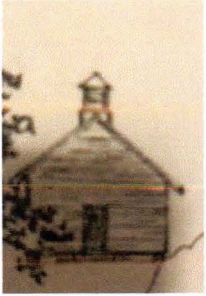


A Brief Overview of the History of Central United Methodist Church



Lebanon CME



Old Methodist



Central Methodist



Central United Methodist

Central United Methodist Church has evolved over the past almost two centuries from the spiritual seed planted by early Methodist circuit riders as they travelled through our area, drawing small groups in individual homes or large revival crowds in outdoor settings. The seed sprouted and grew into established church buildings through the near-impossible dreams, unceasing prayers, heavy labor and monetary support of generations of committed Christians whose names compose its roll. Those members are a patchwork of men and women, young and old, doctors, lawyers, teachers, industrialists, factory and government workers, farmers and laborers who made their homes in and around Mount Airy from late 19th century until today. Early Surry County residents were led to construct the first structure that eventually evolved into modern-day Central.

“Old” **Lebanon** Church, organized as Methodist Episcopal, was a small wooden structure built circa 1829, sitting atop Lebanon hill, bounded by current North Main, Lebanon, and Poplar Streets. Although well within the city now, it was rural at the time. With expansive outdoor grounds for picnics and revivals, it drew larger and larger crowds for preaching. As local population grew and as the wooden structure aged, the membership was led to build two new churches.

The one on South Main Street, now known as “**Old Methodist**” or South Main Methodist, is in Central’s lineage. This church was a two-storied painted plank structure with a hitching post out front, and stood adjacent to the Old Cemetery, about where the old Gilmer Wesleyan Church structure still stands. The congregation grew and thrived there, but by 1892 a minister deemed it old and inferior. Momentum grew to build a larger, more comfortable, more permanent and more impressive church home, this time in the center of town.

Thus **Central Methodist** got its name. And impressive it was, built in pseudo-Gothic architectural design of dark red clay brick with beautiful stained glass windows. The sanctuary was designed to accommodate 450 people with a 250 capacity annex. The congregation began services in the annex on wooden benches in 1897. The expense of the project, just over the projected \$15,000, delayed completion of the grand sanctuary until late 1899. But this congregation thrived and grew, frequently filling the large sunken sanctuary and spilling over into the annex. Throughout the town, the church was a hub of social activity for all ages, in addition to being a center for spiritual growth and inspiration. Many Central families intermarried and produced offspring, growing the congregation from within. Jobs were readily available so sons and daughters grew up and started their own families, remaining in the area and remaining committed to Central. And thus it was until the late 1950s. But as Central grew to bursting at the seams, the town was encroaching on their space. The neighborhood was becoming transitional with textile mills, auto garages and boarding houses as close neighbors. There was no room for expansion. It was surrounded by concrete with no lawn. By now, people lived in the suburbs, not within walking distance to the church. Parking was a serious problem. The building was aging and maintenance was becoming very expensive. The difficult and controversial decision was made to build a new church on the north end of town on spacious property with a sweeping lawn and large trees. This time a more modern design was decided upon, no less grand but totally different from the past. There was no attempt to duplicate the beloved brick church. It was torn down literally to build a parking lot.

But for those that were upset about the decision to move, once they entered the glorious sanctuary in the new **Central United Methodist Church**, their anger subsided. It was a magnificent, spiritually-uplifting presence with seven windows above the altar depicting the seven days of creation. The high vaulted ceiling mimicked an upturned wooden boat reminiscent of Noah's ark. The melodious pipe organ in the raised choir loft at the back of the sanctuary delivered beautiful music at the hands of master musicians. A stained-glass Resurrection Window served as the focal point as congregants exited the sanctuary. There were plenty of classrooms, a large fellowship hall and modern kitchen conducive to many times of fellowship and good food. There was space designated for a Child Care center that would serve the community. With good ministers over the years, Central has continued to be a beacon of light in the community, serving God by serving the community as needs arise.

Central has maintained a strong core of its congregation over the years but, like all churches in the area, has been impacted in recent years by outside influences. The exodus of residents from the area due to the loss of manufacturing in textiles and furniture and the decrease in profitable farming in the area has resulted in a loss of members. The explosion of travel and recreational activities on Sundays cuts into attendance. As this is being written, our sanctuary has not been used for gathering

the congregation in over three months because of the 2020 COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic. Central has responded to this immediate challenge by creating virtual worship that reaches all members via internet outside our church walls.

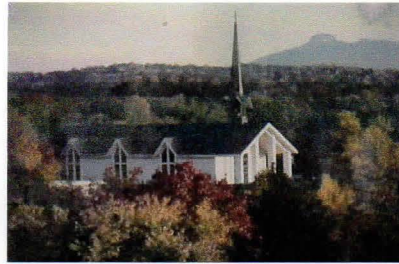
In reviewing the long history of Central United Methodist Church, it is obvious that this church has withstood many challenges in its almost 200 year history. It has persevered through the hardships of early rural Surry County, sending men to the Civil War, 2 World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Middle East. It has pressed on through the Great Depression, recent recessions, the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 and now the Corona Virus Pandemic. Alongside these challenges, it has also been bolstered by many positives like new inventions, advances in medicine and agriculture, the industrial revolution affecting textiles and furniture and the building boom after WWII. In addition Central has been buffeted over the years between multiple Methodist Districts and a myriad of different ministers of varying personalities and capabilities, all while moving between 4 physical church homes. The congregation has accepted each new challenge as a renewed call to be good stewards of God's gifts to us, to be of good service to those who are in need and to spread the Word of God in whatever way we are able. As it move into the future, Central will strive to bear witness to Christ's love as those who have gone before us have done.

Submitted by Arlette Lambert Porter

.....

You are encouraged to read the in-depth history of earlier Central houses of worship ***Central Methodist Church – Its Early Years*** written by Ruth Minnick, renowned historian and long-time member of Central and ***Central's Greatest Move in a Century*** penned by Rev. Earl Brendall, Minister at Central 1957-60, both posted on this same site.

History of Central United Methodist Church



"In the 'Hollow', the region between the Chesnut Ridge, Slate, Saurtown, Pilot and the Blue Ridge Mountains, there was very little religion" according to Methodist history, when Bishop Asbury, that remarkable founder of American Methodism, came

riding through Mount Airy in the late 1700's, Methodist societies began in homes.

From 1831 until 1858 among these pioneer churches was our Lebanon, which stood on

the crest of Lebanon Hill, on North Main Street near the water tank. Then in 1858, with Methodism growing and the population of Mount Airy shifting, the little church

of Lebanon divided. Those members who oriented toward the north formed their own

church, Salem, and those members living toward the south built their new church on

South Main Street, called Old Methodist, Main Street Methodist. The cemetery of this

large white frame church still exists.

From 1894 until 1965, Central grew into a most prominent Methodist congregation.

The Pseudo-Gothic church featured a beautiful imported French stained glass window. This

beautiful round stained glass window of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane now enhances

the chapel at Northern Hospital of Surry County on Rockford Street.

In 1966, the fourth church, 1909 North Main Street, was built, a stately edifice with magnificent French designed stained glass windows and with "Old Central's" bell still

pealing from its tall steeple. The seven magnificent windows known as the Chancel

or

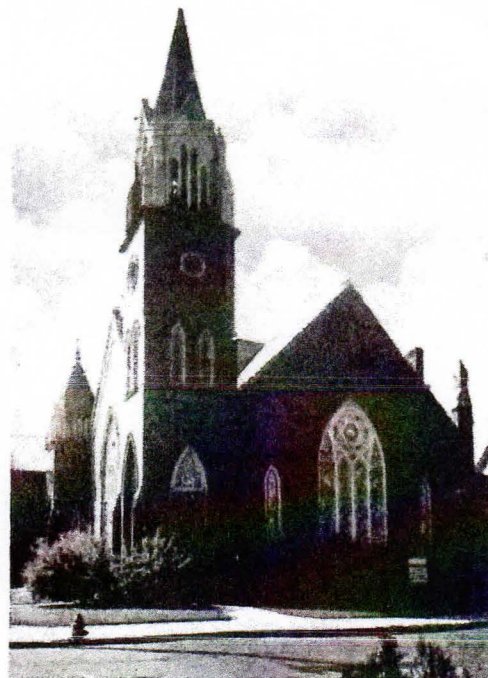
Apse windows tell the story of the six days of creation as found in the Bible, Genesis, chapter 1. The seventh window represents God resting from all His work which he created

Climaxing this masterpiece of art series, there are reflections of the various items in other windows.

Call the church office at 786-8324 for more details.

THROUGH THE YEARS WITH CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

In The Hollows between the "ridges" and the Blue Ridge Mountains there were but few houses, no Mount Airy, and very little religion when Bishop Francis Asbury, that remarkable "founder of American Methodism," came riding through Flower Gap on horseback from the Holston country beyond the mountains down to Clemmons, in present day Forsyth, where Methodism had taken hold. The years were 1788, 1790, and 1792.



Asbury had seeded his territory well as Methodist societies began to spring up, first in homes, then in organized congregations.

The first conference appointed minister who, we have reason to believe, visited The Hollows, as our section was known at that time, was Thomas Waddill, appointed in 1815. From then on Methodism in our vicinity seemed to have grown. In the late 1820's Peter Doub, who later became an eminent Methodist minister, was appointed presiding elder of this district. He must have held meetings and preached because around that time a number of local churches were organized, among them our first congregation, "Old Lebanon," housed in a frame structure which stood on its four granite pillars on Lebanon Hill near where the present water tanks are. Tradition, and it is only tradition, places the building of Lebanon church in 1829.

Lebanon served well this community and the just emerging town of Mount Airy until in 1858 the congregation divided itself into two groups, one going north to found Salem, and one going south to serve Mount Airy.

In 1858 a new church to be placed more in the center of things was built down on South Main Street. It's cemetery still exists. "Old Methodist," or Main Street Methodist, saw the Civil War and the end of slavery, Reconstruction, and the more tranquil years which followed.

In 1894 it again seemed prudent to build a more handsome edifice in the newer central part of town. Thus Central was built, and the old wooden "Old Methodist" building abandoned.

So from 1894 until 1965, Central, in its fine brick building with its beautiful French glass windows

grew into the most powerful church in this part of northwest North Carolina and into one of the most solid in the Western North Carolina Conference.

In 1966 it again seemed expedient to move into a new church nearer to the center of the church population. So our present church came into being just one scant mile from its beginning on Lebanon Hill.

The Methodists, The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal South, The Methodist Church, and now the United Methodist Church, and just as many changes of conferences from the whole of western North Carolina to our present "shoestring" district, our church has gone through them all.

In its earliest years Central had some remarkable ministers, three of whom will be mentioned here: The Reverend Miles Foy, doctor-preacher, converted by Peter Doub in 1829, pastor of Lebanon, server of "Old Methodist," groundbreaker of the then new Central; James Needham, lovingly called Father Needham, local preacher, served of Lebanon, of "Old Methodist," and deliverer of a revival sermon at Central in his ninety-ninth year; and Marcus L. Wood, last pastor of Lebanon and first at "Old Methodist," missionary to China, author of an exhaustive diary now housed at Duke University, without reference to which much of the early history of Central would have remained mostly tradition.

By ELEANOR POWELL
News Woman's Editor

The first church building to be erected in the corporate limits of Mount Airy was the old Lebanon Methodist Church, which stood on the north slope of Lebanon Hill just beyond the city water tanks. The approximate location was on the hillside just above Eckerd Drug Store.

The church, probably built in the 1830's and in active use for about 30 years, was housed in a wood framed structure on four granite pillars.

History records show that Francis Asbury, the remarkable founder of American Methodism, seeded this territory well with Methodist societies in the late 1700's.

Bishop Asbury came through "the Hollows," the region between the "ridges" (Pilot Mountain, Sauratown Mountain, Chestnut Ridge) and the Blue Ridge Mountains on the way to Clemmons. The years were 1788, 1790 and 1792.

The first Conference-appointed minister to serve the Hollows was Thomas Waddill, appointed in 1815. From then on Methodism in the vicinity grew steadily.

In the 1820's Peter Doub, who later became an eminent Methodist minister, was appointed Presiding Elder for this district. He must have held meetings and preached near here, because around that time a number of local Methodist churches were organized.

"Old Lebanon" served the community well but gradually the town of Mount Airy began to shift its population southward. So about 1858 the congregation divided itself into two groups, one going north to found Salem Church, and one going south to better serve Mount Airy.

In 1858 a new building was built on South Main Street (just behind the North Carolina Employment Security Commission office). Its cemetery still exists and is maintained by the City of Mount Airy.

"Old Methodist," as it now called, saw the turbulent Civil War years and the end of slavery, the unsettled years of Reconstruction, and the more tranquil years that followed.

The new church was a large, two-storied, white-planked church with a recessed porch which had in front two fluted columns. At each end of the porch and flush with it were two enclosed stairways which led to the balcony. The balcony extended along the sides and the back, and was

reserved for the colored members and the little white charges who evidently considered it such a privilege to sit with their colored nurses that they gave prominence to it in their conversations.

The steeple was plain, and the old bell which was used there is now, unless recently removed, hanging in the belfry of the Episcopal Church. It was said to have had a "sweet tone" and when pulled by its long rope, it tolled not only for church services, but for the many members who were then to lie in the graveyard — a toll for each year of their lives.

Leading up to this big white church which sat rather far back from Main Street was a graveled driveway with hitching posts along the fenced sides, and which was wide enough for carriages. Lining the driveway were aspens — either a species of the cottonwood or a quaking aspen with silver lined leaves shimmering and shaking in the wind.

Around the sides and in the back and rather far down a gentle incline was the graveyard in which the Allreds, Gilmers, Banners, Foys, Galloways, Browers, Hollingworths, Schaub, Bittings, Davises, Satterfields, Lowerys and others were to lie.

The unpainted sanctuary with its "marbelized" wainscoting was entered from the recessed front porch through two front doors, one for the men and one for the women. There was one middle and two side aisles. The benches were plain, wooden pews with high backs. On the right side sat the women; on the left sat the men. The church was heated by two huge, "pot-bellied" stoves which were halfway down the room on either side.

The pulpit was square and "home-made." An altar rail was in the front. On either side of the pulpit were the "amen" corners with the organ on the right, in front of the choir which sat in the right "amen" corner. The reed organ was "pumped" by a Mr. Doshier whose son, Albert, played the bass horn and whose daughters, Eva and Linda, sang. The organ was played also at one time by Mr. Herbert Lowery, a son of Tom Lowery, a leading steward. The silver communion set with tankard and two silver goblets, dates, 1885, are still to be seen in Central United Methodist Church.

Often accompanying the organ and choir was the shouting and clapping in time, which, old residents said, was usually in noisy evidence. The Methodists, up until the 1900's when they got sophisticated, were "shouting Methodists."

The church on South Main had its ups and downs. And then around 1893 the Rev. H.M. Blair, and some

of the members began to talk up a new church.

And to reinforce the move, a copy of the Yadkin Valley News read, "The Methodists of Mount Airy have long been in need of a larger and handsomer temple of worship. The old church is small and intensely plain and uncomfortable. Many smaller congregations have neater churches than this one on. A community is judged by its church, and Mount Airy has suffered from such judgments, though their justice is not to be questioned. It is with no little pleasure and satisfaction, therefore, that we see the beginning of a church edifice in our midst that will do credit to the thrift of our people and to their hearts and religion. Strangers who visit Mount Airy will no longer be shocked at the little plain building which has heretofore been pointed out to them as the house of worship of one of the strongest congregations in the state.

And so, Central was begun. For about 20 years, the building on South Main remained there. For several years a Sunday school was maintained in the old building. Some of the older residents remember how they used to go to Sunday school at Central in the mornings and to the "Old Methodist" in the afternoon. The building for a time was used by the newly organized Friends Church then it passed into private hands. The church was torn down in 1914.

The town of Mount Airy was growing, and, as in the case of any growing town, the population began to shift. At first there was Lebanon in the northern part of town then Old Methodist at the southern end.

Again came a subtle shift of population, north again but not quite so far. The new Central Methodist was begun in the central part of town on the corner of Dixie and Franklin Streets and on Aug. 20, 1894 the cornerstone was laid. The church was completed by 1899.

"The new church", it was noted in the Yadkin Valley news, was to be "one of the handsomest in the state. The main auditorium will hold 450 and the annex 250 people. The cost of the church completed will be \$12,000 to \$15,000."

And handsome it was to be, this brick structure of pseudo-Gothic architecture and its beautiful stained glass windows and towering spire dominated the skyline for many golden years.

Then in 1966 it again seemed expedient to move into a newer church nearer the center of the shifting church population. Central's present building on North Main Street is admired throughout the Conference as one of the finer examples of modern church design, and its stained

glass windows, designed by French artist Pierre Milous Chartres, are among the finest examples of that art in America today.

Salem Methodist

Salem Methodist Church, an outgrowth of the old camp meetings conducted by circuit riders, is now in its 135th year.

The church is located on Wards Gap Road just across the road from the old camp ground where worshippers used to gather in the early and middle 1800's.

No one knows just when the circuit riders first came to this community. It is believed a Methodist preacher, Isaac Rollins preached along the Yadkin Valley as early as 1776.

By 1800, camp meetings had become popular in this section. A large tent would be pitched and persons would gather from miles around for religious meetings lasting sometimes for weeks.

One such meeting was held at Toast. The camp meeting later moved to the Oak Grove community. And from there it was moved to Salem about 1850.

Within a few years, people in the Salem community realized the need for a permanent church. Finally, in 1857, John R. Patterson deeded property on which to erect a church.

Soon, lumber was sawed and the work begun. The men of the community donated the labor, the women fed the hungry workers.

As the years passed, the congregation outgrew the frame church. Mrs. R.J. Reynolds of Winston-Salem, wife of the tobacco millionaire, furnished money for a new church building in honor of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Z.T. Smith of Mount Airy, who were buried in the church cemetery.

Mallalieu-Jones

Mallalieu-Jones United Methodist Church was founded in 1969 as Mallalieu Temple Methodist Episcopal Church. It was built in 1900 and merged with Jones Temple in 1966 to form Mallalieu-Jones Methodist Church. Located on North South Street, it was rebuilt as Mallalieu-Jones United Methodist Church in 1975.

Francis Asbury

For 44 years Francis Asbury traveled up and down the American seaboard, hardly ever spending any two nights in one place. And during his journey, he came by way of Flower Gap, Piper's and Fancy Gap. He hit Paul's Creek, went down by Stewart's, and then probably joined the Hollow Road, opened in 1762, now roughly Highway 52, veered off through Shoals and Siloam area, on down to Clemmons.

Asbury probably was instrumental in starting Surry's oldest church in

Siloam.

Due to his three visits to Surry, Methodism spread throughout this area. He saw during his lifetime the American Methodist church grow from 1,000 scattered members to over 210,000.