HISTORY OF THE
OWL ROCK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Owl Rock United Methodist Church, located at 5880 Campbellton Road, S. W., Atlanta, at the intersection of Union Road, was founded in 1828. It is on land ceded from the Creek Indians, January 8, 1821.

THE CALLING OUT OF REFORMERS IN A LOCAL CHURCH

The Methodist Episcopal ministers came into the frontier settlements of Georgia just as soon as pioneers had set up their homesteads. Following a conference held at Savannah, the Gwinnett Mission was established and the Rev. William J. Parks was appointed. He was invited to the home of John M. Smith, who had settled in what is now the Ben Hill section of Atlanta, and on April 23, 1824, Brother Parks delivered the first of his sermons in the Smith home. Soon thereafter, he organized the Mt. Gilead Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. There were fourteen charter members and included among them was Richmond Barge and his wife, Margaret. During the period of 1825-26 the house of worship was built by the members on a small tract of land donated by John Smith on Fairburn Road, Ben Hill area.

During the period 1820-28 there came into existence a new faction or party in the Methodist Church known as the Mutual Rights Party, who contended for the mutual rights of the ministry and laity against the Episcopacy or control of the church by Bishops. Richmond Barge became a supporter of this new faction, which afterwards became known as the Methodist Protestant Church. It is said that one occasion, during a meeting at Mount Gilead, an opportunity was given to all members of the church to declare themselves either for or against this new faction, that a line was drawn upon the ground in the church yard across which all dissenters might go over to the new faction, the faithful members of Mount Gilead to remain. Other families also crossed over, whose names we have not recorded.

Richmond Barge, with his negro slaves had built a house of worship near his home, on a lot he had given for that purpose, which was used as a mission branch of Mount Gilead Church. Hence we see that OWL ROCK CHURCH came from the original membership of Mount Gilead Church. In 1828, when the split came between the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches, Richmond Barge rolled the little log house, which he had built, off the lot where it stood and moved it near the present site of OWL ROCK CHURCH and organized what was known as the OWL ROCK METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH.
After the log house was moved across the line on Land Lot 119, in the year 1828 one of the first of the "Associate Methodist Churches" in Georgia was formed. Then in 1830 when the Methodist Protestant Church was established, Owl Rock again was distinguished as one of the first in this movement. J. J. Barge served as Secretary of the Georgia Methodist Protestant Conference for 12 years.

Robert S. McWilliams settled in the community near Owl Rock Church in 1847 and acquired considerable land holdings. On July 24, 1856, he executed a deed of two acres situated just across the line on Land Lot 118. Trustees were Richmond Barge, John McWilliams and Alexander Smith.

OWL ROCK DURING THE BATTLE OF ATLANTA

It is interesting to note that it is this church building that is referred to in the Civil War Maps of the Atlanta Campaign of 1864 as follows:

On the morning of the Battle of Ezra Church, General Hood, after learning of Union forces active at Campbellton, dispatched the brigade of Col. Thomas Harrison directly to Campbellton. The Texas Brigade of Gen. Lawrence Ross went by way of the Owl Rock Church late in the afternoon of August 1, 1864, and allowed his men to dismount in the road and rest, bridle in hand, while he awaited further orders. (The report of Brig. Gen. Ross, Aug. 1, 1864, "The War of the Rebellion," Part III, p. 963.)

For further references of Owl Rock Church, refer to reports of one of the Union cavalry commanders, Army of Ohio, named Col. Israel Garrard. (Two battle reports referring to Owl Rock Church appear in the OFFICIAL RECORDS OF THE WAR OF THE REBELLION, U. S. Govt., Series I, Vol. 38, Part V, pages 467-68 and page 480 respectively.

OWL ROCK CHURCH-SPONSORED PUBLIC SCHOOL

Soon after the war a public elementary school was sponsored by the Owl Rock Church in an old log house where the old church had first stood. One of the first teachers employed was John Hamilton Cash who was licensed by the Fulton County Grand Jury during the Reconstruction. Six or more teachers followed. In 1921 Owl Rock School was consolidated with Boat Rock and Sandtown schools to form Sandtown School.
BUILDING PHASE ON THE PRESENT CHURCH

The sanctuary of the present church building was erected in 1879—built by the members themselves. The old building was torn down and sold to the Negroes who used the materials for the construction of the colored Enon Baptist Church. In 1879 the building appeared with two front doors. Worshippers entered the church through two doors, with the ladies going in on the right hand side down one aisle and the men entering on the other side. Not only was this separation observed in worship but the partaking of the Holy Communion was segregated. The silver Sacramental service (purchased in 1889) consists of flagon, bread plate, and two chalices. This 1889 communion set is now in a bank safe deposit box.

Soon after the 1900 Annual Conference session had been held in Owl Rock Church, a second building program was underway. In 1906 the twin towers and the vestibule were added. The two doors were kept however, and the vestibule was open from one side to the other for entry into the sanctuary by the two original doors. At a later time the vestibule was partitioned for small rooms under the towers with entry to the rooms from the sanctuary through the original doors. These doors remained in place until the 1975 renovation at which time they were placed in the center of the sanctuary as double doors from the vestibule.

The Sunday School Annex was added in two sections, four rooms were added in 1948, and four additional rooms along with two restrooms and the fellowship hall and kitchen on the lower level were added in 1956.

An extensive renovation program was completed in 1975. Colored stained glass windows were added and the interior of the sanctuary was completely redesigned and rebuilt. A new organ was given by Latham Time Recorder Company the same year.

OWL ROCK CHURCH BUILDS PARSONAGE IN 1958-59

Ground was broken on November 2, 1958 for the Parsonage and completed on March 17, 1959. Consecration services were held on May 17th as part of 1959 Homecoming. The parsonage is located at 5291 Campbellton Road, S. W., Atlanta, and contains 2,360 square feet of floor space. The lot was given to Owl Rock by the James Parker Campbell family.
THE NAME "OWL ROCK"

Owl Rock Methodist Church received its name from an eight foot natural rock formation, of biotite granite of a soft greyish tone, located to the rear of the present church on the eastern border of the cemetery.

The Creek Indians named this the "Owl Rock," and carved an eye in what they considered to be the head. Weather-worn markings around the base, which were fairly visible until recent years, would establish it a "guidepoing" for Indian movement and activity. One carving would point in the direction of "Sandtown" another to "Buzzard Roost," and most interesting of all, the face side would have the "Owl" looking upon ceremonial grounds, now the Owl Rock Cemetery.

HISTORICAL MARKER

The Georgia Historical Commission roadmarker was unveiled by the Honorable Ben W. Fortson, Jr., The Secretary of State of Georgia, Sunday, May 15, 1960.

OWL ROCK - FIVE PHASES OF METHODISM IN GEORGIA

To date Owl Rock has been identified with five phases of Methodism in Georgia as follows:

1828-1830 Associated Methodist Church
1830-1916 Methodist Protestant Church
1916-1939 Methodist Episcopal Church, South
1939-1968 Methodist Church
1968 to date United Methodist Church

The present pastor is Rev. James H. Wellman and to the best of records available is the 115th pastor.