SKETCH OF SMYRNA METHODIST CHURCH

Smyrna Church located five and one-half miles East from Washington in Wilkes County, is one of the most historic churches in the conference, as well as one of the oldest.

Smyrna was organized in 1785 or 1786 by Rev John Newton and Rev John Simpson, Presbyterian ministers. For several years there was no church building, the members worshiped in their homes. In 1783 John Talbot, a wealthy Virginian, moved to his large land grant in Wilkes County in the community Smyrna Church had been organized. Talbot was an Episcopalian, but finding here no church of his faith, he joined the Presbyterians and worshiped with them.

In 1788 John Talbot gave the Smyrna Church trustees two acres of land on which to build a church, on February 21, 1793 he deeded the two acres to the trustees and a house of worship was built. This church was used by the Presbyterians for almost thirty years.

In 1820 the membership of Smyrna had become so small it was decided advisable by the fifteen remaining members to move their membership to Washington Church. Through the Elders of the Church the Presbyterians offered the use of the Smyrna Church to the Methodists. The offer was accepted and soon there was a growing membership.

The original church was built of logs, but unusual in those early days, it had a steeple. The pulpit was in the northwest corner of the church and was greatly elevated, steps led up to it. Near the foot of the pulpit was a railing where communicants knelt to receive the sacrament. A gallery for Negroes was in the rear of the old church.
The Methodists continued to use the old building until it was unsafe. The Presbyterians gave their permission for the necessary repairs on the structure which was used until 1860 when it was torn down and a new building erected. This second building was repaired and some minor changes made in it in 1883.

In 1886 the Presbyterians, for a consideration of Ten Dollars, deeded the property to the Trustees of Smyrna Methodist Church.

The church built in 1860 was used until May 1912 when it was torn away and the present building was erected at a cost of $2,112.69. Its furnishings cost $1,054.41. The entire sum was raised before the church was completed. Rev. A B Sanders, pastor at that time, preached the first sermon in the new church; it was dedicated by Bishop McCoy, Wednesday morning, October 16, 1912. Rev B P Allen was Presiding Elder. The building committee was A C McMakin, G R Garrard, Charles A Garrard, T L Rees and William G Bailey.

The exact date of the organization of the Sunday School is not recorded, but it was in operation before 1880. For many years after that it had to disband in the fall on account of the roads and bad weather, but it would reorganize at the church in the Spring. At one time, however, there were three Sunday Schools run by members of Smyrna; one at the Church, one at the home of Mr and Mrs. Albert Barnett, and one at Oak Grove School House, supervised by Mr Erford M. Booker. The children of this community had excellent Christian training even if the weather was bad and roads almost impassable.

The Woman's Missional Society was organized in 1882 with Mrs. Julia Barnett Gartrell president. This society has been existence ever since.
Smyrna is rich in history, both Methodist and Presbyterian, and is located in one of the most historic sections of the State. It was in this community that Eli Whitney perfected his cotton gin. His blacksmith who did the metal work, is buried in the churchyard.

Abraham Simons, the wealthy Jew whose money founded Mercer University, lived and is buried just a mile or so from the Church. Simons and his wife were regular in their attendance at Smyrna.

In the Churchyard a former governor, Matthew Talbot, is buried. Several Revolutionary officers and soldiers are buried there and a number of prominent early settlers rest there.

The present membership of the Church 145
Sunday School enrollment 65
WSCS members 19
MYP Members 24
Value of Church property 10,000