

THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH

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In the more than three-quarter century since the beginning of the Toccoa First Methodist Church on the corner of Pond and Doyle Streets, it has been a leader in the spiritual and physical growth of not only the city of Toccoa and Stephens County, but the entire area of Northeast Georgia.

Through the many years of changing times, things have not gone smoothly in every instance, but despite the difficulties, the trend has been toward a stronger growing church organization, coming from less than seventy-five charter members to approximately eight hundred today.

At no time in the past seventy-six years have the people of the church been more active in the great Kingdom building program than at the present. In the past two years more than two hundred new additions have been made to the membership and the average Sunday School attendance has grown accordingly. One of the most important current projects is the Building Fund for the erection of the new church which will enable the present trend of growth to continue and will carry this religious institution into higher and more mighty works than it has ~~been~~ possible to attain in the past.

The early history of the Toccoa First Methodist Church was formulated one year after the City of Toccoa received it's charter. The early settlers of the Methodist denomination began their worship by holding services in an old building which was used for a school house and was located on Doyle Street on the lot on which the Stephens Health Center is now located, and in a hall which stood on or near the present site of the Belk-Gallant Company at the corner of Sage and Doyle Streets. Need for a new church building was soon realized and on the second day of March, 1876, A. H. McAllister, James M. Payne, Alex White, S. W. Crawford and W. A. Cooper, Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church South at Toccoa, Georgia purchased from B. H. Broomhead, for the sum of \$125.00, a lot on the corner of Doyle and Pond Streets where the present church building is located. In the year of 1876 the membership of this church, which was founded the same year, as shown by the cornerstone of the present building, began the construction of a new church for a place of worship.

The first minister to preach to the Methodists in Toccoa, so far as is ascertainable, was the Reverend Walter Yarbrough. Later a Reverend Lewis held religious services (probably a revival) for the benefit of those who were inclined toward the Methodist Doctrine. The records available show that the Reverend J. J. Morgan was the first to serve the organized church.

There were approximately seventy-five members of this first Toccoa Methodist Church and the early pastors served other churches at Belton, Clarkesville and Tugalo. Later the charge became a threequarter station with only the Toccoa and Tugalo churches. About fifty years ago the Toccoa church became a station with regular religious services being conducted every Sunday in the year.

The original church building, which was a wooden structure with no Sunday School facilities or rooms, became too small for the progressive and growing membership of the church. They became aware of the pressing need for a larger building with Sunday School rooms to meet the demands of that day.

At the Fourth Quarterly Conference held on September 7, 1896, F. A. Mabry, J. B. Simmons, T. A. Capps, D. W. Edwards and Daniel Hogsed were appointed as a Committee to build the new church. In the year 1897 the church purchased from Mrs. Ida S. Netherland, for \$157.00, one half of the lot adjoining the church lot fronting on Doyle Street and work was started toward building a new and larger structure.

At the Second Quarterly Conference held on March 22, 1897, the pastor, Reverend J. B. Allen stated in his report, "By the time another Quarterly Conference is held, we hope to be in our beautiful new church where we can sing 'Home Sweet Home'."

According to the minutes of the Quarterly Conference, the membership went into the new church on the fourth Sunday in June, 1897 and began a protracted meeting "which resulted in some good in helping to settle the aims and objects for which the church was organized."

The report of the Reverend J. B. Allen to the Third Quarterly Conference, June 20, 1898 reads as follows:

"On April 13, 1898, just two days fater our last Quarterly Conference, our beautiful new church was burned. We hope in six weeks more, however, to be in our new church which bids fair to be even more elegant than the former building". The Trustee's report for that year showed that the church which burned had been replaced with a building following the same plan, with improvements which added to the strength and beauty of the church. The walls were of brick and the roof of good Virginia slate. The report stated further that the inside was neatly finished and attractively furnished with Oak pews, carpets, bell and furnace.

Among the records of the church is the original receipt from George W. Hitt, Contractor, dated May 12, 1898, in which he acknowledged payment of all demands for building the new church, which is the present Sanctuary, after the old one burned.

Realizing the need of more Sunday School room, the Quarterly Conference, in session on June 17, 1907, appointed F. A. Mabry, T. A. Capps, W. C. Edwards, J. B. Simmons, D. E. Hogsed, C. A. Cooper and D. W. Edwards as a committee to build a Sunday School Annex. The Sunday School reported during the period that it had an attendance of 124.

An examination of the minutes fails to disclose any action on the part of this Committee further than the discussion of the needs and plans for such a building.

On February 14, 1926, at the suggestion of Reverend E. G. Thomason, the pastor, a committee was appointed by a church conference to canvass the membership

on the proposition of building a Sunday School Department. This committee made it's report and recommended that the Trustees proceed with the building. Later, a Building Committee composed of T. A. Capps, H. J. Busha, G. D. Trogdon, R. W. McNeely, J. B. Simmons, T. W. Anderson, H. W. Meaders and Claude Groover was appointed to act in conjunction with the Trustees for the purpose of carrying out the plans for building a Sunday School annex building. Messrs. J. B. Bond, G. K. Lotheridge and C. M. McClure were later added to this committee. This committee, with each of the pastors, labored together toward carrying out plans for building. Early in 1929, Mr. H. J. Busha, Chairman of the committee, and Reverend W. J. DeBardeleben called the members together and adopted plans drawn by Reverend C. M. Lipham for the construction of the Sunday School annex. Largely through the efforts of Reverend DeBardeleben, subscriptions were secured and the committee engaged Contractor Wilbur W. Haynes to do the construction work. Work was started on September 30, 1929 after "ground-breaking" exercises were conducted by Reverend H. L. Edmonson, Presiding Elder of the Elberton District, assisted by Reverend DeBardeleben, Dr. A. T. Cline, Pastor of the First Baptist Church and Dr. R. A. Forrest, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church.

When the present building program was completed, the Trustees and Building Committee estimated that in addition to being beautiful, the building and lot was worth the sum of \$30,000.00; that the church building and equipment would be adequate for the needs of the membership for some time; that the annex would meet the requirements for a standard Sunday School and be sufficient to house the attendance for several years to come.

Early in 1940 the Stewards made plans for the building of the beautiful modern brick parsonage on East Doyle Street. Acting as the Building Committee, the Stewards had it ready for occupancy before Fall. The old parsonage on South Pond Street was sold after serving the pastors who "came and went" over a period of forty-eight years.

The foregoing incidents relate largely to the building program of the church; however, a careful study of the facts discloses that the membership from the very foundation has endeavored to attain the objects, aims and results for which the various buildings have been erected, and that the spiritual growth of the church has not been neglected.

The TOCCOA NEWS on December 16, 1887 carried an account of the assignment of Reverend C. A. Jamison to the Toccoa Church. Also an account is given of the revival meeting held in 1890, during his ~~pastorate~~, in which fifty people applied for membership under the preaching of Reverend S. J. Cowan.

The ATLANTA JOURNAL issue of November 27, 1900 brought the news of the appointment of Reverend W. W. Brinsfield to Toccoa Methodist Church.

The reports of the various pastors at regular Quarterly Conferences show that interest was taken in each department of the church work. The Sunday School reports uniformly state that the Sunday School was well attended and that the officers and teachers were faithful.

It is noted that it was the custom of the Presiding Elder to include as a part of the Quarterly Conference Record an item showing that the various official members of the church had been examined as to their spiritual condition.

So many people have contributed to the early history of the organization that time and space will not permit the mentioning of all; however, these family names are frequently found in connection with the past activities of the church: McAllister, Payne, White, Crawford, Cooper, Freeman, Davenport, Mabry, Capps, Simmons, Brown, Edwards, Wright, Burgess, Edmonson, McAvoy, Hitt, Vickery, Busha, McClure, Nelms, Whitehead, Fessenden, Nowell, Hogsed, Tabor, Cox, West, Bryant, Renney, Harrison, Withers, Lotheridge, Gregory, McNeely, Willingham, Childs, Hill, Scott, Beasley, Garland, Addington, Allman, Trogdon, Carruth, Meaders, Clark, Teasley, Haynes, Moss, Curtis and Neville.

One of the most faithful and loyal records of service shown by the minutes is that of the late Mr. J. B. Simmons who was an official member of the church from 1890 until the time of his death in the early part of the year 1929.

During this continuous period he served as Sunday School Superintendent at four different times, aggregating fifteen years. Others who served as officials for unusually long periods of time include: F. A. Mabry, T. A. Capps, Mrs. S. V. Davenport, W. C. Edwards, D. E. Hogsed, P. W. Whitehead, C. A. Cooper, G. K. Lotheridge, D. W. Edwards, R. W. McNeely, G. G. Edmonson, W. R. Beasley and H. J. Cox. G. K. Lotheridge has served more than fifty years in official capacities and was the first President of the Epworth League. Others have served just as efficiently and faithfully, but for shorter periods of time.

The following members have served as Superintendent of the Sunday School:

Dr. J. R. Brown, J. J. Hardy, Lee McWhorter, who was the youngest in the State at the time of his service, J. M. Freeman, J. B. Simmons, N. A. Fessenden, W. F. Perry, J. A. Burgess, J. H. Gregory, J. I. Allman, Pope R. Hill, F. W. Carruth and C. M. McClure. C. M. McClure gave more than thirteen years to the

Superintendency.

In the last two years, the Sunday School has had an increase in average attendance of one hundred and eight. This increase has been in evidence in all age groups, but more particularly among children and young people. Increased attendance of men has made it necessary to form another Men's Bible Class, The Curtis Class, named in memory of Mr. J. H. Curtis who was one of the church's most faithful officers.

This increase has brought to the forefront another need--that of adequate church and church school plants. This idea is gaining momentum; \$40,000.00 has been raised on this project during the past fifteen months.

There is evidence of growth of evangelistic and missionary-mindedness in the life of the congregation. There is a small but growing group of men in the membership, about twelve in number, who are making consistent evangelistic visits in the homes of the community. The results of these visits have been heart-warming. As to the missionary-mindedness: in addition to paying the regular missionary pledges, during the past year the congregation has pledged and paid four mission specials. They are:

1. The Wembo Nyama Training School,
2. Wesley Foundation Home at the University of Georgia,
3. Full support of a Belgian war orphan, and
4. Camp Glisson Development Fund.

The work with children and youth has been intensified. Permanent equipment has been purchased for the Junior, Primary and Kindergarten departments.

Sunday evening sessions for children have been inaugurated. The evening meeting of the Methodist Youth Fellowship has been departmentalized so that Intermediates, Seniors and Older Youth meet in separate sessions. Three choir groups are active among the children and youth:

1. The Cherub Choir, made up of Kindergraten and Primary children,
2. The Junior Choir, composed of Junior age children, and
3. The Youth Choir, composed of Intermediates and Seniors.

A keen Christian conscience is being developed as to the stewardship of talents, time, possessions and life itself.

According to available information, Miss Carrie Davenport is the only living charter member of the First Methodist Church of Toccoa and has been a member continuously since it's organization until the present time.

Through the years there has been a gradual increase in the amount raised for the support of the church. It is felt that the greatest development of the church in the last two years is that of a deeper spiritual life on the part of the membership.

The following figures give a puctire of the growth over the past fifteen years.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Church Members</u>	<u>Paid on Gen. & Conference Benevolences</u>	<u>Average Attendance at Sunday School</u>	<u>Number of WSCS Members</u>	<u>WSCS paid to Conf. Treas. World-Wide Missions</u>
1935	453	\$ 400.00	-	74	\$ 221.00
1940	522	400.00	-	114	200.00
1945	586	900.00	144	94	469.00
1950	710	1,072.00	254	100	612.00

World War II Service Record

The Reverend D. S. Patterson, who served as pastor during the war years, carried on a moral building correspondence with most of the one hundred and two men who went into the armed services.

The "Gold Stars" on the service banner show that six made the supreme sacrifice that we may continue to worship as we desire.

The following ministers have served as pastors of the Toccoa church: J. J. Morgan, J. R. Smith, J. T. Curtis, T. P. Winter, W. W. Lampkin, J. A. Timmerman, F. S. Hudson, B. F. Fraser, C. A. Jameson, J. E. Rorie, B. P. Allen, M. H. Dillard, J. B. Allen, W. W. Brinsfield, John E. Rosser, L. W. Rivers, J. H. Logan, S. R. England, J. T. Erwin, W. S. Robison, C. H. Branch, J. E. Ellis, H. H. Jones, V. E. Lanford, Felton Williams, E. G. Thomason, T. R. Kendall, Jr., W. J. DeBardeleben, G. F. Venable, John P. Erwin, E. F. Dempsey, D. S. Patterson, S. D. Cherry, Sr., and Frank Moorhead, who is now ministering.

Many members and friends of the congregation have made valuable contributions to the material which has been included in this history. Special mention should be made of the contribution of C. M. McClure who has made his files available for us. Our appreciation goes to the many who have so willingly assisted in this work.

Geo. W. Hitt

Historical Committee Chairman