

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Granite Falls, North Carolina

Bethany Methodist Church is the origin of The First United Methodist Church in Granite Falls. Documentation of the existence of the Bethany Methodist Church can be found in the official records of the Post Office as early as 1829. As with most churches during this early history, no formal written deed existed until 1855. It is known from the notes of Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury, that a Methodist group was meeting in the area as early as 1779. Bishop Asbury recorded stops along the Horseford Road (present day US321) and actual preaching at the Connelly Meeting House near present day Sawmills, N.C. It is very possible that the Bishop spent time at Baird's Forge as Annie L. Baird had a school and meeting house.

Joseph Hayes provided one of the earliest meeting places for Methodist worship. Lutherans, Baptist, and Methodist shared his store building. Another place of worship for the Bethany group was located along Duke Street. An old building on Dudley Avenue was remodeled and served as a church (from Andrew Baird family records, 1816).

The earliest recording of new members is listed as 1836, when Elizabeth Helton and Mary Thomas joined the fellowship. Myra Hayes and Rebecca Helton became new members in 1843. The fifth building (1855-1903) used for Bethany Methodist was located in downtown Granite Falls across from what is now the "triangle" park. This structure burned in the big fire of 1903. The only church property left was the parsonage and the Rock Creek campground. The Lutheran Church was used by the Methodists for their worship until a new church could be built. Membership was listed at 27.

Property was purchased from Dr. Samuel Jones for \$125.00 on September 10, 1904. Mr. Otto Payne was the general contractor and his brother C. Robert Payne was in charge of masonry. Many early members recalled bringing the handmade brick from the banks of the Catawba River at Lake Rhodhiss to construct the sanctuary. The building was occupied in 1906, finishing work was completed and the dedication took place in 1908. Membership at this time is listed at 250, and by 1915 the total had risen to 360 members. The first confirmation in the new church took place in 1906.

The name of Bethany Methodist Church changed to The Methodist Episcopal Church South at the time of the dedication in 1908. Another name change took place when the Episcopal South dropped. Then another change again in 1968 when the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined with the larger Methodist membership and became known as The United Methodist Church.

The Women's Home Missionary Society, once the Ladies Aid Society, also experienced a name change to The United Methodist Women. The WHMS had its beginnings in 1914. At one time there was a Junior Missionary Society. The women of the church have been an asset to the local and foreign missions for the church. Contributions from the women are invaluable in the area of the spiritual, physical and financial growth over the long history of the church.

Classroom space was added to the back of the sanctuary in 1918. The "Hut" (senior men's classroom) was built in 1933. Additional classrooms were constructed in 1935 on the right side of the present sanctuary. Payment of all indebtedness for buildings and equipment was complete by 1941 and dedication by Bishop Purcell followed.

By 1948 the church had new pews and a wonderful new pipe organ. In 1949, two church families presented the chimes and the music tower, given in memory of family members.

Thirty-one new members were added to the church roll during the conference year of 1952-53. A children's choir was started in 1950 with 24 aspiring singers. The Methodist Youth Fellowship, organized in 1950, had 25 members. The original youth program, "The Epworth League" was begun in 1896 with 35 charter members.

The first church directory was published in 1958-1960.

Land purchases in 1963 extended the church property from the rear of the education building to Park Avenue. In 1964 another strip of land was obtained to complete the circle driveway around the back of the church.

Plans were made in 1965 for a new education building. By February of 1967 the 8,201 square foot facility had been completed and the consecration by Bishop Hunt was done in May of the same year.

In 1968 the Granite Falls United Methodist Church and the Hudson Methodist Church were a two-point charge. The next church year that was changed and the Granite Falls church became a two-point charge with Rhodhiss Methodist Church. First Methodist became a single charge in June 1990.

Methodists of Each Caldwell Cooperative Ministry (MECCOM) was begun in 1970. A weekday kindergarten sponsored by MECCOM was housed in the Granite Falls Methodist education building. The day care program was disbanded in January 2003.

A large undertaking occurred in 1974 with the writing and publishing of a written history of the Granite Falls United Methodist Church. Mary Deal Haynes was responsible for gathering much of the material used in the booklet.

The Education Annex was renovated in 1983. Church membership was listed at 396, with 107 men, women and children enrolled in Sunday school. The South Caldwell Christian Ministries was organized at the time as part of our local church missions. The first fundraiser activity was held in the First Methodist fellowship hall. FUMC continues to be an active supporter of SCCM.

During the year of 1984, the men of the church constructed a new outdoor bulletin board of brick. The main entrance handicapped access ramp was completed during this time. A new church bus was purchased. The United Women's Mission Union had the sanctuary stained glass windows cleaned and repaired and also placed a protective glass on the outside of each one.

The 1980's show an active church organization involved in the community through the local South Caldwell Christian Ministries and the housing and support of the MECCOM day care project. 1985 starts the beginning of the church sponsorship of foreign missions. The church has sent teams to Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Alaska, Guatemala, Jamaica and Mexico. Teams have helped build churches, parsonages, medical centers, shelter homes and schools. A mission team was sent to Florida to help with recovery after the hurricane.

A new pictorial directory was published in 1988. Church youth classes in the UMY were very active in this time. The Joy class was organized during the 1980's.

In the year 1992 the First United Methodist Church council on ministries experienced their first overnight planning retreat. The retreat provided much impetus for new actions in spreading our many programs within the church and in the community. A Habitat For Humanity house was a first time project in 1997. The Prayer Group was begun during the 1997 church year. The FUMC was moved from the Statesville District to the North Wilkesboro district in 1997.

Our choir members have continued their beautiful music contribution to the worship service. New robes were recently purchased. The addition of two Hand bell Choirs have enriched our worship services. There is a music program for our young members who meet together each Sunday morning before their Sunday school classes begin. All enjoy their musical contributions.

The First Methodist Church has a summer ball team for our young members. They participate each year in competition with local church teams. The team provides an additional mission effort. The most senior members of the church have organized a "Just Older Youth" group for enjoyment of a covered dish meal at the fellowship hall or a trip on the new church bus.

In the year 2004 the newest pictorial directory was compiled. The membership is listed at 330 members.

In June 2005, a long range planning committee began effort to study the possible remodeling of the 1906 sanctuary along with the 1935 classroom addition. The 1918 addition had previously been condemned so that part of the structure would be removed. After much thought the vote was taken to do the remodeling. When exploration of cost involved was investigated the planning committee came back to the congregation to ask for a new sanctuary with added classrooms. The vote was taken to rebuild. 175 members were present for the vote (5 members dissenting). Looking to the future the membership is grateful to all those who have left generous monetary gifts in order that this new facility will be possible. Membership in March 2007 is 337.

"The history of the First United Methodist Church of Granite Falls, NC is not complete with what has been written. Every faithful Sunday School teacher and officer, work area chairperson, trustee, administrative board and council on ministries leaders and members, committee chairpersons, other church officers, choir directors, organist, youth counselors and every participant in the life of First Church are vital to its life and mission. The church would have no history without them, and they are presently its history unfolding. The church's history tomorrow shall be what each member now is in his relation to Christ, the head of the Church, and what each one contributes in meeting the challenges of today's world as he or she is the church in today's world".

From the history of the church by Mary Deal Haynes, 1974.