HISTORY OF PROVIDENCE METHODIST CHURCH

by Mrs. J. C. Weldon

Rev. Johnny Wade and his consecrated wife Polly were among the first citizens of Shoal Creek community to think in terms of establishing a Methodist Church. The first services were held under a brush arbor with Rev. Johnny Wade doing the preaching.

In 1815 the church proper was established with a delegation from Athens assisting. Fourteen members were required by the discipline of the Church for organizing a society, seven of whom were white and seven colored forming the charter members. Rev. Johnny Wade and his brother Joseph Wade built the first log church on land belonging to Mr. Rucker, brother-in-law of Rev. Wade, now known as the estate of the late R. L. B. Shirley. Several years later it was decided to move and build a new log church, with wood shutters, near the present site.

Each age has its Christian stalwarts; as the Wades and their co-workers waxed old and passed on, their mantles fell on the Parker brothers, Jacob, Lewis, B. B., and Joseph. These four brothers, together with other interested members built the second log church.

In 1875 Lewis Parker deeded two acres to the church and the present building was constructed in 1875-76 at a cost of between eight and nine hundred dollars. The stone steps were built by Col. Cornog and the first sermon in the present church was preached by Rev. John Neese, from Ephesians 6:18. John, Jacob, Benjamin, and Lewis Parker helped to build the present church.

Providence church was first on the Carnesville Circuit, then


Providence was put back on the Lavonia charge and Rev. Elrod was pastor 1919-20, 1921-22-23 J. C. Adams, 1924-25-26-27 C. D.
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Among those who have served as Presiding Elder or District Superintendent as they are now known were T. J. Christian, C. F. Venerable, W. L. Pierce, F. J. Mashburn, Rev. Quilliam, C. L. Middlebrooks, Sr. Rev. Yarborough, H. S. Smith, and J. C. Calaway, the present District Superintendent.

Mr. J. M. Cochran served as Sunday School Superintendent about forty years. A brother-in-law, Mr. J. M. Shirley served twelve years. The community was so enter-married and enter-mingled that a Baptist, Mr. Pick Young served as Superintendent of the Church School a number of years. Others serving were Mr. Early Burton, Mr. C. C. Harris, Mr. James Cochran, Mrs. J. C. Weldon, and Mr. Julian Mauldin, the present Superintendent.

Among the many things of human interest connected with the church's history is the fact that has already mentioned, seven of the charter members were colored people. And mingling with the sacred dust in Providence's city of the dead are the two Rucker children whose bodies were enterred near the first log meeting house and later exhumed and placed in the present resting place. An Indian child's earthly house rests among the sacred dust, the parents of whom in yester-years were regularly in attendance at the services, though being unable to understand very little of the sermon, it is said the mother wept bitterly during the services.
The tallest and the most commanding memorial in the cemetery is the one placed to Professor Parker's grave. Funds for same were provided by his former pupils and admirers contributing ten cents each. The last Regular Saturday service was terminated by Rev. Stevenson and Mr. J. M. Cochran who were the only ones present.

It is said that during the pastorate of Rev. Cantrell a visiting evangelist, Rev. Quarterbeam, held services under a tent and so arroused and stimulated spiritually the people who attended that thirty-five men collapsed from exhaustion from shouting at one service. A Mr. Wiley Vickery, an uneducated man was converted during these services who later moved to Bold Springs community, in Franklin County, reared a large family and by much prayer and diligent study became self-educated. At a later date he returned to Providence and delivered a sermon from its pulpit. He has three sons in the ministry.

Three Preachers have gone out from Providence church, James Parker, Benjamin Parker, and James Griffin. Fate alone kept Edgar Wade, nephew of Rev. Johnny Wade, from entering the ministry. Just after the Civil war this consecrated young man, returning home on horse-back by night, after a three day fast, his mount became frightened, young Wade's foot was caught in the stirrup and he was dragged to death just three days before he was to have been admitted to the Methodist Conference.

The first person buried in Providence cemetery was Mr. John Hutchenson. The ground was covered with a heavy blanket of snow and his body was carried to its last resting place on a horse-
The Rev. Johnny Wade preached with such unction and power he has been compared to the late Rev. Sam P. Jones. Rev. Wade assisted in the establishing churches in both Elberton and Athens.

There has been a gradual increase in membership of the church throughout the years but the greatest increase occurred during the pastorate of J. C. Adams when sixty-seven members were added to the church roll. Thirty-three joined during S. H. Dixon's ministry.

The present graveyard site was bargained for from the late Lewis Parker's estate. Upon last enquiry as to final settlement the late Col. J. H. Skelton, then Administrator for the Lewis Parker estate remarked, that the amount due was very small and that he would check and make a deed for same. But he passed on before this was done and according to law, after a period of year it became the property of Providence church.

Bill Rance, an exslave, was the last colored person to attend services at Providence. This was during Rev. C. D. Read's pastorate. Rev. Read shook Bill's hand after finishing the last sermon. Bill with eyes swimming in tears said, "Boss you made these things leak."

On May 5, 1951 the first church wedding took place when Miss Mahala Bartlett (a member of Providence) and Mr. Billy Gaines were united in holy wedlock.
Providence has not just been a man's church, but from the time Polly Wade aided her husband in establishing the first church through the years when not enough men were present to raise the logs on a new church building to the present time the women have filled their places in the church's activity. The present membership of the church is about one hundred and sixty-nine.