

The History of the Atco United Methodist Church

One Spring morning – early in the 20th century – both men and women came early to begin clearing a wooded site for the building of a church.

There were no tractors or bulldozers then so everyone used picks, axes, and shovels. It is understood church members dug the basement themselves. As they worked, other prepared a chicken dinner to keep up their strength.

Contract for construction was given to Benjamin Rennard. The cornerstone for the new church was laid during a special ceremony in 1904. Among its contents are a Bible, several testaments, an Epworth League pin, the town paper of Atco and samples of currency. There are no plans to open the cornerstone.

The Rev. Harold P. Sloan became the first pastor for the new church during its construction. The first organist and choir director was Rebecca Naudain and the first choir was made up of Mrs. Lawrence Duble, Robert Wood, Jessie Cain, Bertha and Blanche Brown and Lena Ware. Miss Ware later became the only church member to ever go into foreign mission work. She was sent to Rome (Why Rome, we now ask?), in 1919 sponsored by the Women's Foreign Missionary Society.

The first baptism was that of Blanche Watson, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Horace Watson, Sr., the first couple married was Blanche Brown and Frank Reinhard and the first funeral was that of Rebecca Naudain.

The new church was a frame structure consisting of the church sanctuary, Sunday School Room, another small classroom and a library. When the Sunday School grew too large for the original room, the primary department was moved to the basement.

Stained glass windows were donated in memory of the people whose names appear on them. A quick scan around the church today reveals eleven windows with the following names enshrined in a monument of multi-colored hue: Mrs. Elizabeth Tusy; John J. Githens and wife; Mrs. Emma Kline, Deborah Richards; Marjorie Chambosse; Fernley C. Van Schoick; Joseph, Elisha, Katie and Joly Cook and Mrs. Joseph Eldridge. To the left and right of the pulpit, as if in special placement, are two stained glass windows bearing the names of Sarah A. Richards and "In Memory" of John Richards. The window near the choir loft – with the names of Thomas J. and Helen M. Baizley – is different from the others because it is older and was taken from the Universalist Church.

The Church furnishings came from many different sources. The pulpit furniture and chancel rail were brought from the Universalist Church. These remained until the mid-1960's when the altar area was redone with a new rail, table and pulpit. The pews were purchased when the church was built and remain in use today. The first organ was a pump organ. In the late 1930's a woman's group called the big Sisters purchased the church's first electric organ which was in the memory of Mrs. William Cain and Linford Crawford. The next electric organ was donated in 1957 by Richard Ewan, Sr. Mr. Ewan was a member of a family who has continuously

supported the church's music program as choir directors and church organists. They also donated the echo speakers in memory of Irwina Ewan. The latest organ was purchased in 1983 in memory of Marthabelle Anning and Dr. Edward Stanko.

Not long after the new church's construction, the old Universalist Church which had served the Methodist congregation for a short time was moved from Hutton's Hill to a lot beside the church. The move proved to be an interesting tale. As the building was being moved, it became stuck in the mud enroute to its new location which caused the traffic to be rerouted for several days. A few of the parsonage's distinguishing features are the front door and stairwell which are wider than normal. This is due to the fact that they both belong to the Universalist Church. Located in the center of the church, the door was moved to the left to serve as the parsonage's front door and the stairwell once led to the church balcony.

The Atco First Methodist Episcopal Church was not the first church formed in Atco, but the third. The first being the short-lived Universalist Church built by a group of New Englanders in 1866. The town's second church was the First Presbyterian, built on an acre of ground donated by the Richards Estate in 1867 and located near the Atco Cemetery. This land was also a gift of the Richards.

Eighteen years elapsed before the Methodist congregation was able to pay off the mortgage on the church which was built in 1904. On February 16, 1922 a Jubilee Service was held where Caleb Githens, Sr. (the oldest member of the Official Board) touched a match to the mortgage as the congregation sang the Doxology. This was done when an Atco citizen heard that an \$800 debt remained on the church at the beginning of a new conference year in March, 1921. He began by offering \$100 toward the mortgage if the church could raise the remaining \$700. A team was formed under the leadership of Jessie Cain and they divided into divisions of ten, with each group to secure \$100. The plan was successful and the mortgage paid.

The church continued to grow. In 1917 membership grew to 86 and improvements continued within. A garage was added to the property and the parsonage was papered and a new pipe less heater installed. Indoor plumbing came in 1935 but it wasn't until 1955 that the church discontinued use of the outhouse behind the parsonage when the first bathrooms were installed downstairs. In the mid-1950's aluminum siding was installed to the exterior of the church and parsonage. Mildred Norcross remembered it cost to the church was \$2,900 and the parsonage was \$1,900. That was a lot of money in those days but they were good when they needed funding. It always seemed to come in. In 1945 a new roof was placed on the church and a new oil burner installed. In 1964 this was replaced with another oil burner. It wasn't until 1970 that the church sanctuary was carpeted. This was paid for by the J.O.Y Class. Prior to that a linoleum floor sufficed through the 1960's.

Now for an example of how time has changed. When the church needed volunteers to dig a hole for a new oil tank in 1985, unlike the early days of 1904, no one volunteered.

In the 1950's, the church steeple was the source of eventide hymns. Speakers from which the hymns were heard were connected to the record player which was located in the church office in the parsonage. They were set to play automatically. One day, Lee Trumen, who was pastor at

the time, was attending school at Drew Seminary. The record played to the end, but then the needle caught in the groove and the equipment failed to shut off automatically. Rev. Truman's wife, Ruth, described what followed in her book, "Spaghetti From the Chandelier": "...the alarming realization dawned: the parsonage was locked and no one had the key. For three miles in every direction, the Methodist church carillon was playing 'Ka-thunk, ka-thunk, ka-thunk...'. Windows refused to open and doors wouldn't yield to skeleton keys. Then someone remembered the cellar. Throwing back the outside cellar doors, they (the Trustees) almost fell down the steps in their hurry to stop the noise... a skeleton key slid into the lock and with signs of relief – they all raced upstairs to throw the switch. Lightening struck the church steeple a few months later and destroyed the system. This was never repaired.

There are a few other church structures which don't exist anymore. One is the building which once sheltered the horse and wagon of churchgoers. This was located behind the church, back near the alley. Another is the goldfish pool which once decorated the grounds between the church and the parsonage. A third are the kerosene lamps which once lit the sanctuary. Tom Anning remembers a cross atop the bell tower illuminated by spotlights. He tells how it was installed with the help of a town fire truck and its 55-foot ladder. If pressed a bit, he might even tell how he did a handstand on top of that very same ladder.

By 1960, church membership had reached 100 and church/school membership 160. It was decided that the next need of the church was an educational building. Plans began under the leadership of the Rev. J. D. Overcash. By the time fund raising began, the Rev. James E. Thompson was pastor. Under his leadership, the Rev. Edmund R. Warne of the Methodist church's Department of Finance and Field Service was secured as Crusade Director of a financial campaign to raise more than \$30,000. In the last two weeks of June 1963, the entire amount was raised in cash and pledges. Several of our members who served on the Executive Committee for this project were: Earl Brobst (chairman), Charles DelCamp, Ed McLeod, Ruby Wilson, Marie Mayers, Esther Furgione, Charlotte Gaisbery, Elizabeth Hirst, Carolyn Bakley, Wanda Emmett, Kass DelCamp, Jean Bartling, Earl Bartling, Marthabelle Anning, Richard Ewan, Mildred Norcross and Marion Szawalla. Wilbur Lewis of Long Branch was secured as architect, and the builder was Clair Slacum of Westmont. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on October 27, 1963, with District Superintendent, Rev. George E. Probert and Rev. Thompson officiating. The cornerstone, engraved with the year "1964" was laid on June 14, 1964. the building was consecrated on September 27.

The laying of the cornerstone was a memorable occasion. A list of the cornerstone's contents is secure in the personal safe of a church member. Among its contents are: the building permit for the Educational Building, an announcement of the ground breaking ceremonies, a report of the Nominating Committee, the church membership list for 1964, clippings from a local newspaper and the morning worship program for September 29, 1963, which contains an announcement of the opening of bids for the new Educational Building. Also included in the cornerstone are a 50-cent piece donated by Eugene Ewan (church organist), a photograph of ground-breaking ceremonies and a church program for June 14, 1964 (the day the cornerstone was laid).

Total cost of this building, including some furnishings was \$60,000. Its mortgage was burned on October 12, 1974 after a covered dish supper in the new Fellowship Hall. The Rev. Thom Kinter was pastor at this time.

The years 1970 to 1978 are remembered as a time of financial struggle for the church. Chuck DelCamp remembers Sunday church attendance dwindling down to about 29 people.

Now we arrive at the present. In 1999 work began to renovate the parsonage. It took a great deal of work and effort on everyone's part. A big "thank-you" goes out to Jack Broome, Carl Weaver, Frank Crowder. A special thanks goes to Joe and Judy Rival who headed up the renovating committee. There were many days when these workers would stay late into the night working at painting, installing new lighting fixtures, repairing walls and sanding. Special thanks also goes to the ladies of Tansboro for donating their spare time to put up new blinds and curtains. Appreciation to all those who helped with cleaning and various other chores.

Sandy Ewan hosted a "Parsonage Shower" to acquire some of the things needed to complete the renovations. These items included curtains for all rooms, bath accessories, pictures for the walls, area rugs and phones – just to name a few. The shower was a complete success. Our sister church, the Trinity United Methodist Church, supplied the Venetian blinds for the whole parsonage.

On May 6, 2001 the parsonage was ready for re-dedication (with a few minor items still to be completed). Our District Superintendent, Rev. Ron Watts, was on hand to help with the dedication services. There was a special church service held at Atco United Methodist Church at 10:00AM which was attended by both churches. Since this was Communion Sunday, the bread used for the service, was baked by Ellen Carlson in the new stove which was donated by Barbara Ann Johnson. During the regular service, the congregation will proceed out the church and over to the parsonage for the actual breaking of the bread. Everyone was then invited to a walk-through the 'new' parsonage followed by a pot-luck lunch at Fellowship Hall.

May 6, 2001