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Grady County Historical Society – Churches

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# Whigham United Methodist

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHIGHAM METHODIST CHURCH

By Judge T. J. Mills

There were just a few people in Whigham when the town was first surveyed out in blocks and the streets were named in 1863. The late W. W. and John Harrell deeded the old Atlantic and Gulf Railroad Co. 10 acres, of land to establish a depot at Whigham and they also deeded the Methodist Church a lot on the north side of Broad Street, its present location. D. W. Guilford, with his teams, furnished all of the lumber and it to the present location without any cost to anyone. About 1869, a school building had been built at the corner of First parallel Street and McGriff Street and there, different ministers had appointments. In that same year, 1869, there came along a Methodist Circuit who held a protracted meeting. Dave Cooper and his wife; Tom Brown and his wife; and Penelope Mills, joined. Mrs. D. W. Guilford also joined at that time, but for some cause, was never received into the church, although she lived and died, I believe, a consecrated woman.

The school building did not long serve as a meeting place because it was not a very stable structure and we had a very severe storm that blew it down. It was then, that the Harrells deeded a lot on Broad Street for the Methodist Church.

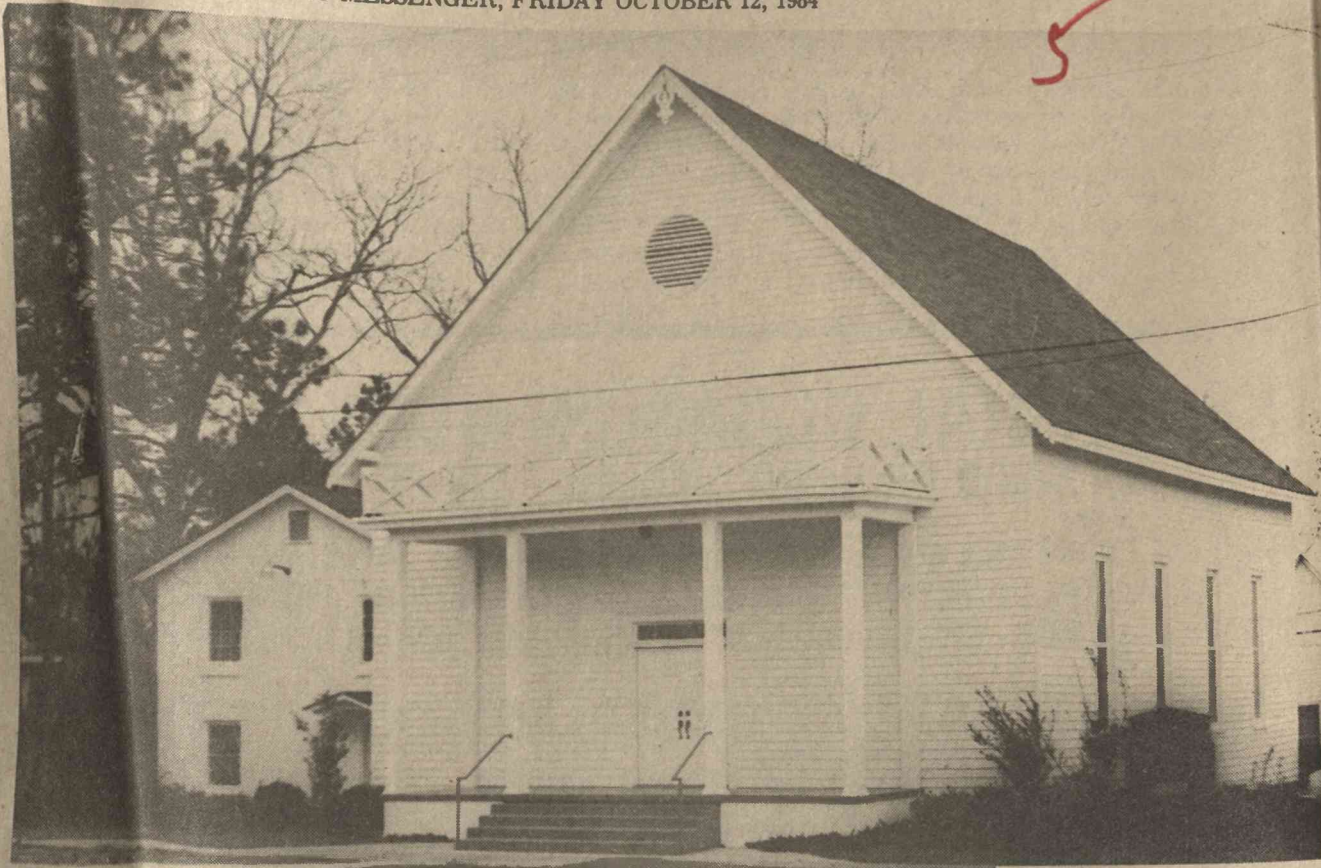
Mr. Guilford, who furnished the lumber for the new church, had a very active and extensive part in building it. The deed called for a two-story building, and the top story was to be used by the Masons. The Masons never used it, but it was used by the Graingers, and organization of farmers, until they disbanded.

In 1875, William A. Chester, moved to Whigham and under his leadership, a new Methodist Church was erected. He bought the very best available material for this new building; the main part of which still stands. In the last few years, the church building has been re-roofed and sealed with sheetrock. The belfry or steeple was torn away and the old church bell, which had reminded

local resident of church services for many years, was given to the Negro Methodist Church. About this time, Brother Crumpler, who lived in Bainbridge, held a meeting in the church and about 60 people joined. They were mostly young people. At that time, Bainbridge and Whigham made up a circuit. The old church bell given to the negroes, is still in service there.

Mr. Chester's services in buying only the best materials that could be bought, has paid nice dividends down through the years, and will continue to so, because, although new roofs have been needed several times, and the interior of the church has been improved from time to time, the main part of the building is just about as sound as it was when it was erected.

In this connection, it is interesting to mention that the first sermon ever preached in Whigham was by Reverend Joshua Martin, a noted Southwest Georgia Baptist Minister. He used a sawmill shed on the north side of Broad Street. The sawmill about where Willie Crew now lives. Brother Martin later built the Whigham Baptist Church, the main part of which is contained in the building, is now used. Of course, it has been added to and improved many times, but is now such that it would do credit to a place larger than Whigham. When Brother Martin came here, he was appointed Agent for the railroad, which position he held for a number of years. He asked for permission from the railroad company to build the Baptist Church on one corner of the lot that had been deeded to the railroad company by the Harrells, and such was granted. That is why the Church was built where it is now. Brother Martin, with what help he could get, built the Baptist Church, while serving as the railroad agent. Incidentally, the railroad company got into financial difficulties at a later time and he served as Agent for it, for six months without pay. The railroad was fast extended westward from Savannah to Bainbridge, which was the western terminus for a long time; the extension to Montgomery being built years later. This railroad is now the Atlantic Coastline.



ALTHOUGH REMODELED AND MODIFIED over the years the main part of the present Whigham United Methodist Church is the original building constructed on the site in 1876. (Photo by Hugh Gandy)

# History Of Whigham United Methodist Church

This is the ninth in a series of brief histories of the Methodist Churches in Grady County being published in commemoration of two hundred years of Methodism in America.

It features Whigham United Methodist Church which is located one block west of the center of town on a site it has occupied for one hundred and fifteen years.

Whigham UMC is on a circuit with Spring Hill UMC and Climax UMC and is served by Rev. Charles Whatley who preaches there on the second, fourth, and fifth Sundays for morning joint worship. John Vanstone preaches on the first and third Sundays, and on every fifth Sunday night the three churches of the circuit hold joint worship services.

The earliest known pastor of Whigham UMC was Rev. Thomas K. Leonard, who served the congregation in 1974.

There were just a few

people in Whigham when the town was first surveyed. It was laid out in blocks, and the streets were named in 1863. A school was built at the corner of First Parallel and McGriff Streets. That same year a Methodist circuit-rider came to town for a revival. Mr. and Mrs. Dave Cooper, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Brown, and Mr. and Mrs. William J. Mills joined the church. Mrs. D. W. Guilford also joined, but for some reason was never received into the church. They met in the school with eight members, and three ministers held appointments there. However, the building was not very stable and blew down in a storm.

W. W. and John Harrell deeded the Methodist Church a lot on the north side of Broad Street, and deeded the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad Company ten acres of land to establish a depot. Mr. D. W. Guilford, with his laborers and teams, donated the lumber and delivered it to the

site. That first church building was built on the lot in 1869. It was a wood, two-story structure. The Mason's were to use the upper level, but never did. Instead it was used by the Graingers, which was an organization of farmers, until they disbanded.

In 1875 this building was also blown down by a storm. The stewards sold the lumber to a local Methodist preacher and school teacher, Mr. Latamore, who built a house with it. Later the Reverend N. G. Christopher, a local Baptist minister, lived there and his daughter-in-law still does.

In 1876, William A Chester moved to Whigham from Cairo, and led the congregation in building a new church. He bought the very best materials, and the main part of that building still stands. At that time Whigham was on a circuit with Bainbridge. Later the belfry or steeple was torn away, and the old church bell was given to a

local black congregation, or sold to a church in Florida according to at least two local stories.

At this time the church had no rear door, and wedding parties had a difficult time. The pastor and groom with the groomsmen had to climb a ladder into a rear window. Later the rear door was put in with a passageway to the Sunday School building when it was built in the late 40's.

In the early days, pastors lived in the parsonage just east of the present-day school building. Mrs. G. B. Trulouk remembers Reverend Shearouse living there when she moved to Whigham. A new parsonage was built in 1972 at the corner of Laing and McGriff Streets during the pastorate of Claude Croft. The land was donated by Miss Ruth Kelly and Mrs. Gussie K. Belcher who live next door to the new parsonage. They also donated land for the Baptist parsonage which is on the other side of their house.

In the past two years the church has been extensively remodeled. The congregation built an addition to the Sunday School building and enclosed the passageway between the sanctuary and the Sunday School building. This greatly increased the size of the fellowship hall and kitchen area. Four bathrooms and two nurseries were also added. Other rooms in the older part of the building were remodeled, and the outside was painted. A new roof was added, as was a stairway in the rear of the building. Finally a central heating and cooling unit was installed.

When a storm damaged the tin roof of the sanctuary, the church replaced it with a shingle roof. A new heating and cooling unit had to be purchased for the sanctuary. It was then decided to go ahead and remodel the sanctuary. The ceiling and outside were painted, and the columns on the porch replaced. Finally, the yards were landscaped, and a contract let to keep them up.

A church historian says, "Whigham United Methodist Church is a vital growing part of the community. Through the years many faithful laypersons and pastors have worked together to build the church and share the faith," and adds "Now it is handed to us to carry on and then to pass on to our children; a strong church and a living faith in Jesus Christ. To that end we are "a family of United Methodists."

## Mr. Ray Cox To Speak At Local Methodist Churches Oct. 14th

Mr. Ray Cox, a layman on the staff of the South Georgia Methodist Conference Council on Ministries, will speak at the Tired Creek UM Church (9:30 a.m.) and the Cairo First UM Church (11 a.m.) Sunday, October 14 as the area churches observe the annual "Laity Day."

Mr. Cox is a graduate of Young Harris College and Valdosta State College. He was a lay preacher for five years and has fourteen years experience in the insurance industry as a claims repre-

sentative. He is also past president of the Brunswick, Georgia, unit of Toastmasters International. He has served his local church as Chairman of the Council on Ministries and Administrative Board for two terms in each office.

He and his wife, Carol Owens Cox, live in the "Golden Isles of Georgia." His office is at the Methodist Center on St. Simon's Island, Epworth-by-the-Sea.

Mr. Cox also was elected by the Annual Conference as a

Lay Delegate to the 1980 and 1984 General and Southeastern Jurisdictional Conferences.

## Beginner Clogging Classes

A Beginner Clogging Class began October 9 in Cairo at the State Farmers Market.

The Instructor for this eight week course is Connie

Stevens, of the Orange Blossom Specials of Tallahassee. This Class is for all ages.

If you missed the first class, there is still time to get enrolled. All you have to do is be at the Farmers Market on October 16, Tuesday, at 7 p.m. Be sure to wear hard sole shoes and comfortable clothing.

For more information, call Joyce after 5 p.m. at 377-1679, or Twila at 377-2055.

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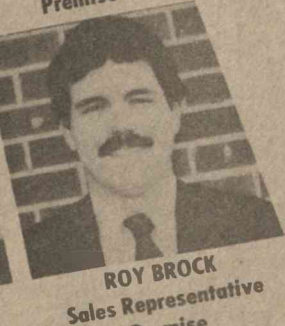
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