A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OAK GROVE METHODIST CHURCH

Collected and compiled by: James L. Welden, Pastor
May 14, 1953
The Oak Grove Methodist church was organized in 1836 by the Reverend Mr. Denny. The first building was built of hand-hewn logs and was located within one half mile of the present church building. General Sherman's men permitted it to stand.

Oak Grove grew and soon felt the need of a larger church. Mr. James F. Akin gave the land for the second church building and the Derden family gave the land for the cemetery. The second building was built where the present parsonage now stands, about 1880. The first church building was then used as a school for the community. It is now a part of the home of Mr. and Mrs. C.T. Elliot.

In 1929 a third church was built. The Reverend C.L. Middlebrooks Sr. was pastor at this time.

In 1939 the church was made a station appointment for the first time with the Reverend Charles T. Gray assigned as pastor. It was under his leadership that the first parsonage was built. In 1952 the church had grown until it was decided that a full time pastor was needed and the Bishop appointed the Reverend James L. Welden as pastor.

On April 18, 1948, the ground was broken for a new and better church. The church school building has now been completed and plans are being made to build the sanctuary of the new church.
The Oak Grove community is located in Dekalb County, Georgia, about ten miles east northeast of downtown Atlanta between Highway # 23 to Gainesville, Georgia, and Highway # 29 to Athens, Georgia. It is centered around the Oak Grove Methodist Church, which is located on Oak Grove Road. Oak Grove Road is a cutoff between Briarcliff Road and LaVista Road.

The Oak Grove Methodist Church dates back to 1836, and present members of the community believe that the first inhabitants or the settlers of this community, then a wilderness, came here around 1825.

A family by the name of Akin was the first to settle, and their descendants are active leaders in the community today. No knowledge as to why this particular spot was settled is available other than the fact that it once was very rich farming land. Those living here today said they had remained in the community "because it was a good place to live." It seems that the growth of the community started as the children of the original settlers began to build around their parents. Other families appear prominent in the history of the community and in causing it to grow. These were the Davis, the Jones, and the Derden families.

The first building of four for the Oak Grove Methodist Church was built approximately 1836 on land donated by the Lively family. This building was also used for a school. It is said by some that the first court of this county was held in this same building. It was spared during the Civil War by General William
T. Sherman's "Blue Coats" as they marched by the community en route to Savannah, Georgia. Other buildings, homes, and barns were burned to the ground or leveled by the "Minnie Balls". The Civil War marked the end of an era in the history of this community.

Like most Southern communities and particularly those in Georgia, the Oak Grove Community had to rise from the ruin and ashes of the War to begin rebuilding. From its founding the community had been a prosperous farming section of Dekalb County. Farming continued after the War as the main enterprise. The major crops were cotton, corn, peas, and potatoes. The resurgence of the community caused a growing need for a larger church. Mr. James F. Akin, grandfather of the present generation of Akin's, gave the land for a new church and in 1880, only fifteen years after the war, the second church structure was erected on the site of the present parsonage. This building was also used for the Oak Grove School, and Mrs. John Honea, one of the community people interviewed for this history, attended this school as a little girl.

Mr. John Honea, the oldest living community member, moved into the community 55 years ago. Farming was still the major enterprise of the community. As he put it, "It was all farming then, and it's all town folks now." This trend, however, has occurred only in the last ten of the past fifty years of this century. Mr. Honea described Atlanta at the turn of the century as "filled with mudholes." Mrs. Akin, the wife of the grandson of Mr. James Akin, remembered her husband's driving to Atlanta and not travelling over a paved road all the way to Five Points.
By 1908 the community again felt the need for a larger meeting place. A new church was built, the third building in the history of the community. The building was completed during the ministry of the Reverend Charles L. Middlebrooks Sr., who later became the district superintendent of the district of which Oak Grove is a part (Decatur-Oxford District). This church building continued to be used as the school until 1929, when Oak Grove School and Union School were consolidated as the W.D. Thompson School, the present grammar school of the community.

Between 1900 and 1940 farming, dairying, and construction work were the principal occupations of the residents. Since 1940 farming and dairying have decreased in importance, and the people work mostly in Atlanta and Decatur, with a few working at the General Motors plant at Doraville, Georgia. The community has changed more to a commuter community and at the present time is tending strongly in this direction completely. Since January of 1950 several sub-divisions have been cleared and opened for building of new homes. At present the community is only 30 or 40 minutes from Atlanta and only ten minutes from Decatur.

Electricity was extended to Oak Grove in 1929, and city water was first supplied in 1945, as was dial telephone service. The main roads around the community have been paved for 10 or 15 years, Oak Grove Road was only paved in 1949 after a petition was presented to the County Commissioner by the citizens of Oak Grove. This was the results of five years of effort by the people of Oak Grove.

Less than ten percent of the families rent their home.
Several years ago the majority rented from large-land-owners, but since then the land has been divided and sold.

There is a predominance of children in the community and there are an estimated one hundred, twenty-five families in the community, the average size being between 4 and 5 members. There are about twenty Negro families in Oak Grove Community, most of whom are farmers. Most of the white population over twenty-five years of age have obtained at least a high school education. There is little mobility among the members of the community because they like to live out from the city, yet they are close enough to enjoy all the services afforded by the city.

The Oak Grove Methodist Church became a station church in 1939. When Tucker Church became a station, Oak Grove made the decision to do likewise. Rev. Charles Gray became the pastor at this time. He was a student at Emory University. Friends joined in building a parsonage, and soon the pastor’s home was completed and furnished. There are two other churches for the white population, Midway Baptist which is half-station and a new Presbyterian Church which has just been organized, but is doing an excellent job. The Mt. Zion Methodist Church is a Negro church and the center of the geographical area in which the negro families reside. The other Negro church is the Mt. Moriah Baptist Church.

The main sources of recreation have been and are the cities of Atlanta and Decatur: at least, for public and commercial entertainment. The Oak Grove Methodist Church furnishes most of the intra-community recreation, a highpoint being the Oak Grove baseball team. A Woman’s Club provides social activities for both
younger and older women. The community has a Boy Scout and a Cub Scout Pack. Families gatherings and picnics play an important part in the social and recreational life of the community.

In April 1948, another chapter in the history of the Oak Grove Methodist Church was opened. The members sensed the growing need for a new and modern church building with adequate educational facilities. On April 18, 1948, ground was broken for the Educational Building of the new Oak Grove Methodist Church. This building is now complete and in use as both the Church School and Sanctuary. Plans are in operation to complete the Church Building.

Charles T. Gray, appointed pastor of Oak Grove Methodist Church in 1939, served until 1941. In 1941, D.M. Wagner was appointed and served until June 6, 1943, at which time Benjamin A. Petty became pastor to serve until Annual Conference session in October. J.W. Eberhardt was pastor for two years; then J.G. Wooten, Jr., became pastor and served until 1947. T.W. Jennings was pastor until June, 1948, at which time W.A. Horne arrived to serve until July 1949. Webb Garrison served until June 1950. Then came A. James Armstrong who served two years after whom The Reverend James L. Welden came as the first full time pastor and is still serving.

The present parsonage is well-furnished. The Church School Building includes a two-room nursery, a kitchen, three class rooms downstairs, a church office, and an assembly room, which is being used as the sanctuary and as the assembly for the Sunday School. The twelve rooms upstairs have been completed and are in use.

Today the community of Oak Grove lives at the edge of the
Emory section of Druid Hills. The development of sub-divisions in and around Oak Grove is increasing. The New North Decatur shopping center has given the community easy access to primary provisions: food, drugs, hardware, barber and beauty services, bakery, flower shop and sundries.

Oak Grove is rapidly losing its old rural atmosphere and acquiring the nature of a suburban community. The Oak Grove Methodist Church stands ready to minister to this rapidly growing community.

In the very near future Oak Grove will be known as a great church in a great community.