Mrs. D.W. (Lucy) Loyd, with Mrs. Guy (May) Jones contributing to the research. Without their work this history could not have been written.

Much of the above is about preachers and buildings but the church is people. The vision and work of the congregation in 1820 and up to now has made the church what it is today. Mrs. Porter wrote in her history:

"We would like to pay tribute to our founding fathers who left us such a rich heritage. According to the old records the family names of those who served and preserved our church from 1820-1891 inclusive are: Roper, Fady, Burge, Loyd, Glass, Pitts, Beeland, Dickerson, Gay, Childs, Brooks, Williams, Harwell, Carson, Duke, Wilson, Porter, Murrelle, Henderson, Simpson, Stanton, Hodge, Zuber, Taylor, Saxon, Stowe, Freeman, Benton, Epps, Bailey, Perry, Smith, Bonner, Patrick and Davis.

Our first record of any church officials dates back to 1891. Here is the list of officials:

Church trustees: James M. Harwell, Judge Manson Glass, Robert Childs, W.F. Gay, and John L. Pitts. The church stewards were: James M. Harwell, Robert Childs, W.F. Gay, John L. Pitts, and Charlie Williams. Church secretary was J.J. Duke and the Sunday School Superintendent, W.E. Stowe. Mr. Dewitt Loyd served for a number of years as the Chairman of the Official Board and as Church Treasurer. His son Robert J. Loyd later served as chairman of the Official Board and also as church treasurer.

We have no data as to when the first Sunday School was organized. For a long time Sunday School was held in the afternoon but around 1919 the members voted to change the hour to 10:00 a.m. Prior to the building of the annex the entire Sunday School met in the auditorium. The Philathia (Women's Bible) Class met on the right rear section and was taught for a number of years by Mrs. J.L. Epps and Mrs. E.B. Nelson. Mrs. J.T. (Mary) Pitts taught the young adults on the back pews in the left section. Mrs. W.R. (Bertha) Porter had a large Men's Bible Class that met in the back center section. Later the classes were combined and Mrs. Mary Adams was the teacher of the new group. The toddlers class was behind a screen on the right front just behind the big stove. The youth met in the choir loft and was ably taught by Mrs. Lula Smith. In the summer the class often met out of doors on some benches under a big oak tree. The unselfish sharing of time and talents by these teachers and leaders continues to enrich the lives of many to this day. E.B. Nelson, Grady Smith and Fred Williams were some of the superintendents that served effectively for a number of years.
In a memorial written in 1902 the Rev. Cantrell paid tribute to Mrs. Walter W. Childs, who in 1879 had become a charter member of the Atlanta Foreign Missions Society. Later Mrs. Childs organized Newborn's first Missionary Society - making it one of the oldest in the conference. It has undergone many name changes, including Women's Society of Christian Service (W.S.C.S.) and today is called United Methodist Women. The contributions of this group to the local church and the many forms of missions are outstanding.

A unique feature of the church today is the Men's Fellowship Club which brings together men from several neighboring churches and denominations for a breakfast meeting each month. Junior Ozborn provides strong motivation and leadership for the group.

Several members of the congregation have entered the ministry. While Jackson Harwell was a lay preacher, he is listed as the first preacher of the Newborn Methodist Church and was a forceful leader for many years. In March of 1899 Samuel Holcomb asked for a license to "exhort" and it was granted by unanimous vote of the quarterly conference. He served as lay preacher from 1899 - 1919 when he moved to Oxford. Dr. Charles L. Allen, who recently retired as pastor of First Methodist, Houston, Texas, was born in the Newborn Parsonage June 24, 1913 when his father was serving as pastor of the Newborn Church. The Rev. M.B. Sams entered the ministry in 1906 and retired after serving 39 years. Dr. J.T. Pitts was a graduate of Southern Medical College — a forerunner of Emory's School of Medicine. He was a physician, merchant, farmer and was ordained as a local deacon. Dr. Pitts gave the land and the building materials for the erection of the Pitts Chapel Methodist Church. He preached there on a regular basis. It became a part of the Newborn Circuit until 1953 when it was made a part of Rutledge charge.

Oscar Green began his ministry here in 1938 when he was 19 years old. He retired in 1982 after a forty year ministry. Charles Williams was appointed interim pastor on the Shady Dale Circuit and celebrated his 21st birthday on that circuit. He joined the conference in 1939. His was the last class received by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and was in the first class received by The Methodist Church. He retired in 1982 after 43 years of service. Two interim pastorates since then brings his active ministry up to 45 years.

Through the years the following have served as voluntary organist and pianist: Miss Mattie Glass, Miss Maggie Blasingame, Miss Nelle Stanton, Miss Ora Smith, Mrs. C.B. Childs and Mrs. Gray Hinton. Joe Sears was employed in January, 1976 as Choir Director and continues to serve today. We are grateful to each one of them. The church choirs have always been a strong feature of the church. In 1980 a Baldwin organ was given to the church in memory of Robert Smith Sams (1907-1980).

As we look back we are aware that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who have given us a rich heritage. It is because of their faith we are here. As we think about the future we give thanks that we serve a great God who leads and empowers us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8). When the Prospect Methodist Church in Jasper County celebrated its 150th year it dedicated their history to the people of Prospect. "Those whose past we conserve - those whose present we celebrate - those whose future we consecrate." Let me simply add "The past speaks to the present. Let us listen!"

That the church is tomorrow is largely in our hands. May we be good stewards and faithful in our work and witness.

Please forgive me for any errors and omissions. If you will call these to my attention I promise they will be included in future revisions.

Charles R. Williams
Addendum:

For a number of years, the Newborn Charge consisted of five churches: Newborn, Mansfield, Starrsville, Pennington, and Pitts Chapel. In 1953 Pitts Chapel was added to the Rutledge charge, then to Porterdale, and to North Covington before it was closed. The building has since burned. In 1955 Pennington was coupled with Rutledge and continues to be served by the Rutledge pastor. In 1963 Mansfield became a station and Newborn and Starrsville became a charge. In 1982 Starrsville became a station and Newborn became a station. It has been served by Candler School of Theology students since 1988.