

HISTORY OF ROCK CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH

Compiled by J. B. Bond, September 1950.

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Sometime in the year 1825, exact month and year not known, while some scattering Indians were still around, early settlers like William Lee, Ben Carr, William Griffith, Charles McGuffey and others united and built a log meeting house near a spring in Land Lot No. 195 near the Northwest corner of a rock mountain and both took the name of Rock Chapel. A nickname of "Soap Factory" was given the meeting house because an old time ash hopper stood near it.

A few years later Joseph B. Bond of Hall County bought Land Lot No. 190 West of 195 and moved on it. In January 1834 he gave the Commissioners of Rock Chapel a deed to a parcel of Land Lot 190 about 200 yards due West of the original site, most of which is now the cemetery.

On this lot a frame church was erected about where the Dr. Bond Monument now stands. This building was used for both church and school. In 1870 this building was burned. The school was moved to another location and another church built near the present site. This building was sold to colored Baptist Church in 1886 when the congregation voted to build a new and better church.

Edmund Lee who owned a lot of fine yellow pines just East of the mountain gave the timber and my father Asom J. Bond, David B. Chupp, Tandy Y. Nash, Simeon Duncan and J. L. Chupp moved a sawmill to the pool near it and sawed the lumber which was stacked and dried. D. B. Chupp had a planer. The church was hulled in that year and finished in 1887 and dedicated November 7th, by Bishop Key, M. L. Underwood was the pastor and G. W. Yarbough presiding elder. The Sunday School rooms were added in 1923. Walter M. Twiggs was the pastor; Rock Chapel was regarded a spiritual fountain of all the section round about in the last century. The membership of the church has never been very large, from a low of 75 to a high of 150.

In 1860 the Lithonia Church was organized and many of the leading members transferred to that church, and the war between the states reduced the male members to only 18. In the days of slavery the slaves joined the church with their masters and their names are recorded as Lees, Ransom, Smiths, John, etc. On the roll of 1858 we find the names of 61 slaves, generally separate services were held for them.

In the old days Hymn books were very scarce. The preacher would read two lines and the congregation would sing and they knew songs like: The Old Ship Of Zion, How Tedious and Tasteless The Hours, Come Ye Sinners Poor and Needy.

From this church James W. Lee joined the North Georgia Conference and filled the highest pastorates in Southern Methodism. Robert M. Wesley joined the South Georgia Conference where he was a faithful soldier for many years. Francis Asbury Ragsdale a local preacher served as a supply for several circuits and married more couples and buried more people than any man I know. His daughter Miss Jean joined this church here and is known all over North Georgia as a young peoples worker. Hundreds of others have gone from this church to make the world better. I will name a few families who have helped build a good name for Rock Chapel. Some did not belong to this church but helped it morally and financially long ago. Chupp, Bond, Lee, Nash, McGuffey, Mitchell, Ragsdale Evans, Smith, Braswell, St. John, Diamond, Phillips, Duncan, Corley, White Venable, Veal, Maguire and Anderson; I cannot name those who are carrying on today. William F. Parks and Allen Turner were two of the first pastors and it is very likely that the church was in the Gwinett Circuit. We know it was in the Decatur Circuit in 1848 and later in the Sone Mountain and then Lithonia and then Redan and Rock Chapel.

Now a word about the campmeeting which made the name famous. Just how long these meetings were held before the Civil War is not known, but it must have been twenty years or more but ceased during the war.

In 1872 Eason Bond, Dr. W. P. Bond, David Chupp, Dr. Chupp, Thomas Johnson, B. B. Braswell, Jacob Braswell, Ruben Evans, Marion Wellborn, Dan Venable and many others rebuilt the campground. The first meeting was held under a brush arbor. The next year a large tabernacle was built. These meetings were great occasions. At one of the "Grove Meetings" my father was beside a paleface youth, *preaching for years* who was converted and joined the church. He later was the Dr. J. W. Lee mentioned above. At these meetings mourners were called to come to the altar and kneel in the straw while Marion Wellborn and my father led in singing: "I Will Arise And Go To Jesus", "I Am Bound For The Promised Land," "We Have Fathers Over Yonder," etc. John W. Ozmer, Tandy Y. Nash, and F. A. Ragsdale were mighty men of prayer at these meetings. Oftentimes Mrs. Rachel Norton, Mrs. Roan Venable and others would shout the Lord's praises.

For various reasons the campmeetings were discontinued in 1902 and tents removed. The tabernacle was repaired and used for revival celebrations, fairs, etc. and was torn down in 1947.

Among the prominent preachers we recall who preached from its pulpit were: Bishop A. G. Haygood, Bishop W. A. Candler, Bishop Marvin Franklin, conducted a weeks revival in his early ministry. H. H. Parks, W. F. Glenn, C. A. Evans, G. W. Yarbrow, J. B. Robins, W. D. Anderson, W. F. Quillian, Elam Dempsey, J. W. Quillian and others on the roll of pastors who have served the church since 1900 . We find H. M. Strozier, J. S. Sappington, J. A. Quillian, W. P. King, Marvin ^{W. P. King} ~~Alison~~, W. M. Twiggs, J. D. Milton, Fred Guinn, Young Oliver, Rembert Sisson, Ed Elliott, J. V. Hawks, Allen Montgomery, Paul Wohlgemuth and others.