

A History of Orange United Methodist Church

Compiled by Mary Cissell from these sources: The Heritage of Cherokee CO 1831-1998: pp.20-21, 36 by Margaret White Hitt, pp.374, 375 by Nelle Lathem Wallace. "A History of the Orange Community" by Smith White. "A History of Orange Church Homecoming Day 1974", by Kate Smithwick. "History of Orange Church" by Kate Smithwick and Ruby Fossett, 1951, revised by Kate Smithwick in 1962. "History of Orange UMC" by Melba Smithwick Bruce and Fonda Smithwick Oliver. Cherokee Advance Newspaper, Oct.26, 1901.

Early in the 1840's a group of pioneers came from South Carolina and settled along the Alabama Road (Hwy20) in an area that later became the Gold Belt of Northeast Georgia. They named the community Orange, probably for England's Earl of Orange as in the counties of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Or perhaps the color of the soil had some bearing. However, a favorite local legend claimed that at one time an orange tree grew near the old Orange Post Office!

In 1848, Tyre Harris Smithwick and Martha Lathem Smithwick founded the Methodist Episcopal Church South in their home, located off Hwy 20 on the Old Ball Ground Road. The other known charter member from 1848 was Sarah Burton. Other known original members were John and Eliza Ann Smithwick Gibbs, and David and Harriet E. Smithwick Welch.

On June 29, 1849, church member Joshua Burtz deeded to the seven trustees two acres of land for the purpose of building a house of worship. The original trustees were: John Gibbs, Edward Burton, Frederick Burtz, Tyre H. Smithwick, Daniel McCormack, Issac Hill, and Washington Weems. A one-room, wood-frame church building about 20 by 40 feet was erected by these early settlers. It was located in the Orange Community about eleven miles east of Canton in Cherokee County Georgia near today's junction of Hwy 20 and Hwy 369. The area where the church was built later became known as Smithwick Hill. At some point, the name Orange was added to the church's name to denote its location.

In 1909, the location of the church was changed to better serve the membership. The land and the original church building in Orange were bought by Ernest Smithwick and converted into a dwelling. This old house had a series of occupants until it was included in a commercial land sale. In 2007, the Appalachian Heritage Guild made plans to move and restore the original church building. However, upon the death of that group's leader, Frank Stone, in 2008, the restoration project was dropped. The building has since been demolished to make way for Hwy 20 improvements.

The new church building, the present sanctuary, was erected at Lathemtown on two acres of land donated by William A. Lathem, the founder of Lathemtown. This building originally consisted of only one room about 25 feet by 40 feet. Heat for the building was furnished by a wood burning stove. Air conditioning was handheld fans and open windows. Music was led by an old-time, foot pedal organ.

Many of the earliest church members were interred in the Old Cemetery, also known as the Smithwick Burial Ground, 1840-1915, located at Orange/Smithwick Hill, off Hwy 20 on Old Ball Ground Road. Members of the Smithwick family

continue to maintain that cemetery. The Smith Cemetery located behind the Harvester House Restaurant, Hwy 20, is another final resting place for many Orange Church members. Then in 1948, land for a cemetery adjacent to the church was given by the William A. Lathem family. Later, in 1985, Charles (Dude) Turner and his son Lemuel donated an additional acre to this cemetery.

The church was and is today affiliated with the North Georgia United Methodist Conference. For many years worship services were held only once a month by an itinerate preacher. Orange Church was one of four churches in the Holbrook Circuit in the Atlanta-East District, sharing a parsonage with three other churches. Sunday school was held and attended faithfully every Sunday. The classes emphasized memorization of Bible verses.

In 1925, the first piano was bought, and in 1930, eight classrooms were added. In 1947, a basement was constructed underneath the classrooms. Gas furnaces and heaters were installed in 1950 bringing the value of the building to \$15,000 at that time.

The church began in 1964 having a fulltime minister. A parsonage, now the church office, was erected next to the church at a cost of more than \$16,000. The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968, changing the name to Orange United Methodist Church.

Since then, many physical improvements have been made to the church. In 1974, the installation of central heat and air conditioning in the sanctuary, and the purchase of an electric organ helped modernize the 1909 structure.

Fellowship Hall was constructed in 1982 by contractor Haywood Little. It provides a kitchen and large reception room with classrooms on the second floor. In warm weather, "eating on the grounds" is enjoyed in the pavilion built by the men of the Church in 1997. Also in the late 1990's, additional property was bought, bringing the total acreage to over 20 acres.

A new parsonage was purchased in 2001 in the Orange Shoals Subdivision in Lathemtown. That mortgage was paid off in 2006 and the home was consecrated April, 2007. In July, 2007, the new parsonage was repainted and prepared to welcome our new minister Rev. Max Vincent and his family. And five years later, the Orange congregation welcomed our present pastor, Gerald Varner.

Music has always been an important part of Orange Church. Thanks to memorial contributions and donations, we now enjoy a new organ (2002) and a new Baldwin piano (2004). And after two years of fund raising, the choir can now sing in the comfort and beauty of their new choir robes.

Today's congregation continues to demonstrate its love for God and Christ through its commitment to Orange Church through its prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness..

"The Church stands as a memorial to its membership, past and present, and to the work they have accomplished for the glory of God." Mararet Hitt
May the influence of Orange Church reach way out and be as "A city set on a hill that cannot be hid."

Missions and Events, New and Ongoing OUMC

Golden Gallopers: Senior Bingo Games and fellowship
Meals on Wheels: delivers meals to seniors and shut-ins
MYF: Steve Matta, youth leader: retreats, Marietta Feed the Homeless Mission, fundraisers, and weekly Christian study/fellowship
Pastors' Prayer Breakfasts: with other pastors from the area
Mother's Cupboard: a community food bank ministry
Operation Christmas Child: provides shoeboxes filled with small gifts to children around the world
Red Cross Blood Drives in Fellowship hall
Annual Fish Fry: fundraiser
UMWomen: Monthly fellowship meetings, November Bazaar and May Plant Sale - fundraisers for local and international missions
United Methodist Men
Holbrook Camp Meeting Week
Annual Easter Egg Hunt and Santa's Breakfast for Children
Vacation Bible School
OUMC Confirmation Class: young people join the church.
Community Singing: Held on every fifth Sunday evening.
Adult Choir and Children's Choir: Joy Turner continues to lead our fabulous choir!
Scouting Ministry: Scouts and Brownies meet and camp regularly at the church facilities
June, 2012 Honduras Mission Trip with a team of 13 dedicated to spreading God's love and His word.
Annual Benevolence Play/Dinner, Sue Lively: fundraiser to meet local needs
Disciple Bible Study: 30 members dedicated 8 months to an organized study of the Bible