

Methodist Church Is Oldest In City Of Washington

Large Stained Glass Window Honors Three Founders Of The Local Church

First Station Preacher Sent Here 1811; Present Church Was Built In 1899

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The First Methodist church has the distinction of being the oldest church in Washington, North Carolina. A large stained glass window, "The Good Shephard", on the north side of the edifice is in memoriam to Ralph Potts, Sarah Redding and the Rev. James Avent, founders of the church here.

Methodism was brought to America between 1760 and 1766 by two Irish immigrants sent over by John Wesley. Twelve years after the forming of the first Methodist Society in North Carolina, Bishop Francis Asbury came to Washington, N. C. and formed the first Methodist society here in 1784. This was the same year the Methodist Episcopal church was organized at the general conference in Baltimore.

Early History

The early history of the local church is taken from an old history of Methodism in North Carolina: "Previous to the war of the Revolution, Dempsey and Sarah Hinton, residents on Deep Creek, became deeply impressed with the high scriptural character of the Methodist faith. They were genuinely converted and associated themselves with the Methodists, having

up to this time been strict disciples of another and more accommodating creed."

"At this period the quiet of the country was broken up by the repeated depredations of the Tories. Dempsey and Sarah Hinton believing it unsafe to continue living at Deep Creek took refuge from the Tories in Washington. They found the community destitute of any organized religious association. Upon arrival they erected an altar in their private dwelling to the purpose of public worship. The private dwelling where Methodists first worshiped was located on the S. E. corner of Market and Third streets."

Further quoting from the history: "The people of Washington called Methodists labored exclusively in this field for a period of about 30 years. Around 1820 the Episcopalians built a church in Washington, and the Presbyterians erected a church. The Roman Catholics, also, had a church building at this time.

In 1791 the first religious revival was held in Washington. As a result some of the oldest settlers of this region, proprietors of the soil for many generations, connected themselves with the Methodist church. The next year, in 1792, two Englishmen, Ralph Potts and Thomas Robason, came to the church.

In 1798 Ralph Potts, unaided, purchased a lot and built the first Methodist church of Washington, conveying the whole by deed of

gift to the Methodist Episcopal church. It is said the building was quite small but large enough for our fathers in which to praise God. This first church, was situated on the East side of Market street about half way between Second and Third streets, and was recorded in history as the "Old Red Church on Market Street."

Early Leaders

Ralph Potts has been called the Father of Methodism in Washington and closely linked with his are the names of Sarah Redding and the Rev. James Avent.

In 1811 the first station preacher was sent to Washington, the Rev. William Wright. The history states: "The meeting house, which has been very uncomfortably arranged, was refitted, the expense thereof, being defrayed without a mark of discontent. A pulpit and altar were built, backs put to seats, the interior painted and belfry erected."

The Methodist Church grew to such proportions that a new church was built in 1831 on West Second street where the present church now stands. This site was donated by Mrs. Sarah Katherine Quinn. In 1844-45 many improvements were made including a tall and very genteel spire pointing to the clouds. Conference met in this church in 1844, following a great revival held by the Rev. Ira T. Wyche in 1840. Coming into the church at this time were early founders whose names are mentioned repeatedly in connections with early Methodism in Washington: Daniel Wharton, Joseph Farrow, John A. Arthur, Lockwood Hyatt, Sarah Redding, Elizabeth Buckman and Rosamond Hancock.

From a paper written by the late Mrs. W. H. Call, many interesting facts concerning church activities and its early members were learned. Mrs. Call said: "During the dark days of the Civil War this church, built in 1831, together with the parsonage, was burned. Mrs. W. B. Cowell was an eye witness to the burning of the church by the Northern army and through her testimony the church was able to collect \$4,000 from the government. This was used in the present Sunday school building. When the war was over the Methodist members went to work and under great difficulties built a new church. It was said that it was a rather unsightly building with a very sharp roof. They were unable to complete it for a time and worshiped in the basement for several years. The auditorium was finished largely through donations made by Lockwood Hyatt and a Captain Perry."

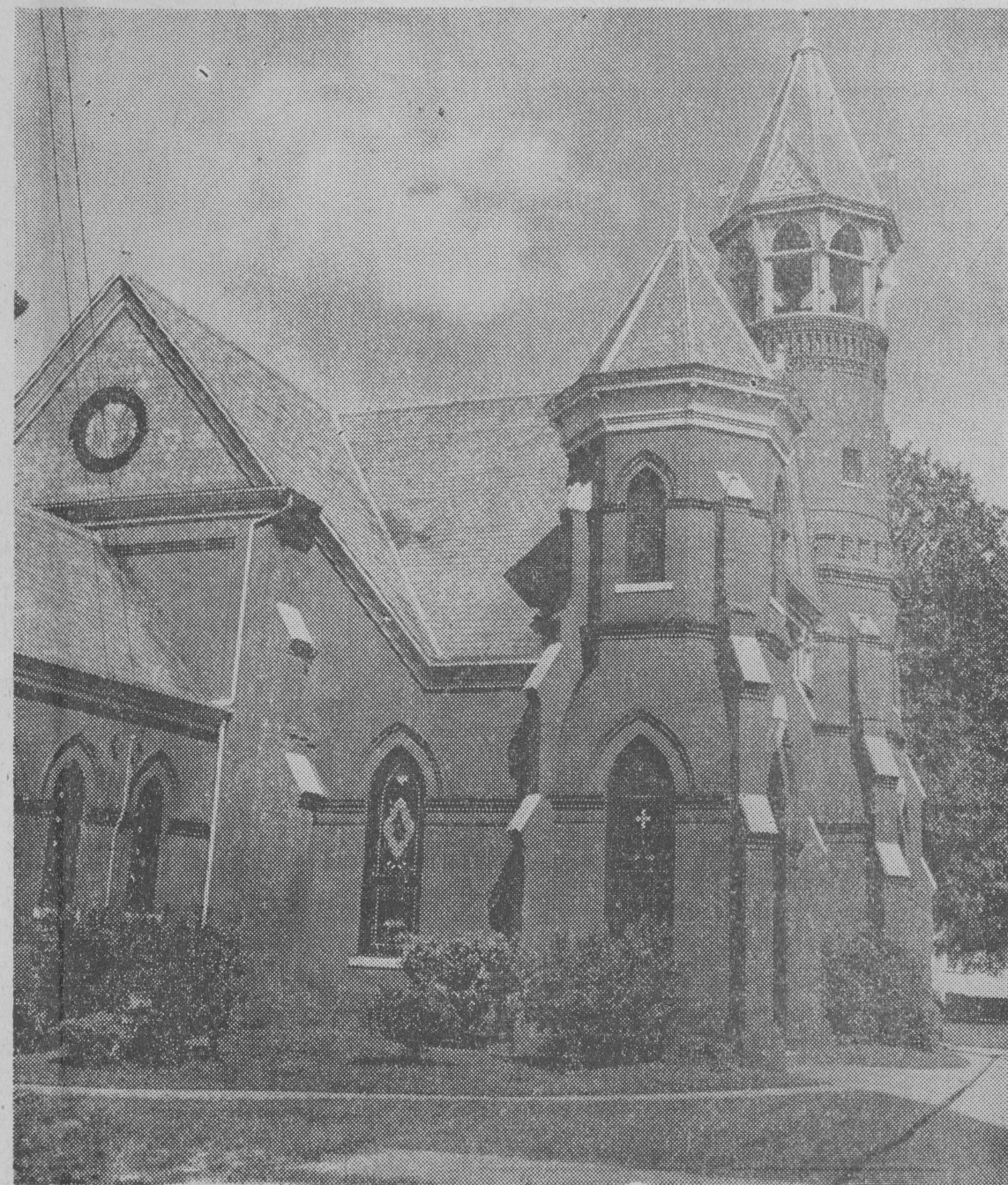
The following served on the Board of Stewards: John A. Arthur, Lockwood Hyatt, John H. Small, Joseph A. Farrow, Warren S. Mayo, W. B. Cowell, and Daniel L. Wharton, whose names also appear on the Good Shepherd memorial window.

Communion Set Preserved

The silver communion set used first in this church has been preserved. In 1929 it was beautifully encased by Mrs. C. V. Swan. It contains the following inscription: Elizabeth L. Gregory, to her beloved church, Washington, N. C., 23, December 1873".

Here it is fitting to mention the handsome handmade Mexican silver communion set and tray used in the church today, bearing the inscription: "In Memory Josephus Daniels, Born 1828 - 1865, Mary Cleaves Seabrook Daniels, Born 1835 - 1923, Communicants of First Methodist Church, Washington, N. C., presented by their sons, Jan-

METHODIST CHURCH STEEPED IN HISTORY



FIRST METHODIST CHURCH, OLDEST IN WASHINGTON

METHODIST CHURCH OF EARLY YEARS



THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH in Washington after the Civil war has been described as a "rather unsightly building with a very sharp roof." This church is shown above as it was pictured in a special issue of the Washington Gazette which was published November 1, 1889, and is now preserved in the Library of the University of North Carolina. (Photocopy by U. N. C. Library Photoduplication Service)

uary 1, 1934."

The massive brick First Methodist church of today came into being in 1899, the members feeling the urgent need for a larger church. The first cornerstone was laid December 29, 1897 at the S.E. corner of the Sunday school building. The corner stone at the front of the church reads "First Methodist Church, 1899."

Within its sacred sanctuary the brightness of day sends its light through the stained glass memorial windows. The windows were erected to the Glory of God and in loving remembrance of Sidney Beckwith, 1864-1897, Elizabeth Lee Gregory, 1799-1883, Jennie B. Ayers, Epworth League, James H. Harris, Annie Adams and Trinity college. One elongated window over the main entrance of the church is especially impressive, depicting "The Last Supper" and given in memory of Nathaniel S. Fulford. Flashing sunlight shines through the gold, purple, garnet and royal blue coloring of the window in memory of Josephus Daniels, Born January 28, 1828, Joined Washington Methodist church 1858, Died

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January 28, 1885, given by his family.

The huge stained glass window cut the South side of the edifice, "Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me" is magnificent, and was erected by the Rosebud Society of the Church, which is no longer active.

Stained Glass Doors

Also adding beauty to the interior of the historic old church are the double stained glass doors, given as memorials to members who have passed on to their great reward. The double doors are marked by brass plates, which read: S.W. entrance, "Memory of Father and Mother, Samuel Timothy and Annie Elizabeth Nicholson, by her children;" the doors at S. E. entrance: "Claudia Ann Waters, 1850-1934, Sarah Tripp, 1857-1937;" Doors from the Sunday school building, N.E., bear the plate "John Thomas Lewis, 1874-1931, Lella Savage Lewis, 1879-1948, given by children;" and the Main entrance double doors are dedicated "to the memory of Emily Freeman Robbins, 1912-1929, To the Glory of God and in Loving Memory".

On the walls of the church are two marble plaques, placed in remembrance of two former members, who served the church and served well. One reads: "To the Memory of Warren S. Mayo 1828-1889, who for 40 years was an official of the church and superintendent of the Sunday school for 13 years." The other tablet is inscribed "To the Memory of John A. Arthur who died Feb'y 2, 1878, age 59. This tablet has been erected by those who have lost most and loved him best, his wife and children." The name of Rosa Avent Arthur has been added at the bottom with the dates 1816-1882.

The Arthur family played an important part in the church's history, and on the rear grounds of the church is the Arthur family vault with a wrought-iron picket fence enclosing its entrance.

The sacredness of the altar is evident by the brass altar cross and candlesticks, and the tall brass chancel vases presented to the church in memory of one of its loyal and beloved members, the late Coolidge G. Morris, and were given by members of his family.

The brass communion rail bears the plate which reads, "Nathaniel Simmons Fulford, Born July 17, 1826, Died January 3, 1897. The communion tray around the rail was erected to the "Sacred memory of Mrs. Annie Walters Spencer, wife of George A. Spencer, 1870-1925."

Completing the cherished memorials within the church are the marble baptismal font given in memory of M. Louisa Gaskill by her children; the polished oak offering plates given in memory of Emily A. Freeman Robbins, 1849-1917; and the pulpit chairs sacred to the memory of Bessie Buckman Hardy.

The grounds surrounding the church are undergoing transformation as the interior of the education building has for the past few years. The Morris Scout Hut, purchased with church funds, was dedicated to Coolidge G. Morris in 1951, for his outstanding work with the Youth of the church.

New Chapel

The church is now taking just pride in the chapel which is being

constructed at the East side of the building, and will be a memorial to Mrs. J. F. Cowell by her son, Charles F. Cowell, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the First Methodist church.

Through the wisdom and foresight of the pastor, the late E. W. Ayers, and J. F. Buckman, Sr., the lot adjoining the church on the East side was purchased years ago at the price of \$500. The parsonage at 404 West Second street was built in 1909 during the pastorate of Dr. M. T. Plyler.

Pastors of the First Methodist church since Dr. Plyler's pastorate are: R. H. Broome, 1910-1912; E. M. Salpes, 1913-1916; D. H. Tuttle, 1917-1919; J. H. McCracken, 1920-1922; L. D. Hayman, 1923-1924; W. R. Royal, 1925; C. B. Culbreath, 1926-1927; H. I. Glass, 1928-1931; E. J. Rees; D. A. Clarke, 1940-1944; C. F. Heath, 1944-1949.

In 1949, the Rev. D. E. Earnhardt came to Washington to serve as pastor of the First Methodist church. Mr. Earnhardt came to this city from the Methodist church of Rockingham, N. C. He is the son of an outstanding North Carolina Methodist minister and has a son who is also in the ministry.

Second and First Methodist

The highlights of the Methodist church year are Sunday School Promotion Day, held the first Sunday in October; the North Carolina annual conference which meets October 21, and the observance of Easter. During the past several years the Methodist choir's Christmas and Easter cantatas have received wide acclaim. Mrs. James A. Hackney is church organist, H. S. Wortley directs the Senior choir, and C. E. Stevens directs the Youth choir.

Mr. Earnhardt, known throughout this section for his wit and humor, when asked accomplishments of the church under his pastorate, jokingly replied: "Things that have been talked about for the past 50 years and been completed." In connection with this we learned that the outstanding achievements of the present administration have been the redecorating and enlargement of the Educational building, providing a building for the Boy Scouts; addition of 275 members to the church roll; 20 per cent increase in the Sunday school enrollment; and the congregations have more than doubled. The Ladies Parlor is being beautifully furnished by various circles of the church, and the kitchen, recently renovated, is very modern.

Oldest Member

Mrs. Mary C. Doughty of 510 E. Second street, is said to be the oldest member of the church, which has a membership of 1,250, with 864 in the Sunday school department, of which Lewis H. Swindell, Jr., is superintendent.

C. F. Cowell is chairman of the Board of Trustees of which there are nine members. The officers of the Board of Stewards are G. E. Jackson, chairman, Leon Thompson, vice chairman, E. T. Buckman, Jr., secretary and Milo Gibbs, treasurer and the board consists of 46 members.

Other church officers are Mrs. J. A. Lindsey, president of the Woman's Society of Christian Service; Thad Hodges, president, Methodist Men's club; H. T. Latham, Jr., chairman, Board of Christian Education; Mrs. Thad R. Taylor, president, Senior choir; Jarvis Latham, president, Youth Fellowship; and Miss Peggy Swindell, Youth