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HISTORY
of
SMYRNA METHODIST CHURCH

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THE HISTORY OF SMYRNA METHODIST CHURCH
Smyrna, Ga.

Compiled by

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The Early history of Smyrna Methodist is buried in obscurity and much of it is lost forever. In seeking information regarding it, I find few written records. However, many interesting facts have been given to me by Mrs. Nettie Ireland Kinard, Rufe Eaton, Mrs. Martha Whitfield Medlin, who joined this church over seventy years ago, and by Mrs. G. C. Green, who for twenty years has been collecting historical data concerning Smyrna. ✓

In all probability the first records were burned during the Civil War. Even the Minutes of the North Georgia Conference do not specifically mention the Smyrna church until 1895 when, for two years, it was a circuit. Prior to that time it was on one or another of several circuits. At one time it was on the Acworth Circuit and again on the Bolton Circuit, and only the main church was mentioned. }

The real beginning was the establishment of the Smyrna Camp Ground on a tract of land consisting of about a hundred acres donated by Asbury Hargrove, Pinkney Randall, Hardy Pace, and Martin Ruff. The original brush arbor stood in the center of the block on Church Street across from the present First Baptist Church, or just about where the present Kinard home is. Grouped around the arbor were small wooden structures called "tents". These were occupied by the campers who came long distances to attend the services. Later the brush arbor was replaced by a frame arbor which stood in the space between the present Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

The camp ground was used by all denominations. Rev. Cambell, a Baptist minister, preached there. After the camp ground was established, the first church building was erected near the site of the present Masonic Hall. It was built of logs chinked with mud, and had a seating capacity of over one hundred. In the building there was a section with a low gallery for the Negro slaves whose names were enrolled as members on the church registry of 1848. After the white people had partaken of communion the slaves went to the altar, and the communion was administered to them in the same manner. } 110 yrs.

Preaching service was held once Sunday a month during the summer and less often during the cold months of the winter. The first day in each month and the Friday preceding Quarterly Meeting was observed as a day for fasting and prayer. On each preaching day there was a sermon in the morning, basket dinners were spread and enjoyed, and then there was another sermon in the afternoon. The infrequent visits of the pastor, who lived at a great distance, necessitated the delay of such occasions as christenings, marriages and funerals. It was the custom when death occurred to inter the body, then have the funeral service on the next preaching day.

It is said that Reverend George F. Pierce, who later became a Bishop, often preached in both the original arbor and the log church. }

The trustees named in the oldest deed on record are Pinkney Randall, W. H. ✓

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Bowie, Martin Ruff, David White, and Asbury Hargrove. Among the charter members were: Joseph Eubanks, Hardy Randall, Elizabeth Whitfield, Thomas Wadsworth Whitfield, Mary Whitfield, Hiram King, Martha King, Martin Luker Ruff, Judith Lovejoy Ruff, William Bowie, Charles Bowie, B. O. Ireland, Nancy Ireland, Asbury Hargrove, Lucy Hargrove, James W. Kehely, Pinkey Randall, Hardy Pace, Lucy Pace, and Claiborne Trussell.

This list is by no means complete since there are undoubtedly others whose families have long ago moved away and been forgotten during these hundred years. The date on the oldest church register in our possession is 1848. In those days members were dropped for various offenses. By one name is the notation: "dropped for evil speaking".

As was the custom in all country churches, a cemetery was started in the churchyard. The earliest burial date on a stone is 1847, but it may have been used earlier, and the graves never marked. Families selected lots at will. As the town began to grow this cemetery was used by the general public, there being no other here. Later people began encroaching on plots which were already claimed by families. As a means of protection, the church sold lots for \$10.00 and gave deeds to them. However, not all the lots were ever deeded in this manner.

Little is known of the first church until the war brought fighting to this section, and it served a new purpose. For two weeks in 1861 it, and the academy next to it, were used for Brown's Officers Training Camp. During the battle of Smyrna Camp Ground on July 4th. and 5th., 1864, it was used by the Confederates as a hospital. The Confederate army moved on, and the church, after being used again as a hospital by the Northern troops, was burned by General Sherman's army on the morning of November 12th., 1864. People for miles around could see the flames and black smoke arising from the burning pine logs. On that same day the camp ground arbor was destroyed. It was never rebuilt.

Immediately after the war another brush arbor was built and used for services. Rufe Eaton remembers having attended Sunday School in it. During the late sixties the members, under the leadership of Reverend Alvin G. Dempsey, set about to rebuild their church. This second structure, more pretentious than the first, stood at the point facing the business section of the town. Outside it was weather boarded; inside it was ceiled overhead, with the side walls plastered. The seating arrangement was similar to that in our present church - three rows of pews making two aisles. In addition, there were several benches facing the pulpit. These constituted the "amen corners". Contrary to the usual church architecture of that period which required two doors, one for the men and one for the women, who sat on sides opposite each other in the church, this building had only one door.

The bell which is still in use in our present church, was bought from the First Methodist Church in Atlanta at the time it was moved to the point at the intersection of Peachtree and Broad Streets. It was cast in England and cost originally \$500.00, but our church paid only \$150.00 for it. Most of this sum was raised by a young Doctor Moore, who, although a resident of Smyrna, was not a member of any church. It is said that when the evening train stopped he would talk to the passengers, complimenting their "Christian Countenances", then get a donation for the bell.

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For several years prior to 1911 the members felt the need of a new church building. The ladies in the Missionary Society began holding ice cream festivals, oyster suppers, and bazaars to make money. Land owned by the church was sold. Even the building itself was sold for \$100.00. It was turned and moved near the highway, and after some alterations was made into a hotel which is still standing on Atlanta Street. The ladies proposed the old building be retained for use as a community center but the majority favored its sale, as there was such a great need for cash. The purchaser desired immediate possession, which was given, and services were held for several months in the school building, which is now the Masonic Hall.

In the summer of 1911 work on the new building began. The members contributed generously of materials, labor and money. There was a comparatively small indebtedness when it was completed. A loan of \$2,500.00 was made on August 12th., 1911, and endorsed by P. M. Rice, A. O. Eberhardt, J. W. Fuller and George E. Knott. The trustees at that time were: J. W. Fuller, Chairman, T. B. Martin, P. P. Manning, J. R. Deavours, J. T. Rutledge, C. G. Matthews, and S. J. Ireland.

By 1920 the entire indebtedness was paid off and in September of that year the church was dedicated at an all day service. Dr. Franklin N. Parker, of Candler School of Theology, Emory University, preached the dedication sermon. Just outside the door, the cancelled notes were burned while those who had worked so hard to pay the debt looked on with joy filled hearts.

The parsonage was built in the fall of 1923. The loan was taken care of at first by monthly notes which proved to be a handicap to the progress of the church. The Church Aid was organized to pay off the debt. The ladies ran a tea-room on Saturdays and altogether, by various activities, raised \$1,700.00 during 1926 and paid off the entire debt. Mrs. Paul Lovejoy was the first chairman of the Church Aid Society.

In 1940 an educational building, a two story structure with assembly rooms on each floor and thirteen class rooms, was added. Church School attendance increased, and in 1948 the Pearce Matthews Chapel was built by the Men's Bible Class.

Those who have served as Sunday School Superintendents for the Smyrna Methodist Church are: T. W. Whitfield, who missed only six Sundays in a period of twenty years as superintendent, J. R. Deavours, A. L. Oslin, T. B. Martin, S. J. Womack, Frank W. Manning, Ernest Jones, Henry Konigsmark, Jr., John Matthews, Reed Konigsmark, Frank E. Edwards, Harry B. Mitchell, Jr., and Glenn R. Yarbrough. The last named has been superintendent for the present conference year of 1950-1951.

Those who have served as pastors are: 1848 - Russell Reneau, Presiding Elder; W. J. Cotter, Pastor in charge; David Lowry, Junior Preacher. 1851 - A. T. Mann, Presiding Elder; L. J. Bellah, Pastor in charge; J. M. Dickey, Junior Preacher. 1852 - James Benjamin Payne, Presiding Elder; Claiborne Trussell, Pastor in charge; James O. Varner, Associate Pastor. 1853 - James Benjamin Payne, Presiding Elder; A. Dorman, Pastor in charge; W. D. Shea, Junior Preacher.

Continuing, we list only those who served as pastors. 1863-69 - Alvin G. Dempsey. 1870-71 - Wm. J. Scott (Acworth Mission). 1872-73 - Wm. A. Simmons. 1874 - S. L. Howard. 1875 - W. R. Foote. 1876-77 - M. W. Arnold.

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1878 - J. J. Singleton. 1879 - D. J. Weems. 1880 - Wm. J. Scott. 1881-82 - H. M. Quillian. 1883-84 - O. C. Simmons. 1885-86-87 - W. L. Wooten.

1888 - A. L. Oslin. This was the year of the Tillman Revival "Uncle" Charlie Tillman, the singer, held a revival in the brush arbor near Concord Woolen Mills. Following that, they had one in the Smyrna Church. As a result of these two meetings the church, known as Tillman's Chapel, was built near Concord Woolen Mills. The mill owners gave the lot. Services were held in the Chapel, but people still held their membership in the Smyrna Methodist Church.

1889 - A. L. Oslin. 1890-91 - J. M. Owens. 1892 - W. F. Caldwell. 1893 - H. L. Edmondson. 1894 - D. C. Brown. 1895 - D. C. Brown (Smyrna Circuit). 1896 - W. G. Henson (Smyrna Circuit). 1897-98 - L. W. Rivers (Bolton Circuit). 1899-1900-01 - W. A. Simmons (Acworth Circuit). 1902 - W. A. Farris. 1903-04-05 - O. L. Kelly. 1906-07-08 - W. G. Crawley. 1909 - A. C. Cantrell. 1910 - W. D. Parrish. 1911-12 - G. W. Barrett. 1913-14 - E. A. Ware.

In 1915 Smyrna was made a station. 1915 - B. S. Branham. 1916 - W. J. Olpepper. 1917-18-19-20-21-22 - V. L. Bray. 1923-24 - G. W. Duval. 1925-26 - A. B. Sanders. 1927 - J. S. Thrailkill. 1928-29-30 - J. W. King. 1931-32 - J. K. Kelly. 1933-34-35 - A. E. Scott. 1936-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44 - J. W. Stephens. 1945-46-47-48 - R. C. Owens. 1949-50-51 - L. F. VanLandingham.

The above history of the Smyrna Methodist Church, Smyrna, Ga., was submitted to Rev. Wm. A. Tyson, Jr., on June 2, 1951, to become a part of the display of histories of churches in the North Georgia Conference, which display is to be exhibited at the Annual Conference session of June 26 - 30, 1951.

PASTORS OF SMYRNA FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1951-52	L. F. VanLandingham
1952-54	J. H. Allison
1954-62	Roland Walker
1962-64	Frank Q. Echols
1964-68	J. W. Scarbrough
1968-74	Fred G. Shelnutt
1974	Larry Caywood