

The History of the Littleton United Methodist Church 1880 – 2005

The formal organization of a Methodist congregation in Littleton North Carolina occurred under the leadership of the Reverend Robert Oswald Barton. The memoir of the late Marion E. Newsom relates “Col Wm Atherton Johnston, Sterling Johnston, myself and some others were the first members to organize the Methodist Church. Reverend Barton was our pastor. We three mainly built the old Methodist Church. Other Methodists from the county aided us, to wit: T.W. Harris, W.H. Thorne, Ed Thorne, W.E. Spruill and Judge C.A. Cooke.” An early roll book shows that there were sixteen members in October of 1880. Eleven of the first members had transferred their membership from Calvary Methodist. The first trustees were W.E. Spruill, Marion E. Newsom, John W. Heptinstall, Ed Thorne, and W. A. Johnston.

Most of these men were interested in seeing that schools were established in this community. They hired Reverend James M. Rhodes to start a school for young ladies which became the Littleton Female College. They were also supporters of Professor L.W. Bagley. He started a school for boys, Littleton High School, better known as the Bagley School. Both of these institutions prospered and attracted state wide attendance.

Land for the new church was donated by Colonel William A. Johnston from his home lot. His home was on the site of the present Littleton Service Center east of our present building. In later years their residence was moved south and became a hotel and now serves as Blaylock Funeral Home. Material for the first church was donated by out of town businesses as well as members and local townspeople. The first building was of frame construction. In its beginning years the church was served by ministers who had several churches.

We would know little of the early life of the church if portions of a journal or diary of Miss Mary Beckham had not been preserved. She is recalled in a chapel memorial window as the founder of the first Sunday School and a faithful worker in this church. She was a school teacher until her older sister, Martha Dandridge Beckham Jenkins, died in 1880, leaving five children. She took care of her sister’s family and they called her “Auntie.”

Later she made herself available whenever there was illness in a family in the area, no matter what time of day or night. The local doctors, Alston, Picot, and Whitaker often sent for her. She befriended so many persons that according to descriptions by her devoted nieces she was considered by many to be a saintly woman. She taught a Sunday School class for young people at the church and is credited with founding the first Sunday School in Littleton. She was also the leader of the Bright Jewels group. Miss Beckham was so highly regarded in the town that her milk cow was allowed to graze at will after there were stock laws to confine livestock. At her death in 1903, her niece, Miss Mattie Jenkins became a much beloved Sunday School teacher of children in the church. A few members yet recall her.

Your attention is called to excerpts from her 1897 journal which are attached as an addendum to this report. Her account gives you an eyewitness account of the activities of our church and her devotion to it.

The present brick building was constructed between 1902 and 1908 after additional property was secured. The Marion Newsom memoir recalls these facts about the new building: "The church has grown so in membership and financial strength that they have removed the old wood building, increased the size of the lot and built thereon a new brick church of the latest design." While the new church was under construction, the recently vacated building of the Methodist Protestant Church directly across the street was used by our membership. A former and now deceased member, Mrs. Frances S. Rives, was given the honor of placing the mortar around the cornerstone when it was laid in 1906. She was a little girl six years of age and the Chairman of the Stewards learned that she had contributed the money that she had been saving for a bicycle to the Building Fund. The new church was first used in 1908. Mrs. Betty Perkins Stallings was pleased that she was the first bride to be wed in the new building. Her marriage to Cleve Stallings took place in 1908.

The church was formally dedicated on April 25, 1911 on Easter morning after the congregation had finished paying for the building. The choir was under the management of Miss Blanche Newsom. Reverend G. F. Smith of Wilson, a former presiding elder on this district preached the dedicatory sermon. Reverend S. W. Taylor of the Methodist Protestant Church, Reverend John Wood of the Presbyterian Church, Reverend J. M. Rhodes of Littleton Female College and Reverend R. H. Willis, the church minister, assisted with the service.

From the early years of the church the Littleton Female College played a significant role. The sanctuary was designed to seat the local membership, visitors and a majority of the students of the college. The students occupied the center section of the sanctuary being marched to church each Sunday, weather permitting, in their white middie blouses and blue skirts. The college was Methodist related though privately owned by its president, Reverend J. M. Rhodes. He was a forceful influence in his school, church and community. Many large church meetings of state wide significance were held in Littleton because of the facilities of the college. The destruction of Littleton Female College in January 1919 by fire was a great loss to the community.

The original light fixtures for the sanctuary came from an exposition building at the Jamestown Exposition of 1908. An Austin pipe organ was placed in the church in 1924, largely through the efforts of the late Jesse Newsom. Mrs. Sally J. Leach and Mrs. Lottie Stallings were among the first to play this instrument. The organ was in the choir loft until relocated to the sanctuary during the pastorate of Reverend M.Y. Self and service of Mrs. John Picot as Music Director. Mrs. Ann Newsom served as our organist for more than 40 years. We have been blessed by an outstanding musical program now under the leadership of Mrs. Trudi May and Mrs. Sue Beazley.

Additional land for church expansion was acquired on several occasions. The dream of having a Sunday School Building was realized during the pastorate of the Reverend Harvey L. Davis. A grant was received from the Duke Endowment to assist with this project and the remaining funds were raised by the membership.

Property for a parsonage had been first purchased in 1883. Additional land was secured in 1897. A two story frame house at the corner of South Main Street and Mosby Avenue served until after World War II. The Reverend Davis and his family, at a great

sacrifice to their comfort, lived in the Sunday School Building while the present parsonage was built.

Extensive renovations and improvements were made to the church in the 1960's and 1970's. The basement Sunday School rooms were remodeled. The narthexes were rebuilt with a bequest of Mr. Jesse Newsom.

In 1975 the stained glass windows were repaired and covers of protective plexiglass were installed. Narthex and additional chapel memorial windows were dedicated at this time. The protective plexiglass proved invaluable in 1981 when a major fire occurred across the street originating at Leach Service Cleaners. A new heating system replaced the old boiler and radiators. Duct work was installed allowing for central heating and cooling of the sanctuary and Sunday School rooms. Wall to wall carpeting was installed throughout the building.

Over the years many memorials have been given to the church, which have contributed to the beauty and usefulness of our building. New lights replaced the original sanctuary fixtures from 1908, metal folding chairs for the Sunday school, the pastor's study was refurbished, a pew audio system was given, the kitchen was renovated and a dishwasher, stove and refrigerator were added. The chapel was greatly improved with an alter table and candle sticks, and a cross on the wall backed by a dorsal curtain. New lighting and heating improvements were also added. The addition of a ramp at the west entrance has made our church handicapped accessible. Exit doors have been added to the Sunday school building.

Our church was a part of a three part charge for many years. We were with Calvary and Bethel at Airlie North Carolina. First Calvary and Weaver's Chapel became a two part charge. In 1969 Bethel Methodist closed and thirteen of their members transferred to Littleton United Methodist along with its pulpit and alter ware. We have been a station church since that time. We were titled the Littleton Methodist Episcopal Church South until the Methodist Protestant denomination merged with the Methodist Church in 1939.

Major construction work was undertaken in the 1980's to solve long standing moisture problems of the brick structure. All of the brick work of the original building was repointed and sealed. The parapet walls and coping stones were removed and reset with the aid of a crane. A new shingle roof replaced the original Buckingham slate roof.

By the mid 1970's our church was being greatly strengthened by new residents moving to Lake Gaston and joining our church. The school in Littleton closed in the early 1970's and our church faced a real challenge. We have been blessed by the talents, interests, generosity and service of the members who are here because of Lake Gaston. They have kept our church alive and a viable force in so many areas with their support.

In 1978 we realized that our 100th anniversary would be in 1980. Therefore, it was decided to have a homecoming celebration in September of 1978 and acknowledge our 98th birthday. The Reverend Kelly J. Wilson, a pastor here in the 50's, gave the homecoming message. The Reverend Neal Salter was our minister at that time of the homecoming.

The 100th anniversary of our church was then celebrated on September 14th 1980 with a large crowd in attendance. Bishop William Cannon preached the Homecoming Sermon. District Superintendent Jack L. Hunter was also present. Reverend Tommy Privette was our minister and Reverend Harvey L. Davis, Minister Emeritus, attended.

A generous bequest from the estate of the late Percy Dawson was received by our church in 1992. It was felt that this gift should be used for major improvements or programs, not for operating expenses. We were able to make a substantial gift to the Hatteras Methodist Church when their building was badly damaged by a hurricane. Habitat for Humanity was generously supported. A scholarship fund in honor of our long time organist, Mrs. Ann Newsom, was established.

After years of planning, a contract was signed with Vance Construction for the erection of a 5500 square foot fellowship hall to be located on property next to the post office. Mr. Robert Kemp, owner of Vance Construction, is the husband of a great granddaughter of the founding minister of our church, Reverend Robert O. Burton. Reverend Charles Meyers was our pastor when this project was undertaken. The building was completed in 1999 and the Consecration Service was held on May 23 1999. Mrs. Rachel Ricks was Chairperson of the Building Committee. The untimely death of Fred Owen in 1999 was a great loss to his church and his community. His support and advice were invaluable in planning for this building. Reiny Hiss was the Chairperson of the Funding Committee and Mrs. Maria Pope was Chairperson of the Memorials Committee. Our church is indebted to the Rural Church Division of the Duke Endowment for assistance in planning this building and grants for it. Many members and friends of Littleton United Methodist contributed to this project. We were also fortunate that our bequest increased in value through wise investments in the 1990's. We are also grateful to the volunteers from our membership who gave so generously of their time and talents to provide the finishing touches for the building.

Bishop Marion Edwards consecrated the building. The District Superintendent, Tom Loftis, assisted in the service. In recognition of the generous gift of Mr. Percy Dawson, the large room of the structure was named in his memory "Dawson Hall."

A painful decision was made in 1997 to give up the Austin Pipe Organ which had served since 1924. It was replaced with an Allen Digital Organ which we hope will serve us as well for many years. When the new organ was installed, the choir loft was enlarged and made more useful. New chairs were added and the floor was tiered for better visibility.

Reverend David Haley was appointed to the Littleton United Methodist Church in 2002. He introduced the church to "hands on" mission work. For a number of years our church has financially supported the foreign missionary efforts of Curtis Edwards, the son of former members Carolyn and Claude Edwards. Reverend Haley has led mission trips to Sri Lanka and El Salvador with members of our congregation participating with their presence or gifts. Our church raised more than \$35,000 for tsunami relief in Sri Lanka. We have worked to help meet the spiritual, medical, financial and educational needs in our area, in the state, the national and international level. A team was led by Reverend Haley to hurricane victims in Florida in 2004. Very recently our minister led a team to El Salvador to witness and build nine homes. Reverend Haley's leadership in mission work was recognized at Annual Conference and our church was given the Key Taylor Award. A grant of \$1,400 accompanied this honor.

In addition to the accomplishments of the Missions Committee, the UMW, the Age Level and Family Ministries Committee, the Outreach Committee and the Nurture and Membership Committee have played a vital role in strengthening the service of our church. Our church building which has served for almost 100 years continues to require

upkeep and attention. Carroll Mann and Jack May greatly improved the appearance of both narthexes with the installation of a slate floor and redecoration of the spaces. The pipe organ bench was placed in the east narthex and plaques attached identifying the musicians associated with it. We are attempting to replace the parsonage with one that is in a more desirable location and meets conference guidelines. The Littleton Baptist Church wants to purchase the present parsonage property. The corner lot adjacent to our church was bought in 2005 and is being rented by the Littleton Observer. A dedicated group of volunteers led by the Trustees have worked steadily since May 2005 cleaning, repairing and painting the church facilities. These individuals have worked more than 1500 hours, often donating the supplies and repair materials that they use.

At the present time there are 145 members of this congregation. We have 5 Certified Lay Speakers and one candidate for a certified Lay Minister. While we were in the charge with Calvary Methodist, Johnny Aycock was led into the ministry of the Methodist Church. Howard Guidry is attending Roanoke Bible College and has been ordained and is serving Turkey Branch Baptist Church near Ringwood, North Carolina.

As our church celebrates its 125th anniversary, the mission statement adopted by a past Administrative Council seems most appropriate: "Littleton United Methodist Church strives to provide all inclusive worship of God through our Savior Jesus Christ. We are committed to deepen our spiritual growth. We are to minister in Christ's name to the needy, the sick, the dying, the unchurched and to each other. We are to be active Christians spreading the Good News. We are to strive to witness for Jesus in our daily lives, in our community and throughout the world."

Pastors of Littleton United Methodist Church

1880 – 1882	Robert O. Burton
1882 – 1883	J. D. Buie
1883 – 1884	W. H. Watkins
1884 – 1886	T. P. Bonner
1886 – 1890	L. J. Holden
1891 – 1892	R. P. Troy
1892 – 1893	J. L. Rumley
1894 – 1897	E. H. Davis
1897 – 1898	P. L. Herman
1899 – 1900	A. R. Goodchild
1900 – 1903	H. A. Humble
1904 – 1907	G. B. Perry
1907 – 1908	J. G. Johnson
1908 – 1909	R. H. Broom
1910 – 1913	R. H. Willis
1914 – 1916	S. A. Cotton
1917 – 1918	A. P. Tyer
1919 – 1920	G. B. Starling
1920 – 1921	J. P. Bross
1921 – 1922	Jesse H. Lanning
1922 – 1927	G. F. Smith
1928 – 1930	L. B. Pattishall
1930 – 1935	Rufus Bradley
1936 – 1939	W. J. Phipps
1939 – 1948	Harvey L. Davis
1948 – 1953	Marvin Y. Self
1953 – 1957	Kelly J. Wilson
1957 – 1959	Claude L. Barrett Jr.
1959 – 1961	Hubert R. Ashmore
1961 – 1963	John H. Sutton
1963 – 1968	O. V. Elkins
1969 – 1970	John C. Andrews
1970 – 1975	Vance C. Way
1975 – 1980	Neal Salter
1980 – 1983	Tommy Privette
1983 – 1987	Tom Sweeley
1988 – 1990	Paul Burke
1990 – 1995	Bruce Allen
1995 – 1998	Vance Way
1998 – 2000	Charles Meyers
2000 – 2002	Nick Holman
2002 – 2007	David Haley
2007 -	Robert Licht