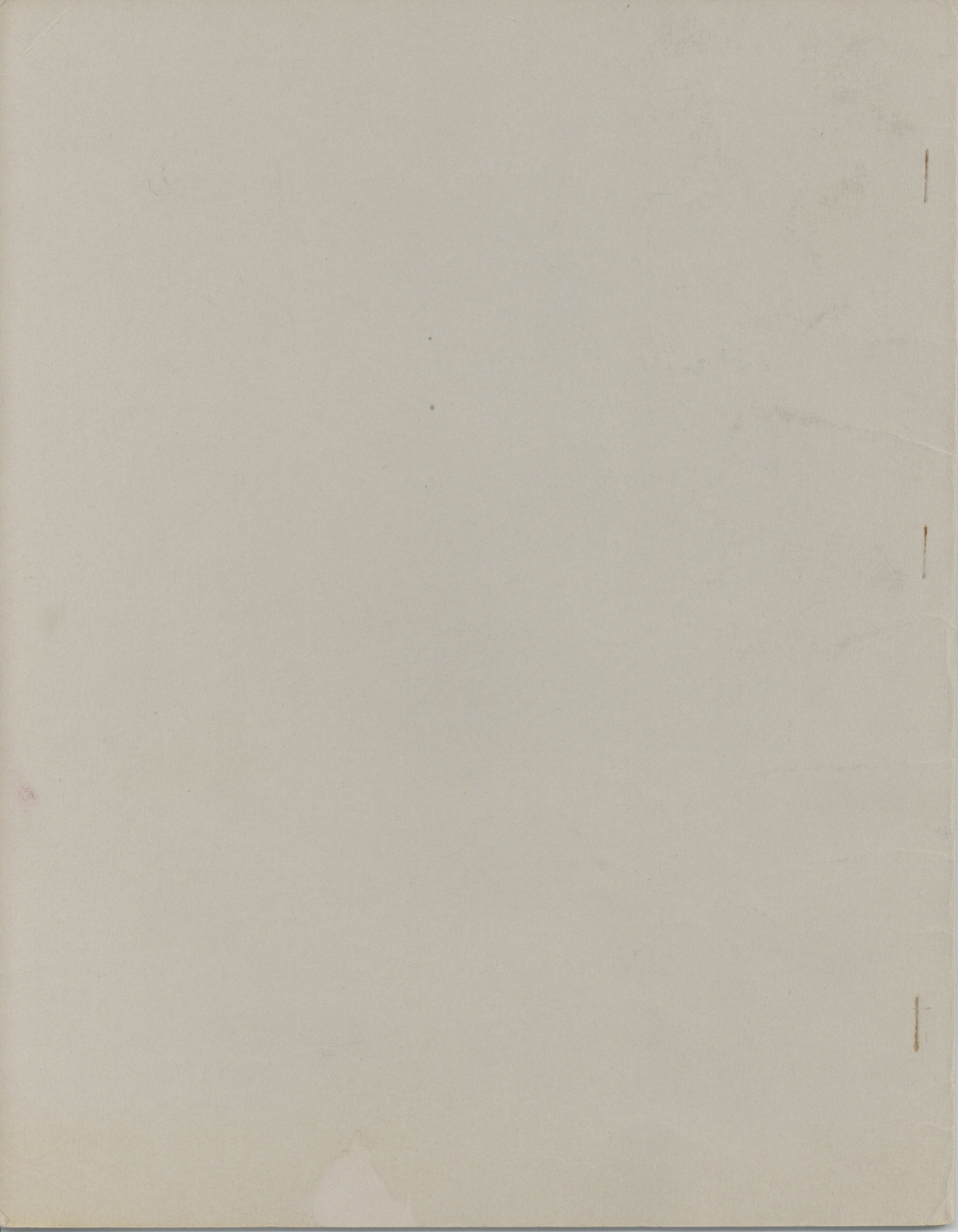


The Early History
of
Duke Methodist Episcopal Church South

DUKE, NORTH CAROLINA

Name changed to Erwin November 20 1926

E. S. Yarbrough



THE EARLY HISTORY

OF

DUKE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH SOUTH

DUKE, N. C.

The name was changed to Erwin
November 10th 1926, by the
North Carolina Annual Conference
meeting at Durham, N. C.

Compiled and read

by

E. S. Yarbrough
February 15, 1954
at The Golden Anniversary
of the founding of the
church.

It seems appropriate that in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Duke Methodist Episcopal Church South that some one should give a few of the historical facts. This has fallen to my lot.

The history of any church is far from complete without giving something of it's finances, something of it's value to the community, and something of the spiritual values of it's membership. All of these factors are so closely related that one cannot be mentioned to the exclusion of the others. This brings a difficulty on the party attempting to write the history, because there are so many people involved, as well as so many interests that some are of necessity overlooked, and often these persons not mentioned feel neglected. Fifty years have passed since this church was established and the writer is more than seventy years of age, and consequently his memory is not perfect and he greatly fears that items and names will be omitted that should be mentioned, and he here asks forgiveness for any apparent omissions. He should like to mention every person who had any part in the establishment and promotion of the church and Sunday School, but this will be impossible. So, please remember that his heart is right but his memory may be bad.

This paper covers the period from August 15, 1902 to May 1920. On the latter date, owing to my moving from Duke to enter business for myself, my membership was transferred and my membership on your board of trustees and stewards as well as superintendent of the Sunday School was placed in the hands of other members of your church.

The beginning of the town of Duke really started August 15, 1902. On that date Frank P. Tate, civil engineer in charge, brought me from Duns to a spot in front of where your bank now stands, and said "Mr. Yarbrough, here is where we are going to build the mill." At that time the land was covered with the prettiest forest of long leaf virgin pine that I have ever seen. Very soon we were converting this forest into dwellings and laying the foundations for the mill buildings.

Early in 1903 a few of the dwellings were finished and people began moving in, seeking work of any kind, hoping later to secure jobs in the mill. In the spring of this year, 1903, a union Sunday School was organized. A few months later the Baptist withdrew and started a Sunday School of their own. This took a large number from the enrollment of the union School.

When we started building here the place had no name and we began calling it Erwin in honor of Mr. W. A. Erwin who at that time was at the head of the mills. But, when the Government wanted a post office here and asked for a name the officials of the mill decided to honor the Duke family who were largely responsible for the mills coming here, and named the town Duke. Therefore the church was called the Duke Methodist Church. Later, when the Dukes endowed Trinity College heavily and changed the name to Duke University, it was decided to drop the name of Duke here and change the name to Erwin. The Annual Conference meeting in Durham on November 10, 1926 changed the name of your church to Erwin.

The North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South soon took notice of the growth of the town which was then called Duke, and at it's annual meeting in Goldsboro on November 30, 1903 formed a circuit called the Duke Mission composed of five churches viz:

Benson, Angier, Elevation, Pleasant Plains, and Duke. There were only two church buildings on the charge. One at Benson and one at Pleasant Plains.

Early in the year of 1904 the Methodist, eleven in number, withdrew from the union Sunday School and on February 6th organized the Duke Methodist Church and the Duke Methodist Sunday School. Elizabeth Womble was named organist and secretary. The first quarterly conference of the Duke Mission which was held on February 20, 1904 at Benson, N. C. with Rev. J. B. Hurlay, presiding elder, and Rev. W. A. Forbes, pastor in charge, recognized and confirmed these organizations and elected J. J. Womble steward of the church and E. S. Yarbrough superintendent of the Sunday School. Of the eleven members of this new church, the Womble family furnished four, J. J. Womble, Mrs. Ida Womble, his wife, and Elisabeth and Cora his two daughters.

The first sermon of the Duke Church was preached on February 27, 1904, by Rev. W. A. Forbes, in the picker room of the Number Two mills. Two boxes of electric light fixtures were properly arranged for the pulpit. From then until the summer of 1905 services for both church and Sunday School were held in a dwelling near the present Baptist Church.

The quarterly conference on May 21, 1904 elected J. J. Womble and E. S. Yarbrough as trustees and members of a building committee for the proposed church at Duke. In the summer of 1904 the actual work was started on the building of this, your church. The Bright Jewels Society aided by subscriptions raised \$516.47. On September 10th The Erwin Cotton Mills Company sent a check for \$100.00 and a little later Mr. B. N. Duke sent a check for \$500.00.

By the end of the year the building was up with the roof on and the doors and windows in place. The Erwin Cotton Mills Company had given us the lot 100 feet square but the deed was not made until May 20, 1907 when the property was deeded to W. M. Crawford, W. P. Holt, R. H. Knight, E. R. Thomas and E. S. Yarbrough, Trustees of The Methodist Episcopal Church South at Duke, Harnett County, North Carolina. The deed was filed for registration on August 15, 1907 and recorded in book 169, page 156, in the office of the Register of Deeds of Harnett County at Lillington.

The Annual Conference met at Henderson on November 30, 1904 and Rev. W. A. Forbes reported five churches with a total membership of 142 and receipts of \$147.00 for his salary. On November 11, 1904 E. S. Yarbrough was elected to the board of stewards and attended the annual conference at Henderson to ask the mission board for help in paying the minister's salary. The board granted \$200.00 for this purpose for 1905.

On May 27, 1905 R. H. Knight was elected to the board of trustees in the place of J. J. Womble, who with his family moved from Duke. On the same date Dr. W. P. Holt was elected to the board of stewards and on November 28th the name of W. M. Crawford appears on the board.

The first services held in the church building were in September 1905.

At the first quarterly meeting of 1906 which was held at Duke January 27th. The board of trustees was enlarged and the following were made members: R. H. Knight, E. S. Yarbrough, W. M. Crawford, W. P. Holt and S. N. Betts. At the fourth quarterly

conference held on October 6th of the same year the name of E. R. Thomas was added.

By this time the church and Sunday School were well organized and doing splendid work. Our minister had to give a great deal of time to the other four churches and we missed him greatly. As our membership increased we saw the need of a full time minister so we asked Angier to join in and raise enough money between us so that we could have the pastor just for the two churches. Angier agreed and we raised our pastor's salary and succeeded in getting the mill owners to give us assistance along this line. We pushed our cause and the annual conference of 1910 made the change and the name was Duke station and no longer a mission. Angier was given one Sunday and Duke the rest of the time. The minister continued to live at Duke.

Two grandmothers told me recently, while talking with them about the early days of Duke Church, to be sure to mention the Christmas tree which we had at Christmas time in 1907. They said, "It was the prettiest Christmas tree that we ever saw and the church was never decorated more in keeping with the Christmas time." They had helped with the decorations and the tree and were right. It was a great occasion for the church and the folks talked about it for a long time. Each year thereafter they asked for another Christmas tree. It was remarkable what an influence this tree had on the increase of membership in our Sunday School.

The board of stewards and trustees working together spent much time in building up a strong organization for both the church and the Sunday School. It is now interesting to read some of the reports of the ministers to the quarterly conference. They speak of the interest-

ing and excellent organizations. In 1912 our Sunday School became a standard school. It met all of the requirements of the Sunday School board of the annual conference. There were only three such schools in the entire state. Our Sunday School was really the church at work and through it the majority of the new members were brought into the church. September 13, 1913 Rev. Frank Culbreth reporting to the quarterly conference stated: "Our Sunday School at Duke is well organized and is one of the most interesting schools that I have ever attended." In making a similar report on March 7, 1914 he said, "The Sunday School at Duke is well organized and as well managed as any Sunday School that I know anything about. It has all of the departments required in the standard of excellence of our church and is therefore a standard school. We not only have the departments, but are working through them and find the results to be very satisfactory."

Many efforts were put forth to increase our membership in the Sunday School. You might call them drives and under such occasions our membership would increase, but soon the attendance would drop back to almost normal. These drives had a tendency to take pupils from other Sunday Schools and we did not think it quite right. Therefore, we did not look with great favor on membership drives. The last I remember was in 1918 and we called it "Over the top". Our enrollment was 180 and we wanted it doubled. It did, but soon dwindled to the faithful ones.

In the very first years of Duke it was found that members of the church, not only of the Methodist Church, but of any church made better citizens, and better workers in whatever calling they were engaged. The mill owners were aware of this fact and threw their

influence toward the churches. When a good worker in the mill was singled out for some special record it was always found that he was a member of one of the churches. In those days people who worked in mills did not mind moving from one town to another and of course this was always a loss to the mill and to the family moving. For many reasons our church seemed to get a strong hold on it's members and we found that the movement from place to place among our membership was at a minimum. Many heads of families have come to me stating that they had good offers from another town and were thinking about moving but they just could not give up our church.

Mr. W. A. Erwin, in those days head of the mills, came to Duke often and always asked about the progress of our church and at times would ask me to take him to our prayer meeting on Wednesday nights. He was much interested in the welfare of the church and our ministers.

Mr. B. N. Duke came with others on a visit to Duke in 1906 and asked me to take him to see the church. He had contributed a total of \$1,000.00 towards the building fund. He noticed that the inside of the church had not been painted and this seemed to worry him and he questioned me as to why it was not painted. Finally I had to tell him that we just did not have the money. He brought the subject up at lunch that day and asked me what it would cost to do the painting and I told him \$155.00. There were eleven visitors at the table, all of whom had come with the Dukos for the visit. Mr. Duke asked me to get a pencil and paper. Then he called the names and said, "Put down Buck \$25.00, that was his brother J. B. Duke; put down Bill Erwin \$10.00; Jim Southgate \$10.00; Billy O'Brian \$10.00 and thus he

went round the table and when he had finished we still lacked \$15.00. "Put Buck down \$40.00 and that will paint your church inside." Next week checks amounting to \$155.00 came and our church was soon painted inside. It was Mr. B. N. Duke who gave us \$100.00 annually for several years when the church was changed from a mission to a station. Of course the will gave us a home for the pastor from the beginning rent free. These good folks seemed always to keep in close touch with what our churches were doing. It was a wonder to me how well they kept posted and how generously they responded to our needs.

Finances play a big part in any organization and the church is no exception. In the very beginning of the Duke Church the officials decided to handle all affairs pertaining to finances and let the minister devote his full time and attention to the spiritual welfare and work. From the very first the church treasurer was instructed to tell the minister that he need not worry about finances. That his salary would be paid monthly and that all conference collections would be paid long before he was ready to leave for conference. Furthermore should any extra calls come for money he should turn them over to the board and it would see that the necessary amount would be raised. In checking the records it was found that there had not been a single year that the pastor's salary was not paid in full and many times over paid and all conference collections were likewise paid in full. Our ministers were much pleased with this action and often stated that it was a great relief not to be worried about finances and that it gave them a great deal more time to handle the spiritual life of the church.. Also, that it was a great relief not to have to mention money while in the pulpit. The good effect of this was reflected in the lives of the church members.

Time after time things happened to indicate that the spiritual status of the church was excellent. Of course this showed in the individual members. It is well to mention one or two instances. W. K. Crawford, one of the outstanding stewards, and whose son Herbert, made a wonderful secretary for many years, was asked how he could raise church money so easily. He replied, "I never let a day go by that I do not say something to some one about his soul's salvation and his spiritual life. This keeps his heart right, and when his heart is right there is no difficulty in collecting money. Always put the spiritual side above the money problems."

On another occasion our venerable friend and then member of the board of stewards, D. W. P. Holt told me that always immediately after attending a mother bringing a child into the world he got down on his knees and thanked God for the safe delivery. On another occasion Ed Thomas was stricken with Pneumonia and in those days this was almost always fatal. Dr. Holt had done all that he could in a medical way and then went to our minister and said, "Brother Brown, Ed Thomas is seriously ill and I have done all that I can for him and unless God intervenes he will die. Please go out into the woods and get down on your knees and pray for him." Ed Thomas got well and is with us today.

One of our revivals was approaching and we selected what we thought to be twelve of the most spiritual men in our church and decided to hold a secret prayer meeting each night for twelve nights just preceding the revival. Each person was to have charge of the service one night. The last night was set apart for spiritual testimonies. These testimonies revealed a wonderful manifestation of the Christain spirit. God was

with us and we felt his presence. Young Will Stephens was the last to speak. He was a thoroughly consecrated christian and when he rose to speak, stood for a minute by the organ in silence. His face was radiant and when he spoke his voice was that of determination. He preached the biggest sermon in the fewest words that I have ever heard. He was emphatic in both manner and words as he said, "I can't speak for Jesus, but I can stand up for Him." Will sat down. No one spoke. We felt nearer the Upper Room than ever before. Frank Wilson rose and started singing "Stand Up For Jesus". The song was over. The benediction pronounced. Every one left quietly except for a "good night". The next day our minister Rev. Frank Culbreth, who knew nothing of the prayer service, for we did not tell him or our wives that we were holding the services, came to me and said, "there is something in the air that tells me that we are going to have the best revival that we have ever had. I do not know what it is but I just feel it." We did have the best meeting that we had ever held and when the doors of the church were opened, for new members, our membership was increased by fifty percent, and some went to other churches. Will Stephens is now the leading man in his church and community up in the Sand Hills of North Carolina. These are just some instances of the revelation of the spiritual life of the church members and many more could be easily related.

This christian spirit developed in the early days of your church was, and still is, felt in your community and the seed sown in those days have sprung up and given a wonderful harvest for good. This harvest is still growing as the years go by. Some of the children and grandchildren of those good members are still in your church playing a big part in the organization and their influence is for the best in life.

Strong young men have entered the business field here and elsewhere and are exerting a christian influence in the operation of their particular business. Others have entered the armed services and where ever their lots have carried them are letting their religion be felt among their associates. Young women have married and moved to other parts of the country and the training that they received in your church and Sunday School is still making them outstanding leaders in their communities. Here I would like to mention two women as illustrations. Lucy Williams married Clarence Poe and moved to West Durham. Edna Abernethy moved to East Durham and married Murphy Boyd. Lucy is now a real leader among the women of her church and civic life in her community and Edna is doing a similar good work and is an outstanding woman in East Durham. Both have brought up families who are following in their footsteps. Both of these women look with pride upon the training received here in your church. Many others have done likewise and could be mentioned with pride but these are enough to give you an insight into what early religious training will do.

Music played a wonderful part in the life of your early church. Good music is almost as important as is a good sermon. Sermons are often preached through music. Music stirs the soul. Our church had organists and choir directors who knew how to select and present songs and hymns that gave enthusiasm and purpose to the services. One outstanding characteristic was their faithfulness in the performance of their duty. As stated before, Elizabeth Womble was the first organist for both church and Sunday School. Others, and they may not be

mentioned in the order in which they served, and some may have served who are not mentioned were as follows: Rosa Thompson, Rosa Thomas, Emma Ivey, Mrs. Frank Culbreth, Louise Goddy and Mrs. Elisabeth Holt. For many years Frank Wilson directed the choir. He resigned in 1916 but returned and resumed his good work in 1922. Joseph Core was director during this period. Both did excellent work. Will Jolly and Frank Wilson were good with their cornets and for a long while played in our choir. Joseph Core was a specialist in arranging quartets, both male and mixed and then had them do wonderful work.

One other service connected with your early church was a Tuesday night prayer service for men only. The attendance was good and the meetings developed into real experience gatherings in which practically all took part. References are made in the quarterly conference records as to the good attendance and the participation in the programs of these services, and as to their value in developing the spiritual life of the men of the congregation.

Ministers who served this church from it's organization to 1920 were:

1. Rev. W. A. Forbes 1903-1904
2. Rev. J. M. Daniels 1905-1908
3. Rev. W. C. Martin 1909-1910
4. Rev. Frank Culbreth 1911-1914
5. Rev. M. A. Osborne 1915
6. Rev. W. L. Maness 1916-1917
7. Rev. W. E. Brown 1918
8. Rev. R. F. Taylor 1919
9. Rev. N. M. McDonald 1920

So your church was organized on February 6, 1904 with eleven members and has grown steadily to it's present membership. At all times it has been a leading religious organization of the entire community and has shed it's influence in many other places in the state and nation. It's members have been outstanding in their spiritual lives, working members and active in civic life, and especially excellent in training their own children. You have always had a fine board of trustees and stewards and your pastors have been unsurpassed for their integrity and faithful services.

"I love thy kingdom Lord,
The house of thine abode
The church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood."

May God bluss you, and OUR CHURCH.

