

HISTORY OF THE CLANTON FIRST METHODIST CHURCH

Facts concerning the founding of the Clanton First Methodist Church are unavailable. The earliest existing record goes back only as far as 1873. In that year, on June 28th, the property on which the present church building stands was purchased from Alfred Baker for the sum of \$1.00.

The pastor in those early days is thought to be R. A. Micars, who shared his preaching duties with Mt. Nebo, and possibly with Lime Springs, Jemison, and Mt. Moriah. (These five churches were known to have made up the Clanton Circuit in the late 1800s. Jemison and Mt. Moriah remained on the Circuit until around 1913, Lime Springs remained until the 1930's, and Mt. Nebo was still a part of the Clanton Circuit as late as 1919.)* These churches were a part of The Methodist Episcopal Church South, having joined with most of their fellow Southerners in breaking away from the Northern Methodist churches over the slavery question.

The building which housed the Methodists of the Clanton area in the early days was a white one-story frame building; facing east/west as does the present building. It had a bell tower which housed a bell said to produce "the clearest, sweetest sound ever heard in Clanton!" A highlight of the week for the children of the church was the opportunity of helping the pastor ring the bell every Sunday morning! One little boy who took particular delight in this was Joe Mullins, who thought he was "taller than a mountain" when the bell rope lifted him six feet into the air!

Directly behind the church, facing north, was a small house which served as a parsonage for the preacher and his family.

There being no Sunday School rooms attached to the old church, the classes met in various parts of the sanctuary. The building was heated by two pot-bellied stoves and music for the worship services was provided first by a peddle organ, then later by an organ, piano, and bass violin. The choir which sang at both services each Sunday was not outfitted with choir robes. Instead, the men dressed in their Sunday best and the ladies vied with one another to see who could wear the fanciest hats to the choir. (An amusing incident concerning the choir took place in 1918, when E.C. Maye was the pastor. During the evening service one Sunday a bat flew in through an open window and began circling the choir loft. The ladies ducked frantically with every swoop, and the congregation became visibly nervous. At last the bat landed squarely on a large be-ribboned hat belonging to the pastor's wife. Mrs. Maye promptly leaped to her feet, snatched the hat from her head and threw it wildly over the pastor's head and into the congregation. At the same time, in a piercing voice she cried "Oh-o-o-my Lord!" As the congregation roared with laughter, Brother Maye maintained his pastoral poise and calmly said, "When Mrs. Maye regains her composure we will continue with the service."

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The old church had a special section down front which was known as the "Amen Corner." On these pews sat the older men of the congregation who gave forth with loud "Amens" and "Praise Gods" at appropriate times during the service. These vocal tributes to the sermon were a vital part of the people's worship, and no one thought it embarrassing to be called a "Shouting Methodist" in those days. Another characteristic of the older, more devout members was their custom of kneeling at their pews during every prayer. This custom persisted until about 1910.

In the early 1900s a room was added to the south side of the building to serve as a pastor's study and literature supply room. This convenience allowed the pastor to have a quiet place in which to counsel and to work on his sermons.

The early Methodist Church in Clanton also boasted a Camp Grounds which was located 2-3 miles from town on the Enterprise Road. This was the place where the people came in the summer for services which lasted anywhere from an all-day affair to a week-end long series of revival services. A large wooden shed housed the people during the preaching services, and long log tables and benches served as the place where they ate their "dinner on the ground." The services were often conducted by visiting preachers who shouted lustily as they delivered their "hell-fire and brimstone" sermons which usually lasted at least two hours! Hand clapping and loud "Amens" punctuated the preachers' sermons as the Methodists testified to their religious fervor!

A time for singing was always observed at the Camp Grounds and the Methodists could be heard at surrounding farm houses and for at least a mile or two down the road! Few hymn books were available in those days, so the song leaders followed the principle of "lining off the hymns" ... that is, reading the unfamiliar hymns line by line and letting the people follow their lead.

Some of the early recorded members of the Clanton Methodist Church were: Mrs. Mollie Bowden, in whose memory a small stained glass window in the present building was erected; W. A. Middleton; Mr. & Mrs. Henry Warren Athney; Mrs. Martha Carrol; Mrs. H. E. Evans; Miss French Evans; Mrs. Glennie Evans; William McDaniel; Mrs. Maggie McDaniel; Mr. & Mrs. J. B. Marlors; Mrs. Mary E. Oates; Mrs. Willie Jones; Mrs. Glennie Phillips, who taught the Phillips Willing Workers class for many years, and whose class purchased one of the large windows in the present church building; Miss Rene Rembert; J. W. Stanfield; W. M. Wilson and W. T. Callen, in whose memories two of the large sanctuary windows were erected. (The above members were listed in the old church record books as belonging before 1895.)

In the early 1920's the Clanton Methodist Church took a great step forward. The congregation, under the leadership of the pastor, C. C. Wilkerson, voted to dismantle the old building and to erect a

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beautiful new church to the glory of God. Architect on the project was W. S. Price; the building committee consisted of C. C. Wilkerson, J. Q. Wade, T. C. McSwain, T. H. Neighbors, J. B. Atkinson, V. J. Elmore; Secretary was J. O. Middleton; Treasurer was Eric Hart.

Pledges for the financing of the new church were raised in one of the most thrilling campaigns ever seen by the people of Clanton! The well-known evangelist, Bob Jones, was brought to town for a three-day series of sermons designed to raise pledges. For these three days he was paid \$300, an amount thought by many to be extremely large for such a short series of preaching. However, the fiery messages of Bob Jones paid off ... at the end of three days the people had pledged \$50,000 toward the building of a new church!! An additional \$13,500 was borrowed from the bank, and the work was underway.

When the old church was torn down, the "sweet-sounding" bell was given to the Negro Methodist Church in West End Clanton. It still may be heard each Sunday as it calls the worshippers to the Negro Church.

While the new church was being built, the congregation met for worship and prayer meeting in the Courthouse. During the week the members were busy at the task of raising money for the new building. An active part in this fund-raising was taken by the Women's Missionary Society under the guidance of its president, Mrs. Sophia L. Mullins Jones. She pledged the Society to raise \$5,000 for the new church. The money was raised in some of the following ways: Fourth of July barbecues at the old high school; dinners for various groups; ice cream socials; cake sales; and selling ice cream cones each Saturday in front of the old J. C. Jones store.

An interesting note concerning the church comes from those of our church who were neighborhood children at the time of the building. They relate that when the time came to pour the cement for the basement floor, each child brought a glass jar full of notes and mementos, and carefully laid them on the ground. The cement was then poured over them and they became a part of the basement floor. There they remain ... a childish gesture that may someday be revealed to a far-distant generation.

The new church was completed in 1923. The building had a Sanctuary with a seating capacity of 500, eleven Sunday School rooms, a Pastor's Study, kitchen, and large Fellowship Hall. A distinctive feature of the Sanctuary was the Christian symbolism which was evident in the stained glass windows, around the chancel rail, and on the arch over the choir loft. Other aids to worship were the two large murals which depicted Christ and the Woman at the Well, and Christ with Mary Magdalene at the Empty Tomb. These murals and the symbols around the chancel and choir loft were the work of an Italian artist, C. V. Malmede. They were dedicated in honor of his wife, the former Mrs. Belle J. Matthews.

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Mention should be made of the neighborhood children who had the honor of sitting on the scaffolding and watching Mr. Malmede as he painted the murals. They were: Sam and Leroy Martin; Alice and Corinne (Snookum and Patsy) Polk; Mary Goodwin Jones, now Mrs. E. G. Chism; Julia Ruth Hester, now Mrs. Percy Hicks; Clyde Jones, now Mrs. Leroy Martin; Imogene Simms, now Mrs. J. W. Moliston; and Mary Robinson, now Mrs. Tucker. (Mary reports that she sat on the floor and looked up at the painting more than she sat on that high scaffolding!) The painting of the murals and symbols was done during the coldest part of the winter, and took three months to complete. The only expense for this work was Mr. Malmede's room and board at the Wilson Hotel. The tedious work was done at the request of the artist's wife, who wanted to see a thing of beauty installed in the new Methodist Church.

In 1926, three years after the construction of the new church, Chilton County's first pipe organ was installed in the Clanton Methodist Church. It was a Moller organ costing \$17,500. The Women's Missionary Society took on the job of fund-raising and pledge \$1,200 per year until the organ was paid for. At the time this pledge was made, there were only 51 members in the Society!

In 1926 the church saw the necessity for a larger house for the parsonage family so the house adjoining the church, owned by Mrs. E. A. Matthews, was purchased. This was to serve as the parsonage for the next twelve years, until 1938. At that time the house fell into disrepair and it was considered essential that a new, more up-to-date parsonage be built. There was opposition to the idea, however, due to the debt which still existed to some \$2,000 on the church building. Mallie White and John C. Page, Chairman of the Board of Stewards, undertook the job of soliciting funds from the families of the church. At the end of their solicitation a total of \$1,000 had been pledged to the new parsonage, and the work began. The house was built by the pastor, J. M. Truitt, Mallie White, who was given 90 days off from his job at the L & N Railroad, one brick layer, and one carpenter. The parsonage family moved into the basement of the church while the work was being done. The new house was completed in August 1938 at the cost of \$2,842.

In 1931 the beautiful holly tree which adorns the yard of the parsonage was planted by Mrs. D. W. Haskew, wife of the pastor in charge.

In 1939 the Northern and Southern Methodist Churches, along with most of the Methodist Protestant Churches, united to form The Methodist Church. Our church in Clanton was therefore no longer known as the Methodist Episcopal Church South, but was officially the First Methodist Church of Clanton.

In 1956 the church purchased the vacant lot adjoining the parsonage for the sum of \$3,000. This was done to insure the privacy of the parsonage family and to provide extra space in case of an addition to

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the church in later years.

In 1961 the need for additional Sunday School space became acute and the congregation voted to enter into a building program to erect an Educational Building. The pastor was Lloyd H. Kimbrough, and the Building Committee consisted of: J. Hollis Jackson, Sr., Chairman; R. C. Williams, W. B. Crowe, Mrs. M. L. Batson, and Mrs. L. H. Bodden. Chairman of the Official Board was Isaac C. Byrd. Architect was Harold Foshee; contractors were Patterson Alred of Clanton. Cost of the building was \$96,720.00. Space was provided for 20 classrooms, modern restrooms, and a Church School Secretary's office.

The Educational Building was completed in 1963 and named The Griffin E. Lloyd Building in memory of a beloved former pastor who died while serving the Clanton Church.

In 1968 two departments in the Educational Building were dedicated in memory of two devoted women who gave many years of outstanding service to their church. The Junior Department was dedicated in memory of Clara Small Mullins who served as a teacher in that department over forty years. The Nursery Department was dedicated in memory of Pearl E. Carter who served as Nursery Mother for fourteen years.

The Methodist Church in Clanton is now officially The First United Methodist Church of Clanton, having assumed this new name when The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Churches united in 1968.

During its years in Clanton the Church has had the high privilege of seeing many members take a step forward for Christ. Foremost among the Church's proudest moments came when four of her young men made their decisions to enter the ministry: Oliver Eugene Murphree, Russel P. Shelton, Jr., Marvin Ervin Dailey, and Perry Mease Dalton. Another young man is presently studying for the ministry and will receive his License to Preach this year - Lester Stanley Carter.

The following members of our present congregation are recorded as having joined this church more than 50 years ago: Mrs. R. N. Ranson, 1907; Mrs. John Newell, 1907; Omar Reynolds, 1907; Mrs. Mattie Lee Johnson, 1908; Miss Lurline Harper, 1908; Mrs. Phala Belle Martin, 1908; Otto Jones, 1910; Miss Alma Jones, 1910; Mrs. T. C. McSwain, 1911; Mrs. Maggie Wilson, 1911; Mrs. J. O. Middleton, 1912; Hugh Branch, 1913; Mrs. W. L. Maddox, 1913; Robert Evans, 1913; Mrs. Myrtle Pitts, 1917; Mrs. Etta Wagner, 1917; Mrs. Mason F. Jones, 1918.

Other members of our present congregation who joined this church from 38-49 years ago are: Crit Jones, 1919; Mrs. John C. Page, 1919; Jack Jones, 1920, Burton Mullins, 1920; Hoyt Reynolds, 1921; Mrs. E. G. Chism, 1921; Mrs. A. S. Prince, 1923; Earl Wilson, 1923; S. A. Jones, 1923; Vernon Jones, 1923; R. L. Jones, Jr., 1923; Mrs. Omar Reynolds, 1924; Mrs. G. H. Tucker, 1925; Mrs. Berber Farley, 1925; W.

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L. (Fate) Maddox, 1925; Marcus Polk, Jr., 1926; Mrs. B. R. Plyler, 1926; Mrs. J. S. Nivens, 1927; O'Dell Headley, 1927; Mrs. G. C. Headley, 1927; Miss Ruby Branch, 1927; Mrs. Earl Gore, 1927; Milton Diefenderfer, 1929; Mrs. J. E. Edgar, 1929; Mrs. O. D. DeLoach, 1930; Mrs. Sam Powers, 1930; T. R. Burdette, 1930; Wilbur Prince, 1930; Cecil Carter, 1930; Mrs. E. D. Dailey, 1930; Miss Helen Parrish, 1930; Mrs. L. H. Bodden, 1930; Mrs. G. A. Arnold, 1930.

The present membership of the First United Methodist Church of Clanton is 497.

* Mt. Moriah was located 5-6 miles from Jemison across from what is now Scott's Store. Most of the members seem to have transferred to Randolph or Jemison in 1909-1912. The last building used as Mt. Moriah Church is still standing and is occupied by a Mr. Green.

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PASTORS OF THE CLANTON METHODIST CHURCH

1873-1875	R. A. Micars	1950-1952	J. M. McKinney
1875-1876	W. H. McDaniel	1952-1956	Marvin Keron Vickers, Sr.
1876-1880		1956-1959	Griffin Eugene Lloyd, Sr.
1880-1881	S. H. Nettles	1959-1963	Lloyd H. Kimbrough
1881-1882	Robert Strictlin	1963-1964	Glenn P. Cantrell
1882-1883		1964-1967	Arthur Lee Martin, Sr.
1883-1884	John W. Roy	1967-	John D. Trobaugh
1884-1885	J. A. Scott		
1885-1887	A. A. Green		
1887-1889	Daniel L. Lindsey		
1889-1891	A. J. Briggs		
1891-1895	B. E. Feagin		
1895-1896	P. M. Guthrie		
1896-1898	W. B. Dennis		
1898-1899	S. W. Williams		
1899-1901	D. F. Ellisor		
1901-1902	J. S. F. Stephens		
1902-1903	W. A. Montgomery		
1903-1904	D. B. H. Jeffcoat		
1904-1905	J. T. Eckford		
1905-1907	S. U. Turnipseed		
1907-1908	J. F. Price		
1908-1909	Felix M. Wood		
1909-1911	R. J. Mills		
1911-1913	L. H. S Chappelle, Sr.		
1913-1915	I. W. Chalker		
1915-1916	J. Frank Bilbro		
1916-1918	Thomas G. Jones		
1918-1920	E. C. Maye		
1920-1921	David M. Pearson		
1921-1926	C. C. Wilkerson		
1926-1927	W. M. Cox		
1927-1928	Lemuel B. Green		
1928-1930	Earnest A. Childs		
1930-1932	Daniel Walter Haskew		
1932-1934	Robert Presly Cochran		
1934-1936	Acton E. Middlebrooks		
1936-1938	J. M. Truett		
1938-1940	J. Lawrence Daniel		
1940-1942	T. C. Casaday		
1942-1945	O. C. Lloyd		
1945-1949	John Carlisle Miller		
1949-1950	W. Brunson Atkinson		

This History of the Clanton Methodist Church was compiled for the occasion of the Chilton County Centennial. September 1968

Helen Parrish
Church Secretary

Transcribed from paper copy 2020 by Derric Scott with minor changes for typographic errors.