HISTORY OF SANDY SPRINGS METHODIST CHURCH

1848 - 1969

The founding of a church is truly a marvelous thing, for in it we see clearly the hand of God touching the hearts of men and filling them, as was done in earliest Biblical recordings, with a burning desire to set up an altar of worship and there to pay homage to Him.

May this brief but significant history gathered from treasured notes and records loaned to us by the descendants of earliest settlers in this area, tell the reader something about the sacred past and the challenging present of this church. An inspiring record it is, indeed, of this old and historic Methodist church founded here so many years ago in Sandy Springs by a group of devout men and women, most of whom had come to Georgia over one hundred and twenty years ago, out of the Carolinas, seeking homes and a place to worship.

Among these pioneer settlers we find in the records the names of Abernathy, Anderson, Austin, Ball, Brightwell, Burdett, Carter, Cook, Copeland, Dalrymple, Heard, Martin, Morgan, Mitchell, McMurtry, Reed, Owens, Power, Spruill, Thomason, Wright, Waits, and others, all religious and faithful worshipers of our Lord.

The story is told that when these first white men came in caravans of covered wagons to these parts, they found Indians encamped around and about a beautiful clear spring of water, the bottom of the spring being covered with white sand through which a large quantity of fresh pure water came gushing forth, causing the bubbling and boiling up of the sand. They called this spot Sandy Springs, which later became the name of this pioneer settlement. Travelers to and from Atlanta often stopped at this spring for rest
and for water for themselves and their horses, often spending the night in their wagons nearby. The spring can still be seen through a boxed and grilled enclosure below a curve of the road on Sandy Springs Circle near its intersection with Hilderbrand Drive. A record shows that an easement for use of this spring was given to the church by Mr. Owens who owned the property at that time. Later, a piece of land east of the spring was bought from him on which the earliest church building and burial ground were located.

Early records tell that before any permanent structure of worship could be built, a group of ten devout local settlers met near the junction of the Lawrenceville Road, later known as Mt. Vernon Highway, and Heard's Ferry to build there a brush arbor and an altar of worship, and later to organize the very first Methodist church in this area. The families of William Austin, Franklin Austin, (sons of John Austin), Wilson Spruill and James Spruill are listed among these ten early church fathers. Meetings were held during the warmer months with preaching by circuit riders at irregular intervals. Burning lightwood knots provided light for night meetings.

It was in 1848 that the first church building was erected. It was a one-room log structure and was built on a site just inside the present and ancient cemetery gate. The property on which it was built was given by Wilson E. Spruill, who married Eliza Jane Austin, sister to William and James Austin, all of whom had come with those early settlers from South Carolina. An interesting note states that Mr. Spruill purchased a 202 acre plot of land in this area for $80.00. This same land today is almost priceless in monetary value.
This log church was built not far from the present church site and was to serve both for worship and as a school. Logs for the building were hauled by ox cart. Seats were half-logs with peg legs. The building was heated in winter by a huge fireplace. The first preacher, a circuit rider, was Walter Manning. The next was known as Uncle Johnnie Yarbrough.

In 1866, a frame building for worship was built just east of the log church and the removal of this log structure enlarged the grounds of the old cemetery. There, among the ancient graves, are found the names of those early pioneer founders of this community and of this church. Move softly, speak gently, and think reverently, for here rest those who have dared much and sacrificed greatly, and who have passed on to us the rich heritage of a church in this place — namely, our beloved Sandy Springs Methodist Church. Sensitive souls are still able to catch something in the very air around these hallowed spots, still so dear to those descendants of those first few families who are left, and whose lives were shaped by the spiritual impact made by those early Christian men and women, their forbears and our benefactors.

The frame church mentioned above was lighted at first by homemade candles, later, by wall and swinging lamps. Services were held only in warm weather during the first few years since there was no provision for heat in the church building. It was decided in the early 1900's, by the leaders of the community to build an open air tabernacle or arbor where, for many years, camp meeting services were held during the last of August. It became a widely known center of worship, and outstanding ministers and bishops came to preach to the immense crowds of people who came from far and near to sing and worship and to enjoy fellowship with relatives and friends.
Zealous souls they were, seeking refreshment of spirit and a respite from their arduous labors, after their crops were laid by, and they could gather here and worship together for a period of ten days or more.

The first permanent arbor was built entirely of hand-hewn material fastened together with wooden pegs. It was covered with hand-riven boards put on with hand-made nails (nails hammered from wire). The tents or simple wooden structures, in which the worshipers lived during the camp meeting, stood back and across the road from the church. An interesting note states that the very earliest shelters were open air scaffolds covered with sod. Burning pine knots were used for light at night and these gave a glow, not only to the inside of the arbor, but to all the surrounding area as well. Home-made candles lighted the pulpit stand. Later the use of kerosene lamps improved the lighting for night services. The lengthy sermons, the zeal and devotion of the worshiper's search for a meaningful faith probably made the services stretch late into the night. But, truly, we believe that the woods and hills around, and even the stars above, heard the joyful sounds and shouts, and witnessed the rebirth of many souls and the rededication of lives here to the service of our Lord.

After the regular services held at night by the white worshipers, the servants would gather inside the arbor and hold worshipful services of their own.

The frame building constructed in 1866 served the congregation until 1920. It was removed and a small red brick church, with beautiful stained glass memorial windows, was built on the exact site of the earlier church. During its construction, the congregation held its worship services at Hammond School. In 1924, five Sunday school rooms and a basement were added. Between 1940-1944, the church auditorium was enlarged and more
classrooms were constructed at the rear and in the basement of the church. The movement of many hundreds of people from the city to the suburbs brought rapid growth to membership rolls of formerly rural churches. Sandy Springs was one of these churches, known historically and located in a favorable position for such growth.

The first arbor and the tents were destroyed by fire in 1931, the day after the closing of its annual meeting. A larger, more modern structure arose on the same site within the year and was used for open air services for many years. The advent of rapid transportation and easy communication caused the gradual falling off in attendance and appeal of the dear old camp-ground, so this second arbor fell into disuse and was removed in 1959 for the building on its site of the new sanctuary.

In 1954 ground was broken for the first unit of a new educational building. This building was completed and consecrated in 1955.

Because of the tremendous growth of the community and increased church attendance, with needs steadily increasing for a larger church auditorium and for more class rooms, a Plan for Progress, to meet these needs, was set forth in a folder published in August, 1958. This plan, "Together We Build", was sent to every church family.

The church's whole-hearted support of this plan brought about the erection of the new sanctuary which was completed and consecrated on Easter Sunday, 1960. It has a seating capacity of 1,200 and was erected at the cost of $412,000.00. The lower floor of the building consists of a large fellowship hall, several classrooms, and a youth recreation center.

The three steps proposed in the folder mentioned above are shown in
the outline below.

Plan for Progress

Step I: Education Building - 1955

Step II: New sanctuary and fellowship hall - 1960

With a connector to be added later to join with the
first new education building - 1964

Step III: A new chapel to stand on the site of the red
brick church built in 1920; this chapel to use the old
memorial windows in its plan of architecture.

The first two steps of the plan have been completed. The third step
is yet to be realized.

The second step of the Plan for Progress was in two areas of
development:

1. The sanctuary and fellowship hall.

2. The connector

This connector is a four story structure joining the earlier
educational building to the sanctuary. It consists of a number of
classrooms, library, staff offices, kitchen facilities, Wesleyan Day School
rooms with an enrollment of 200 nursery and kindergarten children, pastor's
study, music room, store and rest rooms and a visitor's lounge or bride's
room. The entire church plant is heated and cooled electrically. This
connecting structure cost $222,000.00 and was used for the first time

In 1965 a large beautiful parsonage at 6920 Castleton Drive, N. W.
was purchased at a cost of $37,000.00.
For the sake of safety the old red brick church, erected in 1920, was removed in 1967, but its lovely memorial windows and its corner stone were stored in the basement of the educational building, hopefully to be used in the small chapel to be erected at a future date. The pews from the old church are being used in the balcony of the present sanctuary.

The membership of the church grew from less than 600 in 1955 to more than 1900 in 1969, and offerings increased for this same period from $21,000.00 to $162,000.00.

1959 - Average Attendance - 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Worship</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Costs, averages and numbers all show rapid change and amazing progress in the financial and structural, as well as the membership growth of the church.

The name of our church has been affected by two unions that have taken place. The first was in 1939, when the northern and southern branches of Methodism became one. Our Sandy Springs Methodist Episcopal Church, South then became simply Sandy Springs Methodist Church. Then, in 1968, the union of all Methodist Churches with those of the Evangelical United Brethren changed our title to Sandy Springs United Methodist Church.

Truly God's blessings have been unceasingly and abundantly poured out upon Sandy Springs United Methodist Church throughout its 121 years of existence! The rich heritage this church has passed to us presents the challenge to move on and up and out to larger more sacrificial fields of service in His blessed Name. From 1848 to 1969! What a glorious past is ours to treasure! What hallowed memories are held by the many who
have worshiped here! The future - how challenging to us and to those who will follow after!

"Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the King of Kings.

Rise up, O men of God!
The Church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task;
Rise up, and make her great!

Committee on Church History
J. Frank Burdett
William A. Sorrell, Jr.
Mrs. B. M. Woodruff

May, 1969.
May 26, 1971

SUPPLEMENT TO HISTORY OF SANDY SPRINGS METHODIST CHURCH (1848-1969)

Dr. Charles B. Cochran came to serve Sandy Springs in July, 1968 and was joined by Rev. Chas. F. Moon, III, as the Minister of Music in September of 1968, Rev. Ron Johnston as the Minister to Youth in June, 1969, and Rev. Comer L. Brownlow as Co-Pastor in July, 1969.


The membership of Sandy Springs stands at 1935 as of May 26, 1971 with a current annual budget of $204,000.

There is a church sponsored Wesleyan Day School which has an enrollment of 250 this year. The Day School covers from Pre-Kindergarten through 2nd year elementary.

Committee on History & Records

J. Frank Burdett
Dr. D. L. Hearin
Mrs. B. M. Woodruff
Mrs. C. H. Dallas