

HISTORY

— of —

Little River Presbyterian Church HURDLE MILLS, N. C.



Read by Miss Madelaine Hall Latta
At Meeting of Orange Presbytery July 14, 1942

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History of Little River Presbyterian Church

Toward the close of the Seventeenth century, Scotch people, ever zealous for the freedom of body, mind, and spirit, finding the old regime of their homeland encroaching upon their religious principles, came to America that they might work out their own salvation with fear and trembling in the sight of God, but without fear of any man. About 1738 or 1739, these people settled along the Cape Fear, Black, Tar, Haw, Little, Flat, and Eno Rivers. They at once built "meeting-houses" and services were held by members of the communities. Many years passed before they had settled ministers and organized churches. The religious needs of these people were met partially by missionaries sent from Philadelphia and New Jersey, where there were already large and rapidly growing Scotch-Irish settlements. While we are unable to trace in detail the movements of the first missionary, there is no uncertainty as to the movements of the next missionary, Hugh McAden, who was sent on an extended missionary tour through Virginia and North Carolina, in 1755.

Happily we have a full and interesting journal, which has been preserved almost in its entirety, and which is the most valuable document that has come down to us from those early days, and which faithfully records the activities of young McAden, and informs us that he traveled through the Valley of Virginia across the Blue Ridge, the Dan River, and, on July 29, 1755, he entered North Carolina. He traveled on horseback and preached as he went.

On the second Sabbath of August, 1775, Mr. McAden preached to the Eno congregation. While there he lodged at the home of John Anderson.

This extract from the history of Eno Church, most of which is the common history of all old Presbyterian churches of this section of North Carolina, brings us to the period when Little River Church was organized.

Services were probably held in the community as early as 1755. Though we know little of the circumstances surrounding the organization, we are told by Dr. D. I. Craig, who was stated clerk of the Synod of North Carolina for 25 years, and stated clerk of Orange Presbytery for 30 years, and who wrote a historical sketch of the Presbytery, that Little River Church was organized in 1761 by John Wright. Three historical sketches written within the first century of the church's existence fix the date of organization as 1760 or 1761. Like most of the old Presbyterian churches of North Carolina, it took its name from the nearby river.

For the first four years of its life, Little River had neither a pastor nor a meeting house for worship. It was served by visiting missionaries, and worshiped in the homes of the congregation, or in the open. One of the sketches says that the country was thinly settled and the heads of families were generally Presbyterian, some Scotch and some Irish.

Foote's sketches of North Carolina tell us that Orange County was set off from Bladen in 1751. Thus we see that Little River Church is just 10 years younger than Orange County.

Some of the charter members were James Murdock and his wife, Joseph Allison, John Hall and his wife, Jean Deal, and William Deal, father of Jean Deal.

In the year 1765, Hawfields, Eno, and Little River churches united in presenting to Hanover Presbytery (Orange Presbytery had not yet been organized) a call for the pastoral services of Rev. Henry Patillo. Rev. Patillo accepted the call and became the first pastor of these old churches, which are the mothers of other churches in this section.

After Mr. Patillo came to this field, the congregation was called to meet at this site which was given by Mr. William Murdock. This land is part of a parcel of land deeded to James Murdock by the Earl of Granville in 1700. The Earl of Granville was one of the Eight Lords Proprietors to whom King Charles II of England granted what is now North and South Carolina. William Murdock gave this land to the church.

When the people came together they knelt down and prayed to God for His blessing and guidance, then Mr. Patillo rose up, picked up an axe and said: "In the name of God I commence the work." He then cut down a sapling where the first and second church buildings stood. The foregoing sentences are taken from a sketch written in 1876. The author is unknown. The first building stood north-east of the present site and was of logs. The logs were hewn with the broadaxe which is now the property of Miss Mary Hall of Durham, whose grandfather was an elder in the church for fifty years. The second building was a frame structure built upon the foundation of the old log church.

While pastor of this church Rev. Patillo became one of the organizers of the Orange Presbytery, now the oldest existing presbytery in the Southern Assembly. The first meeting of Orange Presbytery was held at Hawfields church, then in Orange County, on Sept. 5, 1770. Mr. Patillo preached the opening sermon.

Mr. Patillo left here in 1774, and died in 1801.

One of the sketches mentions the following preachers as having preached here in the next few years: Roberson, McMullen, McGready, and Frazier. However, Dr. Craig's record gives Rev. John Debow as the second pastor. Mr. Debow came from Brunswick Presbytery and began his work in this section about 1775. Under his ministry there was a revival of religion and a goodly number were added to these churches. In September, 1783, he died at the early age of 38. Tradition says that he was a chaplain in the Revolutionary war and died of a disease contracted in camp. His remains lie buried in Hawfield cemetery.

The next regular pastor to remain with the churches for a time was the Rev. Jacob Lake. He was a brother-in-law of Rev. John Debow. During Mr. Lake's ministry Cross Roads was organized (1792). Hawfields and Cross Roads then became a pastorate and continued such for many years.

The next pastor was Rev. James Bowman. In the great revival of 1802 and onwards he gathered many into the churches.

During the year 1802 the first camp meeting in the South

was held at Hawfields Church. So great was the blessing received that the custom was extensively practiced by the churches of this section for some years. Such camp meetings were held at Little River, sometimes lasting several days. The pulpit was a double oak tree which stood on the left of the path toward the spring and across the present road from the church.

Samuel Paisley was the next pastor. We find the date of his coming in one place as 1812, and another as 1816. One writer says he was pastor for 22 years. Of one thing we are sure, he moderated the first session meeting recorded in the oldest session book which has come down to us. This meeting was held on December 6, 1822. There were six additions to the church on profession of faith at this meeting. One of them was John Neely, for many years an honored elder in this church. Another was David Dickey, a licensed, but not ordained minister of Orange Presbytery for many years. This may seem strange to us that this was during a camp meeting when the snow was several inches deep. However, the writer who tells us this says we need not be surprised when we learn that the preachers present for this camp meeting were the Reverends Samuel Paisley, Ezekiel Currie, John Pickard, and William Paisley, who were men mighty in the Scriptures and full of the Holy Ghost.

While pastor of this church, Mr. Paisley, apparently represented the Presbytery of Orange in the 1830 meeting of the General Assembly in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mrs. A. A. Ellis, of Cedar Grove, North Carolina, has in her possession a letter written from Philadelphia by Mr. Paisley to Mrs. Paisley. Mr. Paisley moved to Moore County in 1834. During that year Little River had two near neighbors born. They were Fairfield and Mars Hill. When Mr. Paisley died in 1863, he was brought to old Eno cemetery for burial.

The same year Mr. Paisley left, Rev. Daniel G. Doak was called to Little River. He was a man of unusual zeal and power, and devoted much time to pastoral visitation. Many members, 78 in number, were added to the church through his instrumentality in a pastorate of 6 years. In 1835, 50 persons were added to the church. There was a camp meeting in August and another meeting in the fall. Mr. Doak left here in 1840.

Rev. David Dickey and Rev. William E. Sutton served the church for about two years each.

In 1846 Rev. Archibald Currie, father of Rev. James L. Currie, became pastor and served the church for ten years. The church was edified and grew in numbers during his pastorate.

Next Rev. Thomas U. Faucette took charge of this congregation. He had often preached here at Spring and Fall Communion. In the fall of 1856 a camp meeting was held. One of the historians describes the proceeding of this camp meeting as follows: "The order of religious services on this occasion were as follows: family worship at sunrise, which consisted in reading the Bible, singing and prayer; social prayer meeting at 9:00 a. m. in the church, in which there was reading, singing and praying together with short addresses and exhortations; regular public worship at eleven o'clock; and intermission of one hour and then another service. The afternoons were spent in attending to necessary business, friendly and religious conversations, and in pri-

vate and concert prayers for special blessings. There were services again at night. The social and religious interests and benefits of these frequent services were felt to be very great. The different families mingling together formed attachments and friendships which were very pleasant then and afterwards; and many souls were brought out of darkness into the marvelous light and liberty of the gospel. As evidence fifty additions were made to the church—40 whites and 10 colored.”

The ministers assisting Mr. Faucette were Reverends Thomas Lynch, Anderson G. Hughes and S. A. Stanfield.

Another season of refreshing was enjoyed by the church in 1860. During this year there were 32 additions. The whole number received into the church from 1856-1872, Mr. Faucette's pastorate, was 165. Of this large number about 20 were heads of families. And not more than five were more than 60 years of age. The great majority were added to the Lord while young.

Rev. James H. Fitzgerald began his ministry in August 1873 and continued until April 1876.

In June 1876, Rev. James L. Currie became pastor. He had been in this congregation as a boy, being the son of Rev. Archibald Currie. He was the father of Professor Archibald Currie, of the Davidson College Faculty, and of Rev. Thomas K. Currie, Director of Religious Education of the Synod of Virginia.

In April 1889, Rev. W. F. Wilhelm became pastor and continued until about September 1893. It was during his pastorate that the present church building was erected. This is the third building. In the fall of 1893 Mr. Wilhelm died in the manse in Hillsboro after eight weeks of illness with typhoid fever. He is buried near the front door of the Hillsboro Presbyterian Church. Mrs. Wilhelm went to her relatives in Texas and lost her life in the Galveston Flood. At the last session meeting Mr. Wilhelm moderated at Little River, there was received into the membership of this church on profession of faith Numa R. Claytor, now pastor of the Milton group of churches in Caswell County.

In 1894, Dr. H. S. Bradshaw began his work here and continued until December 1899. Dr. Bradshaw was for a number of years pastor of the Hillsboro Church.

During the next five years, 1900-1905, the church was supplied by Reverends J.H. Hammett, L. M. Kerschner, J. W. Goodman, and others.

In 1905, Rev. C. M. Arrowood, who came from the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church of Burlington, accepted a call to this church. While pastor of this church he taught in the Caldwell Institute, a school which was for many years a power for good in this community. Mr. Arrowood died at the manse at Caldwell November 24, 1909.

In 1910, W. S. Wilhelm was called to be pastor and continued his work here until 1920 when he was forced to resign on account of ill health. He died in the State Sanatorium in 1927. While he was a quiet, unassuming man, yet he left with this people the memory of a deeply consecrated life.

Mr. Wilhelm was succeeded by Rev. Robert E. Henderlite in 1920. He continued his ministry here for four years. As Dr. James H. Henderlite, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of

Gastonia, said: "Robert was the best Christian I ever knew." He was a scholar of note. King College, his Alma Mater, honored him with the Degree of Doctor of Divinity. He died at Jackson Springs, North Carolina, January 1929. During Rev. Henderlite's pastorate, in the fall of 1923, Presbytery met with us.

Rev. C. D. Whiteley served the church as Stated Supply for one year, 1925.

On the fourth Sunday of April 1926, a son of Hawfields Church and a licentiate of Orange Presbytery, J. W. Mann, began his ministry in this church. On October 26 of that same year he was ordained by Orange Presbytery, and in the following March was installed as pastor. During his pastorate of 15 years three outstanding accomplishments will remain as a lasting tribute to him and his good wife. First, through his patient efforts the church membership became more conscious of its duty as good stewards. Our gifts have increased, tithing is being practiced more and more, and this in turn is resulting in deeper consecration. Second, during his labors with us there was a substantial growth in the program of the women's work—and third, the entire church was made aware of the importance of its young people.

We have no record of the organized women's work of the church back of the past few years, though we know that some organized women's work has been done in the past. We have at present a Women's Auxiliary composed of 3 active circles with a total enrollment of 50 women. We are beginning to see some of the splendid results of women working, praying, and studying together as auxiliary. We also have a Young People's Organization, meeting twice each month. Our greatest material need at present is equipment for Sunday School and Young People's work.

In recording the historical events of this church, it seemed best to group them around the pastors and supplies. However we would not forget the men who have served the church as ruling elders and deacons. The absence of the early sessional records prevents us from having a complete list of the elders of the church. The first elders were John Hall and John Murdock. After them Joseph Allison, a Mr. McCulloch, and William Woods. We have a record of 35 other elders down to the present Session. The present Session is composed of the following elders: Edgar Carden, J. Edmund Latta, Toy V. Walker, W. Nelson Wilkerson. J. E. Latta is a descendant of William Woods, one of the earliest elders and seems to be the fifth generation elder of William Woods. Mr. Latta, Clerk of the present Session, represented Orange Presbytery at the 1932 Meeting of the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church held at Montreat in May 1932.

While the record of elders is not complete the record of deacons is. For the first 99 years of its existence Little River Church did not have any deacons. The first deacons were ordained on June 3, 1860, one year before the Civil War began. It was one year before the Southern Presbyterian Church came into being as a separate organization. The names of the first deacons are as follows: James Allison, Sam H. Jordan, William Doak Woods, John W. Woods, Thomas Wilson, Charles Wilson, and John Wilkerson. There were nineteen others down to the present ones. They are John A. Woods, John H. McKee, Henry P. Woods, and Thomas Villines. A. B. Latta is the present Treasurer.

There are at present 179 names on the church roll, which includes resident, non-resident, and otherwise inactive members. Practically all of the nearby town and city churches have received members from this church.

The church has sent into the ministry David Dickey, Clem Rogers, and Numa R. Claytor. Perhaps others have gone into the Gospel Ministry.

This 182-year-old organization has worshipped in three buildings. The first was a log building northeast of the present site. The second was a frame structure built upon the foundation of the first. We worship in the third today.

During these recent years, with the spiritual growth of our church, we have not neglected the building in which we worship. Several members have made gifts to the church—some as memorials and some as gifts of love. Among these are the Communion set presented by the Harris family in memory of their mother. Mrs. Fannie McKee presented the church with the song books now in use and the piano. Also Mr. J. W. Miller furnished and installed the new hardwood floor and he has also helped substantially in fitting out our house of worship with new walls and new pews.

From April 1941 to April 1942, we were without a regular pas'or. Rev. Mann left this pastorate in April 1941, after being with us 15 years. In April 1942, Rev. J. S. Cook began his ministry with us.

I have tried to recite a few of the outstanding events in the different stages of the Church's life. May we rededicate ourselves today to the unfinished task which our forefathers began. May this account of the faith of our fathers challenge us to a greater and better service, and move us to become "good stewards of the mysteries of God", and to make Christ and His Church the supreme object of our devotion and loyalty.

