

HISTORICAL SKETCH

UNION SPRINGS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1978-2003

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FOREWORD

In writing the history of this period in the life of our Church, the writer necessarily depended heavily on the Minutes of the Session and the Diaconate. Furthermore, all were available, complete, and well written.

It is hoped that no significant and important information has been omitted and that excessive and unnecessary detail has been avoided, keeping the finished product complete and still easily read. The decision as to what to include has not always been easy, but the writer has used his best judgment, after a complete reading of material available. The writer has taken the liberty of adding an account of interesting and amusing events which are part of our Church history as well.

Special thanks are extended to Elder Bill Salter who acquired the Minute Books and other helpful material, without which this Historical Sketch could not have been written.

CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

As always, most of the work of the Church takes place within its various organizations. Most of these carried forward throughout the one-quarter century of this period in the life of our Church. Following is a list of these organizations with information thought to be appropriate.

SESSION

The Session has ultimate authority and responsibility as the governing body of the Church. During this period it consisted of six members, later increased to nine, and the minister. Standing committees, when appointed, consisted of the following: Worship and Music; Building and Grounds; Witness, Service, and Stewardship; Budget and Finance; Christian Education. Among those serving on the Session were Cecil McNair, B.E. Cox, J. M. Varner, Roger Welk, Phillip Richardson, Donald Parker, Jean Welk, Ada Kate Morgan, Bill Salter, Bill Hembree, Graham Hixon, Ray Mason, Henry Goodson, J. D. McMillan, Olivia McMillan, Joe Varner, Bob Retzlaff, and Dwight Hixon.

BOARD OF DEACONS

The Deacons normally met monthly with a quarterly joint meeting with the Session. One member served as Church Treasurer. The Deacons had as their primary responsibility the care and maintenance of all Church property and the management of financial matters of the Church. The Board of Deacons was disbanded on January 13, 1987, at which time the Church adopted a unicameral form of government. Among those serving as Deacons during this period were Bruce Johnson, Bill Hembree, Joe Varner, Leif Carlson, Bill Salter, Henry Goodson, Sam Rainer, John F. Moorer, Dwight Hixon, Ray Mason, and Olivia McMillan. Olivia was elected in 1985 as the first female Church Officer.

During the 1950s, before the Church had air conditioning, during really hot Sundays, the doors were left open to provide some air circulation. Really, this helped some, but there was the problem with Mack Varner's dog, a terrier who liked going to church, usually arriving during the sermon, trotting happily down the aisle, taking his place on the floor close to the pulpit. He was quiet, creating no disturbance, but somehow it didn't seem quite proper. I think what may have brought the matter to a head happened on a Sunday when one of our officers, Elder Chilton Creason, an FBI Agent, decided, during the service, that it was time for him to act – maybe because of his career in law enforcement requiring respect for law and order, and this wasn't orderly. Picture Mr. Creason, quietly tip-toeing, trying to herd the dog out. Back and forth he went between rows of seats, the dog always a few feet ahead. So, the Deacons took up the matter at their next meeting, seeking a solution. That was when one of the Deacons, Charles Archibald, came up with a way to stop the dog from coming to church – “just make him a Deacon, Preacher!”

WOMEN OF THE CHURCH

As they have throughout the life of our Church, the Women of the Church were an active and important part of our Church during this period of our history. They normally met monthly; also, they were a part of the the larger organization of Presbyterian Women of Presbytery. Money, raised largely from contributions of members, was used to assist in the program of our Church by providing for unbudgeted needs such as playground equipment for Sunday School children, new chandeliers for the sanctuary, reupholstering of the pulpit chairs, and new furnishings for the Nursery. Their resources were used also to help fund Presbytery-related needs such as Presbyterian Home for Children, Stillman College, Mission Haven, and Columbia Seminary.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Christian Education has been a vital part of our Church throughout its life. Various organizations have helped perform this function, but the Sunday Schools have had primary importance. During this period of our Church's history, Sunday School classes were provided for all age groups, several classes for children and two adult classes. Among those serving as teachers were Jean Welk, Doris Warren, Pam Salter, Joyce McMillan, Olivia McMillan, Dwight Hixon, Cecil McNair, Donald Parker, and Phil Richardson.

There used to be a large crabapple tree on the west side of the Church. At certain times of the year, this tree produced nice round, firm crabapples, and ideal ammunition for the crabapple wars that raged between Sunday School and Church among pre-teenage boys, of whom we had a goodly number at that time. Church time brought the boys in. Unfortunately, many still had pockets full of crabapples. Usually, all went fine until the sermon, at which time squirming boys pushed some crabapples out of their pockets, and they (the crabapples) rolled slowly, noisily all the way down to the front, producing snickering boys and scowling parents – ineffectually scowling parents, because they were in the choir and could do nothing else – snickering boys because they knew they were out of reach.

Another uninvited memory to share came to me while taking up collection this morning. About eighty years ago (about 1937), two barefoot eleven-year-old boys came down the same aisle and told the minister that they wanted to join the Church. I was one, and the other was one of the Hixon boys, probably Graham. Our decision was made spontaneously between Sunday School and Church – no preliminary discussions with a Church member, not even our parents. It just seemed a “neat” thing to do. My parents, both in the choir, were totally surprised.

MEN OF THE CHURCH

For some time, the men in the Church met monthly, usually for breakfast at the CE Building. Members of the group prepared the meal which was followed by a period of fellowship.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

As it had for many years, our Church continued during this period to provide a Bible School for our children each summer. The ladies of the Church gave generously of their time and talents to ensure the success of this valuable program. Sadly, the First United Methodist Church was sharply divided over some issues within the Church; therefore, a large part of their membership chose to leave and form a new church. As a result of the decrease in the number of children left, it was decided that their church and ours would cooperate and have a Joint Vacation Bible School each year. By combining this program, it became more viable and effective; the ladies of the two churches worked together to plan and carry out the Bible School each summer. The actual location of the Bible School alternated each year between the two churches. This combined Vacation Bible School continued throughout this period in our Church's history.

PASTORATES

During this period, our Church was fortunate and blessed to be served by several exemplary pastors, interim pastors, and a commissioned lay pastor.

Rev. Willard Hurlbert continued his service to the Church until 1984, at which time he accepted a call from Carbon Hill Presbyterian Church. His nine years of caring leadership was noteworthy in that it included not only our Church, but our entire community.

In 1985, our Church considered yoking with the Tuskegee Presbyterian Church, sharing the same minister. Committees from both churches were appointed and met in an effort to work out such an arrangement. After several meetings, it became evident that an agreement satisfactory to both churches could not be achieved, so the effort was reluctantly abandoned.

Following the departure of Rev. Hurlbert, our Church was ably served by Interim Minister Rev. L. E. Woodward until our Church issued a call to Rev. Alan Hagenbuch.

Rev. Hagenbuch served as our minister from April, 1991, until November, 1991, at which time he accepted a call to a church in Panama City, FL. Again, Rev. Woodward provided valuable service to our Church as Interim Minister during the time our Pastor Search Committee actively sought the services of a full-time minister.

Rev. John Langham accepted a call to our Church and was ordained and installed in December, 1993. Rev. Langham served as our minister until August, 1997, at which time he accepted a call to Grace Minister Presbyterian Church, Monroe, LA.

Dr. Bill Sauser came to us as Interim Minister in December, 1997. After approval by Presbytery, Dr. Sauser was designated as Commissioned Lay Pastor and served our Church in this capacity through the remainder of this twenty-five year period in the history of our Church. The Pastor Search Committee discontinued its search for a full-time minister.

In 2000, Ms. Pat Hitchcock, a member of the Presbytery Committee on Ministry, suggested that we consult with the Ramsey Memorial Church regarding sharing the services of Rev. John Curtis. Contact was made with a member of Ramsey Memorial, and some consideration was given to this idea. However, when Rev. Curtis accepted a call for full time service at another church, the effort was ended.

INFORMATION RELATING TO BAPTISMS AND MEMBERSHIP

During the twenty-five year period included in this historical sketch, the writer has been able to acquire the following information:

- 28 - number of baptisms performed
- 92 – number of new members coming into the Church either by transfer of letter from another church or by confession of faith
- 39 – number of members removed from Church role due to death
- 47 – number of members transferring by letter to another church

It will be noted that Church membership at the end of this period in its history is essentially the same as at the beginning, records indicating a net gain of six members during this time. It should be pointed out that some of the members included in the total have been placed on inactive status by the Session.

As of December 31, 1983, the Deacons reported 76 active members of the Church, whereas on June 9, 1986, the total was stated to be 69.

GIFTS TO CHURCH

Among gifts received by our Church were the following:

A new plaque or board to hang on the front wall of the Church was given by Syd Cook. This board was used for posting the hymn numbers to be used in each worship service. The board was handmade from walnut by a local builder, Lamar Moorer, who would accept no pay for his work.

In 1991, a number of hymnbooks, identical to the ones being used, were given to our Church by the North Decatur Presbyterian Church, Decatur, Georgia.

In 1991, Rev. Hagenbuch gave a computer and printer to the Church.

In 1996, Mrs. Betty Main gave our Church 65 Bibles for distribution and use in our worship services by the congregation. The Bibles were given in memory of her mother, Mrs. Mary E. Bell who became a member of our Church by letter of transfer from the First Presbyterian Church, Auburn, AL in 1990. She passed away in 1996.

In 1983, the Church received a bequest from the Estate of John C. Curry in the amount of \$25,000. After due consideration, the Session decided that investment income from this bequest should be contributed annually to benevolent causes of the PCUSA outside of Bullock County, AL. A committee called the Curry Fund Committee was appointed, its purpose being to recommend annually recipients of investment income from this Fund. It was specified that all income received during a calendar year be disbursed, after approval by the Session, and that the Congregation be informed of the Committee's actions.

In August, 2002, a bequest was received from the Estate of Henry Goodson in the amount of \$25,000. The Session decided that interest received annually from this bequest would be used for educational purposes. The specific allocation of this money will be decided by the Curry Committee, henceforth to be known as the Curry-Goodson Committee, in its report to the Session. After Session approval, the money will be disbursed and such action reported to the Congregation.

CHURCH PROPERTY

At this writing, the real property of the Church consisted of the Sanctuary, the Manse, and the Christian Education Building. Throughout this period, the upkeep and maintenance of our property has been dutifully accomplished by the Board of Deacons and the Session. Especially important and significant matters will be briefly summarized.

In 1981, our Church congregation voted to take the necessary legal steps to incorporate with the Session members to be named as trustees.

In 1986, the property north of the manse was bought and developed commercially. After discussions with the new owner, Hardee's restaurant, and the City of Union Springs, the Church agreed to close the alley running in an east/west direction between the Church property and the property newly acquired by Hardee's. There was a provision that the closed alley be divided equally between the two adjoining owners, that Hardee's erect and maintain a wooden fence on the new property line, and that there be no grade sloping of Church property. In 1986, the Deacons contracted with Green Thumb Nursery to plant a hedge on the south side of the new fence.

In 1986, the carport at the Manse was enclosed so as to provide additional living space.

In 1986, the Church was given an opportunity to buy property adjoining the CE Building on the west side. After consideration, the Deacons decided against making this purchase.

In 1991, the City decided to rezone a portion of East Conecuh Avenue from residential to commercial. Due to the close proximity of this property to our Church, we actively, along with other interested parties, opposed this change. However, the City subsequently voted to authorize the rezoning; legal efforts to prevent this were unsuccessful.

In 1991, two live oak trees were planted in front of the CE Building in memory of C. E. McNair and Dwight Hixon, two valued and beloved members of our Church, both of whom passed away during 1989. The trees were given by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Archibald, former members of our Church. A tree was also planted in memory of Deacon John Frank Moorer.

In 1991, a new air conditioning and heating system was installed in the Church by Luquire Co. at a cost of \$5,100.

In 1992, after due consideration of two proposals for modifying the steps at entrances to the Sanctuary, the Session approved one of the plans and had the work done making access easier; also, to make entering the access safer, hand rails were added.

In 1995, our Church sustained substantial damage during Hurricane Opal, including roof damage and almost complete destruction of the large window in the east wall of the sanctuary. The stained-glass window was rebuilt and installed by Llorens Stained Glass Co., Atlanta, GA. It was discovered that this same Company built and installed the original window when the Church was built in 1883. Roof repairs and repairs to outside walls were also completed.

Due to the absence of a full-time minister, the Session decided in 2000 to rent the manse to a desirable renter, with the understanding that the renter would vacate if a minister was called.

In 2002, for the first time in its history, the Session decided to have locks installed on all doors into the Sanctuary. Keys were made available to all members.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Music has always been an important part of worship in our Church. We have a fine organ, and have been blessed with the services of good musicians and choir members. Among organists who served our Church during this period were Linda Anderson, Helen Holcombe, Margaret Varner, Darren Driggers, John Rumph, and Jane Padgett.

There is a story, truly historical, about organ use during the early years of our Church. This story was told to me by my mother, but it took place long before she became our Church organist, probably during her childhood, since she was born in 1892. Picture a little black boy squatting in semi-darkness beneath the floor, under the organ. At the time, the organ may have had a “water motor,” as indicated in our Church History, or a bellows to provide air for operation. In any case, manual power was required, thus the little black boy. Apparently, he performed his job well, pumping the air for hymns, during the early part of the service. It was only during the sermon that he tended to doze off, so that when the time came for the final hymn, the organ wouldn’t play. This posed no serious problem – the preacher simply stamped his foot a few times, the little boy woke up, carried out his duties, and the service proceeded smoothly to its conclusion.

Phil Richardson served as our choir director for many years. He was relieved by Rhonda Langham for a short period of time. Perhaps twenty or more years ago we had a choir consisting of six or eight members. On a typical Sunday morning, the Choir was leading the Congregation in singing a familiar hymn. As with many organs, ours is topped with a broad array of pipes of various sizes, some perhaps as much as ten or twelve feet tall and eight inches in diameter. One of the larger ones, with no apparent cause, suddenly fell across Phil Richardson’s shoulder. The pipes are light in weight, so no injury resulted. Amazingly, he never missed a note! The pipe was put back in place, but a small dent is still visible. It was suggested to Phil that this might be a sign from a Higher Power, but he shrugged it off and continued his valuable service in the Choir for many years.

In 1995, we changed the time of our Sunday Worship Service and Sunday School to 9:30 a.m. and 10:45 a.m., respectively, so Jane Padgett could continue to serve as our organist and continue as organist at the First United Methodist Church.

Special services on our Church calendar included Maundy Thursday, Easter, Thanksgiving, and a Christmas Eve Service. The Christmas Eve Service, begun in 1956, has been held every year since and has been an important part of our witness to our Church and to the community as a whole.

WITNESS AND SERVICE

Throughout this period in the history of our Church, monetary gifts have been made to various organizations including John Knox Presbytery, Columbia Seminary, Presbyterian Home for Children, Bullock County Correctional Facility, Conecuh Springs School Scholarship Fund, and The Fund for Indigent Transients. Many of our contributions have been made possible by the use of designated income from the John Curry Fund.

Members have given of their time at Christmas by participating in the Salvation Army Bell Ringing.

In 1987, the John Curry Committee was dissolved, and its duties were transferred to the Session Committee--Witness, Service and Stewardship. This action was necessary because of the Church's decision to adopt a unicameral form of government.

A Dial-A-Prayer service continued for a number of years utilizing the services of Pastors and Session members.

Our Church participated with other local churches in organizing and operating a Food Bank.

Our Choir on several occasions visited the Bullock County Correctional Facility and took part in worship services. We have also presented Christmas gifts to inmates.

Alcoholics Anonymous was given permission to meet once each week in our CE Building at no charge to them.

SPECIAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

In May, 1983, a special service was held commemorating the 100th anniversary of construction and dedication of our Sanctuary. Members of the Bethel Presbyterian Church and the First United Methodist Church were invited and attended. A meal was served after the service.

Also in May, 1983, a special service was held in connection with the opening of the Church cornerstone, during which items found in a box behind the cornerstone were removed and displayed. The box was found to contain a Bible, a Confession of Faith, a list of businesses in Union Springs, various religious publications, a history of the Church, copies of two local newspapers, several letters, photographs of members and ministers, an engraved silver dollar, and a bottle of cotton seed oil. Copies were made and are displayed in our Church. The original material was placed in a new, sealed, stainless steel box and replaced behind the corner stone which was put back in place.

During 1983, Rev. Hurlbert and Elder Donald Parker attended the meeting of the General Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, as commissioners from John Knox Presbytery. The experience was especially meaningful because it was at this Assembly that the PCUSA (so-called Northern Church) and the PCUS (called the Southern Church) were reunited, after many years, as one Church.

In April 1987, our Church members joined with the Bethel Presbyterian Church in a special service commemorating their 150th anniversary.

In April 1989, our Church had a special Homecoming Service well attended by many visitors. Part of the service included performance by the Scottish Pipers Band of St. Andrews Society from Montgomery. A meal was served after the service.

Following the horrendous terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, in New York City, our Church was opened for an unplanned and impromptu gathering for prayer and consolation. People came from all over town offering individual prayers, seeking comfort and solace. For those present, it was an experience to be remembered for a lifetime.

Our Church had its 150th Anniversary Celebration on October 19, 2003. It was truly a grand and glorious occasion with over one hundred attending, including many former members and friends from out of town. Members of the Bethel Presbyterian Church were present. A delicious lunch was provided after the service. A loose-leaf binder with more information, including a copy of the sermon and numerous photographs, is available for viewing in the Sunday School room of the Church.

EPILOGUE

It is hoped that the preceding summary of the history of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church, during the twenty-five year period from 1978 to 2003, will be read along with the published account of the first 125 years of our history. By so doing, the reader will develop a historical perspective of our Church, permitting one to honor and respect those, down through the years, who have stood firm in the faith for the benefit of their families, their children, and indeed, for all mankind.

In conclusion, the writer has chosen to use two quotations from the “History of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church” from its beginning to the time of the celebration of its Centennial in 1953. These quotations are used because they are just as appropriate at this time as they were when first written.

“It is well at times to dwell upon the past, drawing from it lessons for our profit, and gathering the inspiration it has to give for future undertakings.”

“We recall a stanza from a beautiful song which reads:

Then in memory’s page I can see again
The Church by the side of the road
And whenever I roam, it is guiding me home,
The Church by the side of the road....”