

PACES FERRY

United Methodist Church

"A History of 100 Faithful Years of Service to God's Kingdom"

by James J. McGrath



Church History



Walk through the red doors of Paces Ferry United Methodist Church and the warmth, the love, and the history seem to reach out and touch your heart and soul. Even those who merely pass the grounds in the business of their lives must pause for a moment to let their spirits drink in its tranquility.

For one hundred years, its rock and oak foundations have supported the ministry in North Georgia of twenty-six Bishops, twenty-three District Superintendents, and sixty-seven pastors, not to mention the work of hundreds of dedicated laypersons. Four generations of spiritually hungry and searching persons have come to know satisfaction and peace in Christ within the shadow of its alter. Its century-old walls have been like the hands of God, holding his children in love, seeing them safely through the experiences of birth, commitment, and death.

This is the story of a simple church, built by "people who tilled the land." As with any church, it is a story of growth and decline, of sorrow and joy, of struggle and peace. Yet the story is still unique, because the people and the circumstances which built this church are unique. It is the story of small and faithful numbers finding the strength within their community to minister to a much larger and overpowering city and world. This church has never produced anyone of national prominence, only a small, steady stream of love, work, and commitment to the Kingdom of God.

ROOTS:

Even though the Wesleys first came to Georgia early in 1736, it would be some fifty years before Methodism would begin to fire the hearts of Georgians. But once the fire had been kindled in America, it did not take long to reach Georgia. In 1785, at the first Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Bishop Coke was able to report that the Church had had "an increase of 991 this year, and...stretched our borders into Georgia."

At that time, Georgia was primarily a coastal state. The interior of the state, including the Atlanta area, was still unsettled. In the nineteenth century, however, a few pioneers began moving inland, displacing the Indians and building their homes and towns.

Atlanta itself began through the work of the Western and Atlantic Railroad in 1838. A railroad was being built south from Chattanooga, and the southern terminus was surveyed and constructed near the present Spring and Magnolia Streets. "Cousin John" Thrasher was contracted to build the large embankments on which the tracks would lie. The quarters and company store he built and operated for his workers became known as "Thrasherville" and then as "Terminus" when the railroad was completed.

As more and more settlers came in, a town was soon established and in 1843 took the name "Marthasville", in honor of the daughter of ex-Governor Wilson Lumpkin. But with the growth of the small town, so too did dissatisfaction with its name. So within three years, the citizens had renamed the town "Atlanta", a name they thought was more attractive and had more flare. But even so, Atlanta was still a small town of less than 3,000 local Methodist preachers began to hold services in the railroad's roundhouse in 1847.

Their preaching proved very effective, and on March 24, 1848, Bishop Andrew dedicated the first house of worship built in Atlanta, Wesley Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, South. (The name was changed to its present one, First Church, Atlanta, in 1870.)

The growth of Atlanta was great in the time leading up to the Civil War, more than doubling to 7,741 by 1860. And even though the Methodist Episcopal Church of America had split into North and South before the founding of Atlanta, the southern church was strong and growing as well. When that terrible conflict began, the Georgia Conference was secure enough to meet annually and carry on the work of God in the midst of war. Of course, the work of every church was severely hampered by the war. Many ministers left their homes and churches and served the Confederate Army as chaplains, with more Methodist chaplains than any other denomination - 209. Methodist ministers were so numerous in the army that the churches of New Orleans had no ministers.

But their dedication could not stop the destruction that was to come. The South and its churches were devastated. The charred buildings could be

rebuilt, but a generation of young men had been lost forever. It really seemed that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had been mortally wounded. And it was reported in the New York "Christian Advocate" of 1865 that:

So far as we can ascertain, most of its conferences are virtually broken up, its circuit system is generally abandoned, its apportionments without preachers to a great extent, and its local societies in utter confusion. Its Book Concern is overthrown; its Missionary Society, Sunday School Union, and most of its other Church enterprises, without power, if not without form. All has been submerged in the general wreck of the South.

A "general wreck" indeed! The war was over. Membership in the southern church had been slashed from 750,000 in 1860 to less than 500,000. In the whole state of Georgia at the end of the war, there were a little over 5,000 church members. The war was over, but the work of rebuilding was just beginning.

PHOENIX:

Atlanta began to come around slowly. The city limits were extended from the original mile circle to include another mile and one-half in 1866. The Public Library was founded in 1867 and the Atlanta Constitution the next year. But interference from persons taking advantage of the weakened condition of the South made what progress there was bitter. Even though the population doubled by 1870 over the 1860 mark, it was not until 1872 that the injustices which marred the Reconstruction Era were ended. Feeling a greater freedom, Atlantans worked harder than ever to improve their city, culminating with the arrival of the telephone in 1877. The city was well on its way to doubling again in population by 1880.

The Church was a similar story. "The southern church began painfully to treat its wounds, sort out the pieces, and began to get up." The work ahead was formidable, but hopes were high. They were expressed in an editorial which appeared in the "Southern Christian Advocate" on November 30, 1865:

If we have not realized our hopes, neither have we realized our fears....Prosperity and peace have returned faster than we dreamed and, in some respects, we have been surprised into humbling joy and loving admiration as we beheld the strange evolutions of Providence....Six months since, we were almost a homeless and cheerless people, but today, revived in spirit and renewed in energy, Providence is working within us even more strikingly than in our outward affairs.

It took awhile, but the Church soon got its property back from occupying Union troops. But then the Church had to reach deep within itself for God's strength to rally back. Many reforms and changes were made to help the Church back on its feet. In an historical decision, lay representation was allowed at Annual and General Conferences by 1870, an example the northern church would beslow to follow. Three of the southern Bishops - Andrew, Paine, and Pierce - issued a call to discipleship, "exhorting the people to meet worthily their new situation...to carry forward the preaching of the gospel, even though the preachers must work with their own hands for support and the members must let 'their deep poverty abound to the riches of their liberality.'"

The rebuilding was difficult and many preachers had to suppliment their income by seeking secular work. But even so, by 1875, membership was again over 700,000 and "financial support had recovered and surpassed the 1860 figures." The fact that Georgia was "financially destitute" did not keep the Methodist Church in Georgia from rising to new heights of service. In fact, the growth of the Georgia Conference by 2,303 members in 1867 prompted the conference to divide into North and South.



It was to this growing, thriving area that William Brown came. Little is known of this faithful servant, but this man who could not write his own name provided the soil in which a strong congregation was to grow.

William Brown was born on May 5, 1831, probably in Alabama. There he grew up, married, and began a family. His life was interrupted by the coming of the War Between the States. He joined the Confederate Army and during the course of the war was wounded in the knee, an injury that was to cripple him, though not seriously, for life.

After the war, he returned to Alabama and tried to rebuild his life. But soon, during the early 1870's something drew William Brown and his family to Georgia and Atlanta. There, on November 24, 1874, he purchased 25 acres of land near Mr. Pace's ferry and Mr. Howell's mill. For this small plot of land, he paid C. A. Howell \$250.

The day of importance to this church came three years later. On September 29, 1877, William Brown donated one-half acre of land at the intersection of Paces Ferry Road and Mount Paran Road. He gave the land to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as he put it, "for and in consideration of the love I bear for the cause of Christ, and from an earnest desire to promote his heritage on earth....to build a house for public worship." And before his death twenty years later, he saw that dream become reality.

William Brown died on August 31, 1897 at the age of 66, leaving a wife and six children - two sons and four daughters. But the church had been built on a strong foundation of hewn, oak sills that have lasted these hundred years not only in service to God, but as a witness to the generosity and dedication of this great Methodist layperson.

THE EARLY YEARS (1877-1915):

These early years of growth were very hard to research since there are no records. Even the official records of the North Georgia Conference did not specify the names of churches on any circuit. The earliest map which shows a church on this property was made in 1893. But we know that the church was built before that time. The earliest confirmed date of use is 1888. In that year, John F. English began elementary school there under Miss Ida Williams. But again, no one knows exactly when the church was built or exactly when it began to be used as a school.

Dispite the absolute absense of evidence, I would guess that the church was built by 1880. There are several reasons for this conjecture. The first is based on the trustees named in the gift deed of William Brown. The Vaughn's, the Randal's, and the Brown's formed part of the core of the congregation of Pleasant Hill Church, and I doubt that they would have waited long to build a house in which they could worship their God.

The second reason has to do with the atmosphere of the Methodist

Church in the South at that time. As we have seen, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was in very bad shape after the war. There were those on both sides who were seriously concerned that there would be no one to see to the spiritual welfare of those who had survived in the South, especially the newly-freed blacks. So there soon developed a sort of race between the southern churches to rebuild and the northern churches to move in and establish themselves. The northern churches saw this as an outreach of missions, and the southern churches saw this as an invasion. This race was particularly intense around the metropolitan areas of the South. So it is easy to assume that as many churches as possible would have been established as soon as possible by both branches of the Methodist Church in the Atlanta area.

The third reason is again deductive reasoning. In the history written by Mrs. Satterfield in 1965, she quotes Miss Alice Kate Clark listing the members of Miss Williams class. One of the names Miss Clark mentions is that of Jeff King. If she was accurate, Jeff King would have begun school in 1879, since he was born in 1873. He must have begun his schooling early in the 1880's.

But in any case, a small, wood-frame church was constructed on a grassy knoll overlooking Paces Ferry Road around 1880, and its people named it Pleasant Hill - a name that sings serenity.

Although he was probably not the first minister of this church, J. J. Morgan, M.D. was probably around to thank William Brown for his generous gift. Dr. Morgan served the Fulton Circuit from 1877-78 while also serving the medical needs of the area. He was followed by Robert R. Johnson who, although he served the Fulton Circuit for only one year, is my candidate for pastor. Brother Johnson was known for his courage and determination. If any of the preachers who served this area during that time could have started a building campaign, it would have been Brother Johnson.

Another reason for nominating Mr. Johnson for this honor is the relative confusion that dominated the Fulton Circuit from 1880-1887. It began when William R. Foote, Sr. came to us in 1880, for Brother Foote was soon forced to leave because of ill health. He was so ill that he died within a year after he gave up the circuit. In the time that followed, no pastor is listed for this area. I. G. Parks served the circuit in 1883, but he too was very ill from an 1881 illness. He remained very weak from that illness until his death in 1885. So for the most part, supply and local preachers filled the pulpit of Pleasant Hill in those hard, young years of struggling growth.

It was at this time that I believe W. J. Roladaer helped out by preaching. Although there is no record of his service, it is attested to by many familiar with the history of the church. If so, he came to us at a time when he was sorely needed.

Some stability was reintroduced with the appointment of C. C. Davis as supply pastor during 1885-86. His bald head and full, white beard must have been an impressive sight in the pulpit. But the succession of pastors was not firmly reestablished until the appointment of William Asbury Dodge in 1887. Described as a "great evangelist," the Rev. Dodge brought new life and fifty new members to his little fourpoint charge. When he left, he reported a total membership for the circuit of 549. Our first ten years had been hard, but the little church on the hill survived. And Dodge's name is an important one to remember, for Brother Dodge was to be in an important position of power when we needed him later in our life.

It is unfortunate that our records as a church and a conference from this period are so sketchy. All we know of the next four years are the names of the pastors - N. H. Matthews (1888-89) and J. F. Balis (1890-91). The two succeeding pastors were both named Brown, but they were no relation to our Browns'. F. P. Brown (1892-93) was a man known all over the conference for his scholarship, preaching ability, and fine talent for administration. David C. Brown (1894) was coming home when he served the Fulton Circuit, for he grew up in this area after his parents died.

Due to the preservation of an old register from the 1890's, our records as a church improve considerably at this point. It is hard to sort out, but when Caspar Wright (1895) served the circuit, Pleasant Hill had about forty members. So few members allowed the conference to bounce the church around from one circuit to another. In 1896, Pleasant Hill was put in the Sardis-Sandy Springs Circuit under the Rev. Marcus Hale Edwards. Brother Edwards was a distinguished educator. While serving the Towns Circuit in 1887, he also served as one of the first principals of the newly-formed Young Harris College.

Pleasant Hill was moved again the next year and made part of the Atlanta Heights Circuit. J. A. Burtz (1897) was pastor on that circuit, and with the increases that were to come, we would be on this same circuit for almost thirty years.

In 1898, James Evans Rorie began his pastorate at Pleasant Hill. Brother Rorie was not only a fine pastor, but he is also the first pastor of whom we have personal remembrances recorded. In Mrs. Satterfield's history, the recollections of Mrs. Beulah Donehoo Manston who taught school at Liberty Hill in 1898-99 are recorded. "I remember that when I was out there, the Rev. Rorie had the circuit, which also included Vinings. We only had preaching once a month, but the children and I walked a mile and a half every Sunday afternoon to Pleasant Hill. Folks came from miles around." And come they did. Even though J. E. Rorie was a quiet preacher, he was still able to bring people to Christ and the community of the church. But he also must have been a disciplined man, for three members were expelled in May of 1898 for their inability to keep the Christian witness in their relationship with alcohol.

One point must be strongly made here. The key to this growth, or any

other period of growth, was not to be found in one person, no matter how talented or educated. The key to growth is to be found in the nurturing community that met each week as part of the Sunday School and Epworth League. People that I wish I had known, like Mrs. Manston, Charlie and J. B. Thomason, Faye Gorman, Lester and Mamie Cobb, George Brown, and Mrs. Willie Langston who pioneered the leadership of these groups and people like Mrs. Nell Cobb, Miss Katie Thomason, Grace Allen, and Aaron Lanier who have carried on that work, are heroes that statistics and official reports do not give recognition. I have been told that "Sunday School would not have survived if Mrs. Allen hadn't held it together, teaching it herself."

So their's is the greatest contribution, for as pastors come and go, they continue to enable the community to grow and mature through fellowship, study, and service. It is probably not scholastically sound to make such judgements from an historical viewpoint, but even without the evidence, our hearts know the true and priceless value of these dear servants of God and Church.



1924: (l. to r.) First row - Lonie Mae English McGill, Evelyn English Matthews. Second row - Sara King Hobson, Margaret English Dilbeck, Rubye English Davis, Maymie Cobb Lindsay, Marie Price, Grace King Allen, Lillie English Isom, Nora King Florence.

In 1900, J. E. Rorie left and Atticus Burton Sanders (1901) came to the Atlanta Heights Circuit. He too was known as a quiet preacher, but also as a great talent in church finances. He never left a charge with any indebtedness. It might have been at this point that the overflowing pews caused the thoughts

of expansion to begin to take shape. For the decision to extend the church must have been made around this time in order for the work to have been completed by the end of 1903.

The actual construction on the expansion of the church building would have been done in 1901-02, under the leadership of Sander's successor, John Tillman Eakes (1902-03). It was Eakes who received \$136 from the Board of Church Extension in 1903, the chairperson of which was our own W. A. Dodge. \$136 may not seem like much, but it was the second largest amount given out among twenty churches that year. And the requirements for such funds were very strict. The rules state, "As evidence of good faith on their part, we must insist that work on the enterprise for which aid is sought must first be done before aid will be granted." The expressed purpose of the Board was "to aid in building modest and plain Church buildings, opening them free of debt where the people greatly need houses of worship." Truly an

accomplishment for a congregation approaching one hundred members.

This growth continued over the next few years under the leadership of two dynamic preachers - Zedekiah Speer (1904) and Enoch Walter Jones (1905-07). During this period, church membership climbed over the one hundred mark. They also had some help from a preacher named R. O. Weir. He must have been one of the multitude of local preachers who helped out in the work in this area. But again, I can find no record of his service other than his name by a handful of members in the register.

For reasons that will probably never be known, the years between 1906-1918 were dormant ones for Pleasant Hill. There were no new members and little excitement, even though among the pastors of that period there were great evangelists like Adolphus Fletcher Nunn (1906-10). These men were J. L. Allgood (1911), I. H. Miller (1912), and J. R. Jones (1913-16).

THE "PENN PERIOD" - (1915-23):

I suppose that in the life of every community there is one life that seems to shine out from all the rest. One name that always comes up, one example that serves as an ideal. In the case of Pleasant Hill/Paces Ferry Church, that life belonged to the Rev. H. Jack Penn.

"Preacher" Penn began to be listed as a "local preacher" for the Atlanta area in the 1912 North Georgia Conference Journal. His main work was that of head timekeeper at the American Can Company, but the work he loved was God's. It is not known when Jack Penn



first preached at Pleasant Hill, but several people place it around 1915. With six churches on the Dunwoody Circuit (which Pleasant Hill joined in 1914), J. R. Jones could use all the help he could get. Since services were being held by the appointed minister only once a month, local preachers were used to increase the number of "preaching services" to three or even four a month. And Jack Penn did not do this for the money, for there was little or none to be given. But Grace Allen does report that her family and others "furnished him with vegetables and things. We'd carry him milk and butter. Folks were giving him stuff all the time!"

So, it did not take long for Jack Penn to become a favorite with all the folks at Pleasant Hill, and he began preaching there two Sundays a



H. JACK PENN AND FAMILY

month. On these mornings, Jeff or Joshua King, or Billy Brown would hitch up his rig and go out to the end of the trolley car line on Howell Mill Road to pick up Brother Penn and his family which seemed to grow every year. Once at church, everyone shared in an afternoon of study, worship, and fellowship, being blessed by the words and presence of this wonderful man. Then one of the families of the church would take the Penn's home for dinner. The day was usually rounded out by an evening worship.

The testimonies of those who knew Jack Penn paint a touching picture. He seems to have been a man who made friends easily and was concerned about people. He was an unabashed evangelist and would not hesitate to speak to a stranger about the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

But even without the testimonies of those who came to love Jack Penn, one can see the great influence he had on Pleasant Hill by examining the register of that time. The names of those brought into the fold by his preaching form a major core of the present congregation - Grace King Allen, Nora King Florence, and Sara King Hobson were among fourteen people he received by baptism on September 8, 1918. And later, on October 10, 1920, he brought Emma Brown English to us, a faithful woman whose family has followed in her hard-working footsteps. The Cobb's, the Thomason's, and the English's are all names that Brother Penn brought to us and which later became indispensable to the work of the church.

Jack Penn became such a permanent figure at Pleasant Hill and the Dunwoody Circuit that he was appointed as Supply Pastor from 1920-23. During that time and before, Brother Penn served with four different pastors. In addition to J. R. Jones, there was Brian Hughes Greene (1917-18), Grover Cleveland Knowles (1919-21), and Bird Lawrence Betts (1922-23), each of whom was a distinguished minister in his own right.

When Jack Penn's poor health forced a temporary retirement in 1923, the circuit reported a membership of over one thousand, and increase of three hundred since his arrival, and Pleasant Hill still had around one hundred members. But much more than this, he left a warm, loving feeling in the hearts of those who knew him, a warmth that still sparks lives today.

The time following Jack Penn was one of which there are fond memories. When folks speak of those days, they speak with a certain glow in their eyes. It is a glow that comes from remembrances of celebrations like "Children's Day" in May, Fourth of July picnics, summer revivals, Homecomings, Fall conferences, and Christmas celebrations. At those times, the little church would be bulging with people. Water would be "fetched" from the spring below the church and firewood for the old stove might have to be gathered. Tempting foods and smells would abound. And, of course, the singing was louder, the preaching more stirring, and the fellowship more rewarding than on any other day, for there were good memories in the making.

The celebrations still continue today, although we have not had a performance like the one that little five-year-old Ruby English gave us in 1910. She nervously appeared before the congregation and said, "I have never spoken before today, the smallest girl am I, so as I haven't much to say, I'll just say goodbye."

During this time the conference also increased the number of ministers appointed here to one full-time and two supply pastors. W. W. Cash (1924-27) was the main pastor while W. B. Reeves (1924-25), C. W. Fruit (1924-25), D. C. Starnes, Jr. (1926), and A. E. Barton, Jr. (1927) filled in over the six churches. Of these, it is C. W. Fruit who is most often remembered. He not only served the Dunwoody Circuit well, but he is remembered for his great service to the North Georgia Conference as well. From 1945-51, he served as Conference Secretary and Editor of the Conference Journal.

Bureaucracies are known for doing strange things, but I am at a loss to explain what happened over the following five years. John Seals Askew was appointed to the Dunwoody Circuit in 1928 when it was reduced to a four-point charge. But the following year, Pleasant Hill was assigned to both the Dunwoody Circuit and the Sandy Springs Circuit under Benjamin Franklin Mize (1929-32). Both circuits had three churches of which one was Pleasant Hill. What a blessing! To be served by two such dedicated men was a great fortune.

J. S. Askew was replaced by R. C. Singleton in 1931, and the next year

we were back on just one circuit - Sandy Springs. According to the register and the Satterfield history, there were three other preachers helping Brothers Askew and Mize, but again I can find no record of them on a Conference level. J. W. M. Stipes (1929), B. F. Elrod (1927), and a man named Hall (1923) are all listed.



1924: (lt. to rt.) Marion Isom, Chester Cobb, Lillie English Isom, Nora King Florence, John W. Thomason.

All in all, this was a peaceful time for the little church on the hill. The first vote for union with the northern church came in 1925, and while the controversy rocked the rest of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Pleasant Hill progressively voted in favor of the resolution for union. The Church as a whole was to reject this idea for a few more years, but positive steps had been taken toward this great ecumenical move. And even though Pleasant Hill had weathered that storm, clouds were coming that would literally knock the church off its foundations.

STORMY TIMES - (1929-52):

The South, already exploited and poor, was hit very hard by the Depression. For the small, rural farmers who made up the congregation of Pleasant Hill, it became a great effort just to make ends meet. There would be those who would not survive. But we were by no means alone in our troubles. In 1935 the Bishops reported that "church attendance was embarrassingly small, finances distressingly reduced, pastor's salaries painfully lowered, contributions to benevolent activities diminished and a spirit of defeatism had become widespread."

The Bishops' concern for these problems took the form of a Crusade with a two-fold thrust. Georgia's own Bishop A. J. Moore was called back from the Orient to lead an effort which eliminated the \$400,000 Mission Board debt in less than a year. The second part of the Crusade was designed to provide "a richer experience in the Church at home," and was equally successful. The resurgence of the southern church proved once again that God's work and workers will be neither stopped nor slowed by adversity.

During this time, Pleasant Hill also had its own share of problems. Around 1930, a storm with very high winds came through Atlanta, destroying trees and buildings on its way. One of the many casualties of that storm was the little wood-frame church. It had been built on foundations of rocks

stacked into pillars. They proved to be no match for the mighty winds and the church was tilted off its foundations. As if the structural damage were not enough, the wind also devastated the roof. Repairs would require a new foundation and a new roof. No doubt B. F. Mize and church treasurer John Cobb were at an initial loss as to what to do.

But they did not have to wonder long, for within the congregation were two men who would rise to meet the challenge. A. A. Clarke was Superintendent of the Public Works Department of Fulton County. In those days, it was common practice to have the convicts on work details do their work on church grounds as well as public grounds. So it was not unusual when the workers came out and not only provided the church with a fine, rock wall foundation, but with a front porch as well.

Through the generosity and hard work of Clifford Gorman, we were also given a new roof. Not only did Cliff Gorman provide the money for materials, but he also did much of the work on the roof.

After Pleasant Hill's own comeback, the church was once again as solid physically as it had been spiritually all along. The trouble that plagued the rest of the Church were dealt with remarkably well by the little congregation. The membership remained close to eighty all through the Depression, although the finances could not have possibly been kept intact. The ministers who served this church then had to be strong men. A. E. Scott (1933), S. A. F. Wagner (1934-35), and especially Omar L. Vickery were all preachers known for their determination and practicality. Brother Vickery is described as a man "without frills" in his memoirs. Leslie Parker also served as a supply pastor in 1935 and, although I cannot find any record of it, so did A. C. Nelms in 1933.



All during the rest of the Depression, the members of Pleasant Hill remained faithful. This was also a great time for the Epworth League which met every Sunday night. A typical meeting is outlined in their minutes recorded by Rubye English Davis on September 7, 1930.

1930: (lt. to rt.) Faye Garmon Bryon, Burnice Thomason Rosser, Mary Bell Thomason Hamlett, Agnes Garmon Masteller.



Arminta Brown in the church cemetery on August 17, 1932.

The devotional Services were opened by our President, Miss Faye Gorman. The opening song was #149 - "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart." After the song, the program was turned over to the leader, Miss Marybelle Thomason. The subject of the lesson was, "Jesus: Christianizing Commerce and Industry." Faye closed with a prayer.

Total present - 44

Collection - 83¢

In 1937, Pleasant Hill was placed in the Masons (or Maysons) Circuit with Vinings. The three churches were served by R. W. Wood (1937) and J. D. Swaggerty (1938-39) as the effects of the Depression began to be overcome.

In 1939, an event took place that was truly significant to Christians around the world. From that time forward, there would be no longer a northern and southern church. There was but one - The Methodist Church. It was not a complete union of all the various branches of Methodism, but it was truly a monumental, ecumenical step forward. The church had a new name and a new mission would emerge with it.

As the world approached its second World War of this century, another of the "favorites" came to Pleasant Hill - Charles R. Williams (1940-41). Charles, who is our District Superintendent at this time, came to Pleasant Hill while he was still in seminary, and this was his first charge. The war in Europe seemed far away and the people of Pleasant Hill were more concerned with the changes that were taking place in their area as more and more of the "affluent crowd" began moving in. Of that time, Charles writes, "I found love and acceptance - a single preacher...with no experience. It was a growing experience for me." Charles was one of the new generation of pastors who would come to serve this wonderful church - the student pastor. Before this time, the ministers were primarily older men, well seasoned. But with this new breed, the mission of the church would take on a new nature, and future pastors would echo Charles' words of praise for the nurturing he received.

Everyone found out soon enough that the war in Europe was closer than they thought. Once again, the people of this church and this country were called upon to keep their faith in hard times. Just as the Civil War had reduced the supply of ministers for the home front, so too did World War II. And once again the laypersons of the church were able to carry more than their share of the load.

Through this troubled time, Pleasant Hill was led by dedicated and hard-working persons. Men like M. E. Firth (1942), Norman U. Boone (1943), Raleigh H. Mann (1944-45), and Woodrow Lane (1946) served as our ministers. Laypersons like Grace and Walter Allen and the retired Rev. J. E. Cook also provided much needed leadership. Unfortunately, the church did not fare as well through this storm. By 1944, Pleasant Hill had less than thirty-five active members.

In the midst of these stormy times, God, in his mysterious movements, eased into service one of the most dedicated laypersons this church has ever known. The process was so subtle that Grace Allen does not even remember being officially elected treasurer. She and Walter lived across the street from the church in the old Brown home. One day one of the Depression Era preachers asked her to prepare the Conference Financial Reports for the church. Soon word got around and before she knew it "everybody would come by and give me their money for the church." And ever since that time, Grace Allen has faithfully and competently performed the duties of that office.

After the war, Pleasant Hill again had a period of dormancy. There was no growth and the only development was the incorporation of the area into the city of Atlanta. T. H. Vickery (1947) was followed as pastor by Woodrow W. Jackson. Jackson was appointed at the Fall Annual Conference in 1947, but his stay here would be short. For in 1948, the Annual Conference switched to June meetings as we have today. There, H. R. Reynolds (1948-49) was appointed with W. C. Mason as his assistant. Then came John H. Cely (1949-51) with his assistants being Charles Ray Franklin (1949-50) and Cecil W. Page (1950-52). The 1951 Annual Conference saw Gilbert Schroer-lucke appointed to the Masons-Vinings Circuit but he was unable to complete the year and was soon replaced by James Reese. But Pleasant Hill would soon leave this valley.





Activities in and
around the parsonage.

ON THE MARCH AGAIN - (1952-75):

In 1952, Pleasant Hill was made part of a two-point charge with Vinings Church. The student assistant on the Masons Circuit, Cecil Page (1952-54 or 1950-54 in all), was appointed pastor. Membership was still around thirty, but the people were determined to get going once again.

As the spirit and the numbers of people began to pick up, a remodeling of the interior of the church was undertaken. The flooring, walls, and pews were in quite bad shape. So Sunday School Superintendent Buster Jones and John Smith put their heads together and tried to figure out how the \$35 in the Sunday School treasury could be transformed into a remodeled sanctuary. The answer turned out to be not only a profitable one, but a very tasty one also - barbeque. In the back of the church, John Smith dug a pit and then made an iron rack on which to cook the food. Several barbeques later, the Sunday School had raised enough money to buy the materials. This would not be the last time the Sunday School has done great things for the church. Soon, the floor was redone and the walls covered with sheet rock. But there was still the question of the pews.

As it turned out, Underwood Methodist Church was also remodeling. As soon as the folks at Pleasant Hill caught wind of this, Brother Page, Walter Allen, and John Smith went over to take a look. The pews were in great shape, but were really out of the church's price range. Undaunted, John Smith decided to be forthright and honest with the Underwood pastor. "Preacher, we can't pay you what those pews are worth....But we can give you \$75...so there's not much use in haggling. That's it!" The preacher laughed, but within a few days they were ours. A campaign was immediately started to cover the cost by offering people the chance to dedicate one of the ten pews to the memory of a loved one. Even at \$7.50 a pew, the response was



total and the cost was soon recovered. Plaques can be seen on the various pews today.

W. L. Brackman, Jr. (1954-56) put the pace of the march at double time, leading Pleasant Hill to full charge status. And some of the most significant events in the history of the church took place while he was pastor.

As growth became a reality, the people of Pleasant Hill began to dream of expansion. But they were destined to share that dream with another congregation. For not too far away, a group of Christians were struggling to form their own church. The congregation was called West Wesley Methodist Church, but they met at Margaret Mitchell Elementary School. Under the leadership of the Rev. Robert Gary and Dr. Rudolph, this small group had grown to thirty-five members in just a few years. But the little congregation had big problems. Their search for land on which to build a sanctuary was thwarted time and time again. They had managed to purchase a beautiful set of chancel furniture, but they had no place in which to use it. An arrangement was worked out finally, through the Conference, and on October 30, 1955, West Wesley merged with Pleasant Hill to form a new church with a new name - Paces Ferry Methodist Church.



With the size of the church suddenly doubled, thoughts moved even more swiftly toward expansion. A committee was formed to approach Ben Smith who owned the property in back of the church. Mr. Smith rejected the first offer of \$1,000, but later donated the land to the church when he was offered \$4,000. The deed was signed over on April 18, 1956. But there was still another property problem before construction could begin. By examining the map on page 23, you will notice that there was a small triangle of land between the original property and the land that Mr. Smith gave. This land was owned by the same group that owns the cemetery land, a group of William Brown's ancestors. All would have to agree to sell or donate the land. The problem was complicated when it was discovered that the church had been illegally extended in 1902 onto property owned by the Brown heirs.

The graveyard itself is somewhat of a unique situation. The church people work to keep it up. Many have all or part of their families buried there and feel a responsibility for its upkeep. But there is no official

relationship between the church and the graveyard. Many families purchased plots there, but whenever anyone has died in the community over the past one hundred years, they have been buried in the Pleasant Hill cemetery. As a result of this open management, there are over 130 graves of which some 50 are unmarked.

It was the church's good fortune that one of the Brown heirs was already aware of the problem with the church being extended onto cemetery property. Ruel Brown, Sr. began to take steps to insure that the little troublesome triangle was given to the Paces Ferry congregation. It took awhile, but the deed was finally signed over on August 26, 1959.

Brother Brackman had indeed led his church to new heights. And even though he had to return to Florida before Paces Ferry became a single charge, he knew that the new pastor would be appointed to Paces Ferry Church and not a circuit.

The first pastor of the Paces Ferry Charge was to be Granville C. Henry (1956-60). It would be Brother Henry who would be faced with easing the mounting tensions between two growing parties in the church. One group, made up primarily of those from West Wesley, wanted to tear the old church down and build a new and larger structure on the newly aquired property. The other party, made up primarily of the members of Pleasant Hill, wanted to build an education building and leave the little church as it was.

John Smith drew up plans for both ideas, but the plan finally decided upon was to keep the church as it was and build a combination education-recreation building. Unfortunately, this decision split the new church and before the building could even be completed, the members of West Wesley transferred out to either Northside or Peachtree Road Churches. It was not a bright time for the little church.

But the work had to be continued. And by the time Brother Henry had to leave Paces Ferry, the new building was completed.

This may sound as if the building just went up, but the story is more complicated than that. The sight picked for the new building was that of the old barbeque pit. The people of the church had had several barbeques rained out, so John Smith built a small shelter. He did not know it at the time, but this structure would be the basis for the new building. As John gathered more and more

Walter Allen and the Rev. Jimmy Johnson with new chancel furniture.



spare materials, he and all of the volunteer help were able to add more and more onto the building. Concrete blocks left over from a job. Second-hand windows. All these made up the contributions to the building. The effort took almost a year, but when finished, Paces Ferry had a building with a kitchen, a large fellowship hall, three classrooms, and indoor plumbing. Truly a building to be proud of.

But even this was not enough for Granville Henry and the congregation, and before he left, plans were made for landscaping the property, every member visitation, and a canvassing of the neighborhood. When James L. Johnson (1960-62) arrived, he found a very busy church. A church that, even with the transfers, still was growing to close to sixty members.

Changes continued for the people and buildings of Paces Ferry under Brother Johnson. The front porch was enclosed by Aaron Lanier, Walter Allen, and John Smith to form a vestibule for the church. John Smith also worked to build a stone retaining wall in front of the church. Inside, the chancel furniture contributed by the people of West Wesley was made a full set with the purchase of a podium. This gave the church a split chancel for the first time. But perhaps the most noticeable change was the sudden appearance of red doors on the front of the church, courtesy of Brother Johnson.

The best touch to the interior of the church was sparked by the family of Mrs. Leake. When Mr. Leake died, many people wanted to send flowers, but the family requested that money be sent to Paces Ferry Church instead. So under the leadership of the women of the church and the new pastor Larry Kay Hardesty (1962-65) red velvet material and foam rubber were purchased. With those materials, the women made pew cushions, altar rail cushions, and curtains for the chancel area. The addition of a red carpet down the center aisle and a new coat of paint for the walls made the sanctuary seem brand new.

Brother Hardesty was the kind of pastor who inspired activity. One of the first things he did was to move into the education building and turn it into a parsonage as well. With so much going on, it seemed natural to try to capture some of it for posterity. So Kay Hardesty got together with Mrs. Satterfield to write a history of the little church. Although he was not there to see it published, he knew of its coming. It was a large project to undertake, but one that would bless many.

"A Church Surrounded" was published in 1965 after much hard work and research by Mrs. Satterfield. Though only twenty pages long, it captures the spirit and history of the people of Paces Ferry Church. I owe her a great debt as I too work on this project.

In the midst of this growth and celebration, not even Paces Ferry was immune to trouble. With the appointment of Glenn Moore (1965-68), Paces Ferry entered a time of some embarrassment. Even though the people do not like to talk about this time, the fact that they were able to deal with it

speaks highly of their courage.

When it was discovered that Brother Moore had divorced his wife and was living with another woman, needless to say, this caused quite a stir. Complaints grew worse and patience thin when he married a third woman on New Year's Day 1968. Through consultation with District Superintendent Candler Budd and Bishop John Smith, Glenn Moore withdrew from the ministry. Those outside this situation who knew Brother Moore acknowledge the problems he had, but they assure me that he has matured greatly since that time. And even though he could no longer serve as pastor, the prayers and concern of the people went with him.

Paces Ferry was very fortunate to have Dr. Beverly C. Gamble as a member of the congregation. As Conference Evangelist, he was more than willing and able to fill the pulpit of Paces Ferry until Annual Conference time.

At that time, Robert V. Phillips (1968-70) came to pastor the folks here. But once again the church had a new name, for with the 1968 union, the name became Paces Ferry United Methodist Church, the name it bears today. Brother Phillips was unable to complete his second year and Charles Houston was called in to round out the year. Charles stayed another year and Paces Ferry was in the news. Brother Houston and Mrs. Satterfield worked up a one-page presentation which appeared in a local paper on May 28, 1970. There were pictures of the church and its members and a story about the development of Paces Ferry. The next year we made news again by keeping "Grace and Walter Allen Day" a secret from two people so intimately involved with the church. One day is really not enough to express our appreciation for the witness of these two dear saints.

The next year, Samuel Matthews served the church. There was much excitement that year for the General Conference of the United Methodist Church was coming to Atlanta. That same year, Randy Mark Taylor (1972-75) was appointed here. This "Son of the Confederacy" was well-loved by the people at Paces Ferry. And his comments on the church reflect the feelings of the many student pastors who have served here since Charles Williams. "Their love and loyalty to God and Church was refreshing. The people seem to take a young minister under their wing and struggle and share with him as he finds and defines his ministry. I feel that Paces Ferry has made a good and fine contribution to the ministry and to the United Methodist Church because it has served as a testing and training ground for many fine ministers"

I could not have put it better myself, for that is the truth. Many ministers have served here as students or as brand new pastors and have gone on to distinguish themselves as servants of God and Church. Robert Singleton on the national boards dealing with missions and education. Charles Williams on the Boards of Education and Ministries, and now as our District Superintendent. James L. Johnson advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel as an Army Chaplain. William Brackman, Charles Houston, Sam Matthews and Randy Taylor all serve the pastorate today. From his church

in Plains, came the news that Charles had played host to both the Bishop and the President of the United States. But these and many others have taken the blessings, prayers, and lessons of the people of Paces Ferry Church with them as they seek to serve God through the ordained ministry.

THE SECOND HUNDRED YEARS - (1975-Future):

The years have held their blessings and storms for the little church on the hill. After the growth of the early sixties, many of the children grew up and moved away. The church was entering another period of latency. As more and more \$100,000+ homes were built, more and more of the community was displaced. I-75 also cut through the community. The loss of the young people of the church hurt, but the people have kept their spirits high as they have prepared for the second hundred years.

I was appointed in 1975 and as we entered the Bicentennial year, everyone was baptised by the "historical spirit." Talk soon began about our own centennial celebration and a new history. And so the preparations began. I spoke with Dr. James May, a professor of church history at Candler School of Theology, and he was willing to help out on the project you are now reading. The Sunday School provided the money and I built a new church sign. The date of May 22, 1977 was selected as an ideal time at which to celebrate our joy and Charles Williams was invited to officiate. The 1976 Annual Conference even passed a resolution expressing "congratulations and thanksgiving to the people of Paces Ferry...for one hundred years of faithful service to the Methodist Church and the Kingdom of God." All is now in readiness.

I will be leaving in June 1977, and a new student pastor will begin the second century here. To look at the congregation, one is tempted to say that the church will die out in a few years. There is little or no community to serve or from which to draw new members. As it is now, most members drive over five miles to faithfully attend the church they love. And financially, costs and inflation keep rising while income stays the same or even drops. But to know these dear saints gives one quite a different prospective. They not only have faith and loyalty, they have a determination and a will to survive and to serve God. In the face of that, all negative speculation about the future of Paces Ferry Church must respectfully take a back seat. "For this is the church founded never to fail/ Against which the gates of hell cannot prevail!"