

~~~~~  
*Salem United Methodist Church*  
*Sesquicentennial Celebration*  
1857 - 2007

*Historical Review # VIII*  
~~~~~

Salem Methodist Episcopal Church South 1865-1900

The southern states were hurt badly by the civil war. Fortunately, this area was not adversely affected by battles, but was hurt in spirit and economically by the inflation and disruption of commerce.

Most of the families that attended Salem, after the war, lived on small farms where they made or grew most everything they needed, so life continued on much as it had before and during the war. The soldiers returned home and soon were back at work on their farms.

The few larger farmers in the church, who raised crops for market and had some slaves to assist in this were more affected. A number of the former slaves continued to live in the community and to provide manual labor for area farmers.

In the 1870's the coming of the railroad to nearby Mount Airy brought great opportunities to the entire area. Now, for the first time there was a way to ship crops, lumber and produce to the outside world. The railroad also provided a means of getting finished materials to the outside markets and so furniture, textile, tobacco factories and the granite quarry produced goods to be transported by rail. The coming of these industries produced jobs as well as a great demand for local raw materials such as lumber.

By the late 1900's life had improved somewhat for the families of Salem. Though wages and farm produce were still low, so were cost of things that people of the rural community of Salem might need. A lot of that which was needed still were produced on the farm or locally. Families continued to be large and several generations of family might live in the same home.

Salem Methodist Episcopal Church South, remained a church on a circuit of churches served by one minister. Preaching Sunday's continued to be once a month. Sunday school in the early years was held in the spring, summer and fall, every Sunday, but not during the cold months of winter. By the 1890's Evergreen (year round) Sunday schools were held at Salem and other Methodist churches. Each church had dedicated lay leaders who were key to the church's success. The Sunday school superintendent and dedicated teachers kept the Sunday school going. There would be a card class for the small children in one of the front corners of the church. Each child would be given a small card with a bible picture on the front with a memory verse and on the back a short explanation of the picture and its application to life. In the other front corner would be a class for older youth. In the back left corner would have been the women's class and in the back rear corner would be the men's class. Some of the

early Sunday School superintendents that are remembered were; Murlin Sparger, L. M. Ashby, Andrew Jackson Satterfield, Saint Patterson, John Satterfield and Bud Gwyn.

People would walk to church for miles, while others rode horses or mules and families coming a greater distance would come in wagons with chairs sitting in it or in buggy's.

An exhorter or lay preacher also filled in for the minister. The minister traveled the circuit on horse, gig or buggy. The ministers duties were to preach the word of God, call the unrepentant to repentance, nurture those weak in spirit and body, lead the faithful toward greater faith and Christian love. He was to lead all who would come to Christ, conduct appointed serves of worship, conduct revivals, attend the sick, baptize and conduct Holy Communion, marry those who sought to unite in marriage, conduct funeral services of those who died, and in everything to love everyone.

Additionally, the minister was to fulfill those assignments of the conference including holding quarterly meetings of all the churches, with the fourth quarterly conference being the big one. This conference often resembled a camp meeting of former days when people from all the churches on the circuit would come, camp, stay for several days, have protracted preaching as well as conduct the business of the conference. Often whole families came as well as friends and there might be hundreds who gathered for these conferences.

The white frame church built in 1857 and continued in use until 1923, sit as best as can be determined sit cornered in front the present Sunday school wing, facing Salem Road (now Myers Dr.) as it intersects with Ward's Gap Road. It was constructed by the members of the church. Probably the only things purchased were the window frames and doors. It was covered with locally made shingles, and the inside walls and ceiling were also made of boards. Sometime before or around 1900 a porch was added to the front with steps going up each end of the porch. A lattice screen was on the front of the porch.

Oil Lamps for night meetings were added later. A wood stove set in the center of the church and provided some heat when it was cold. The three windows on each side were raised in the summer time and the two doors were left open for air circulation during the summer months.

In 1894 the first Women's Mission Society was organized with Mrs. Frank Brown serving as President. This was the forerunner of the Woman's Society of Christian Service and today's United Methodist Women. About this same time the Epworth League, was organized for church youth.

Here in this old church, the faithful gathered, worship was held, prayers were lifted and at the alter, sinners sought forgiveness and salvation. Year after year, God's grace and power were proclaimed. Generations came and went, all under the care and love of the little white frame church that stood in this place.