A SHORT HISTORY

OF

SPARTA METHODIST CHURCH

SPARTA, GEORGIA.
PREFACE

This history of Sparta Methodist Church, Sparta, Georgia, is, in the main, a copy of the history written by Rev. Edmund D. Rudisill, Jr. while he was Pastor (1934-36) and who has given me permission to use it. This history was written by Mr. Rudisill in observance of the Sesquicentennial of American Methodism by the North Georgia Conference in 1934. Part of the Introduction and the chapter dealing with the history of Hancock County are omitted. An account of the completion of the present building has been added.

May 23, 1951. 

P.C. Owen, Pastor.
INTRODUCTION

In this paper the free use of the "History of Georgia Methodism" by G.G. Smith, "The Life and Times of George Foster Pierce" by G.G. Smith, certain parts of the manuscript of "The History of Hancock County" prepared by the mother of Mrs. Sara Carnes, and old registers and records of the Church are gratefully acknowledged.

The Sparta Methodist Church

In the year 1800, Bishop Asbury accompanied by Bishop Whatcoat, entered Hancock County and passing through Powellton, went to the home of Edmund Butler. It appears that this home had been a preaching place for Methodist for some time. During this visit, it is thought that Bishop Asbury preached at Smyrna church.

Two years later, Bishop Asbury came to Sparta, a frontier village less than ten years old. Among the Virginians who had settled at Sparta was John Lucas, a follower of Devereux Jarrett as Episcopal minister and a staunch friend of the Methodist. Asbury preached in the courthouse, there being no church in the town at that time. John Lucas joined the Methodist at this time and he and Bishop Asbury became life-long friends. Lucas was the pillar of the church in this section for many years. It is probable that a church organization in Sparta dates from this visit of Asbury.

During these years at the beginning of the century, Hancock county was frontier territory and the people lived under frontier conditions. There were no good roads and no bridges over the streams. Transportation from place to place was with great difficulty. Yet, during these days the State of Georgia was only a Presiding Elder's district of the South Carolina Conference. The first regular preaching was done by men from Richmond county. And the first regular appointment for Sparta as a preaching place on a circuit was in 1799 when George Dougherty came to the Oconee Circuit.

The Year 1806

The year 1806 was an important one in the annals of the Sparta Methodist Church. In July of that great year a great Camp Meeting was held at the old Sparta Camp Ground, three miles from the town, near Buffalo Creek. There were twenty seven preachers in attendance and it is estimated that 4500 people were in attendance during the duration of the meeting. The conversion of more than 100 people added strength to the Sparta Methodist Church; not only in strength but also in fervor and enthusiasm.
1806.

In the year 1806, Sparta appears for the first time in the Conference minutes. The new "Sparta Circuit" was created and included the territory of Greene, Hancock, Washington, and Warren Counties. It was served by J.H. Mellard and Reddick Pierce, the brother of Lovick Pierce. From that date Sparta has been an appointment in its own name, first as a circuit and as a station from the year 1854.

In 1806 the church in Sparta received and put on record a deed to the church lot. It was made by Robert Flournoy, a soldier of the Revolutionary War. It was made to John Lucas and Henry Mose as trustees of the Methodist Society of Sparta. It was the lot on which the church building then stood, it having been erected the preceding year. To this church building various additions were made and it continued to serve the congregation as a place of worship until it was destroyed by fire in 1910.

Probably the most significant fact to the whole church, associated with this momentous year of 1806, is that in December of that year the South Carolina Conference held its annual sessions in Sparta. The conference met at the home of Captain John Lucas. That mighty man of toil and travel, Bishop Francis Asbury, was the presiding bishop at this conference and made the appointments. Jesse Lee, who by Divine help and grace had planted Methodism in New England, a man of zeal and enterprise, the author of Methodist History, asked to be assigned along with others to the Sparta Circuit, that from this outpost he might keep in touch with Methodism in the South and Southwest.

When the year 1806 closed, Sparta Methodism had made great strides forward. A great camp meeting had been held to the enrichment of many and to the strengthening of the church. A church building had been erected and deeded to a board of trustees. Sparta had become outstanding enough to head a circuit, and had been host to the South Carolina Conference.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

In an old church register this note was found: "The first church building was erected in 1806 during the pastorate of J.H. Mellard and Reddick Pierce. In 1868, during the pastorate of A.J. Jarrell, and again in 1875 Geo. H. Pattillo pastor, the church was remodeled and improved. In 1891, under the pastorate of E.R. Cook, it was transformed into a thing of beauty." A further note describes this latter renovation in more detail. "In February and March of 1891 the old church was handsomely refitted and furnished at an expenditure of more than $600.00. The re-opening of the church was followed by a gracious revival. It is estimated that more than 100 were converted and there were 55 accessions to the church by profession of faith."

This building, which was very fine for its day, served long and well. It was standing when in 1906, under the pastorate of S.R. England, the Centennial of the Sparta Methodist Church was celebrated. On this occasion Rev. G.W. Yarbrough returned to preach the Centennial Sermon for the church which he had served
as pastor some time before. But in 1910, after having served the people of Sparta for 104 years, it was destroyed by fire. This was during the pastorate of Rev. G. M. Eakes. But within a few weeks a committee was at work and very soon plans were formulated and presented for the erection of a new and much more elaborate building. An announcement, in pamphlet form, of plans for building included this paragraph: "It has long been the wish of those who knew this great man (Bishop George Foster Pierce) that a suitable memorial might be erected to him somewhere in his native state. The opportunity has at last arrived. Just across the street from the cemetery where is buried the mortal remains of Bishop Pierce and fronting toward his tomb, the Methodist of Sparta together with those who loved this great man and revere his memory, are building the Pierce Memorial Methodist Church."

On June 20, 1910 plans had progressed sufficiently for the Corner Stone exercises to be held. On this occasion the following program was observed with John D. Walker, Master of Ceremonies.

Hymn "On this stone now laid with prayer
Let thy church rise strong and fair;
Ever Lord, thy name be known,
Where we lay this corner stone."

Ritual Prayer
Ritual Scripture
Announcement of articles to be deposited in stone
By Marvin Middlebrooks, Sec. Building Committee.
Laying of Corner Stone by Bishop Kilgore
Address by Bishop Kilgore
Poll of Pastors of Church since 1806 by E.R. Cook
Methodism in Hancock County (a short sketch)
by F.L. Little
Doxology
Benediction

Soon the loyalty and devotion of the Sparta Methodist were rewarded in the completion of their beautiful new church. It was at once one of the beauty spots of the town. It was a credit to a town the size of Sparta; it would have been a credit to a town much larger. It was a cream brick veneer building with a massive dome and with an impressive appearance. The annex, with two stories of Sunday school rooms, was
suited to all the needs of the school. The prospect was, that Sparta had a building that would be adequate and suitable for many years to come.

But the beautiful church building was destined to have only a very short life. Seventeen years later, in 1927, it too met the fate of the original church in Sparta, destruction by fire. Claude Hendrix was pastor of the church at this time.

Counting on the qualities of perseverance and determination which the Sparta people had shown on other occasions, plans were immediately laid for the erection of a new, fire-proof brick edifice. The building committee was elected by the church conference as follows: George Berry, E. C. Miller, E. A. Rozier Jr., W. T. Mackén, S. H. Hollis, H. E. Garrett, J. W. Sanders.

Work was soon begun on a red brick colonial type church building which included a basement for Sunday school and other activities and a two story Sunday school annex to the rear. The economic depression caused the work to be abandoned before the building was fully completed. For a few years worship services were held in the basement auditorium, the main auditorium not being completed and without heating means.

In 1934, plans were made to complete the work. The original building committee continued on. At a quarterly conference a finance committee was elected as follows: G. W. Rives, G. Lee Dickens, E. A. Berry, E. A. Reese, W. C. McGehee, Mrs. M. G. Pound, Mrs. T. M. Jones. This was during the Pastorate Rev. Edmund Rudisill. The auditorium was completed and the heating system installed during his pastorate. During the pastorate of Rev. R. J. Kerr, the pews, carpets and lighting system was added, thus completing the building of the present church which is of outstanding beauty and a credit to the faithful and loyal members of the church and to Sparta.

There is a memorial to Bishop George Foster Pierce on a marble slab attached to the wall of the vestibule presented by Mr. William Stevens with the following inscription:

REV. GEORGE FOSTER PIERCE, D.D., L.L.D.
SENIOR BISHOP OF THE M.E.CHURCH, SOUTH
BORN FEB. 3rd, 1811, ENTERED THE MINISTRY 1830,
OPDAINED BISHOP 1854, AND DIED SEPT. 3rd, 1884.

A HUMBLE CHRISTIAN, A GREAT PRAACHER AND A
WISE BISHOP.

HIS CHURCH HAD NO SON MORE LOVING, MORE LOVED,
OR MORE DISTINGUISHED.
"AFTER HE HAD SERVED HIS OWN GENERATION
BY THE WILL OF GOD, HE FELL ON SLEEP"

"WHETHER WE LIVE OR DIE, WE ARE THE LORD'S."

This memorial bespeaks not only the love and respect of Mr. Stevens for Bishop Pierce but also, the membership of the church among whom are several of his blood descendants.

The present building has a seating capacity of 300 or more; twelve Sunday school rooms; a kitchen fully equipped with hot and cold water, electric range, and a sufficient quantity and assortment of dishes; a 30 by 50 dining and recreation hall; a Baldwin electric organ; and a set of Norton chimes, a gift of Mr. Marvin Moate.

The present number of active and inactive members is 385.

The Pastor Of The Sparta Charge

There is little mention of the pastors who have served the church for the 145 years of her history except to give their names. In an old church register of the Sparta Charge these words are found: "This history was begun in 1877 by the pastor Alexander M. Thigpen." then along with other matters of historic interest, there follows this complete list of the pastors of the Sparta circuit and station from 1806 to 1886. It was with comparative ease that the roll was brought down to the present time. It will be noted from the following list many of the pastors have been and are outstanding men of Georgia Methodism. Also, that two, Atticus G. Haygood and Warren A. Candler, later were elected bishops.

1806--James H. Millard and Readick Pierce
1807--Jesse Lee, James Pussell, J.Porter
1808--Abia Christian, William Arnold
1809--Thomas D. Glenn, Joseph Saltenstal
1810--James Hunter, John S. Capers
1811--M.P. Sturdivant, James E. Glenn
1812--Thos. Y. Cook, L.Q.C. DeYampest
1813--Anthony Senter, Jas. L. Belin
1814--Thos. Stanley, John Murran
1815--James Bellah
1816--Jacob Hill, James Bellah
1817--William Partridge, Francis Arnu
1818--Nicholas Tally, James Dunwoody
1819--Thos. Darley, Josiah Evans
1820--Thos. Darley, Asbury Morgan
1821--James Bellah, Foby Flourney
1822--Thos. Sanford, William J. Parks
1823--Thos. Sanford, Nathan Cook
1824--Anderson Fay, Alex F. Edwards
1825--Tillman Snead, Isaac Oslin
1826--Thos. Mabry
1827--Joshua N. Glenn, Benj. Gordon
1828--Joshua N. Glenn, W.B. Smith
1829--Thos. Darley, H. Norman
1830--William Alexander, Geo. W. Carter
1831--Wesley P. Arnold
1832--J. W. Glenn, V. Mahaffy
1833--V. Mahaffy, T.V. Pinsefer
1834--C. W. Key, A. B. Elliott
1835--J. Norman, F. Douglas
1836--J. W. Center
1837--Geo. W. Center
1838--John P. Dennison
1839--Wesley Arnold
1840--Josiah Lewis
1841--Josiah Lewis
1842--M. H. White
1843--Cepal Raiford
1844--Alfred T. Mann
1845--Alfred T. Mann
1846--Richard Land
1847--Calet W. Key, W. J. Sasnett
1848--Wesley P. Arnold
1849--Wesley P. Arnold
1850--Richard Land
1851--Daniel Kelsey
1852--Daniel Kelsey, J. H. Clarke
1853--Josiah Lewis

At this point the Sparta Circuit was divided and the Sparta Station created.

1854-55--Caleb W. Key
1856-57--William R. Foote Sr.
1858-59--John H. Caldwell
1860--W. S. Simmons
1861--Atticus G. Haygood
1862-63--Peter M. Rybun
1864-65--Benj. F. Breedlove
1866--Benj. Breedlove, J. W. Simmons
1867-69--A. J. Jarrell
1870-71--Wesley P. Pledger
1872--Willis T. Caldwell
1873--John M. Lowery
1874-75--Geo. H. Patillo
1876-77--Habersham J. Adams
1878-79--William A. Dodd
1880-81--Daniel B. Cox
1882--Warren A. Candler
1883--Allen C. Thomas
1884--William R. Foote Jr.
1885--Thos. H. Timmons
1886-87--Thos. H. Thigpen
1888-89--A. W. Quillian
1890--A. W. Williams
1891-93--E. R. Cook
1894-96--W. R. Branham
1897-98--John S. Jenkins
1898--G. W. Yarbrough
1899-00--W. S. Stevens
1901--H. L. Edmondson
1902-03--J. S. Bryan
1904-07--S. P. England
1908--J. G. Logan
1909-10--G. M. Eakes
1911-12--W. H. LaPrade Jr.
1913-14--M. S. Williams
1915-18--W. S. Robison
1919-20--A. B. Sanders
1921--J. T. Robins
1922--J. R. Jordon
1923-24--J. A. Partridge
1925-27--Claude Hendrix
1928-29--J. T. Eakes
1930--R. G. Smith
1931--C. D. Read
1932--T. H. Shackleford
1933-36--E. D. Rudisill Jr.
1937-40--R. J. Kerr
1941-43--A. B. Elizer
1944-48--R. P. Etheridge
1949-51--R. C. Owen

May the future history of Sparta Methodist Church be as rich as we see the past has been.