

A

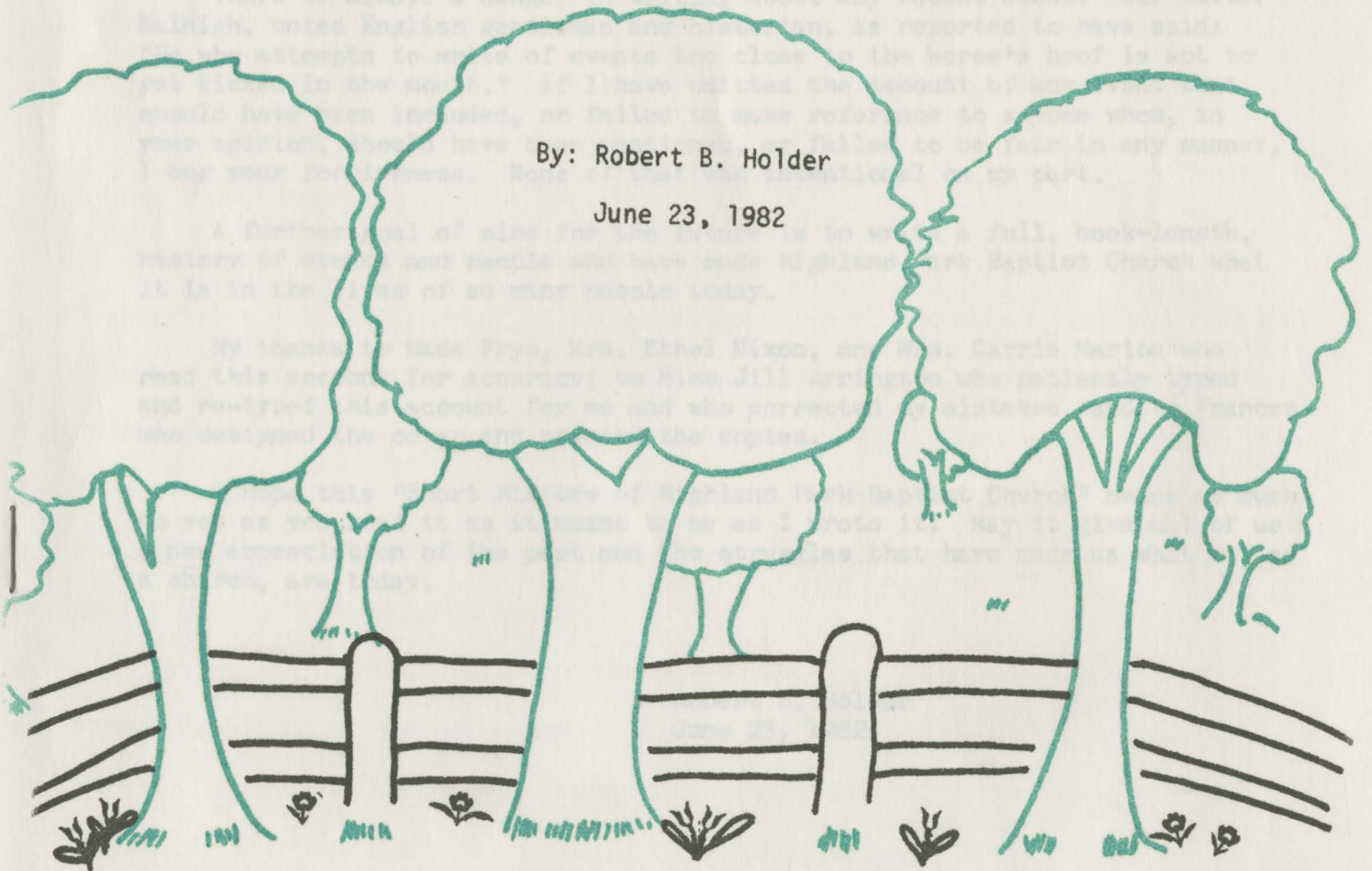
SHORT HISTORY

of

HIGHLAND PARK BAPTIST CHURCH

By: Robert B. Holder

June 23, 1982



PREFACE

It is a difficult assignment for anyone to attempt to write an objective and accurate account of any event. This task becomes an impossibility when the writer has been an active participant in that event.

My purpose in writing this "Short History of Highland Park Baptist Church" has been two-fold: (1) to provide an account that may be printed in the "Surry County History Book" now being compiled, and (2), to provide a somewhat more detailed account of the church's history to church members than has been available.

My goal has been to present accurately all information in a fair and just manner. I have attempted not to be judgmental or critical of anyone or of any action that occurred in the past. In addition, my inclusion of statements about individuals who have contributed to the progress of the church in the past is based simply on my subjective perception of their impact upon events in the history of the church. No doubt others have contributed as much as (or even more than) some whose names have been mentioned.

There is always a danger in writing about any recent event. Sir Walter Raleigh, noted English gentleman and historian, is reported to have said: "He who attempts to write of events too close to the horse's hoof is apt to get kicked in the mouth." If I have omitted the account of any event that should have been included, or failed to make reference to anyone whom, in your opinion, should have been mentioned, or failed to be fair in any manner, I beg your forgiveness. None of that was intentional on my part.

A further goal of mine for the future is to write a full, book-length, history of events and people who have made Highland Park Baptist Church what it is in the lives of so many people today.

My thanks to Wade Frye, Mrs. Ethel Nixon, and Mrs. Carrie Marion who read this account for accuracy; to Miss Jill Arrington who patiently typed and re-typed this account for me and who corrected my mistakes, and to Frances who designed the cover and printed the copies.

I hope this "Short History of Highland Park Baptist Church" means as much to you as you read it as it meant to me as I wrote it. May it give all of us a new appreciation of the past and the struggles that have made us what we, as a church, are today.

Robert B. Holder
June 23, 1982

Page 3

The Highland Park Baptist Church of Mount Airy, North Carolina was organized on the third Sunday of October, 1927. The organization of the church came as a result of a grove meeting conducted by the Rev. Lawrence Phillips in an area between Old Highway 601 (now Forest Drive) and new Highway 601. T and S Motors and the home of Mrs. Tott Carter are near the location of that grove meeting.

The three ordained Baptist Ministers who led in the organizing effort were the Rev. Everett Draughn, the Rev. Lawrence Phillips, and the Rev. Merriman Phillips.

There were twelve charter members: Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Renegar, Mr. and Mrs. R. D. Fletcher, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Gentry, the Rev. Lawrence Phillips, Mr. Emory Nixon, Mr. Brady Coe, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Frye and one unknown. Many others became members of the young church during the next few weeks. There were 42 members when the church was received into the membership of Surry Baptist Association in July, 1928. While there is no officially recognized "Mother" church of Highland Park, many of the early members had been members of Haymore Memorial Baptist Church.

Prior to the erection of the first building, services were held in the home of Mr. "Dock" Overly on Forest Drive.

The first building, a wooden structure 24 feet x 44 feet, was begun on Thanksgiving Day, 1927. Most of the construction work was done by members of the church. A major portion of the building was constructed on Thanksgiving Day. This first church building was erected on a lot 50 feet by 150 feet on Grove Lane, site of the present church sanctuary. The lot cost \$125.00 and the first building and furnishings cost approximately \$600.00. This building served the young church well during its early years of growth.

The early official records of the church were lost when the home of Emory Nixon, Church Clerk, was destroyed by fire in 1940. However, there is a complete record of the Sunday School beginning with January 29, 1928. The Sunday School record for that day shows 120 on roll and 47 in attendance, a tremendous growth from

the twelve charter members of only three months before. By the end of 1928, the Sunday School enrollment had increased to 190 and the attendance on the last Sunday of that year was 122.

The first pastor of the church, the Rev. H. R. Stanley, served the church from 1928 until 1932. The Rev. George Tucker followed him and served until 1938. He was elected pastor again in 1947 but served only one year because of commitments made to other churches in the area. He is the only pastor to have served the church twice. R. D. Fletcher served as the first Sunday School Superintendent but served only for a few months. He was succeeded by B. M. Hardy who served through 1929. Emory Nixon became Sunday School Superintendent in January, 1930, and served until the urgency of the War effort in 1942 led him to the shipyards of Newport News, Virginia. He served as Sunday School Superintendent again from 1946 until his death in 1954. The first three deacons of the young church were Brady Coe, Calvin Frye and R. D. Fletcher. Mr. C. L. Renegar served in several church offices during these early years such as Deacon, Sunday School teacher, Assistant Sunday School Superintendent, Choir Director and Sunday School Superintendent during World War II. He was faithful to the church in many capacities until 1962. Mr. J. C. Rose, Sr., became a member of the church in 1930. He served as Sunday School teacher, Deacon, and loyal supporter of the church and its programs until his death in 1982.

The tremendous growth of the church during those depression years created a great demand for additional space for both Sunday School and worship services. The building could not seat all those who attended. Many of the younger men would lean ladders against the sides of the building and stand on them to observe the worship services through open windows. By May, 1935, there were 236 enrolled in Sunday School with an average attendance of 160.

The church leaders recognized that facilities must be enlarged and improved. In the Spring of 1938, in an act of faith and courage, a decision was made to

construct a new sanctuary with Sunday School rooms in the basement. To ensure that a new building would be constructed, the men of the church met early one evening and began razing the old building. Once begun, this task took only a few short evenings to complete.

During the Summer of 1938, while the new building was being closed in, the members met for worship and Sunday School in a grove at the Southwest corner of Grove Lane and Northridge Street, just a short distance from the present church. Mr. Luther Lawrence unofficially supervised much of the construction work on the new church. The men of the church constructed most of the new sanctuary. George Willard was hired to lay the brick on the outside of the building. As soon as the building was closed-in, it was used for worship services and Sunday School. Despite the fact that many church members were unemployed and the depression was still present, it is said that the new church building was paid for by the time it was completed.

Continued growth of the church was evidenced by the number of baptisms, and attendance at worship and Sunday School. The new sanctuary and other factors filled the membership with enthusiasm and an intense desire for their church to grow. During the twelve months period August, 1938 - July, 1939, 82 were baptized into membership, by far the largest number by any Baptist Church in Surry County for a number of years before or since.

Miss Emma Creed was first elected to teach the "Card Class" in Sunday School in 1937. She served in that capacity continuously until her death in 1974. Every child who grew-up in Highland Park Church during those years bears the imprint of her love and care.

The growth of the church was hampered during the 1940's by the impact of World War II and its aftermath. Many of the young men of the church entered the armed forces. Several families left to work in war industries, primarily in the

shipyards at Newport News. Those who were left at home had the challenge of maintaining the church with less money, fewer people, and an absence of many who had served as leaders since the organization of the church in 1927. Programs and growth suffered under these conditions and the church did not regain its vitality until the late 1940's, when many of those who had moved away returned.

Until 1950, the church was served by a parttime bivocational pastor. While Sunday School met each Sunday, worship services were held only two Sundays each month, usually the first and third Sundays. During some of those early years, services were held on Saturday evenings. In 1950 the decision was made to have services each Sunday. The Rev. C. F. Johnson, who lived in Winston Salem, came for services each Sunday and on Wednesday evenings. While there were services each Sunday, this was still not a full time ministry since the Rev. Johnson was a college student.

In 1950 additional educational space with five classrooms was added at the back of the sanctuary.

In 1952, church leaders believed that it was time to move toward a full time ministry with a pastor on the field. The Rev. W. L. Jenkins was called as pastor. A pastorium was constructed at 1224 Forest Drive. With the new pastor in the pastorium, the church moved forward with a full-time ministry for the first time in its history.

Robert Holder was elected Sunday School Superintendent in 1954 and served in that position for a period of twenty years.

The Rev. Everett Marion came as pastor in 1956 and remained until 1960. The church experienced a period of rapid growth in membership and expansion of facilities under his leadership.

In 1955 the church was located on the original lot, 50 x 150 feet, which was purchased in 1927. During 1955 the church purchased the Raymond Wilson house and

lot (100 x 150 feet) located adjacent to the church on the west side. The cost was \$5,500.00. The house was used immediately for Sunday School facilities. In 1957 the church nearly doubled its property holdings with the purchase of the Ora Taylor property at the corner of Grove Lane and Park Drive at a cost of \$4,000.00. This house was used immediately for an expanding Sunday School.

Church attendance increased in proportion to the expansion of facilities during the pastorate of the Rev. Marion. By 1960 church membership had increased to 363; Sunday School enrollment was 337 with an average attendance of 185. During the four and one-half years of his pastorate at Highland Park, the Rev. Marion baptized 73 into church membership. There was comparable growth in all phases of church life during this period.

In 1962, the Rev. Ray Hamilton came as pastor. His pastorate was to extend for eight years, the longest in the history of the church. Under his leadership the church moved forward in a program of facilities expansion, strengthening of programs and membership development. Additional property was purchased from Roger and Frances Nixon, Billy Slate, Luther Lawrence and Mrs. Etta Nunn on the South and Southwest side of the church extending property holdings to Stewart Drive. This was in preparation for the construction of badly needed educational facilities. In 1966 an educational building, in excess of 10,000 square feet, was constructed at a cost less than \$85,000.00. The building contained modern nursery and kitchen facilities and numerous classrooms well adaptable for Sunday School and other use.

A day care ministry jointly sponsored by the church and Perry Manufacturing Company was begun in November, 1967.

The Rev. Hamilton led the church in a program of membership development and a strengthening of programs. Contributions for the support of the work of the church and missions were the highest in the history of the church to that point.

J. T. Gant, Jr., became an active participant in the total church program upon his return from military service at the close of World War II. He served as Deacon, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, and a member of the Building Committee which constructed the educational building in 1966. His premature death in 1967 had a heavy impact upon the work of the church.

The history of Highland Park Baptist Church during the decade of the "seventies" was a mirror of our total society. The twenty year period of growth in membership and expansion of facilities leveled off and, in some program areas, was marked with a degree of decline. It was true of Baptist churches, and as well as most other religious groups, during the decade that there was turn inward and less of an outward thrust which had been characteristic of the past two decades. Most of the efforts of the church were directed toward maintenance of existing levels of membership and attendance.

Indicative of the kinds of challenges faced by Highland Park Baptist Church during the "seventies" was the experience of having three different pastors - the Rev. William Jeffcoat, Jr., the Rev. Gene Carnell, and Rev. Douglas Williams, each for a period of slightly over two years. Consequently, the church was without a pastor for approximately three of the ten years of the decade.

The interior of the sanctuary was completely renovated in 1973. New pews and stained glass windows were installed. Following tradition, the men of the church did most of the work.

The area of greatest growth by the end of the decade was a new sense of affinity and empathy that developed within the church membership. As a result of shared experiences and concern for the future growth and direction of the church, members began to demonstrate a deep sense of christian love and care for each other.

The Rev. L. M. Schuman became pastor of the church in December, 1980. He brought with him a new enthusiasm for and dedication to ministering to the needs

of the people. The membership responded to his leadership. There was a feeling of optimism as the church entered the decade of the "eighties". There is a renewed desire for church growth and outreach ministry in all areas. The potential exists for this decade to be one of the most fruitful in the history of the church.

During the Spring of 1982, through the generous contribution of a family in the church, a picnic shelter (30 x 80 feet) was constructed. This valuable facility will make possible many additional activities which will enhance the total church program.

The history of Highland Park Baptist Church is not complete. The potential exists for unlimited ministry to people and christian service which will reach well beyond the boundaries of the community and the church membership. The brightest years of the church may be achieved during the decade of the "eighties" as the church dedicates itself with enthusiasm, traditional to Highland Park Church, to meet present and future challenges.