HISTORY

OF

PROSPECT

METHODIST CHURCH

NEWTON COUNTY

SALEM CIRCUIT

DECATUR - OXFORD-DISTRICT

NORTH

GEORGIA CONFERENCE

1830----------1963

Compiled by
Marjorie Longshore Hull
A sense of profound love and reverence for our forefathers and for this church grows upon us as we study records and learn of the great zeal, sacrifices, and untiring efforts they made to keep alive the spark of Methodism lighted by John Wesley early in the colony. It was carried from place to place by the Circuit Riders, at campmeetings in many a cool grove that harbored a nearby spring, and later, in the little log churches that usually were built following the campmeetings.

This old church is held in greater tenderness as we study its humble beginning and trace its history through one hundred twenty years and more.

Most of the original records of our church were unfortunately burned in a home where they had been placed for safe keeping. However, a few historical documents, some records and old deeds were available, so with these, together with personal recollections and traditions handed down from generation to generation, we have been able to sketch a very clear picture of our church from its organization one hundred twenty three years ago until the present time.

In 1818, a revival swept over Methodism and campmeetings were held in nearly every settlement or county throughout Georgia. The location of these campgrounds was usually determined by a grove and a spring, both of which are known to have existed on the site of our first church building.

These campgrounds were composed of crude brush arbors, a platform for the preachers, and split logs for seats. People came for miles around and lived in their covered wagons for the duration of
the meeting, which usually lasted three or four days.

A church or a desire for a church usually followed the meetings, and an old deed found in Deed Book D, page 252, in the Newton County (then Henry County) courthouse shows that in 1830 a plot of land was purchased, or donated from the southeastern corner of land lot fifty for the first church. The site is in the forks of highway twenty to McDonough and the county road to the Wood Piper home. The old cemetery, with no legible markers, can still be seen and the spring, where many a devout worshipper quenched his thirst, is still in use.

These first churches were built of logs, hand hewn and carefully fitted together, the cracks daubed with red clay, and huge fireplaces were built in one end for comfort in cold weather. The pulpit stood in the opposite end, and the furniture was crudely made of hand split logs. The benches were without backs, so there was no napping during the long fiery sermons.

The indenture for this land was made October 17, 1830, between Edward C. Wade of Newton and Morgan counties, and the first trustees, who were:

Samuel B. Turner
Humphrey Posey
A.B.H. Cochran
G. W. Hanson
Thomas Banks, Sr.

The grant was made for the sum of five cents, and the plot contained
one and one-half acres, in the form of a square. The deed was witnessed by Shelley Downs, J.P., and was recorded by Hamilton Burge, Clerk of the Court, on April 10, 1832.

According to old minutes of the Methodist Church, which then embraced the United States and Canada, found in the reference room of the Theological Library at Emory University, also George G. Smith's History of Methodism in Georgia, this church was in the Yellow River Circuit. It was composed of the counties of Walton, Henry, Newton, Rockdale, Fayette and Clayton. This circuit, or mission, first appears in these minutes in 1823. It numbered 350 members, white and colored. It was in the Athens district and South Carolina conference. The first circuit preacher was Andrew Hamill. He was superannuated early for the work was too much for his strength. The Yellow River Circuit was divided in 1833, and we were placed in the Covington circuit.

At the time this church was organized, the conference allotted every preacher one hundred dollars a year. In 1824, the second year after the organization of the Yellow River Circuit, the conference could pay every preacher only forty dollars for the year's work. They all were paid the same salary. In 1834, in response to a call for the superannuates, widows, orphans, and to supplement the deficiency in the preachers' salaries, this circuit paid the amount of two dollars.

James Bellah was the pastor of this circuit from 1827 to 1831, and therefore was the first pastor of Prospect Church. There were twenty-eight appointments, and by riding every day, he could fill
them in one month. He soon gave out under the strain and died in
the work. His brother, Morgan, took his place and continued in the
ministry for over forty years.

Allen Turner, brother of Green Turner, who gave a five acre lot
for the first church at Salem, was admitted to the conference in
1812. He preached for forty years and late in life served this cir-
cuit.

Kitty's Cottage at Salem has a framed license stating that Rev.
Joel Stansell was licensed to preach at Prospect by Bishop J.O. An-
drew in June, 1848. He was one of the original tenters at Salem
Campground and was the grandfather of Major Robert J. Guinn. This
militia district was named for him.

Among our forefathers who were leaders in this church were:
Shelley Downs, born Sept. 9, 1795, and his wife, Louraney, born Apr.
8, 1807. He witnessed the deeds to the original plot for the church-
yard. They came from County Downs in Ireland and it is a tradition
that the county was named for an earlier ancestor. They are buried
in the family cemetery in the grove beside the T. W. Hicks home at
Oak Hill. One line of six generations of this couple are:

Shelley and Louranye Downs

Martha Elizabeth Downs (Mrs. Thomas Moreland Hicks)

Susan Ellen Hicks (Mrs. Eugene C. Hull)

Reuben Thomas Hull

Marjory Ruth Hull (Mrs. John Wood Burson)

David Wood Burson
Hope Ogletree, born in 1803, and his wife, Sarah, born in 1818, came to this community in 1842. They affiliated with this church and were outstanding members until laid to rest behind the present building. Six generations of this family who have lived, loved, and worked in this church are:

- Hope and Sarah Ogletree
- Abbie and Mollie Ogletree
- Wardie and Della Ogletree
- Hardy Ogletree
- Ansley Ogletree
- Daniel Ansley Ogletree

Mr. and Mrs. Wardie H. Ogletree celebrated their sixty-sixth wedding anniversary March 16, 1953.

Harmon Hicks, born Nov. 17, 1793, and wife, Hester, born in 1798, were also leaders in this church. They built and operated the Old Hicks Inn, which still stands on Highway twenty to McDonough. Some of us remember the old log barn across the road from the house. The early cross-country stagecoaches stopped at the Inn and swapped their tired horses at the barn. The coaches forded the river at Peachstone Shoals as there was no bridge at that time. Harmon and Hester are interred in the old Hicks cemetery just below the house, along with two of their sons, Newton and Joseph, who were killed in 1862 in the War Between the States. The brothers were both Volunteers. Another son, Warren, was wounded in the Battle of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and as the line was forced to retreat, he was unable to go with them. His brother, Thomas, who was fighting by his side,
refused to leave his dying brother on the battlefield and stayed by his side until captured by the Yankees. The wounded brother died and is buried in the Confederate Cemetery at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Thomas, our grandfather, remained a prisoner of the Yankees until the end of the war. Six generations of this family are:

Harmon and Hester Hicks
Thomas Moreland Hicks
Thomas Warren Hicks
Clyde Jerome Hicks
Jerry Hicks
Jerry Hicks, Jr.

Thomas and Katherine Oglesby were old members and they with their children, Ellen and Katie, lie in the cemetery here. There were John H. and Nancy Downs and their children, Walter and Ida (Sprecker). "Miss Ida" was the very efficient organist for many years. Moses, Mary and Martha Mann, and many others of whom we have no permanent record, were faithful members until death and are buried in the cemetery here.

Benjamin F. Smith and his wife, Celia, were members of this first Church. He enlisted in the War Between the States in Apr., 1861, at Shell Bluff, near Savannah, and was later assigned the duties of engineer on the Georgia Railroad. When Sherman marched through Georgia they dynamited his train. He was killed near Dalton, Georgia, at his post of duty, that of transferring artillery from Augusta to Chattanooga. His last letter to his wife was on of con-
cern and deep affection for her and their children. Quoting from this letter written a few days before his death, he said; "Some of us must be killed and I may be the first to fall. If I do fall, my dear wife, you must not grieve for me, but remember that I fell in a good and glorious cause, fighting for my country and your rights, and my last prayer shall be for the dear wife and children that I leave behind, for the home of my birth and my country and its liberty." "Aunt Celia" remained a member of Prospect Church until her death in 1915. She was a Guardian Angel among her friends and neighbors, always on hand in sickness and trouble. Being well trained as a practical nurse, she was the only doctor many of her neighbors ever had.

When the late John L. Scott, who with his family were prominent members of the church and community, gave the land for Old South River Academy, he also gave a little unused log cabin to "Aunt Celia" and her children for her lifetime. According to tradition this cabin was the original Prospect Meetinghouse, built in 1830. Among her several children, a son, Alex, grew to manhood in this little cabin. His son, Thomas, was the father of Mrs. Celia Smith Farmer, who so proudly bears her great grandmother's name. She is now a teacher in the Sunday School, and her son, John Thomas, a great great grandson and a very talented musician, has charge of the music, teaches a Sunday School Class and works in the M. Y. F.

About the year 1856, the membership had increased and the community had grown more prosperous. The log building was no longer
adequate for their needs, so a better and larger house of worship was built at a more central place. Although no deed can be found, the land was given by Thomas and Betty Hicks. It stood about one-half mile north of the original site on highway twenty in the forks of the road in front of the old Hicks home, now occupied by Robert H. Jones. Some of the older members remember the church and that it stood in a beautiful grove of trees, cool and inviting to those who came to worship on foot, on horseback, in wagons, and later in buggies.

How proud they must have been of their new church building which was built of home sawed lumber from the finest virgin pines! The boards were hand-dressed, perhaps to the tune of "Amazing Grace" or "How Firm a Foundation". The benches and other furniture were all designed and made by the members themselves. This was a very great improvement over the original building of crude logs.

We have in our possession a paper from the personal belongings of the late John L. Scott, the father of Mrs. Willie Scott, of Charlotte, North Carolina. At ninety-two years, she is the oldest living member of Prospect Church. This paper contains the names of subscribers to a fund for the second church building. Mr. Scott, who died in 1882, was the Secretary for the committee, and the following names are legible: Col. C.T. Zachery, Columbus W. Turner, P.G. Turner, T.L. Oglesby, Dr. L.C. Moore, H.H. Ogletree, Thomas M. Hicks, J.T. Ogletree, H.G. Lester, William Turner, John D. Vandergriff, James C. Moore, David Myers, J.W. Carter, William Harper, Dr. Ira L. Gunter,

Other members of this church who worshipped in the second building were, Dr. Shelley Downs and wife, Ella Cara Vaughn (who later moved to Conyers), Warren Hicks, who was killed at the battle of Vicksburg, and his wife, "Aunt Tinzy". They were the foreparents of the Vandergriffs and Hardemans, who are outstanding families both in the church and the community. Others were C. W. and Jennie Turner, who were donors of the present site of our church and cemetery, P. G. and Susan Turner, P. W. and Lizzie Turner, Hope and Sarah Ogletree, Abbie and Mollie Ogletree, John H. and Nancy Downs, J. F. and Cassie Piper, the Fielders, the M. A. Waldrops, the Stansells, the Pursalls, the Cicero Simms and many others.

This building stood during the War Between the States and the long tedious years of Reconstruction. When prosperity again flourished among its members, they realized the need for a larger and better place of worship at a still more convenient location. The old church was purchased by Walter K. Downs, a son of John H. and Nancy, torn down and moved to Oak Hill where he built a home for his widowed mother and himself. It is in a very good condition today and the old boards still bear the marks of the loving hands of our forefathers. It was later sold to T. W. Hicks who remodeled it for a home for the evangelist, Charles M. Dunaway. He and his family lived there several years and were a great asset to the community.

Mr. Hicks also built a large tabernacle adjoining the present church, where each summer a great community revival was held. It was
also the scene of numerous other gatherings, such as the Fourth of July Sunday School Celebrations, where four neighboring churches met and competed in singing and speaking for a banner, and where Commencement Exercises for nearby schools were often held. Many great men preached in this tabernacle. Among them were Charles M. Dunaway, Bishop Arthur Moore, Dr. Luther Bridges, Drs. Morrison, Brasher, John Paul, and others. Scores of romances budded and materialized at this cherished spot, as it was the scene of so many happy gatherings of young and old from a large community and all nearby towns. The writer of this history met her lifelong companion at one of those Fourth of July Celebrations and they with their children always attended these meetings as long as the tabernacle was used as a social and religious center.

The present church building was completed in 1882. The land was given by C. W. and Jennie Turner, and several years after the church was completed his son-in-law, Thomas W. Hicks, who in the meantime had purchased the land, gave a deed to the grounds and the cemetery plot. This deed was witnessed by Walter K. Downs and Col. L. F. Livingston.

In 1912, the church was remodeled, the wings and vestibule were added and new benches purchased. The old ones may still be seen at nearby Richard's Chapel for Negroes. The pulpit now in use in the M. Y. F. room was used in the old church and is greatly treasured by the present members. It was designed and built by the members from hand-dressed boards and held together with home-made nails. The building was underpinned with Georgia granite in 1949 and new pulpit furniture was purchased recently. The building and furniture
as it stands today is valued at about $4,000.00.

The first person to be buried in this cemetery was Mr. Asbury J. Blanton who was born in 1816 and died in 1886. His body was first interred across the road, but the trustees decided that the rear church yard was a more suitable place for a cemetery, so it was removed to its present resting place. He and his wife were members of the church established in 1830, and lived to worship in all three of the buildings.

Within these sacred walls many great men have preached and lifted their voices in song together with the voices of our loved forefathers long silent. Bishop Warren A. Candler often preached here when he was a student at Old Emory College as did Dr. A. M. Pierce, who later served the church as pastor. The Reverend Lundy Harris, when a student at Emory College, often was a guest preacher at Prospect and usually spent the week-end in the home of Mr. and Mrs. P. G. Turner, according to the recollections of a daughter, Mrs. J. Grier Turner. Mrs. Turner treasures an autographed edition of the book *The Circuit Rider's Wife* sent to her parents by Mrs. Corra Harris.

When Rev. H. L. Embry was pastor in 1896, he baptized a baby and its grandfather at the same Baptismal service.

When Rev. F. R. Smith was pastor in 1902-1903, he received 120 members into the Salem Charge and baptized a large number of babies.

When Rev. Dillard was pastor in the 1890's, he served communion to five generations at one time. They were Mrs. John McClelland, Mrs. William Stewart, Mrs. P. W. Turner, Mrs. Sam Hicks, and Carrie Hicks (now Mrs. Roy Ogletree).
On the lighter side—There were three very prominent Turner families connected with the church. Although not closely related, they enjoyed very close friendship and were often seen together. Around the turn of the century, Dr. Moore, from Emory at Oxford, was conducting a revival at Salem Church. The three Turner gentlemen, P. G., P. W., and C. W., with their wives, rode over to attend services with their neighboring church members. After a lengthy sermon, Dr. Moore asked for volunteers to come to the altar to pray for the meeting. The three Turner gentlemen obediently went to the altar and knelt side by side. Dr. Moore, who possessed a rather powerful voice, said; "Brother Turner, will you lead us in prayer?" Since no one knew to whom he referred, they all remained silent. So after a very embarrassing silence, Dr. Moore said in much firmer tones; "Brother PETER Turner, lead us in prayer!" Since none of them bore the name Peter, there was yet no response. After a still more embarrassing silence, Dr. Moore rose to his feet, pointed to Mr. P. G. and said in no uncertain tones; "BROTHER PETER PROSPECT, PRAY!!"

Miss Layona Glenn, who for forty years served the Methodist Church in Brazil, for several years attended this church. She, with her father, Dr. J. J. W. Glenn, taught school at Old South River Academy in 1883-1884-1885.

Mr. P. G. Turner was the first Sunday School Superintendent on record. He served for thirty years without missing a single Sunday. About 1883, he was appointed Superintendent of the DeSatur Orphans' Home. The work, however, was too strenuous for his wife, so after two or three years at the Orphanage, he returned to his home near the
church, and again served as Superintendent until his death in 1912. He was greatly loved by all, both young and old and is still remembered by many as he came each Sunday morning, always with a bunch of flowers for the church—cape jasmines when in bloom—for they were his favorite flowers. His wife, "Miss Susan", was also an outstanding figure in the church and community. She taught a private school for over thirty years, and most of the boys and girls of that era were numbered among her pupils. The schoolhouse stood just across the road from her home and the old spring where the pupils drank is still bubbling a clear stream of water. This place is now owned and occupied by Reuben Hull, a son of two of her pupils, Eugene C. Hull and Susan Hicks.

Before leaving the Orphans' Home, Mr. and Mrs. Turner adopted a little girl, Pauline, who at that time was about one year old. It is through her recollections, books and other cherished items that much of our history is made possible. During Mr. Turner's absence at the Orphanage, Mr. William Baird was Superintendent. He was a very fine man and a forefather of several of the teachers and other workers in the church today. Others serving as Superintendents were Thomas W. Hicks, W. H. Ogletree, E. C. Hull, Grier W. Hicks, L. T. Longshore, Reuben T. Hull, Hewlett Piper, Hardy H. Ogletree, and Howard Allen. Our present enrolment is seventy-five pupils and ten officers and teachers.

The Sunday School was organized into a Missionary Society in the Spring of 1902. Rev. F. R. Smith was pastor at that time. He wrote in the July 5, 1902 minutes, "We have here one of the best Sunday
School Missionary Societies we have ever known." In the minutes of October 13, 1906, Rev. J. T. Eakes wrote that Prospect Society met all requirements and had a surplus sufficient to cover their part towards the Oxford District Special Missionary. For many years our Sunday School helped to support Dr. Belcher in Brazil.

Although it has not always affiliated with the conference, there has been a Missionary Society or Ladies' Aid at Prospect since 1910. During the depression and other critical times, due to cold and bad roads, it was temporarily discontinued, but with the coming of spring it became active again. In 1938, when Rev. Carl McGrady was pastor, there were twenty six members, and Mrs. J. G. Turner was president. Besides meeting all obligations, much work was done in the church, on the grounds, the parsonage and in the community. Mrs. B. H. Willingham is now president of the Women's Society of Christian Service. There are twenty five members, five of whom were enrolled in 1902.

The Betty Hicks Epworth League was organized March 11, 1927, when Rev. N. P. Manning was pastor. This league was very active for several years and it was instrumental in organizing sister leagues at Salem, Snapping Shoals and Shiloh churches. Although our youth are small in number, we have a splendid M. Y. F. Leslie English, a descendent of one of the pioneers of Salem Church is making a very fine record as president.

The church was in the Conyers Circuit until 1905. A house near Snapping Shoals was rented for a home for the pastor and his family until the Salem Circuit was formed of four churches - Salem, Snapping Shoals, Prospect and Union. On April 27, 1906, the trustees, who
were W. S. Ramsey, H. A. DeLoach, J. H. Ogletree, J. G. Bowen, and W. G. Treadwell bought an acre of land from J. C. Nixon for fifty dollars for a site for a parsonage. The lot is on the Salem road about one-half mile south of the campground. A five room frame house was built, and Rev. J. T. Eakes was the first pastor to occupy it. This was the home of the Salem Charge ministers for over forty years.

In 1946, the old parsonage was sold for about $1800 and the money used to start a building fund for a better home. The present building was erected at a cost of about $3500 on land donated by Salem Campground trustees. It is a modern five room house, with all conveniences, nestled in a beautiful grove of oak and hickory trees.

Prospect claims close kinship with several, in some instances directly, and some through marriage, who are serving in the ministry. Dr. James R. Webb of Wynnton Memorial Church, Columbus, married Lillian Hicks. She is the daughter of the late Thomas W. Hicks, who deeded the land for the present building and cemetery. They were united in marriage in this church. Their son, James Jr. is also a minister in the South Georgia Conference.

Rev. Lamar Hicks, pastor of Spring Branch Presbyterian Church, in Houston, Texas, is a great great grandson of Harmon and Hester Hicks and of Shelley and Louraney Downs, charter members of the 1830 church. Rev. Warren Hicks is at present a student at North Western University in Evanston, Illinois, and Rev. Robert W. Hicks is serving a Methodist church in Seattle, Washington. They both are great great grandsons of pioneers Harmon and Hester Hicks, Hope and
Sarah Ogletree and Shelley and Louraney Downs. Robert served as a Chaplain in World War Two. Rev. Howard B. Simms, a great grandson of William Baird, a former muchly loved Sunday School Superintendent, went from our church to prepare for the ministry in 1928. He served churches in Kentucky, West Virginia, and New England for twenty two years. He has recently transferred to the North Georgia Conference, and is pastor of the Methodist Church at Lavonia.

Dr. J. T. Gibson was a physician who for many years administered to the physical body when needed, and was a great help and inspiration to patients in need of spiritual and mental aid as well. He found his bride, Emma Ogletree, among our membership. She remained a faithful member until her death in 1925.

Dr. Eugene Hicks Hull, son of Eugene and Susan Hicks Hull, and also a great grandson of pioneers of the church, followed in the footsteps of Dr. Gibson and began his practice in this community. He volunteered and served as Commander in the Navy Medical Corps during World War Two and was head of a hospital in the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific until the close of the war. He is now a very successful surgeon in San Bernardino, California.

Other fine young men from our church answered their country's call and fought in World Wars One and Two. They all returned safely when the Armistice was signed. Bill and Sam Smith, twin sons of Mr. and Mrs. James Smith, and Douglas Moss, son of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Moss are now in the Korean War.

Many teachers received their early training here and have gone out to help raise the standard of education for the youth of America.
Dr. G. T. Hicks perhaps heads the list, holding a degree of Doctor of Philosophy. He is a graduate of Columbia University and the University of Colorado, and has taught in schools and colleges throughout the South for about forty years. His wife, Dr. Frances Ross Hicks, also holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree, is Dean of Women at G. S. C. W., and is our Bible Class Teacher. Her beautiful Christian life is a great inspiration to the entire Oak Hill community. Rev. Howard Simms, a graduate of Harvard and Boston University taught for some time in Suffolk and Boston Universities.

For many years this was largely a Methodist community, but in the last decade or two most of the older members have died and the younger ones have moved into the towns and cities. The old homes have fallen into the hands of tenant farmers who, for the most part, are members of Zion, the nearby Baptist church. The membership now is only about 136, and the Salem Charge, composed of Salem, Snapping Shoals and Prospect, has a total membership of 494. In 1900, the Circuit, composed of Ebenezer, Snapping Shoals, Prospect, and Union, totaled 588 members. That year they paid the pastor $426.77, raised $69.37 for Foreign Missions, and $35.00 for Domestic Missions. Last year the charge paid the pastor $1500.00. This year Prospect's budget is $714.80.

Through the years Prospect remains a proud little church, with her people ever devoted and faithful. Rev. Trevor D. Turner, a promising young Emory Theological student from Roanoke, Virginia is pastor of the charge.
Ministers serving this church from about 1890 until the present are:

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This church has been a great factor in molding the lives of the people in this section and in giving help and inspiration to the many who have come within its influence. All of us feel a "little closer to Heaven" within these sacred walls, and there are many of us who wish to be brought back to sleep here when we are transferred to the Heavenly Church. These memories and traditions have come down to us through over a century to become a priceless heritage to the sixth and seventh generations of those early fathers and mothers who knelt around this sacred altar in the long, long ago.

"From the church in the valley by the wildwood,
When day fades away into night,
I would fain from this spot of my childhood
Wing my way to the Mansions of Light."