Local Presbyterians Were Organized 129 Years Ago

First Church Has Had Hard Struggle For Existence During Long History

But It Has Witnessed Continuous Growth Until It Is One Of Foremost

Since it was organized 129 years ago, the First Presbyterian church of Washington has had a hard struggle for existence, but it has continued to grow until it is now one of the outstanding churches of eastern North Carolina.

In 1823, a group of Washingtonians met on August 7 in the Potts Chapel Methodist church, which stood where the post office building is now located, and organized a Presbyterian church. At this meeting, William R. Swift, Abner Burbank, and Beth Thayer were elected ruling elders.

On November 4 of that same year, the Orange Presbytery met at Raleigh, North Carolina, and accepted the First Presbyterian church of Washington as a regular organized church of the Presbytery.

First Church

Local Presbyterians set about to build a house where they could meet and worship. On August 7, 1824, after a year of hard work they laid the cornerstone of their church, which was being built at the present site of the church at 121 Glenn Avenue. It took four years to complete the construction of this building.

During the Civil War, Federal troops occupied the town for two years. When they left here April 26, 1864, they set the town on fire, and the Presbyterian church was burned along with most of the other buildings.

With no meeting place of their own, the Presbyterians met in a small wooden Baptist church which was located at 212 North Market street where Swan Buck company now stands.

In the Spring of 1866, the Rev. P. H. Dalton came to Washington to lead the work of the Presbyterian church. Under his direction, money was raised and construction was started on a new church building.

Amid the devastation of the town after the war, tradition says that boys and girls made beds and carried bricks from charred ruins to their church site where they were laid by the workmen.

Cornerstone Laid

The corner stone of this building was laid May 28, 1867, and the church was dedicated February 24, 1871.

In about 1890, the Presbyterians remodeled their church by removing the high pulpit, cutting an arch behind the pulpit for the new Moller pipe organ which was installed, exchanging the straight pews for circular ones, installing gas lights in place of the oil lamps and the chandelier, and removing the second story.

Educational Building

WASHINGTON'S FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
col founded in 1823. 129 years ago, is one of the finest in eastern North Carolina. It is rich in history, including a long struggle for existence.

First Church

The present church building was dedicated, many people still do not consider it complete until a bell hangs in the steeple. For this reason, the women of the church inaugurated a bell campaign, and every church member was asked to collect scrap metal which was shipped in 1872 to New York on one of S. R. Potts' vessels, the "Catherine Johnson." The bell makers were instructed to cast a bell weighing more than 1000 pounds, and plans were made to locate a Christian service. The Rev. George Watkins Crabtree was ordained April 15, 1870, the Rev. James B. Potts, D. D., was ordained October 14, 1873, and the Rev. John H. Potts was ordained in 1874. Verne B. McCall, a member of our church, is now pasting for the ministry.

One former pastor of the church, the Rev. W. C. Ritterger, who served from 1924 until 1944, went to Japan with Commodore Halsey in 1944 on the first official attempt of the United States to open diplomatic and trade relations with the Flowery Kingdom.

Fostered Other Churches

The First Presbyterian church is the mother of two active churches in this county, and one church which was active during the first quarter of this century.

The Payne Memorial Presbyterian church, which grew out of a Sunday school, was organized in 1903. The church was located at 114 East Seventh street, and at one time had an attendance of 116 in its Sunday school. Modern conventions were held in the church in 1929.

In the summer of 1898, a Sunday school was started by local Presbyterians in the Batesville methodist church, and the church entered fulltime service in 1899.