

Grady County Historical Society – Churches

Bethpage Methodist Church

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History of Bethpage

by the Church Historian

The

Bethpage

Methodist Church

BETHPAGE

Methodism emerged in Florida with the coming of the American period in 1821. By 1825 the church had grown sturdy enough to take a few steps of its own with a district called Tallahassee, after the Capitol of the territory. This district reached to Albany, Georgia.

Bethpage was organized about 1830—the exact date not on record. The first Florida Conference came into being in 1845 and Bethpage was in this conference until 1867.

The original church building was on a hill near the site of E. J. Dickey's home. This first building was of logs and hand-hewn timbers. When the old building was gone, services were held in the two-story Masonic Lodge building which stood on the site of the present church. After the Masons transferred to nearby towns, they gave the building to the church. About 1875 a contract was given to Thomas E. Dickey to convert the lodge building into the present building. The same hand-hewn timbers and hand-planed wide boards were used.

Three clay roads converge about sixty yards from Bethpage. Here one pauses to catch a breath or shift a gear before making the last sharp turn and the final short climb to the grassy, tree-shaded slope where Bethpage encased itself into the hillside three generations ago, and where it has watched serenely as its membership and friends have come by buggy, wagon, automobile and even afoot to worship beneath its shingled roof and exchange neighborly conversation near its eaves and under its trees.

One of the three roads leads, at the end of the service, southwest toward the Meridian Presbyterian neighborhood and winds between woods and farms to and beyond the Florida line that runs two short miles away. Another road climbs east and then bends south over the red hills

to Florida again, a mile away. The third road is an up-and-down red ribbon that leads to Rocky Hill, a mile away, where it crosses the Beachton-Thomasville road and, after making the crossing, leads to Cairo, the county seat, some fifteen miles to the north. Of lesser width. but equal in significance, are footpaths that lead to and away from Bethpage. Two of these wind away to the south, climbing between corn rows and over stiles by near and more distant neighbors. The third is guite the most used, the one that receives the imprint of shoes both large and small, the one over which every member and every visitor walks at some time. This pathway crawls through a lush grove of hardwoods to a clear, cool spring. "The Spring" it has been for the generations that have known the church, the Masonic lodge and the school. From its small clear pool three generations (who knows how many more?) have drawn cups, gourds, glasses and crumpled magnolia leaves of water to guench a thirst brought on by walks and rides in the June-time sun.

Whoever worships at Bethpage cannot fail to appreciate the charm and simplicity of an early pioneer church.

The sheltering arms of a country church was often a haven to pioneer families moving into a new frontier. A lone unmarked grave in a wooded lot near Bethpage is a mute reminder of sorrow in one family sheltered in this wayside house of God.

The first and second Presiding Elders of the Tallahassee District were Reuben H. Lucky and Peyton Smith who served during the time Bethpage was in this conference. The members listed on the earliest records are Hays, Sapp, Dickey, Doss, Strickland, Jones, Sessions, Atkinson, Harvin, Gwaltney, Brown and Van Brunt. From these pioneer families have gone doctors, lawyers, teachers and manufacturers—all of them church leaders who established Christian homes. History reveals to us that from rural churches come America's best leadership.

Descendents of the Strickland, Sessions and Dickey

families still own ancestral farms in the community and are active in the work of Bethpage.

The first Sunday School of Bethpage was organized just after the war between the States. The first Superintendent was William E. Hays. Following him were Captain Sapp, Captain Doss, W. J. Dickey, Edwin J. Dickey, A. C. Dickey, Henry Blount Strickland and Mrs. Ruth Harrison. These seven persons served consecutively up to 1930, or approximately sixty-four years. Superintendents since then have been W. J. Dickey second, Le Roy Collins, Mrs. David Green, Perry Lee, Mr. Hershal Collins.

• The leadership and training of Mrs. Minnie Williams Dickey, who served faithfully as a Sunday School worker for thirty-five years, is evident today.

The need of a Sunday School building has been felt for years, but not until 1949 was this dream realized. A building twenty by forty feet was erected near the church building to serve as classrooms and as a community center. Mr. and Mrs. Le Roy Collins efficiently led in this movement.

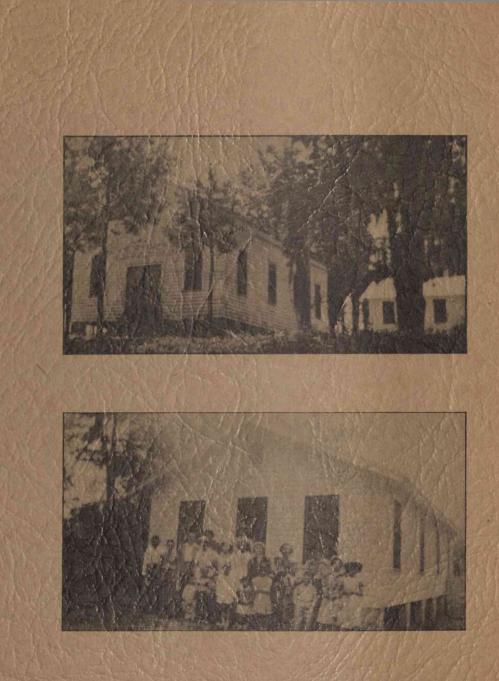
Bethpage is now a well-organized country church. Church services are conducted each second Sunday by Harold Raines, the Pastor, who also efficiently guides a Youth Fellowship, a well-attended Sunday School which meets each Sunday morning, and a Prayer Service held each Wednesday evening. A Woman's Society of Christian Service was organized in 1947. Charter members include Mrs. Le Roy Collins, Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, Mrs. Charlie Harrison, Mrs. Toy Harrison, Mrs. T. P. Strickland, Mrs. Horace Strickland, Mrs. David Green, Mrs. Robert Stringer, Mrs. A. D. Blackburn and Mrs. Joe Wilder. Seventeen members are now enrolled with Mrs. Robert Stringer as President.

This history of Bethpage would not be complete without the story of its unique organization, perhaps the most unique church organization in the South Georgia Conference. In 1885 Mrs. W. J. Dickey nee Lizzie Wilmot, without help from any other person, organized a Missionary Society, going to the church each month for her programs. (Missions were a minor part of a country church in those days.) Mrs. Dickey was faithful in this work until her death in the early nineties.

In this brief record of Bethpage are venerable mementos of a pioneer church in the wildwood. We trust our friends will feel grateful for the Christian heritage of faithful saints who through the years have made possible this place of worship.

Following is a list of Pastors who have served Bethpage since 1866: Robert W. Flourney, 1866-67; James Harris and James T. Ainsworth, 1868; John Talley, 1869; W. Lane, 1870; Charles E. Brown, 1871; L. C. Peek, 1872; J. D. Mauldin, 1873; P. H. Crumpler, 1874; W. J. Green, 1875; L. A. Darsey, 1876; L. C. Peek, 1877; S. W. Stubbs, 1878-81; J. J. Ansley, 1881; L. Davenport, 1882; Charles Snow, 1883; E. L. Padrick, 1884; N. B. Ansley, 1885; J. W. Arnold, 1886-88; Ed. F. Cook, 1889; J. Glenn, 1890; I. C. Rider, 1890; W. C. Jones, 1891; J. M. Outler, 1892; N. C. Brewton, 1893-94; E. L. Tucker, 1895; R. Kerr, 1896; J. W. Foy, 1897; Joel Cowart, 1898-99; A. E. Sansburn, part of 1899; E. E. Rose, 1900-04; W. C. Embry, 1905-07; Judson Groves, 1907; B. W. Jordan, 1908; J. E. Channel, 1909-10; E. L. Rogers, 1911-12; J. L. Llewellyn, 1914; C. E. Dell, 1916-18; T. C. Gardner, 1919; E. M. Elder, 1920-21; J. W. Reese, 1922-24; J. N. Sarrette, 1925-27; S. J. Brown, 1928; D. A. Lastinger, 1929-31; Robert Kerr, 1932; J. W. M. Stipe, 1933-34; W. W. Taylor, 1935-38; J. C. Saville, 1939; J. O. Akin, 1940-44; J. A. Wiggins, 1945; G. W. Bates, 1946-48; Harold Raines, present minister since 1949.

Compiled by: Mrs. Joe Wilder





BETHPAGE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (Photo by Hugh Gandy)

Bethpage Is One Of Grady's Oldest Methodist Churches

Methodism in America is brief history of each United the county's Methodist Bicensary this year and in County. observance of that celebration

celebrating its 200th anniver- Methodist Church in Grady tennial Committee.

We begin the series this Material for this series is week with information on the Messenger will publish a being provided by members of Bethpage United Methodist Church, which is located south of the intersection of Hadley Ferry and Meridian roads very near the Florida Line.

It is one of Grady's oldest Methodist congregations and had its beginning circa 1830, an outgrowth of the expansion of Methodism in Florida which began in 1821 after the United States acquired the territory from Spain.

Church historians indicate the first building was near the site of the E. J. Dickey residence and constructed of logs and hand hewn timbers.

Services were later held in the two-story Masonic Lodge building located on the present church site and after the Masons in the area disbanded the builiding was given to the Bethpage congregation.

About 1875 Thomas E. Dickey was contracted to convert the lodge building into the present church building, using the same hand-hewn timbers and handplaned boards.

Prior to the Civil War. much of present Grady County south of the Ochlocknee River was in cotton plantations and those familiar with the early history of Bethpage indicate that most of its founding families lived and worked on those plantations.

"It's still a family church," one familiar with its congregation of twenty-seven members says, and every year, usually in April, Bethpage holds a homecoming service when those who have moved elsewhere come back in large numbers to renew old ties.

Bethpage Church sits on a grassy tree-shaded slope where three roads converge, two of which lead eventually into Florida with the third running north to Rocky Hill and then to Hadley Ferry and Cairo.

The 1949 church history reports, "Here it has watched serenely as generations of members and friends have come by buggy, wagon, automobile, and even on foot to worship beneath its shingled roof and exchange neighborly conversation near its eaves and under its trees.

That history also notes that earlier two well-worn foot paths led away to the south and southwest and a third "crawled through a lush grove of hardwoods to "The Spring," a landmark very familiar to those who knew the site as a church, a Masonic hall, and a school."

When organized, Bethpage came under the jurisdiction of the Tallahassee district and was a member of the Florida Conference from the 1845 organization of the conference to 1867.

Members listed on Bethpage's earliest records include those named Hays, Sapp, Dickey, Doss, Strickland, Jones, Sessions, Atkinson, Harvin, Gwaltney, Brown, and Van Brunt.

The Bethpage congregation organized a Sunday School just after the War Between the States and under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Collins, built a Sunday School building in 1949.

According to the 1949 Church History, "The history of Bethpage would not be complete without mention of its "Missionary Society" organized by Mrs. W. J. Dickey, nee Lizzie Wilmot, who single-handedly founded the society in 1885, a time when missions were a minor part of a country church's concern."

Bethpage United Methodist Church is presently a part of the Metcalfe Charge and its pastor is Rev. R. V. Sneed.

No records exist naming its first and earliest pastors, however it is known that Rev. Robert W. Flourney served the church in 1866 and 1867 and Rev. James T. Ainsworth and James Harris in 1868.

A church historian has described Bethpage as "a pioneer church in the wildwood" and expressed a desire that the community will "be grateful for the Christian heritage of faithful saints who through the years have made possible this place of worship."





Dear Editor.

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care of her ever s I hope more pe Cairo first and themselves that good doctors al hospital and the p care. Try Cairo fir Thanks for ev

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"I know every bolt and beam. **Block knows every deduction** and credit."

Canomesser



Open 9-6 Weekdays, 9-5 Sat. Phone 377-3773

APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE

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MasterCard and Visa accepted at most area locations



Was \$5100 Good thru. end of March Top grade Bond paper The Cairo Messenger

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and family

GEORGIA, THOMAS COUNTY.

This indenture made this the third day of February in the year A. D. One Thousand Eight Hundred and Seventy Nine between W. E. Hayes, W. J. Dickey & R. Williams, trustees of Armonia F.A.M. of the County of Thomas State of Georgia, of the first part, W. E. Hayes, G. Y. Brown & A. F. Berry of Fla & Wm. L. Bibb, W. J. Dickey, G. W. Wood & L. H. Player, trustees Church property Spring Hill Circuit South Ga Conference of Methodist Episcipal Church South of the County of Thomas State of Georgia of the second part, witnesseth, that the said parties of the first part for and in consideration of the sum of two hundred dollars, to them in hand paid by the said parties of the second part, at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have granted, bargained, sold and conveyed, and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said parties of the second part their successors and assigns, all that tract or parcel of land situate, lying and being in lot number sixty two (62) in the twenty third (23d) district of said county and state whereon Armonia Lodge is now situated including the buildings thereon containing one acre to have and to hold the said bargained premises together with all and singular the rights, members and appurtenances thereto appertaining or belonging to the own proper use, benefit and behoof of the said parties of the second part, their successors and assigns, forever in fee simple. And the said parties of the first part will and their successors executors and administrators shall the afore granted premises unto the said parties of the second part, their successors, executors, administrators and assigns forever warrant and defend by virtue of these presents. In witness whereof the said parties of the first part have hereunto set their hands and seal the day and year above written.

Signed sealed and delivered in presence of

Wm. E. Hayes LS Richard William LS Wm J Dickey LS

Chas T. Hansell William D. Mitchell J.C.C.T.C.

Recorded February 4, 1879, In Deed Book "P", page 636, Records of Thomas County, Ga.

H. A. VANN

Clerk Su Clerk Superior Court of Thomas County and City Court of Thomasville

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THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA

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State Feb 3, 1879 Cono - \$\$ 200 3 Properlywithussed Recorded Feb 4, 1879 aleed Book P, page 636 all that tract as parcel I land setuate, bying and being in lot no 62 in 23rd Dist of said county and state atterior armodia Lodge is now returaled including The building Thereon containing one asil.

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Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1878, by the Book Agents of the M. E. Church, South, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Discipline of our Church provides that every Society shall have a permanent Register, in which the Secretary of the Church Conference "shall enter in chronological order the full names of all who shall join the Church, with the time and manner of the reception of each; and also shall make a permanent record of all baptisms and marriages within the congregation." These Registers are intended to be permanent, and to contain not only the list of living members, but of all who have joined the Church, with the date of their admission and of their disposal or death. A Register, therefore, should be large enough to last a generation, and should never be revised or rewritten until the book is exhausted. In this respect many of our Registers have not been properly kept. The custom in most places has been to rewrite the list of living members every year or two, and omit entirely the names of all who have died, removed, or in any manner ceased to be members; the old Registers have been thrown away, and as a consequence there is no proof by record of the fact, or date of the admission of thousands of our members.

The Register here presented may not contain every feature which some excellent pastors would prefer, but in practical use will be found to embrace every thing absolutely necessary. In this simple form it has the advantage of being easily understood; and it can be furnished about as cheap as a common blank-book of the same size and binding. The first form in the book is a Register of Pastors, and needs no explanation. The second form is a Register of Members, so ruled as to allow space opposite each name for recording the date of admission, the manner of admission, as by certificate or profession, the name of the pastor by whom the member was received, and the date of the death or disposal of the member. This form should be numbered on the left-hand margin, beginning with one and continuing consecutively, so that the last number will show the number of persons who have ever been connected with the charge. The next form is a Death or Disposal Register, which will be easily understood. It should also be numbered from one consecutively, so that the last number, subtracted from the last number of the Register of Members, will always show the number of living members in the Charge, or Society. The blanks for registering Baptisms and Marriages are intended to be used only when our ministers officiate, or the parties are members of our Church or congregation. In case of the baptism of children, the names of parents or sponsors should be inserted. In case of the marriage of a female member, causing a change of name, the marriage and the date should be noted in the column of disposals, and the new name should be reentered like a new member, and the column "When Received" should be filled out by reference to the number of the name when first entered. The new number should also be noted in the disposal column opposite the first entry of the name.

This form of Church Register has been in use nearly four years, and has been highly approved by all who have used it. It is made in two sizes for the convenience of large or small Societies. The copyright belongs to the Publishing House, and it is sent out with the earnest desire that it may prove convenient and useful to the Church in giving a correct historical account of each Society, and of the admissron and disposal of every member.

D. M. SMITH.

Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, Nashville, Tenn., July 1, 1882.

Register of Pastors.

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Date of Appointment. Term of Service. NAME. Robert A. Flournoy. 1866, 1867. 2 years. Jas. Harris. 1 year. las. J. Ainsworth. 186 ohn the Talley & H. Lane: 1869. " Kesley Lane. 187.0. Chas. E. Brown. 1.871. L. C. Peek. Dec. 1872. J. D. Mauldin. 1873. P. St. Crumpler. 1874. Im. J. Green. 1875. L.A. Darsey. 1876. " L. C. Peck. 1 1877. I. M. Stubbe 1878. p3 years. I. M. Stubbs. 1889. I. M. Stribbe ... 1880 f. J. Ansley. 1 year. 1881. Daverport. 1882. Chas. M. Snow. 1883 E. L. Padrick. 1884. M.B. Queley + J. M. Amold. 1885. A.B. Ousley 1 year. J. M. Arnold. 1886 f. th. Arnold. J. St. Amold 3 years 1887. Ed. F. Gook. 1888. A. B. Quely J. G. Glenn 1889. 2. 6 Pugar 1890 h. C. Jones . A. m. Outles 1891 1892 Ar C. Baundan 1893 + 1894 E. L. Juster 1893-R Seer 1896 In Foy 1897

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Bethpage is one of Grady County's oldest Methodist congregations originating with the Methodist expansion in Florida which began in 1821 after that territory was aquired from Spain. It was part of the Tallahassee district in the Florida Conference from the 1845 organization of the conference until 1867.

The church was organized about 1830, and the first building was constructed on a hill with logs and hand-hewn timbers. The original site is very near the E. J. Dickey home. Later the church met in the two-story Masonic Lodge building south of the intersection of the Hadley Ferry and Meridian Roads very near the Florida line. The Masons gave the building to the church in 1875. E. J. Dickey was contracted to convert the lodge building into the present church structure using the same handhewn timbers and hand-planed wide boards. It sits on a grassy tree-shaded slope where three roads converge, two of which eventually lead into Florida with a third running north to Rocky Hill and then to the Hadley Ferry Road and Cairo. Robert W. Flourney was the first listed pastor in 1866-67. No records exist naming other early pastors, except James 7. Ainsworth and James Harris who served the church in 1868.

Prior to the Civil War, much of Grady County south of the Ochlocknee River was in cotton plantations. Most of the founding families of the church worked on those plantations. It is a family church, and many people come back during April for the homecoming. Members listed on the earliest records include Hays, Supp, Dickey, Doss, Strickland, Jones, Sessions, Atkinson, Harvin, Gwaltney, Brown and Van Brunt.

Mrs. W. J. Dickey(Lizzie Wilmot) organized a missionary society in 1885, at a time when missions were a minor part of a country church's concern.

The congregation organized a Sunday School just after the War Between The States. In 1949, under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Collins a Sunday School building was added, and later a front porch and new altar. The pews and the floors are original. Behind the church is "the spring", from which several generations have drunk using yourds, ylasses, and even magnolia leaves.

Bethpage UNC is presently part of the Metcalf Charge, and pastored by the Reverend Robert V. Sneed. One church historian described Bethpage as "a pioneer church in the wildwood", and expressed a desire that the community will "be grateful for the Christian heritage of faithful saints who through the years have made possible this place of worship."

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Grady County Bicentennial Committee Pastors and Bicenternial Chairmen/Historians

Bethel UMC Calvary UMC Centennial UMC Reverend Marshall K. Singletary Mrs. Maurice Connell Mrs. Nora Mitchell Mrs. Bill Butler

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Bethpage UMC

Reverend Robert V. Sneed Mrs. R. E. Stringer

Reverend James D. Aycock

Mrs. Madge Clark

Miss Toby Belcher

Bold Springs UMC Friendship UMC Woodland UMC Mrs. Maisia Hudson Mrs. Evelyn Rineer Mrs. Jewel Prince Reverend William G. Brown

Cairo 1st UMC Tired Creek UMC

Map of Churches

Springhill UMC Whigham UMC Reverend Charles B. Whatley Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Larry Gainous Mrs. Emily Maxwell Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1878, by the Book Agents of the M. E. Church, South, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington. Grady County Bicentennial Committee Pastors and Bicentennial Chairmen/Historians

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Cairo 1st UMC Tired Creek UMC Reverend William G. Brown Mrs. Mudge Clark Miss Toby Belcher

Map of Churches

Springhill UMC Whigham UMC Reverend Charles B. Whatley Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Larry Gainous 17 Mrs. Emily Maxwell 21

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