Salem Charge

History of

Salem Methodist Church
Route 2
Covington, Georgia
1824-1952

Written by
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(Mrs. George Ramsey)
Salem Methodist Church is located in the north western part of Newton County, a few miles off Highway No. 12, on the Conyers to Porterdale road. It is now on the Salem Circuit, Decatur-Oxford District.

The Pastor is the Rev. Trevor Turner, from Roanoke, Virginia, who is attending Emory School of Theology at Emory University.

The history of Salem Church dates back over a hundred and twenty-nine years.

In 1824 Salem Church was organized and a log structure was built in a wooded area near the Salem Camp Ground spring, on a five-acre plot donated by Green N. Turner. This five acres includes part of the present cemetery.

According to old minutes preserved at Emory University library, this church was in the Yellow River Circuit, which included what is now Walton, Henry, Newton, Rockdale, Fayette and Clayton counties. It was the Athens District, South Carolina Conference.

It is known from family records that Eli Bennett was one of the founders of Salem Church. He was born in 1790, in Virginia. He came to Newton County, Georgia in 1822, as a local preacher and preached at Salem for a number of years. He was also Justice of the Peace.

Other early members of this church were Presley Christian and family, Rufus Christian and family, and Isaac Christian and family. These three Christian men were cousins.

For two years Salem Camp Meeting was held at this Church.
No accurate records are available as to how long this Church was used as a place of worship, but it is believed to have served as the "Meeting House" for almost half a century.

Some years later between 1865 and 1870 a new Church was erected on the camp ground exactly west of the present stand. The lot for the Church was donated by David Crawford. Trustees of the Church at this time were George M. Cunningham, W.M. Mann, Rufus Christian, G.B. Almand, Lorenzo Smith; as recorded in Deed Book W, page 217, Newton County Clerk of Superior Court. Stewards were H.A. Ogletree and Steve Brown:

Wardy H. Ogletree, one of the oldest living ex-members joined this Church in 1880. At that time John Rogers was superintendent of Salem Sunday School. Tom Shaw, Grey Treadwell, Roland Vaughn, Rufus Christian, John Boyd, and probably others, also served as superintendent during the period 1880 to 1903. The pastors in this period were: James L. Pierce, 1882-1885; C.E. Dowman, 1886-1888; M.H. Eakes, 1889-1892; J.E. Dickey, 1893-1895; W.M. Joiner, 1896-1897; C.C. Simmions, 1898-1900; G.M. Eakes, 1901-1902, and F.R. Smith, 1902-1903.

The Conyers Circuit as organized about 1896. Salem Church was admitted to this circuit in 1901. E.R. Hendricks was Bishop, W.R. Foose, Presiding Elder and G.M. Eakes, pastor. Salem paid the pastor $119.00, as their part of the $625.00 which this circuit of five churches paid.

A Missionary Society was organized in connection with the Sunday School in 1902. Records show it was a very active Society. The pastor, Rev. F.R. Smith reported at the fourth quarterly conference that year $45.00 collected for Home and Foreign Missions and that he had never had
better societies than the ones on Salem Circuit, at Salem and Prospect Churches.

Some very interesting articles are often found in some of the old reports. In 1902, Rev. F.R. Smith wrote in the minutes "For the most part the membership has been quickened. Some feuds have been settled". In another report he wrote "Our attendance is very good, our people are interested and love to come to church."

An Epworth League was organized in the spring of 1902, but for lack of interest and leadership, it was soon discontinued.

The last service held in the old Salem Church that was located west of the present stand was the Christmas program of December 24, 1902. This program and Christmas tree was in charge of the Sunday School. An original copy of the program is in the possession of Mrs. Cub Smith nee Emma Treadwell. Among those who had parts in this program, a few of whom are still members of this Church, were John Zack Almand, Annie Mae Treadwell (Mrs. Ratcliffe), Tom L. Burns, J.P. Cooley, Stella Pruitt, Mattie Helms (Mrs. Will Harrison), Alberta Plunkett (Mrs. John B. Gordon) Elmo Cowan, Jeff Ramsey, Eli Treadwell, and J.W. Burns. The Sunday School Superintendent at this time was W.C. Treadwell.

At the first quarterly Conference held January 7th, 1903, records show a resolution was passed asking trustees of Salem Camp Ground to transfer a site for a new Church in exchange for the site of Church which was in use at that time. This was granted and work was immediately begun on the present Church building.

The following is told by some of the "boys" who helped to tear down the old church. As the ceiling was being torn off the inside, a white object, about the size of a small goat, jumped out of the wall and
ran off toward the cemetery, and was seen no more. What this white ob­
ject was, the ones who saw it didn't know. They only knew they were so
frightened they could hardly work after seeing what they thought must
surely have been a ghost.

The Church lot consists of two acres. The value of the Church was
placed at $2,500.00. The trustees and stewards at this time were W.S.

The Salem Circuit was organized in 1905, with four churches; Salem,
Prospect, Union and Snapping Shoals. At this time Salem Church paid the
pastor $265.00. Through the generosity of Professor J.P. Cooley a lib-
rary was started at Salem in 1905.

In 1906, one acre of land on the Conyers to Porterdale highway, about
one-fourth mile south of the church was purchased from J.C.Nixon for the
sum of $50.00 to build a parsonage for the new Salem Circuit. The land
was deeded to the parsonage trustees who were J.H. Ogletree, W.S.Ramsey,
was built on this lot. This was valued at $1200.00. Rev. J.T.Eakes was
the first pastor to occupy this parsonage.

In going back through the years, the names are very familiar as many
are the same as are on our church roll today such as: Almand, Bailey,
Boyd, Burns, Christian, Cowan, Ficquette, Hollingsworth, Kirkland, Loyd,
Melton, Plunkett, Ramsey, Smith and Treadwell.

Seven generations of Eli Bennett who was one of the founders of Salem
are Eli Bennett who married Lecey Bolds; their daughter Lucy Jane Bennett.
who married Benson Reese Plunkett; their son, E.Hulsey Plunkett who married Anna Treadwell; their son, David Reese Plunkett who married Nancy Nolan; their son, David Sanford Plunkett, who married Ruth Sellers; their son, David Samuel Plunkett who married Mildred Freeman; and their sons who are Steve and Gary Plunkett. Other descendants of Eli Bennett who are present members of Salem Church are Mr. and Mrs. Jack Kirkland and family, Mrs. Hulda Kirkland, Mrs. Ed Bell, Mrs. Charlie Berry, Mrs. John Berry and Mrs. Otis Maxwell.

Six generations of Presley Christian who was also a pioneer member are: Presley Christian, who married Elizabeth Sappington; their daughter, Fannie Christian, who married William Samuel Ramsey; their son, Coe David Ramsey, who married Sue Cunningham; their son, George William Ramsey, who married Mary Sue Hull; their daughter, Susie Ruth Ramsey, who married John Aaron Kemp; and their daughters, Dana Sue and Martha Ann Kemp. Other members of Salem who are descendants of Presley Christian are Mr. and Mrs. John M. Hollingsworth and family.

Five generations of Rufus Christian, another pioneer member are Rufus Christian, who married Bessie Christian; their son, Milton Christian, who married Lulie Cunningham; their son, Rufus Hayden Christian, who married Lillie King; their son, Robert King Christian, who married Vashti Almand; and their daughters, Jacqueline and Charlotte Christian. Other descendants of Rufus Christian who are members of Salem are Mr. and Mrs. John Zach Almand.

The Epworth League was reorganized while the Rev. N.P. Manning was pastor in 1926. During some years the League was not very active, but since 1936 there has been a very enthusiastic group of young people carrying on the League work. At the present time Ann Christian is president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship, as it is now called.
The Womans Society of Christian Service was reorganized in 1934, by Miss Bert Winters, Rural Conference Worker, with ten members making a pledge of $15.00. The Society at Salem has been very active in doing local work and also acting as Parsonage aid. This year the Society has thirty members pledging $100.00 under the leadership of Mrs Leonard Standard as president.

We are proud of a number of men and women who grew up in Salem Church and who are now scattered far and near serving in other churches and towns as preachers, teachers, stewards, laymen, Sunday School superintendents, lawyers, nurses, etc. Perhaps the two most outstanding such men are Rev. Coe Hayden Christian and his brother, Rev. Thomas Jefferson Christian, both sons of Presley Christian and Elizabeth Sappington Christian. During their lifetime these two served as pastors to some of the largest churches in the North Georgia Conference. On his eighty second birthday Rev. Coe Christian said, "If I had a thousand lives, I would begin them all in the ministry, for there is nothing like it for me. I've passed the liking stage, I love the work, and wish I were able to preach now". Rev. Coe Christian retired from active ministry on account of ill health. However, he managed to get in forty-two years of active and hard service as a circuit rider, a small town preacher, a big city preacher and a big Presiding Elder.

Rev. Jeff Christian lived to be eighty-two years old. He was one of the most loved and respected ministers in the North Georgia Conference. He had many friends throughout the state. He was a member of the North Georgia Conference for fifty years. He also served as Presiding Elder for a number of years. Upon retiring, Rev. Christian voluntarily offered to leave the service of the church to younger men and refused to
accept any help whatsoever from anyone, but rather himself to help others.

Charles Elliott, another Salem boy died in early manhood just as he was beginning a most promising career as a minister. Rev. Elliott worked his way through Emory University. He graduated in 1906. From there he went to Young Harris as a preacher and teacher. For a year or two he served as president of Sparks Collegiate Institute. He was pastor of Wesleyan Monumental Church of Savannah when he died in 1910.

Carl Standard, one of our present members, has been licensed as a local preacher. Carl is a fine young man, rendering any service that he may be called upon to do. He is very much interested in the young people, having been the M.Y.F. Advisor for several years. He has also taught a class of Junior boys and girls. At present, he is teacher of the Men's Bible Class.

Miss Mae Treadwell, of Salem, dedicated her life as a Missionary serving in Mexico.

William S. Elliott, left Salem as a young man to make his way in the world. He was in civil service for thirty years, eight of which he was register of the United States Treasury, during the presidency of President Woodrow Wilson.

Judge Clarence R. Vaughn, judge of the Stone Mountain Circuit, Superior Court, also attended Salem Church as a boy, his father having been Sunday School Superintendent for a number of years. Judge Vaughn makes his home in Conyers, where he is an outstanding civic, social and religious leader.
A faithful member who should have special mention is Miss Irene Smith. She has made regular trips each Saturday for the past eight years to arrange flowers in the Church. Most of these flowers she grows in her own yard, always planning to have certain flowers blooming for each occasion. Miss Smith says "As long as the Lord lets me grow flowers, I'm going to use them to decorate his house". We feel no other person has ever been so faithful in giving time and labor for this service to the church.

On the second Sunday morning in July 1946, four Sunday School rooms were dedicated, followed by a barbecue dinner. This Sunday marked a record attendance of two-hundred-seventy at Sunday School. This annex was built at a minimum cost, the members having done most of the labor.

At the present time Salem Church, including furniture, is valued at $15,000.00.

The pastors who have served at Salem from 1903 until the present are:

Salem Circuit to which Salem Church belongs owns a beautiful modern five-room parsonage located on Salem Camp Ground. This parsonage was built in 1946 at a cost of $8,500.00. The old parsonage which has been used for almost half a century was sold for $1800.00 which was put into the new parsonage. Rev. W.H. Ruff and his family were the first to occupy this parsonage.

Salem Camp Ground, next door to our Church is dear to all our hearts. Our forefathers have been tenters since its beginning, even though they lived only a few miles from the camp site. During the camp meeting, no service is held at Salem Church. This second Sunday in August has brought us sermons by the late Bishop Candler. In later years, we have had Bishop Arthur Moore on this occasion. Many other notable preachers from all over the South have preached here during Camp Meeting.

The Salem young people attend the Daily Bible Classes during Camp Meeting week. Many of the young people have perfect attendance records for these classes. Ann Ramsey has a record of nine years in succession of perfect attendance. The children of Mr. and Mrs. Otis Maxwell have a number of years of perfect attendance to their credit.

The Camp Meeting is a big asset to Salem. During the coming years, it is hoped that Salem Church members will have an even more active part in camp meeting.
The Sunday School Superintendents from 1933-1952 were W.C. Treadwell, William Boyd, J.Will Cowan, Coe D. Ramsey, Tom Treadwell, Frances Hollingsworth (Mrs. Grady Jones), Olive Burns (Mrs. James Turner), Jack Standard, Alton Johnson, and Leonard Standard. The present Sunday School enrollment is approximately one hundred fifty.

In June of 1947 Salem held its first Daily Vacation Bible School. The attendance averaged over a hundred. Teachers, as well as pupils enjoyed the school and it has been a regular part of our Church program every summer since. Each summer we have had almost a perfect attendance of all pupils throughout the week.

For the past two years the Church has sponsored a Boy Scout troop, Troop #240 which has meant much to the boys of the community. Doyle Bailey is present Scout Master. He is very interested in the boys and is doing a good work with this troop.


The membership at present is two-hundred-ninety four. The pastor's salary is $900.00. The total expenditures for the year 1952 were $1,870.89.

It is our sincere prayer that the history of Salem Church will never come to a close. Surely the prayers and efforts of all who have worked and attended Salem will be felt by other generations in years to come. Salem has been most fortunate in its members and leaders. We trust that faithful Christian men and women will always carry on the work of our Lord in Salem Church.