HISTORY OF THE STONE MOUNTAIN METHODIST CHURCH

The history of the Stone Mountain Methodist Church, which is located in Stone Mountain, DeKalb County, Georgia, sixteen miles east of Atlanta, is a story of faithful souls working together to spread the teachings of Jesus and to build a better community.

It has been difficult to secure too many accurate facts concerning the church prior to the turn of the century, due to the lack of printed or written records. But the following information has been gathered from the older members of the church, one of whom is a daughter, others, a grandson and a granddaughter, of some of the charter members.

The town of Stone Mountain celebrated its centennial in 1939, having had its beginning in 1839. Some fifteen years later, or about 1854, a small group banded together in search of the better way of life and the Stone Mountain Methodist Church was founded. There were seven persons who were charter members of this church. These were Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Camp, Mr. and Mrs. Maxie Waits, Mrs. J. G. Rankin, Mrs. Oliver Winningham and Mrs. Ira Camp. During the intervening years there have been found on the church rolls the name of many decendents. Mrs. A. B. F. Veal, a member since 1880, is a daughter of Mrs. Oliver Winningham. Upon the roll today are to be found grandchildren, great and even great-great grandchildren of the illustrious men and women who showed fortitude and courage in founding the Methodist Church in Stone Mountain.
The first place of worship was in a building which had been a part of what was once "The Fair Grounds". It was here that all who wished gathered each Sunday to worship God — the Methodist alternating Sundays with those of other faiths. This was later the site used for the former Baptist and then Presbyterian Church.

In 1870 a wooden structure was erected on the site of the present building. Among the pastors serving this church in its early years were Dr. Davies, father of Miss Daisy Davies; Rev. Elam Dempsey; Rev. W. F. Quillian, 1880; Rev. J. W. Rivers, 1894-95; Rev. John Speirs, 1896-98. In 1898 Rev. B. Sanders, father of the late Rev. Atticus Sanders, was sent by the Conference to serve as pastor, 1898-1900. The Rev. B. Sanders chose to superannuate while here and it was in Stone Mountain that he spent his remaining years. The Rev. John H. Gibson served as pastor 1901-02.

The first records which are available (Jan. 10, 1903) show that Stone Mountain Methodist Church as in the Oxford District with the Rev. J. W. Heidt as Presiding Elder. Rev. F. W. McCleskey was pastor. The Stone Mountain Circuit, as it was called, included the following churches: Belmont, Clarkston, Wesley Chapel and Stone Mountain. At this Quarterly Conference Rev. McCleskey reported from Stone Mountain "A Sunday School with I. N. Nash as Superintendent, no Epworth League or Foreign Missionary Societies". At the Second Quarterly Conference, held in Clarkston, April 18, 1903, Rev. McCleskey reported "A Juvenile Society with 16 members, organized by his wife".

Rev W. H. Speer was sent to serve the circuit in 1904. At the Second Quarterly Conference a Parsonage Committee was elected with instructions to give notes and get bond for the purchase of a
parsonage. Until this time the parsonage had evidently been rented, as the records show "Rent paid on Parsonage". The records of the Fourth Quarterly Conference show that an Epworth League was organized with the following officers: President, J. A. Waldrop; Vice President, Allen Loehr; Secretary and Treasurer, Rufus Sanders.

The Rev. Nath Thompson was the next pastor in charge. The Stone Mountain Circuit was Brother Nath's first charge in Georgia, he and 'Miss Sarah' coming here directly from Texas. During his pastorate a thriving Junior League was organized with Mrs. Bert Wood as leader.

At the Third Quarterly Conference of 1905 the following is found: "The Trustees were authorized to repair the church at Stone Mountain or build a new one, as they see fit". In this record we find where 55 (names included) came into the church during a meeting held in a tent pitched at the southwest corner of Mountain Street and First Main with the Rev. Chas. J. Jarrell doing the preaching.

In November of 1906 Mr. Thompson reported no Epworth League.

The Woman's Missionary Society of the Stone Mountain Methodist Church was organized in 1906 at the Methodist parsonage, which was at that time located on Mountain Street. It was organized as a Home Missionary Society by Mrs. Math Thompson, assisted by her husband. Even before this date there was a Ladies Aid or Parsonage Aid Society which functioned in the interest of the parsonage, but did no connectional work. The charter members of the Home Missionary Society were: Mrs. S. G. Griffin, Mrs. J. H. Griffin, Miss Ella Mae Griffin, Mrs. J. G. Rankin, Mrs. John McClelland, Mrs. Jim Sprayberry,
Mrs. Nath Thompson, Miss Hettye McCurdy, Mrs. Leolyn Veal Sheppard, Mrs. B. H. Davis and Mrs. J. A. Waldrop. Mrs. S. G. Griffin was elected President of the new society and served in the capacity intermittently for many years.

The records of 1907 show that the Presiding Elder was C. E. Dowman and W. T. Bell was the Pastor in charge. The Sunday School continues to be reported with "I. N. Nash and J. A. Waldrop" as superintendents. Specific amounts are now reported for missionary work. The records show that money was being raised for a new church.

In 1908 the Rev. Firley Baum came to serve the Stone Mountain Circuit. Mr. Baum reported a Sunday School Institute conducted by Bro. Henry B. Mays of Atlanta during the second quarter.

The records of the First Quarterly Conference on 1909 show the name of the charge had been changed to Stone Mountain-Clarkston and Wesley Chapel has been placed in another charge. At this same Conference the following is recorded:

"Question 31 - Is there any miscellaneous business? Answer - Selected committee on new church at Stone Mountain, to wit-I. N. Nash, J. O. Norris, B. H. Davis, A. P. Griffin, J. S. Rankin, H. L. McElhannon and Firley Baum." Added later, A. J. Baxter and F. A. Doughman. In supplement Bro. Baum writes: "Steps are being taken to build a new church at Stone Mountain and I am sure this enterprise will mean much to our people there. I doubt if there has ever been a better opportunity than the present to build a church there and I hope that it will be carried on to completion."

At a later Conference the Trustees were instructed to sell the Parsonage, adjust the Wesley Chapel interest and build a
new parsonage on the church property in Stone Mountain. This was
done in 1909, using the lumber from the old church which had been
torn down as the new church was to be erected on the same site.

The cornerstone of the present church was laid in 1909.

During the months when the Methodists were without a place of
worship, the congregation of the Presbyterian Church very graciously
offered the use of their church, which the Methodists gratefully
accepted.

In 1910, the Tucker Church was added to the three on the
Stone Mountain Charge and the Rev. R. F. Hodnett came to the charge
as Pastor. At the Second Quarterly Conference Mr. Hodnett wrote,
"Not having our own House of Worship works a decided disadvantage
to us". He also reported the Epworth League was "planning to put
in one of the handsome windows proposed for the new church."

So anxious were the members to get into the new granite
(Built of our own Stone Mountain granite) edifice, that small in-
conveniences like bare rock walls and no windows did not dampen
their spirits. Even the dampness of the dirt floor, which was
used for some months, did not keep the faithful souls from coming
to worship in the "New Church".

With the help of all, it was possible to place in the
church the stained glass windows which today remain beautiful in
color and design. And before too long the floor was laid and the
bare gray of the granite wall was covered with snowy white plaster
and mission woodwork throughout. The task of finishing, heating
and furnishing the church took several years and we find the follow-
ing pastors during the years: Rev. D. B. Cantrell in 1912-13;
J. A. Partridge in 1919-20; Rev. O. M. Blackwell in 1921-22 and Rev. John L. Hall in 1923-26. Each of these loyal gentlemen played a great part in bringing the church building to a completion. After the church debt was finished during the pastorate of Rev. Blackwell, pews were installed to complete the furnishings of the interior. The debt on these pews was cleared and in the fall of 1926, with Rev. J. L. Hall pastor, the church was dedicated by Bishop Warren A. Candler. After many struggles and many heart aches, the long awaited dream had become a reality but the records show that there was no let up in eagerness and enthusiasm in carrying on the Lord's work.

During the years from 1914 - 1926 there was reported at each Quarterly Conference, a well organized Sunday School with such men as J. A. Waldrop, E. A. Graham and J. H. Griffin acting as superintendents.

From the records available there seems to have been no Epworth League after 1910 until Rev. John D. Milton was pastor. In August of 1915 he called a few of the young people to the parsonage and out of prayer in a bedroom with only three people present, the League came forth. On the following Sunday afternoon the young people of the church met and Mr. W. R. Simpson was elected president and under his leadership the League room of the church was finished and lighted. Of course, this was with the help of the members of the church, as is everything in any organization in any church.

From this beginning in 1915 the Epworth League continued to be a very active part of the church. The Young people have ever been ready to assume any responsibilities and have helped both spiritually and financially.
The charter for this Epworth League was framed in 1918 as a gift to the League by Morgan and Walter Dasch. The service flag in the church is the service flag of members of the League in World War I.

Rev. A. S. Hutchinson was sent by the Conference in November 1926 to serve as pastor at Stone Mountain and Clarkston. The charge was now in the North Atlanta District. The Rev. Hutchinson served the charge two years. During this time his daughter, Edna, married Henry Kohler and thus became the first to have a wedding in the new church.

The Conference of 1928 sent Rev. A. J. Sears to Stone Mountain. Bro. Sears served faithfully for the next two years and some of our faithful members of today were added during his pastorate.

The Rev. J. Foster Young came as pastor in November 1930. The Presiding Elder was S. P. Wiggins. Bro. Young reported a Sunday School, Epworth League and Women's Missionary Society, all active and doing very fine work.

At the First Quarterly Conference of 1931-32 records show the Presiding Elder as Rev. Nath Thompson and the District changed to the Decatur-Oxford District. Uncle Nath seems not to have liked being a Presiding Elder as we find the First Quarterly Conference of 1932-33 with Rev. R. Z. Tyler as the Presiding Elder.

Rev. Young reports in the Fourth Quarterly Conference of that year: "We have recently closed what the people of Stone Mountain say to be the greatest revival in the history of the city. Ninety-five members were added to the churches of the town, of which the Methodist received sixty-nine". Dr. Theodore Copeland of Dallas, Texas was the evangelist.
In 1933 Dr. Wallace Rogers became Presiding Elder of the Decatur-Oxford District.

Bro. Young reports at one Conference, "Let me add in conclusion, to the credit of both congregations (Stone Mountain and Clarkston) they know how to treat a preacher and his family". This shows the Youngs had many friends, not only in their church families but in the two communities as well.

Rev. Geo. W. Hamilton followed Mr. Young in 1935. Though he served only one year, his easy Christian manner left him loyal friends in Stone Mountain.

The Rev. Thos. Shackleford came as the next pastor of the Stone Mountain Church in 1936. He and Mrs. Shackleford were faithful workers in the vineyard of the Lord. The church building, which the membership had felt quite adequate only ten short years before, was already lacking in space for the growing church and its increasing activities. The Rev. T. M. Sullivan was Presiding Elder of the District.

In November 1938 the Rev. Henry H. Dillard was assigned to the Stone Mountain-Clarkston Charge. Bro. and Mrs. Dillard labored well for the Lord and were good shepherds to the church. The church continued to grow and the plea for more space grew more urgent. By the end of their four years pastorate there was some definite talk of plans for some type enlargement to the church. During his stay all electric wiring in the church was replaced and the present lighting fixtures in the auditorium were installed.

The Rev. Henry H. Jones was now District Superintendent of the Decatur-Oxford District.
The next pastor at Stone Mountain was the Rev. E. C. Sweatnam. During this time, 1942-44, there was not too much material improvement in the church as Stone Mountain, like all other communities, was too busy in an all out effort to win the war. The church did make an effort to keep in touch with the boys from our community who were away serving their country and tried to make those boys who came to the church feel at home. The names of many of our men and women were found on the rolls of the Army, Navy & Marines and those on the home front were busy with Civilian Defense, Bonds and entertaining the soldiers who were patients in the hospitals nearby.

In November 1944 the Rev. John D. Maxwell came to serve as pastor. During Mr. Maxwell's pastorate the interior of the church was redecorated, and much needed repairs on the roof and windows were made. The parsonage also had some improvements.

By this time there had been appointed a Building Planning Committee, though it had not been too active, there was a Treasurer with a growing Building Fund. By July 1947 there was in this fund over $4,000.00.

Our District Supt. at this time was Rev. C. L. Middlebrooks.

In 1947 the North Georgia Conference held its first summer session and it was at that time that the Stone Mountain Methodist Church became a full time station with the Rev. Jack W. Nichols coming to serve as pastor. Bro. Jack and the church had much in common, since each was taking on new responsibilities --- the church undertaking the financial risk of assuming a full time church and Bro. Jack bringing a bride to share the ups and downs of parsonage life.
Since it had been the dream of many of the members to add a much needed Educational Building to the church proper, it now became the first aim of all. A Building Committee (L.E. Skelton, F.C. Miller, S.W. Ash, Hubert Morgan and J.C. Blackwood) was appointed and began making a study of our needs and desires, toward drawing plans to meet them adequately. A Finance Committee (Mrs. J.E. Barnett, Roy Mitchell, Mrs. T. Needham, Mrs. J. M. Norton and Miss Grace McCurdy) was appointed to make plans for raising the money. An Advisory Board (W.S. Smith, J.C. Pounds, E.D. Jordan and Mrs. D.N. McCurdy) was named to work with the two committees and help decide any questions that might arise. It was decided that the ground for the new building would be broken when the $10,000.00 mark was reached. In October 1948 that sum was in hand and the new building was begun.

The plans, as finally drawn, were submitted to contractors and the low bid was $54,000.00. One year after the ground was broken and the work begun the 13 class rooms, kitchen, recreation room and rest rooms included in the new building were ready to be used. A gas furnace replaced the old furnace in the main church and the same type heat is used in the new annex.

Today, June 1951, the building stands ready to be dedicated, having cost, not the $54,000.00 as quoted by the contractor, but around $25,000.00. This building stands as a tribute to the faithful men and women who joined hands to accomplish this. Through the money donated, the hours of work given, the rock bottom prices at which the materials were bought, the church stands today as a memorial to all who had a part in making this dream a reality.

Though the building project took much time and money the spiritual and other financial obligations of the church have not
lagged but flourished. The advance the church has made the past four years is a credit to our first full time pastor and proof that where possible, a church should be a station with its own pastor.

Many improvements have been made on the parsonage. One member gave roofing to cover the parsonage, another gave a gas heater, and a new stove and refrigerator have been placed in the kitchen. In July 1950 Rev. E.G. Mackay became our District Superintendent.

From the time of the dedication of the church in 1926 up to the present time much of the work that has been accomplished can be credited to the faithful and inspiring leadership of the Woman's Missionary Society, the Chairmen of the Board of Stewards and the Sunday School Superintendents.

Among the Presidents of the Woman's Missionary Society, known today as the Woman's Society of Christian Service, are found the following: Mrs. J. H. Griffin, Mrs. Vernice Nuckolls, Mrs. Carl Almand, Mrs. J. F. McCurdy, Mrs. Chas. Decatur, Mrs. D. N. McCurdy, Mrs. W. A. Jordan, Mrs. J. W. Nichols, Mrs. Robert Gray and Mrs. W. H. Lacy.

Chairmen of the Board of Stewards have been: E. D. Jordan, J. R. Sams, Miss Grace McCurdy, R. L. Scroggs and C. D. Johnson.


June 24, 1951, Bishop Arthur J. Moore dedicated the new Educational Building and another era in the long history of our church is completed, but as the dedication is read plans are being made for the future, including bigger and better things to come.

July 25, 1951