

Washington First Baptist Church Has Interesting History

Founded By Ex-Methodist Minister Who Was Immersed In Pamlico River

Church First Located At Main And Bonner; Shared "Free Church"

By MARY M. TOLER
Daily News Staff Writer

The First Baptist Church of Washington was founded by a Methodist minister, the Rev. Jeremiah Mastin, born in Frederick county, Virginia. After a ministry of 24 years in New Bern the Rev. Mr. Mastin moved to Washington in 1814 and attended occasional services at the Tranters Creek Baptist church. He was publically baptized in the Pamlico River in front of Washington and a short time later was ordained to the Baptist faith.

Soon afterwards Mr. Mastin and about 20 other residents petitioned the Tranters Creek Baptist church for permission to form a Baptist church in the town of Washington. Elder Mastin was called to its pastoral care and the church grew so that at his death in 1825 it consisted of 60 members.

It is interesting to note that the name of Elder Jeremiah Mastin appears several times in a very old church record of the local Baptist church, dated 1821, and his death is recorded in this book as August 13, 1825.

First Location

The Baptist House of Worship was first located at the corner of Main and Bonner streets, where the Episcopal church now stands. The "Free Church" as it was called occupied lot 50 as provided by James Bonner when he laid out the town in 1776. The Baptist members shared in the use of the "Free Church" along with the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Methodists. The Methodists built their own church building in the year 1800 and the other denominations continued to use the "Free Church" until 1822. During this year the other two churches also built elsewhere and the members of the Baptist church secured sole ownership of the Free church building. The small church building was removed about 1834 and placed on a new site owned by the Baptist on Market street, which was next to the present Sam Marsh Filling station on Market street and opposite the present post office building between Second and Third streets. The church building was of hand-hewn timbers and was very substantial. Much of the heavy timber was used in the remodeling of 1896. The main auditorium and galleries were lighted by a number of small windows and the entrance to the galleries was from the outside. The pews were perfectly straight-backed and seats very narrow and uncomfortable.

After many years of activity, the approach of the Civil War brought a gradual decline until the total disruption had left it the only church building left standing in Washington. The church did not begin to function properly until about 1893 due to the destructions of the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period. Just prior to the War the church was served irregularly in monthly meetings, whereas during the previous period it was led by a full time pastor, and was one of the few churches in East Carolina having a regular minister at this early date.

Early Leader

After the Civil War, and until 1893, James Morgan, layman, and father of the late Mrs. Lucy Williams, had held the church together until such time as a regular pastor could be called, the first of which was Rev. Duncan McLeod. Conditions were such, that when he came, in the early part of 1893, there were only about 15 members. From that date until the present however, the growth of the church has been steady, due to its missionary emphasis, and the church has had services every Sunday since.

The Baptist church was one of the few buildings in the entire town not destroyed by the burning of the town during the War Between the States. For a while afterwards, until the rebuilding of the Presbyterian church, Presbyterians shared in the use of the building holding their services in the Baptist church.

Old Structure Rebuilt

By the cultivation of generosity among the Baptist members, and aided by generous assistance of local friends, those in Eastern North Carolina, and throughout the state, the old structure was rebuilt

and the new building was dedicated Sunday, November 29, 1896.

A new spirit of progress took hold under the pastorate of the Rev. Duncan McLeod to whose faithful labors the work largely owed its success. He resigned in 1895. Pastors who succeeded him were the Reverends J. O. Alderman, J. A. Booth, Josiah Crudup, J. S. Copering, I. M. Mercer, J. H. Sullivan, H. A. Dalton, R. L. Gay and Edward Jenkins.

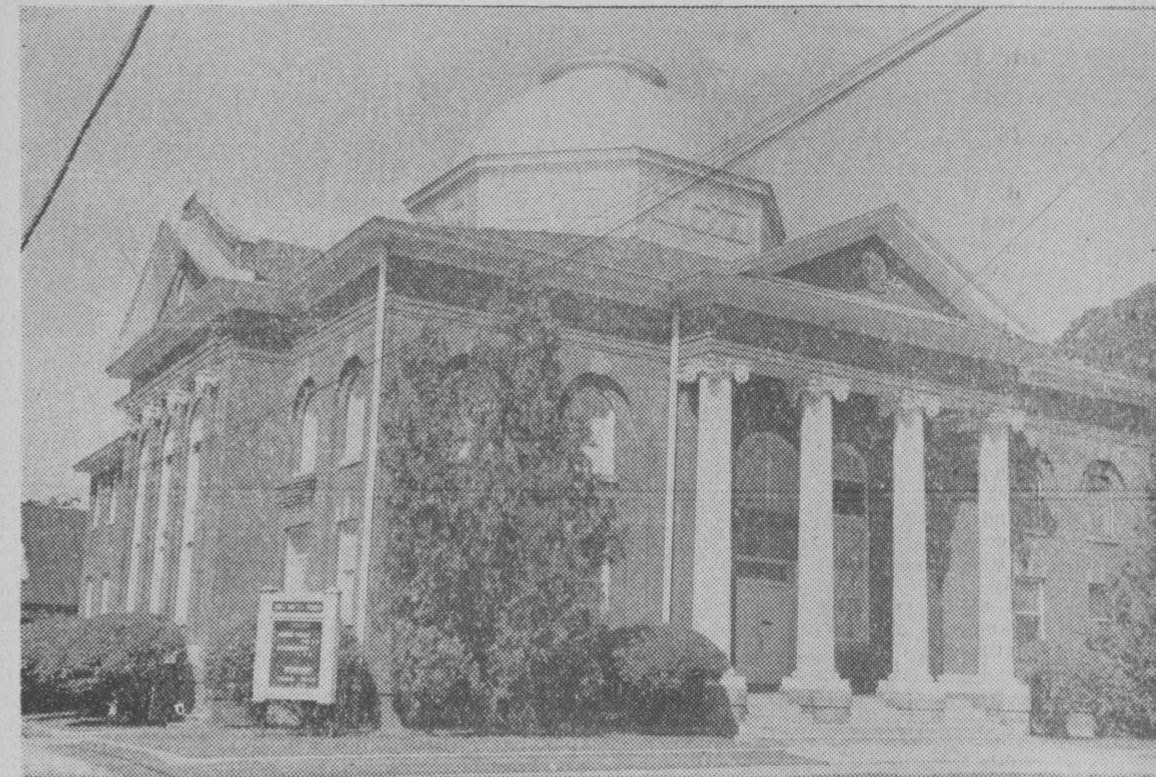
The records seem to indicate that under all these pastors the church made steady progress. During the pastorate of the Rev. J. A. Sullivan class rooms were added and other improvements made. It was at the close of his ministry that the church felt able to relinquish the aid being given by the North Carolina State Board of Missions by which it had been aided for a number of years. Since that time has been self supporting, and has regularly participated in giving aid in turn, to missionary work near and far.

At this time a movement was started to erect a new church building in a more suitable location. For this purpose the Morton property at the corner of Harvey and Main streets was purchased. The Rev. R. L. Gay, pastor, who came after Mr. Sullivan, began the work of raising funds for a new church building. He resigned, however, before actual construction was begun. The Rev. Edward Jenkins was called and remained until after the completion of the building, the ground being broken in 1916 and the building completed in 1917.

The 15 members of the church of 1893 were matched with the 150 of 1917 when the Baptist church was moved from Market street to East Main street. Two lots were sold from the ground before erecting the church and the Morton house which stood facing Main street was moved to a lot facing Harvey street, now used as the church annex.

Following the pastorate of Mr. Jenkins, the following ministers served as pastors of the church. The Reverends Dr. Frank Watson, C. F. Hudson, Charles B. Plybon, W. L. Vaden, Victor Harrell, J. R. Everette, and A. Lincoln Fulk. Mr. Everette served as pastor for 12 years. During his pastorate the unified budget plan was initiated and the carpets and acoustical alterations of the church dome were made possible by the efforts of the

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ONE OF CITY'S BEST



(Staff Photo)

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF WASHINGTON

Fulk's term the church added the services of a Religious Education assistant and a secretary.

Data In Old Paper

The early history of the First Baptist church was partly furnished by an interesting paper prepared by Mrs. S. F. Alligood, who, born October 13, 1867, is the oldest member of the church and has worked diligently towards its progress during her lifetime. For approximately 45 years Mrs. Alligood served as the leader of the young people of the church.

The present pastor of the First Baptist church, the Rev. Dr. Wistar Hamilton, a native of Roanoke, Virginia came to Washington in October of 1946 after serving as pastor in Harrisonburg, and Roanoke, Virginia, and New Orleans, and for two years as a chaplain of 103rd General Hospital in World War II. He received his education at Fork Union Military Academy, Va., University of Richmond, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Ky. Before entering the service Dr. Hamilton taught in the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary which institution conferred upon him the degree of Th.D. in 1949 since he has been pastor in Washington, Dr. and Mrs. Hamilton have their home at

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN 1900



THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH of Washington as it appeared in the year of 1900. The church was located on the west side of Market street, between Second and Third streets. Much of the heavy timber of the Free Church was used in the remodeling of the Baptist church in the year of 1896. The church purchased property and moved to its present location on East Main street in 1917.

BAPTIST

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the new Baptist parsonage at 211 College Avenue in Washington Park which was completed last November. They have two children, William Wistar Hamilton III who is taking training with General Electric Company in Schenectady, N.Y. and Mrs. James E. Herring of Clinton, Mississippi, where Professor Herring is on the faculty of Mississippi College.

Today the First Baptist church of Washington has a total roll of 686 members, of whom 350 are resident members. During the last "church year" there were 99 new members added, 60 of whom were received by baptism. Three branches have gone out from the First Baptist church of Washington. During Mr. Everett's ministry the Riverview church; and recently the Cherry Chapel church and the Nicholsonville church, growing out of the Tenth and Nicholson streets Branch Sunday School, which is still an arm of the Mother church, and is under the leadership of Mr. Merrill Daniels, associate superintendent of the First Baptist Sunday school. This latest branch was begun in July 1951 and already has an enrollment of 98.

Mr. W. D. Welch is the capable superintendent of the Sunday school department of which there are 498 members, graded into study classes on the age basis.

The women of the church are actively working in the Women's Missionary Union and various circles of the church and sponsor the missionary training of the several auxiliaries of boys and girls and older young people.

Church Officers

The church officers are: Paul H. Waters, Moderator; A. J. Rector, clerk; F. T. Paul, Treasurer;

church is now in process of building Sunday school rooms to accommodate its 74 attendants. The church was founded March 28, 1938 by Hubert Morris, and since this date its 28 members have taken an active interest in all phases of church work.

Brother S. J. Hodges was the first pastor of the church and the Rev. D. F. Fulcher of Vanceboro is its present minister. The Belhaven Pentecostal church is a branch of The Mother Church in Goldsboro, N. C.

Sunday school is held each Sunday at 10 o'clock, while preaching services at 11 o'clock are conducted each Second and Fourth Sunday.

Oldest Member

Mrs. Annie Smith, who is the oldest member of the Belhaven church, is superintendent of the

W. D. Welch, Sunday school superintendent; J. D. Warren, director Training union; Mrs. Hannis Latham, Jr., President W. M. U.; R. B. Bilbro, chairman of Deacons; Orion J. Peevy, president Brotherhood, and Mrs. C. S. Graves leader of the young people.

Deacons for 1951-52 are R. B. Bilbro, chairman, Merrill Daniels, William Daniels, J. D. Clark, W. C. Elks, J. R. Jones, Mason Knight, W. J. Leonard, T. W. Miller, A. J. Rector, J. D. Warren, and A. M. Covington.

The highlights of the church year were the evangelistic services held in April; the annual Southern Baptist Convention which Dr. Hamilton and Mr. and Mrs. W. P. Allgood attended in Miami in May, and the vacation Bible school in June which broke all previous records with an average daily attendance of 148. Special religious activities soon to take place are the State Missions Week of Prayer to be held in

Mary Lou Edwards, young peoples teacher; Mrs. Pearl Hawkins, junior teacher; and Mrs. Emily Guthrie, primary class.

Mrs. Smith, who became a member March 28, 1938, the day the church was founded, is a charter member of the organization. Church officials are Mrs. Pearl Hawkins of Ransomville, secretary and treasurer; Ira Daw, Belhaven, deacon; and Mrs. Mattie Edwards of Belhaven, deaconess.

The Small white wooden church with a pointed roof is mounted by an apse and is located in the west end of Belhaven.

The outstanding functions during the past year were the district conference which met at the Belhaven church in February; the organization of the Ladies auxiliary; and the start towards Sunday school rooms.

September, the Roanoke Association in October, the North Carolina State Baptist Convention November 2-8 in Winston Salem, and the Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions which will be held in December led by the Missionary Organizations of the church. A "Roll Call" of the entire membership will be conducted during September. Worship services continue throughout the year without interruption.

Schedule of church services are Bible school each Sunday morning at 9:45 o'clock followed by 11 o'clock morning worship; 6:30 P.M. Training Union; 7:30 P.M. Evening worship and Hour of Prayer each Wednesday night at 7:30 o'clock. (except that the night services are a half-hour later during the summer months, until school begins.)