

HISTORY OF CULLOWHEE METHODIST CHURCH

(Organized in 1894)

The Cullowhee Methodist Church was a colony of the Speedwell Church. The Speedwell Church was organized in 1840. Fifty-four years later several members from this church and some from the East La Porte Church formed the Cullowhee organization. The Cullowhee school building was used as their meeting place and the Rev. Wayne Jacobs from the Webster charge was their pastor. The charter members were: Mr. and Mrs. L. J. Smith, Miss Lena Smith (Mrs. Cassius Wallace), Miss Ida Smith, Mr. and Mrs. J. David Coward, Mrs. Anne Bryson, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Bryson and Mr. Vance Bryson from the East La Porte Church; Mrs. David F. Brown and Mrs. Hamilton Brown from the Speedwell Church; Prof. Robert L. Madison from Sylva; Mr. and Mrs. Hardy Bennett and Miss Mattie Bennett from Cashiers. Prof. Robert L. Madison was the Sunday School Superintendent. Prof. Madison, J. David Coward, Hugh Bryson, and L. J. Smith were the first stewards.

There were a number of pastors to follow the Rev. Jacobs, some serving only one year and some two years. The pastors following him were as follows: R. L. Sprinkle, 1895-96; L. P. Bogle, 1897; J. J. Edwards, 1898-99. These pastors filled what was called the Cullowhee Circuit: J. S. Ragan, 1900; E. Meyers, 1901-02; V. L. Marsh, 1903-04; A. R. Bell, 1905; V. E. Edwards, 1906; C. H. Clyde, 1907; J. A. Peeler, 1908-09; B. A. York, 1910, and D. R. Proffitt, 1911.

From a little pamphlet entitled "Webster Circuit, M. E. Church South," published in 1907 by the Journal Publishing Company of Sylva, North Carolina, is this brief information: "C. H. Clyde, P. C., Franklin District, R. M. Taylor, P. E., Western North Carolina Conference, A. W. Wilson, Bishop."

It was in 1912 that the first church building was erected on the site now occupied by the gray stone gymnasium of Western Carolina College. This was a rather large frame structure, having a high ceiling and plain glass windows. One section could be curtained off and used as Sunday School rooms, or for church dinners. This space was seldom needed by the congregation except when revival services were held. There was an elevated rostrum with a choir section on both sides. The church was roomy enough that sometimes a small Sunday School class would be held in different corners or sections of the church. A reed organ was used for years, but was later replaced by a piano. This church was heated by one large stove; and often on cold winter Sundays, Sunday School was held around the stove.

Also in 1912 the Webster Circuit was changed from the Franklin District to the Waynesville District. In that year Dr. L. B. Abernathy was sent to the Webster Circuit. There were six churches in this circuit. In 1913 Dr. Abernathy served only the Cullowhee pastorate and taught in the Cullowhee Normal School. The Rev. D. R. Proffitt filled the pastorate in 1914 and was followed by J. L. Teague, who remained for three years-- 1915, 1916, 1917; then by the Rev. John Cline, 1918; and Rev. Elzie Meyers, 1919, 1920, and 1921. Mr. Myers had eight churches in the Webster Circuit in 1919. In 1920 this was changed to the Webster-Cullowhee Circuit with seven churches. Then in 1922 the Rev. Samuel Hilliard came to what was then set up as the Cullowhee Circuit. This included three churches: Cullowhee, East La Porte and John's Creek. Because of declining health Mr. Hilliard remained in Cullowhee only one year.

He was followed by a young man, the Rev. A. W. Lynch, who remained for four years, 1923 through 1926. This church was then made a station. Owing to the

inconvenience of the pastor's living conditions in Cullowhee, a small parsonage was built very near the church. It was first occupied by the Rev. J. S. Folger in 1927. The Rev. Mark Q. Tuttle (the present District Superintendent) was pastor for four years, 1928 through 1931. Dr. E. C. Widenhouse followed in 1932-33 and the Rev. M. Hardee in 1934.

The next four years, 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938 were years of change and development. Under the capable leadership of the Rev. Cecil G. Hefner a new church and parsonage were built during the conference year of 1935-36. Western Carolina College gave the Cullowhee Methodist Church five thousand dollars for the church property, including the parsonage and in exchange the College deeded the Church a parcel of land situated on Dix Branch, bounded by the Speedwell road and old highway 107. In addition, the College donated the former church building to the Church to be dismantled and removed for whatever purpose it saw fit. Much of the material was utilized in erecting the new parsonage.

The Board of Missions of the Western North Carolina Conference gave five thousand dollars for building the new church and the general Board of Missions and Church Extension gave five thousand dollars. The cost of the church and parsonage amounted to between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars. Therefore, ten thousand dollars or more was raised, some locally and the rest across the conference by Mr. Hefner. There were some anonymous donors whose names were never divulged. Mr. Hefner gives credit, however, to the sacrificial giving and devotion of the Cullowhee Methodists for helping make possible the new structure. This building program came soon after the depression years and was quite an accomplishment for a small community..

Serving on the building committee were: W. E. Bird, Chairman; Ralph Sutton, Treasurer; David Brown, Mrs. Frank Brown, Sr., Mrs. Carrie Bryson, and the pastor. The trustees of the church at this time were R. V. Brown, Frank H. Brown, Sr., W. D. Wike and Mrs. Pauline Bryson. The church was built in ninety working days, which set some kind of record for building.

Mr. H. M. King, architect for the Board of Missions and Church Extension, was the architect for this new and very lovely structure. Miss Catherine Neal, art instructor at Western Carolina College at that time, spent much time with the architect planning the interior of the sanctuary. She planned the Gothic arches and the lighting. Families were given the privilege of buying one of the beautiful stained glass windows in memory of some members of their families. In this way some of the names of the early members of the church are to be seen upon the windows. Visitors from far and near have admired this beautiful church and remarked of its worshipful atmosphere. The church was paid for and subsequently dedicated by Bishop Paul B. Kern, August 24, 1937, in a beautiful service.

Mr. Hefner remained at Cullowhee four years and was followed in 1938 by the Rev. Walter Lee Lanier for a stay of two years. The Rev. McMurray S. Richey came to the Cullowhee Church in 1941 for a four-year tenure. He and Mrs. Richey spent much time with the young people of the church, from the small children through the college group. They had excellent training along this line of work and, working as a team, they were a shining influence.

In the fall of 1945 the Rev. Tom Houts, Jr., came to Cullowhee as pastor. His stay of six years was the longest any one pastor had served this church up to that time. He was also perhaps the youngest man to fill the pulpit at the time he came and was ordained after coming to Cullowhee. Both Mr. and Mrs. Houts were talented musicians, which added much to the services and choir. The Reverend James Allen followed Mr. Houts for the years 1951-52 and 1952-53.

In the fall of 1953 the Rev. Milford Thumm was sent to Cullowhee. Under his dynamic leadership a widening church program was put in order, for at this time came new community members as well as a much larger college student body to be taken care of. With this expansion in enrollment the present facilities were found to be inadequate. Therefore, a movement was started in 1955 to add an educational building and to enlarge the sanctuary.

Although the church membership was small it was full of enthusiasm and determination and plans were laid for expansion. With cash donations and pledges of more than \$30,000 by the membership and matching funds and commitments from Mission Special Giving, ICC Appropriations, Duke Endowment and the Conference Board of Missions a total of approximately \$140,000 was realized. The general contract was awarded to the Jerry Liner Construction Company of Waynesville for \$116,200 and construction was begun in the spring of 1960. Sanctuary and Church School furnishings, Wesley Foundation furnishings for the first floor, and the fee for the architectural firm of Gudger, Baber, and Wood of Ashville brought the total cost to an approximate amount of \$140,000. The original Building Committee named by Quarterly Conference action April 3, 1955 was: A. K. Hinds, Chairman, Charles Stewart, W. E. Bird, Luther Taff, Anne Hammond, Noble Garrett, R. C. Sutton, F. H. Brown, Jr., W. A. Ashbrook and H. E. Battle, Sr. Mrs. Tyree Kyser served as Treasurer.

Not forgetting the contribution of the members and especially that of the Building Committee and Mr. Frank H. Brown Jr., who served as Chairman during the period of actual construction; we must recognize the untiring work and interest of the Rev. Thumm and Mrs. Thumm who spent untold hours of hard work on this their labor of love which will long be remembered as their greatest of many achievements during their eight fruitful years at Cullowhee. It is only fitting that their ministry ended here with the enlargement of all facilities and the creation of a "home away from home" for the many college students over whom Mr. and Mrs. Thumm had watchcare.

It may be of interest to record some of the Dedicatory Special Gifts which were made: The Chancel Window by the Woman's Society of Christian Service in honor of Mrs. Frank H. Brown, Sr.; the stained glass Nave Window by Mrs. Alfred A. Emery and children in memory of Mr. Emery; two side windows of the Nave by Mrs. Raymond Ainsley in memory of her parents; two pews by Mrs. Joseph U. Crum in memory of her parents; two pews by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hicks; one pew by Mr. Thomas R. Crawford; one pew by Mrs. R. V. Brown and children in memory of Mr. Brown; the Narthex Window by Fred W. Brown for Billy Lee Brown; Altar and Baptismal Font by Miss Frances Brown; two flower containers by Mr. and Mrs. David H. Brown and a Bible in memory of their parents, and Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Brown, Sr., are giving a walnut communion service.

The Cullowhee Methodist Church enrollment has been small, being made up of a few community people, college faculty and personnel. However, it has taken care of the college students and has been a part of the religious life of Western Carolina College. Due to the fact that a program is carried on for the spiritual needs of the students, the Methodist Conference pays a part of the pastor's salary, as well as appropriating an amount for the work of the Wesley Foundation.

This history would not be complete without recognizing the services of some of the church's laymen. Prof. R. L. Madison, founder of Western Carolina College was, as mentioned before, the first Church School superintendent. Following next was Prof. Frank H. Brown, who served in this capacity for around eighteen years. Mr. W. D. Wike and Mrs. Eva Bryson were two of the earlier superintendents and

Ernest and turned over all his business papers to him.

Mr. Henry Bryson filled this position for a number of years. Mr. David Brown served for one period of eight years, another for four years, and later for one year. He was also a teacher in the Church School for many, many years. Mr. W. Ernest Bird was at one time Church School superintendent and has for many years taught the adult classes. L. A. Ammon, Tyson Cathey, Dr. Charles Bird, C. F. Dodson, H. E. Battle, Jr., and Luther Taff are others who have been superintendents. Ralph C. Sutton has been church treasurer for more than twenty-five years. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Worley have jointly served as financial secretaries since 1956. Dr. Richard Renfro, head of the Music Department of Western Carolina College, has been minister of music since 1952. The Rev. A. A. Ferguson was assigned to the charge in June 1961 with Mrs. Ferguson directing the work of the Wesley Foundation.

Mrs. Frank H. Brown, Sr., must have set a record for any church in the number of years she was president of the Woman's Society of Christian Service. She was president at three different intervals for a total of twenty-two years and attended for nine years without missing a meeting. Other presidents include Mrs. A. C. Reynolds, Mrs. Flintom, Mrs. Carrie Bryson, Mrs. David Brown, Mrs. Paul Reid, Mrs. James Gudger, Mrs. Gerald Eller, Mrs. W. B. Harrill, Mrs. Howard Conrad, Mrs. Joe Hicks, and Mrs. Frank H. Brown, Jr. Some of the charter members of the Woman's Society of Christian Service were: Miss Ida Smith, Mrs. Cassius Wallace, Mrs. David Coward, Mrs. W. D. Wike, Mrs. Eva Bryson, and Mrs. Hugh Bryson. There have been many others, not mentioned here, who have contributed much to the growth and welfare of the Cullowhee Methodist Church.

Eddie Marie Wike Sutton

October 8, 1961

She doesn't mention Will who was
treas. for several years until he
died, just before he died he sent for