



On April 4, 1834, nine men signed a deed accepting stewardship of a small lot Joseph Evans owned on the western edge of Sam Cecil's land in Northern Davidson County for a "place or house of worship." Mount Olivet stands there today.

That was 175 years ago and that seems like a long time, but people seeking freedom to worship had landed at Jamestown over 225 years before. Methodist Episcopalans had been worshipping in New York for nearly seventy years and John Wesley had begun to formally organize our church in Baltimore fifty years before Mount Olivet was organized.

By 1834 there was already tension in that Church. It had been divided for six years over the question of Clergy versus Lay authority, and would divide again in another ten years over the question of slave ownership. Andrew Jackson had begun his second term as President and the eviction of the Cherokee from our state to make room for settlers was well under way. That year the Virginia Conference sent Pastor Thomas Barnum to Lexington to be the first Presiding Elder for a new Davidson Charge. He was instrumental in formally organizing our congregation and may have been the first Methodist Pastor to preach in a Methodist Episcopal church in Davidson County. (The following year Pastor James M. Darden organized a congregation at Good Hope.) There was no North Carolina Conference then, but there were healthy Methodist Episcopal congregations where Pastor Francis Asbury's circuit riders visited. Even among the Cherokee.

People of all persuasions had probably been gathering to worship in Joseph Evan's field for some time before the Trustees paid him ten dollars for his lot. We are told that when the weather got better each year and spring farming was far enough along, inspired lay preachers gathered families from the farms for "Protracted Meetings." It may have been from one of these congregations that Mount Olivet began to grow. When we observe our 175th anniversary this year we will think of all of the devoted congregations upon whose sturdy shoulders we as a congregation stand.

We know something about the first 39 years the Congregation worshipped on their new 4 1/2 Acre lot, where our graveyard now is, by what later writers said about the second Church. The original deed says; "for a place or house of worship." "Place" may have meant the field where families had already been gathering for 'protracted meetings' in the summer. If there was a structure there in 1834 it may have only been a dwelling and not a true church.

Two young ladies writing a joint paper for a summer project in 1925 talked to old folks thirty-five years after the second church had been torn down. Those old folks said that the second church had "real glass windows," "handmade pews with backs," "twelve foot ceilings" and sat up on piers. That could mean the first structure - either old dwelling or purpose built church - had shutters to cover the windows, backless benches made of logs, a low ceiling and a dirt floor. That would have been common to structures in this area before the sawmills began to move in, in the 1830's.

There was a spring on the property. That may have been why the field was used for protracted meetings in the first place. Or why there may have been a dwelling there. Community Road, then called The Old Mill Road, was realigned in the 1920's. Part of the original 4 1/2 acres was exchanged for private land between Mount Olivet's lot and the new road. That land was described as; "where the old spring is".

The graveyard began to fill almost as soon as the church was organized, though blacks had been burying in a distant corner of the field by then. An early stone says Mary A. Snider, age two, died two months after Mount Olivet was organized.

During the 39 years the congregation worshipped in that first church tensions continued to divide the denomination, this time over slave ownership. In 1844 our church separated from the Episcopal's and became the Methodist Episcopal Church South. The African Methodist Episcopal Church formed about the same time. The war from 1860 to 1865 made matters worse, but some of those schisms were repaired in 1939.

During this time there were about nine congregations on the Lexington circuit. By 1860 John Lewis wrote in his diary that there were 15 churches on the circuit. They spread from Linwood to Mount Tabor. The Presiding Elder preached several times each Sunday. Even then he preached in a church less than once a month. "Class Leaders", Local Preachers and Exhorters filled the pulpits at other times. Worship was usually limited to the summer months by the condition of the roads and trails.

Singing was a cappella, from memory. There was no instrument nor were there song books. Singing schools were organized at protracted meetings in the summer, where hymns were memorized. A few members of our congregation today may be able to remember their grand parents finding the announced hymn, marking the place with a finger and then singing four verses from memory.

In the summer a grave digger from that generation dug graves in the twilight, when it was cooler. He was remembered for singing hymn after hymn for the whole time it took him to finish the grave. Strangers were said to have reported that the dead were singing together.

By 1873 Mount Olivet's congregation had been worshipping on Joe Evans' field for thirty nine years. The war had been over eight years, President Grant was in his second term and it was time to build a bigger church.

The first land was added to the original lot in early 1874. An acre and a quarter was purchased from the heirs of Mary Burk for eight dollars. The Burk lot gave the church access to Mount Olivet Road along the old line between Elisha Raper and Sam Cecil, and allowed room to build the new Church on a knoll on the Western edge of the original lot. It probably faced South, toward Community Road, then called the "Old Mill Road".

A bill for lumber describes a one room structure with a twelve foot ceiling. Children of the people who worshipped there were told the building sat up on short piers, had glass windows and pews with backs. It may not have had oil lamps or any sort of heating. The rest room was a building in the yard.

The second Church was the first church to have an instrument, a foot-pumped organ. Stories surviving from that time tell of a congregation divided over the suitability of an organ for worship services. A very young R U Zimmerman, later the community's venerable "Doctor Bob", was the first musician. The first wedding about which we know united Flora Belle Craver and David Madison Raper in 1886. Marriages were customarily performed by Judges or Justices in that day.

By 1883 the Davidson Charge was a more manageable nine churches. Preaching was usually once a month. There were 75 to 100 members in the Congregation then. Sunday Schools were usually held only in the summer because of weather and poor roads. They usually closed after Christmas and re-organized when the weather got better. An old record says; "The Sunday School was organized the 28th day of March, 1886". When the roads and trails were bad, some people walked to church either barefoot or wearing work shoes. They carried their Sunday shoes and put them on as they neared the Church. There were other organizations also. An old record for 1888 says: "The Sunday School Missionary Society was organized with 65 members".

The budget for 1888 was \$282.26. That year the Stewards reported pledges of \$306.60. That budget included \$14 to help build a stable in Lexington for the PE's horse. The budget for 1891 included \$1 toward the burial expense for the PC, Reverend P F W Stamey, and \$1000 for the new third church - 6 dollars per member.

Third church:

In the fall of 1889, after worshipping only sixteen years in the second Church, the congregation apparently began to feel crowded. At the Circuit Conference on September 30, 1889, there were 119 votes in favor of building a new church. There were no votes opposed and a five member committee was elected. The budget for 1890 included \$1000 for "a new building".

A routine question in the report for the fourth Circuit Conference for 11 November 1890 was; "Can anything more be done to strengthen and build up the Church in the community and advance the cause of Christ?" The answer was; "Yes, by building a new church."

An article in the Lexington paper for 30 July 1890 says; "the 42 x 64 x 22 foot high building is expected to be completed by the end of September, and when it is, it will be 'magnificent'." The date on the corner stone is July 4, 1891. A bill for lumber says the ceilings are to be eighteen feet high. The lumber cost \$350. Much of the bigger timber was for a long truss that has held up the heavy roof without columns for well over a hundred years. The building had three front doors and no doors at the pulpit end. There were three aisles and four rows of pews. The center doors were double, the ones for the side aisles were single. Men used the left door. Women and children used the right door. Don't know who got to use the double doors. There was no vestibule or balcony as there is today. The pews were made in Lexington.

The roof was of galvanized shingles made in Charleston. They lasted hundred and six years and were replaced with enameled tin shingles. The windows were double hung, glazed with frosted glass. They could be raised in hot weather for ventilation. The tops were arched as the stained glass windows are today. Light came from kerosene lamps suspended from the ceiling over the aisles. They did not pull down for lighting. "Someone had to climb up on a box". Two of them have been wired for electricity and help light the sanctuary today. **Heat was from two double-eye cast iron box stoves just off of the side aisles in front of the first pews.** The pipes went to the ceiling and joined there before going as one pipe to a chimney supported from the rafters above the ceiling. A report from 1902 says the men had gathered to cut wood for the stoves.

The Church was finally painted "inside and out" in 1893. The \$1000 pledged in 1889 was not enough to finish the church. The Circuit Conference of Aug 1, 1896, voted to sell the material in the second church and apply part of the proceeds to the debt that remained on the third church.

On November 9, 1899, three years later, the trustees reported they were still owed twenty five dollars by whomever bought the old Church.

After Mount Olivet's third sanctuary was finished in 1891, (and painted "inside and out" in 1893), there was little change in the building for the next thirty years. There was a great deal of change in the program and activities in those years. Sunday School became a more important part of the worship program.

A short report from 1925 tells what older church members remember being told about earlier days. The first Sunday School, organized before 1886, had no literature and no class rooms. Groups gathered in different corners of the Church according to age and gender. Each teacher spoke loudly to be heard over the closest other groups. Older groups were taught from the Bible, younger groups from the Testament. Small children listened to Bible stories from books brought by their teachers. Some children are said to have brought their school books and studied the ABC's. Early Sunday School literature for children was a small card. One side had a picture and a text, the other had a verse and a Bible story about the picture and four or five questions. The cards were used from at least 1897 through 1916. A quarterly much like the one we use today was in use by 1929.

Just as older folk memorized hymns, the younger memorized scripture. For each verse memorized a child got a red ticket. Five red tickets could be exchanged for a blue ticket. At the end of the Sunday School year, just after Christmas, ticket holders were recognized on Reward Day. Sunday School generally re-opened in March of the next year. In 1918 the Sunday School closed for a time because of flu.

In 1886 classes were divided by age and gender. (1st male class, 2nd male class, 1st female class, etc.). By 1895 classes were named by letters. (A male class, B male class, etc. through D). The one exception to this neat order was "The Old Ladies Class". Next year four more classes were added, making twelve. Later classes began to name themselves. One became "The Busy Girls". The classes purchased their own literature. In 1887, with 162 members on the church role, the Sunday School had \$1.75 for literature. Later they had \$3.50 for the quarter.

In 1896 an Epworth League, an organization for young people, was begun with 34 members. A year later the League started a library with 57 books. The "Literary Department" wrote detailed bylaws and elected a Librarian, an Assistant Librarian and a Secretary to handle library affairs. Though dormant from time to time, the League was active enough to eventually have Junior and Senior divisions.

The Sunday School organized a Missionary Society with 65 members. The third Sunday was Missionary Sunday when a collection was received for foreign missions. On the fifth Sunday a collection was received for an Orphan's home.

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The welfare of others seems to have always been a concern for isolated people. Pioneers seem to sense that others will depend upon them from time to time. Christians particularly are called to that awareness. Though we have few records of early mission activities, Mount Olivet's Congregation was typical of those times. The first women's organization, a relatively recent group, was named The Ladies Missionary Society. They made quilts for a family who were burned out and they were leaders in efforts to buy a cook stove for a needy family and to buy a sewing machine to replace a broken one for single sisters who supplemented their income sewing for others. The nature of their organization changed with time, but traces of their concern can be found all through the years. In 1956 men provided a door, window screens and a sink for a family and as late as 1980 men and women put a roof on the house of a local lady and someone bought a ton of coal when they saw she had none.

Mission effort that started locally naturally grew larger, though it never lost sight of local needs. In 1928 a committee was appointed to provide a mission program for Sunday School every fourth Sunday. Records during the thirty's frequently mention Bible study classes and talks and programs on missions. They were often scheduled in the evening. In 1936 the ladies collected a thousand Octagon soap coupons for the benefit of a place called Bethlehem House and continued that practice for some years. In 1948 they were collecting feed sacks and cloth for sewing classes on the Cherokee reservation. Collections for the Methodist Children's Home in Winston-Salem were received as early as 1919 and through several years during the Depression, when money was scarce at Mount

Olivet, fourth Sunday offering went to the home. O. V Woosley, who grew up in Mount Olivet, was Superintendent of the Home at the time. He is buried in Mount Olivet's Cemetery and Staff and children from the Home still place flowers on his grave each Christmas. An Offering was received in 1939 to help the Red Cross aid flood victims and when a fire at Good Hope destroyed Hymnals in 1950, an offering was received to help replace them.

As Mount Olivet and our Conference have grown mission work has grown. Stories of work teams to the Caribbean and to disaster areas and of Habitat houses and Carolina Cross Connection and Crisis ministry in the sixty years since 1950 are part of a story for another day, but they are a fitting legacy for earlier generations who were able to turn from their own concerns to share what they had with others more needy.

Love, Faye, Tuesday PM.
