HISTORY

of

WINTER CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH
This rough sketch was made on August 9, 1937, by Homer Morgan. The information was given him by the late Mrs. W. Y. Bolton, for many years a member of Winters Chapel.

The church had its beginning in the late 1860's when services were held in people's homes if a preacher was available. The Hardman family partly belonged to the Prospect Methodist Church at Chamblee. Rev. W. A. Dodge, the pastor at Prospect, came home with the Hardmans at intervals and held services under a bush arbor. Christian old people felt the great need of a church in the community, but there were no leaders at the time.

In the late 1860's or early 1870's Jeremiah Winters came from Piney Woods in South Georgia to live in the community. He was suffering from tuberculosis, and had come to North Georgia for his health. He married Elizabeth Boring, whose father, Thomas Boring, was a minister. Mr. Winters settled on the Adel Woodall place. His health improved, and he farmed the first year. The next year his health failed, and he moved to Norcross and farmed no more.

Mr. Winters saw the need of a church. Dr. Boring, his father-in-law, served as an agency to spur him on and occasionally preached in the community. A Baptist preacher, Rev. Wooten from Norcross, also preached occasionally.

In the spring of the early 1870's Mr. Winters announced that Sunday School would be held in a beautiful grove at his home on the Adel Woodall place. The people, hungry for the Bread of Life, came in great numbers. Small children were taught from a catechism and the older people from the Bible. When the weather was favorable Sunday School was held every Sunday afternoon. Boys and girls did not sit together. They sat facing each other on slab benches.

Mr. Winters saw the interest the people had in a church, but the people had no money after the War Between the States. One day Mr. Winters said to some of the men: "Boys we can go to the woods, cut some logs, have them sawed, and haul us up a little church." Mr. J. W. F. Tilly sawed the lumber.

Mr. Rice and Mr. Mitchell gave the land for the church and cemetery. The bush arbor on the Hardman place was near the Rice and Mitchell land line, so they gave the people choice of the bush arbor site or the site of the present church. The present site was chosen because it seemed to be more convenient to the largest number of people.

Work on the first church building was begun in October 1871. Men, with willing hands, met after the lumber had been placed on the site. The women and children walked to the church and carried baskets of food for the men. The church was hulled in and covered nearly in a day. They used wide, coarse weather boarding. There was not a square corner in the church. Therewas no flooring, but the people were anxious for a church that they were not primarily concerned with its appearance. There was only a dirt floor for quite a while. Mr. Winters built the
steps to the little chapel. It had a front door and a side door. The benches were slabs with pegs in augur holes for legs. There were shutters on the windows and a small soap-box-like stand for the preacher. In 1882, Sam Jones, the famous evangelist, was responsible for windows and ceiling. When he made a remark in one of his sermons, the congregation laughed, and he stopped suddenly and said, "Wish you'd laugh up some sash and ceiling." Then the people got busy and ceiling the church and put in windows. The flooring had been put in some years before. Soon they got some little brass lamps which served as lights for years. Mrs. Bolton said this about them: "Very hard for the preacher to speak with smoke going up his nostrils, but we endured it."

In this little chapel the women sat on the left side and the men on the right side. Whenever prayer was announced, all Christians knelt on both knees. They felt this was an obligation. It was the custom of the preacher to go to the pulpit when he first arrived and pray silently. Hymns were lined. About 1902 the first musical instrument was secured. The people shook hands freely and talked with each other freely.

Through the influence of Dr. Boring the church entered the conference. The first conference preacher was the Rev. George Gardner. The people were very happy to have him work with them and worship with them in the little chapel they had built out of their great love of God. Sunday School continued under the leadership of Mr. Winters.

The church had nine members at the beginning: Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Winters, Mr. and Mrs. E.G. Hardman, Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Ware, Mrs. Susan Cobb, Mrs. C.N. Woodall and Mrs. Kitura Womack.

At the early revivals there was shouting. They had twilight grove prayer meetings before the evening service. The men met in one place and the women met in another. A leader was appointed for each group. There were talks, testimonies and prayers.

The following poem was written for this history of Winters Chapel by Mrs. Mary Johnson Blackburn, poet and author, who lived in the community for several years and who will be remembered for her readings at the annual Children's Day services.

For Winters Chapel

There's a little white church on the brow of the hill
In the shade of the trees where devotion doth fill
The hearts of the young as well as the old
Who meet here to worship in the God Shepherd's fold.
There they pray and they sing their praises to God;
There their loved ones rest 'neath the sacred sod;
There they carry their joys and their grief burdened load
To the little white church by the side of the road.
For many a year through the storm and through drought
This little white church in the heart of the South
Has comforted many a weary-worn soul
Whose Christian endeavor sought a true goal...
We earnestly pray that it be the Lord's will
To preserve the little church on the brow of the hill.

-- Mary Johnson Blackburn