In Hancock County, five miles from Sparta, the county site, there stands today a little country church which has the distinction of being the second Methodist church to be organized in Georgia.

The first services were held in a brush arbor, but later a building was constructed, which was known in its infancy as Piney Grove Meeting House. In the year of 1790 the present building was completed and the name was changed to Smyrna Methodist Church.

The age of this building is attested by the foundation, which is constructed of hewn sills, joined with wooden pegs. The little church, a one room structure stands on a slightly elevated lot approximately two hundred feet from the Sparta and Powellton Road. Behind the building is a large grove through which are scattered numbers of family cemetery lots, some of which are well kept, while others show the marks of time to such an extent that the names on the markers or monuments are scarcely legible.

However, in its picturesque setting, the little white church with its red roof, surrounded by family monuments and spreading trees, inspires the observer with a feeling of reverence. The land on which the church and cemeteries are located was given by Irwin N. Waller, and later deeded to the trustees of the church by his son, J. W. Waller, Sr.

While the church building was being constructed, Bishop Asbury preached here. At that time Smyrna belonged to the Oconee Circuit, Georgia District, South Carolina Conference. Beverly Allen was the first pastor, and Reddick Pierce the first Presiding Elder.
This was one of the churches on the first charge that Bishop Pierce served. The exact date is not known. Some of the earliest members of the church were the Wallers, Barnes, Reynolds, Brantleys, Jacksons, and Collins. The descendants of these families still make up the larger part of the church roll.

In 1875, John H. Little organized the first Sunday School. Later he became a minister and joined the conference. Being on a circuit, services have always been held only one Sunday in each month, morning and evening. A week of Revival Services, morning and evenings, are held, as has always been the custom, once every year, during the Summer months. Once each year it has always been the custom to have an all day session of Quarterly Conference, with dinner on the grounds. These have been great occasions throughout the history of the church, with large crowds attending, and the most bountiful dinners.

Although Smyrna Church has never boasted of more than an average membership, for many years it was outstanding in many ways. Some of the most noted church leaders and ministers have been associated with the church and its activities, and their influence has borne fruit down through the ages. So far as the writer knows, Smyrna Church did not produce any ministers or foreign missionaries, but it has produced godly men and women, heads of families who definitely believed in the "Faith of our Fathers" and "The old time religion," and passed it on to their families to the third and fourth generations.

With the passing of time the church membership has grown smaller until at present the number is very small in comparison to what it once was, but it carries on. Services are held at present the first
Sunday morning and evening in each month. Sunday School is held every Sunday morning, with an enrollment of twenty-four. Reverend George F. Wright is the Pastor and Mrs. Crawford Jackson is Sunday School Superintendent. J. W. Waller was superintendent for twenty-five consecutive years.

From time to time throughout the years, numerous repairs have been made on the church building, on the inside and outside, but the general structure and frame work has never been changed at all.

Last repairs on the building were made in 1950. The inside was completely refinished with celotex wall board, new electric lights were installed, and woodwork was painted. The outside was painted, and new solid brick steps across the front replace the old wooden steps.

Some time during the latter part of the eighteenth century, about 1880, Smyrna was put on the Culverton Circuit with three other churches, and remained there until 1915 when it was placed on the Mayfield Circuit.

Among the early pastors of the church were Josiah Lewis, Caleb Key, and George F. Pierce, who later became a Bishop. Bishop Pierce's old home, where he reared his family, still stands about three miles East of Sparta. Josiah Lewis was also a native of Sparta.

Other pastors who served down through the years are as follows:

1876--77 - J. E. Pierce and G. H. Patillo
H. W. Bingham, Presiding Elder

1878--80 - G. H. Patillo - G. M. Kendrick

1880--81 - Clement C. Gary - C. A. Jamison
H. H. Parks, Presiding Elder

1881--82 - C. C. Gary - H. H. Parks, Presiding Elder

1882--83 - J. E. England - H. H. Parks, Presiding Elder
1883--84 - J. E. England - J. E. Evans, Presiding Elder
1884--85 - J. A. Reynolds - J. E. Evans, Presiding Elder
1885--86 - W. F. Smith - J. E. Evans, Presiding Elder
1886--88 - W. F. Smith - W. P. Lovejoy, Presiding Elder
1888--90 - W. J. Caldwell - W. P. Lovejoy, Presiding Elder
1890--91 - G. W. Thomas - J. H. Baxter, Presiding Elder
1891--93 - C. W. Thomas - G. W. Yarbrough, Presiding Elder
1893--94 - M. H. Bakes - G. W. Yarbrough, Presiding Elder
1894--96 - M. H. Bakes - J. F. Mixon, Presiding Elder
1896--98 - Crawford Jackson - J. F. Mixon, Presiding Elder
1898--1900 - J. R. Lewis - J. R. King, Presiding Elder
1900--01 - J. R. Lewis - J. R. King, Presiding Elder
W. I. Delph, Supply
1901--02 - A. C. Cantrell - J. R. King, Presiding Elder
1902--03 - A. C. Cantrell - J. B. Robins, Presiding Elder
1903--04 - W. P. King - J. B. Robins, Presiding Elder
1904--05 - W. P. King - J. B. Robins, Presiding Elder
G. L. King, Supply
1905--06 - W. P. King - J. B. Robins, Presiding Elder
L. M. Twiggs, Supply
1906--07 - C. C. Cary - J. W. Heidt, Presiding Elder
1907--09 - J. R. Jones - J. W. Heidt, Presiding Elder
1909--11 - C. M. Verdell - J. H. Bakes, Presiding Elder
1911--12 - F. R. Seaborne - J. H. Bakes, Presiding Elder
1912--15 - W. O. Butler - W. T. Hamby, Presiding Elder
1915 - Smyrna was removed from Culverton Circuit and placed on the Mayfield Circuit.
1915--19 - C. A. Hall - W. T. Irvine, Presiding Elder
1919--20 - W. J. Culpepper - W. T. Irvine, Presiding Elder
1920--22 - W. J. Culpepper - J. W. Quillian, Presiding Elder
1922-23 - H. E. Stipe - J. W. Quillian, Presiding Elder
1923-24 - C. A. Reese and J. S. Hill
J. W. Quillian, Presiding Elder
1924-25 - J. S. Hill - J. E. Ellis, Presiding Elder
1925-26 - C. H. Dougherty - J. E. Ellis, Presiding Elder
1926-27 - H. M. Strozier - J. E. Ellis, Presiding Elder
1927-28 - H. M. Strozier - W. H. Clarke, Presiding Elder
1928-29 - J. A. Langford - W. H. Clarke, Presiding Elder
1929-31 - T. E. Sherwood - W. H. Clarke, Presiding Elder
1931-33 - T. E. Sherwood - W. H. LaPrade, Presiding Elder
1933-35 - L. G. Hendricks - W. H. LaPrade, Presiding Elder
1935-37 - L. G. Coo - H. H. Jones, Presiding Elder
1937-38 - L. S. Baugh - H. H. Jones, Presiding Elder
1938-40 - L. S. Baugh - L. M. Twiggs, Presiding Elder
1942-46 - G. F. Wright - J. W. O. McKibbin, Presiding Elder
1946-51 - G. F. Wright - C. L. King, Presiding Elder

At present, Mrs. Minnie E. Waller, widow of John Wesley Waller, son of Irwin N. Waller, who gave the land to Smyrna Church, is the oldest living member and the only one of her generation.

Since the church and Sunday school records have been lost or misplaced, the writer is unable to give any authentic dates or figures. With few exceptions, she has been compelled to depend upon memories, having been a member of this church from childhood until the year 1926. The list of appointments was taken from the records at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

Mrs. James L. McCleskey

(Sarah Waller McCleskey)