

RANGER GEORGIA METHODIST CHURCH
(OLD SHILOH)

The original site of this pioneer church was about 2 miles south of the present site of Ranger; the church was built in 1835; early ministers were Dr. Joseph A Sharp, Mr. Seaborn, Mr. Bailey, and Mr. Hammond. The charter members came from Madison, Gwinett, Hall, and other counties before the Indians departed in 1838. Some of the members were William White, H.H. Pitman, Julian Hurt, Milt Fuller, the Halls Ephrim Strickland, Thomas Mitchell, Billy Hopper, Billy Smith, the Morris family, John Wesley Stanton, Elic Neal, Van Buren Watts, Doc Owens and J.S. Taberiaux. A school at the site was attended by many of the older citizens. Early teachers included Misses Meta Dodd, Lula Meadows, Mamie Watts, and Homer Warlick. Ephrim Strickland built the Strickland home to the south. Charter members began moving away or passed on and preparations were made to move the church to Ranger, circa 1908. When the building was moved it was carefully dismantled, each piece numbered, and was hauled by wagons and rebuilt on the present site. Few changes were made and the same pews were used.

Following the removal an opensided roofed building was erected to replace it. This, in deference to a well marked cemetery in the old church yard. The school building was across the road to the east. It remained in place for several years and when no longer used as a school was used as a dwelling at times. It is no longer there. Adjoining the school yard was another burial ground with no identifying markers. It was said to be the last resting place for slaves owned by early settlers who were well to do planters, and possibly a few Cherokee Indians who died prior to or during their banishment to the west. In the early 1900's the

cemetery had long since been abandoned, possibly not used since the early 1860's, nor cared for beyond digging the graves and covering them over.

The road from the northeast leading by the church and school site forked near this burial ground. One fork led to the Tennessee road about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile due west. The other fork arched southwest approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ th mile where it too joined the Tennessee road. Both of these roads have been abandoned. There is no direct access to the church site and cemetery. There is however, a more recently constructed dirt road running east and west from the Tennessee road that passes near the site.

Land for the church and school was made available from land lot 292, known as the Watts Place. Some 84 years after the church was founded a Mr. Shope bought land lot 295 and apparently assumed that he had proprietary rights over the church and school property. Under the leadership of himself, his family and other adherents, the tabernacle was used as a regular meeting place by a sect that labeled itself Church of God. People living in the community used the collective term, Holy Rollers. This was prompted by the manner in which the services were conducted. Reading a lesson from the bible was sometimes followed by testimonies, shouting, talking in the unknown tongue, and rolling over and over on the floor.

This use of the tabernacle developed into a controversy between the Methodist church and Mr. Shope. A civil laws suit was instituted over ownership of the property which resulted in findings favorable to the church.

The old church site with its churchyard cemetery constituted a landmark well worth preserving. The Methodist church at Ranger, in reality old Shiloh, having re-asserted its ownership of the grounds, one might reasonably expect that in reverence to the dead, some of them original founders of the church, some effort would be made to reclaim the grounds from the jungle that engulfs them. This did not happen. Casual neglect became final and complete.

Accompanying this article are three snapshots made in June 1981. At the top of the page on which they appear one may detect a wire fence that marks the north boundary of the old church site. The cemetery, not readily identifiable, is in the upper background. It was possible to photograph with any meaning, only two tombstones. As they appear here the one on the left bears the inscription: M.F. Watts, born Aug. 22, 1879, died May 31, 1897. To the left in this photograph may be seen the remains of a much larger and more elaborate marker. For whom, undetermined. The Stanton marker bears the inscription: John Wesley Stanton-Dec. 23, 1823; Oct. 5, 1895.

Standing among the ruins one is reminded of a passage from The Old Curiosity Shop, by Charles Dickens:

"The memory of those who lie below passes away too soon. At first they attend to them, morning noon and night; they soon begin to come less frequently; from once a day, to once a week; from once a week to once a month; then at long and uncertain intervals; then not at all."

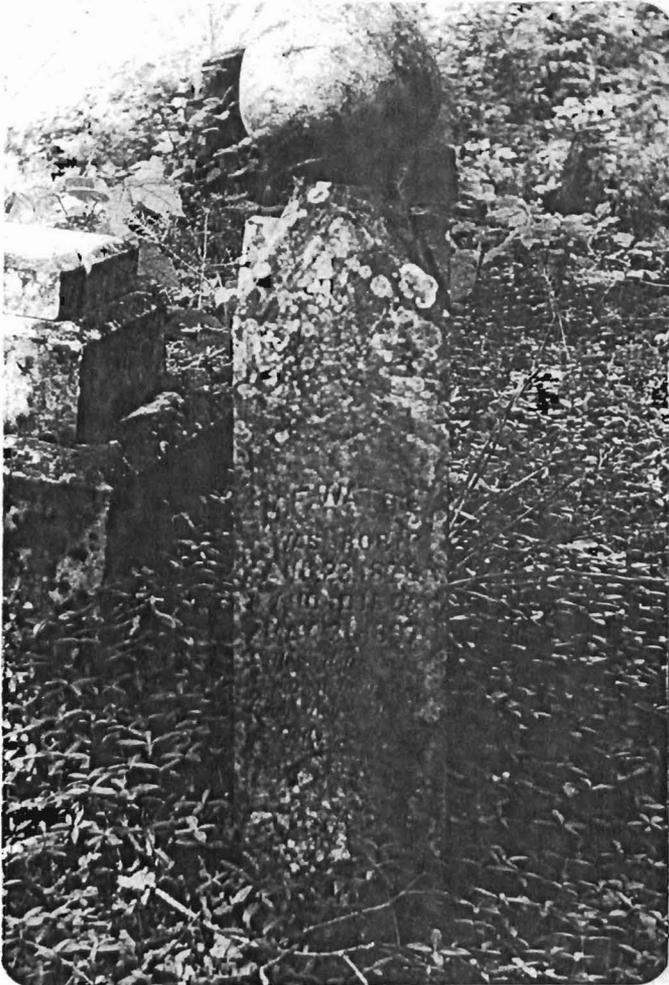
The only living objects in this forelone spot of ground are tall trees in the cemetery. Their presence speaks eloquently of the dead whose remains their roots embrace. This does not speak well for the church which claims the ground.

Note: The first paragraph in this article was extracted from The Gordon County Bicentennial History,

Broadus McAfee



OLD SHILOH CHURCH SITE



SHILOH CEMETERY
H.F. WATTS MARKER



SHILOH CEMETERY
JOHN WESLEY STANTON MARKER