HISTORY

of

OAKLAND CITY METHODIST CHURCH
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On September 4, 1910, probably on the corner of Avenue and Lee Street, across from the home of Mr. I. N. Ragsdale, the first Methodist Sunday School for Oakland City was organized with an enrollment of 48 pupils. The record shows weather fair, eleven officers and teachers present and the election of the following as the first permanent officials: Superintendent, A. J. Mayfield; Assistant Superintendent, John Shannon; Secretary, F. A. Buttrick; Assistant Secretary, M. Caldwell; Choirister, T. V. Brent; Pianist, Ruby Allen; Treasurer, Mrs. E. P. Ryan. At the same time teachers were elected; Mrs. E. P. Ryan, Mrs. M. Caldwell, Mrs. F. A. Buttrick, Miss Lois Dailey, and Miss Myrtle Wallace.

The opening religious services were conducted by Brother John Shannon, now one of the prominent members of Capitol View Methodist Church. How long he continued to serve the school, the records do not show, but his name appears on the minutes for the last time January 22, 1911.

Mr. A. J. Mayfield, the Superintendent, figures rather prominently in the record until June 4th of the same year, when Rev. Neil A. Gillis is mentioned for the first time and he is recorded as "pastor of the church." After September 24, 1911, the name of A. J. Mayfield appears no more and Rev. Mr. Gillis, who is shown as having conducted all the recorded opening services, save two, beginning with June 11th, continued to do so until November 26th. On this date F. A. Buttrick opens the school, evidently in the absence of Rev. Gillis. But the next Sunday, December 3rd, F. A. Buttrick appears as Superintendent of the Sunday School and continued to act in that capacity so far as available records show. These carry us through December 31st. The last record entered, January 6, 1912, reads as follows: "No Sunday School or preaching owing to the snow." The records which have thus carried the school over a period of sixteen months reveal a persisting organization, but one that evidently labored under trying circumstances.

By common agreement of those in the community who have been here since 1910 or before, there was some sort of union services and Sunday School among the Baptist and Methodist people prior to the above mentioned organization. But no clear data is at hand concerning this early period, so a very interesting bit of religious history for the community will have to pass with but a brief mention.

It has already been stated that on June 4, 1911, the name of Neil A. Gillis appeared for the first time in the Sunday School record and that he was mentioned as the pastor, with no reference as to how long he had served as such, nor of what Church. In the Oakland City Methodist Church register, however, which dates from sometime in the year 1910, he is recorded as being in charge.
for the years 1910 and 1911. Whether he was appointed to the work by the conference or came of his own accord, is not indicated. People living here at present, who were here in 1910 though, say he came of his own accord and that he was, at the time, bookkeeper for E. D. Crane & Co. here in Atlanta. From another source it seems that the conference possibly did not recognize this work before the beginning of 1912. The record referred to, runs as follows: "The first quarterly conference was held at Oakland City M. E. Church February 12, 1912, Dr. Lovejoy presiding." Now this could very easily be taken to mean, not the first quarterly conference ever held, but the first conference for 1912, were it not for another statement in this same record. The minutes go on to say: "Preaching at seven-thirty by the presiding elder after which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered the first time in this Church."

During the stay of Mr. Gillis, there are recorded a total of 43 names - six by baptism and thirty-seven by certificate. There are also twenty-five names entered on the register up to 1914 without dates. It is possible that at least some of these were received by Brother Gillis.

The indications are that sometime during the year of 1910, some sort of church organization was effected. How many and who were charter members, the records do not show. There are sixteen names entered for 1910 - fourteen by certificate and two by baptism. There are also the twenty-five names above mentioned as being recorded without date. It is probable that some of these were among the charter members and that some of the organizers have been lost sight of entirely. For example, it is stated on good authority that one Mrs. Mehaffy was among the charter members, yet her name does not appear on the record anywhere. But some of the known charter members were Mr. & Mrs. George W. Allen, Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Buttrick, Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Belk, Mr. T. Y. Brent, Mrs. Mattie Fox, Mrs. J. H. Holcombe, Mrs. Mehaffy, Mrs. S. J. Farr, and Mrs. E. P. Ryan.

Among those whose names are recorded without date appears one who deserves to be placed in a class to himself, with the possible exception to dear old "Mother" Pharr. The one referred to is the saintly "Uncle George S. Barker. Both of these are now gone to their rest, but what a benediction they were while living, and what memories they left now that they are gone!

The Church organization has indeed been itinerant. It began its mission of good in a five room cottage on the corner of Avon Avenue and Lee Street where fire station No. 14 now stands. Here it remained only a few months before it moved in anticipation of a frame building on the corner of Avon Avenue and Epworth Street. It seems, however, that the move from Lee Street became necessary before the quarters were completed, and a brief sojourn was made on the corner of Avon Avenue and Indale Place, somewhere near the present location of Mr. Joe Bomar's home. Meanwhile, worship was held in what is said to have been a very old and a very small tent.

Just how long the Church worshipped in the little frame building on the corner of Avon and Epworth could not be ascertained.
Quarters here seemed to have been rather comfortable and commodious and might have become the permanent home of the Church had it been a bit nearer the center of the community. It is certainly a beautiful site and has the necessary lay of ground for a public building. Its geographical location, however, was against it and another move was eventually in order. From there the little flock journeyed to the corner of Arlington and LaRosa Terrace near where the home of Mr. R. A. McMurry now stands, and began worship once more in a tent. They soon moved from here across the street on the property where the Church now is located. Worship was continued at this place in the tent when the climax of adversities was reached. One cold Sunday morning before services this tent caught fire and burned. Out of this reverse emerged the beginning of the present building.

Of the pastors who have served, Rev. Gillis has already been mentioned together with his work. Others who came in their order were: E. K. Aiken and J. H. Couch, 1912-13; Brother M. L. Underwood, 1914-17; T. Wesley Darnell, 1918, and R. Z. Tyler, 1919-23. The names of Brothers Lampkin and Thompson are also spoken of but when they served, how long, and what were their relations, no one seems to know. Indeed the relations of Brothers Aiken and Couch are uncertain since they are simply recorded jointly in the record for the years 1912-13.

As to the work of these pastors, little need be said. For 1912-13, there is very scant material. The former shows no additions to the Church in any way; while the latter shows only three by baptism, four by certificate and none by vow.

It was not until Brother M. L. Underwood, who is living at present (1923) here in the city, came that the Church began to grow rapidly. In 1914, he received a total of thirty-seven members - eighteen by certificate, eight by vow and eleven by baptism. In 1915 he received a total of twenty-three - eighteen by certificate, two by vows and three by baptism. In 1916, he received a total of nineteen - sixteen by certificate and three by baptism. The year 1917 brought his good and faithful work to a close with a total of twenty-five additions - twenty-one by certificate, one by vow and three by baptism. Such a record would do credit to any one in a small community and, for a man the age Brother Underwood was, it is remarkable. It was he who started the building of the present Church, and though he has been gone for more than five years, one still hears his name mentioned with appreciation and love.

After Brother Underwood came Rev. T. Wesley Darnell. He stayed less than a year before he left to do war work in Europe. Owing to his brief sojourn, there are but meagre reports of his work. The register, however, shows an enrollment of twenty-eight names by certificate during his pastorate. And he is commonly spoken of as having been a very capable man.

Since 1919, R. Z. Tyler has served the Church. Those who had gone before had brought the Church to a point where it was ready for progressive steps, and some fairly substantial results have followed. In brief, they are as follows: A change from a half to
a full station; a new church; a one hundred per cent increase in membership, and an advance from $500.00 to $3,000.00 for an annual budget. Through it all, the membership has been exceedingly kind to the Pastor and his wife.

THE OUTLOOK: In the past four years, some seventy homes have been built within a radius of five blocks of the Church, in addition to several old ones that have been remodeled and enlarged. There have also been opened at least three new residential sections with the prospects of hundreds of new homes in the near future and these come partly within the sphere of this work. Again there are in our own community still scores of vacant lots, while our factory section lying just across the Central of Georgia and A. & W. P. railway tracks from us, has had a phenomenal growth. In addition to all of this, there are at present right in our midst many more than one person outside the Church for every one in it. Of these three classes: (1) Methodist with membership elsewhere; (2) Methodists by inclination; (3) people who have no church preference. Truly the field is "white unto the harvest"! Will we furnish the laborers?

The Historical facts presented upon the preceding pages were assembled by the Rev. R. Z. Tyler. We appreciate his work as a Historian, but his vision of the outlook proved him to be a greater prophet than historian. The information to be recorded in the following pages was compiled by Mrs. R. R. Ingram. Thus the fulfillment of the prophecy of Dr. Tyler is the labor of love provided by the Ministers and congregations which were the Church of Oakland City Methodists from 1923 to 1951.

Dr. R. Z. Tyler served as Pastor for six years, during which time the Church building was erected and the Church grew by leaps and bounds. He left in 1924. He was followed by Dr. Thomas M. Elliott, who served here only one year, from Conference 1924 until Conference 1925. Thirty-six new members were added during that time.

W. W. Carroll was Pastor during 1926 and 1927. Fifty-five members were added during those two years. He was followed by Grover C. Knowles, who was Pastor for two years. 62 members were added during his pastorate.

Jesse Warwick was pastor the following year, 1930. He received 25 members. M. M. Walraven was pastor the next two years. 82 members were added during that time. V. L. Bray was pastor for less than one year, as he accepted a position as chaplain at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. During the few months he was pastor, he added 35 members.

During the pastorates of all these good men, this little Church was struggling valiantly to pay off the indebtedness on the
Church Building. At this time, $1400.00 was still owed. This was the worst part of the depression and it seemed like a million. Men were out of work and nobody had any money. B. C. Kerr was pastor from August 1933 until Conference 1936. Someone has said that one of the best things he did was to find jobs for some of the members who had been unable to do so. He also made up his mind that the Church debt was going to be paid in full, and it was, in spite of the depression. The Church Building, now free of debt, was dedicated on Sunday, October 11, 1936, by Dr. C. G. Jarrell. During Brother Kerr's pastorate, Bishop Warren A. Candler preached in this Church, the first time a Bishop had ever visited this Church. 68 members were added during Brother Kerr's pastorate.

J. W. Gardner was pastor during 1937 and 1938. Now that the Church was out of debt, the time had come to purchase a parsonage. In the early part of 1938, the present parsonage was bought and entirely redecorated. 37 new members were added.

G. W. Hamilton was pastor during 1939 and 1940. 35 new members were added. During his pastorate, indebtedness on the parsonage was being paid.

Roger W. Stone was pastor for six years from Conference 1940 until Conference 1946. In 1943, the Church purchased and paid for a tract of land, consisting of about two and one-half acres, at the rear of the Church, to be used for recreational purposes. All indebtedness on the parsonage was paid off and on Sunday, November 19, 1944, the parsonage and park were dedicated by the Rev. Joe Thrailkill. On November 18, 1945, the Church voted to erect a small building on the park property, to be used as a Fellowship Center. The indebtedness on this building was paid off in one year. On Sunday, November 17, 1946, it was dedicated by Bishop Arthur J. Moore. When Brother Stone left, he had added 262 members to the Church, and the Church was entirely free of debt.

H. C. Emory was pastor from Dec. 1, 1946 until July 1, 1949. This was due to the fact that the time for Conference was changed. 52 new members were added during his pastorate. On July 9, 1948, a fire of undetermined origin did considerable damage to the Church Building, but with the insurance and donations, it was soon restored. Church services were held in the Fellowship Center during this time.

John C. Moore is the present Pastor, having served since July 1949. In the two years Brother Moore has been our Pastor, our Church has accomplished much in several fields. The Church School Membership has increased from 158 in August 1949 to 286 at the present time. The average in attendance has also increased from 90 to 153. Many have come to visit our Church and out of these, 103 have joined our membership in the past two years.

The Budget of the Church has been increased in every item as indicated by the increase in the Pastor's salary from the
$3000.00 paid in 1949 to the present $3600.00.

The physical equipment of the Church facilities has been completely renovated. The first floor of the Church Building was completely redecorated and the Recreation Building was painted inside. New swings, sand boxes, play pens, and lights were placed in the park. A new gas refrigerator was installed in the kitchen and a new gas furnace was placed in the Church. The Young Adults purchased a new gas stove and an electric refrigerator and gave them to the Parsonage.

In this Conference year, the Parsonage was completely renovated. Asbestos siding and aluminum screens were placed on the outside. The inside received a complete redecorating job. Floors were sanded and waxed; walls and woodwork were painted; closets and cabinets were built; new fixtures went into the bathroom, and a new gas furnace was installed for the heating of the parsonage.

While this was being done at the Parsonage, the woodwork in the Sanctuary was being painted. In the year 1950-51, Mrs. Mildred Ryan, in memory of her mother, gave the Church a lovely Altar Set consisting of a Communion Table, and handsome brass Altar Candlesticks, Cross, and flower vases. The Altar was remodeled to accommodate this gift. The W. S. C. S. gave the kneeling pads for the newly constructed Altar.

The present officers of our Church are:

J. O. Harris - Chairman of Board
W. W. Winters - Treasurer of Church
Mrs. R. E. Jackson - President of W.S.C.S.
Frank Ross - Supt. of Church School