

HISTORY OF
BETHESDA BAPTIST CHURCH
1818 - 1968

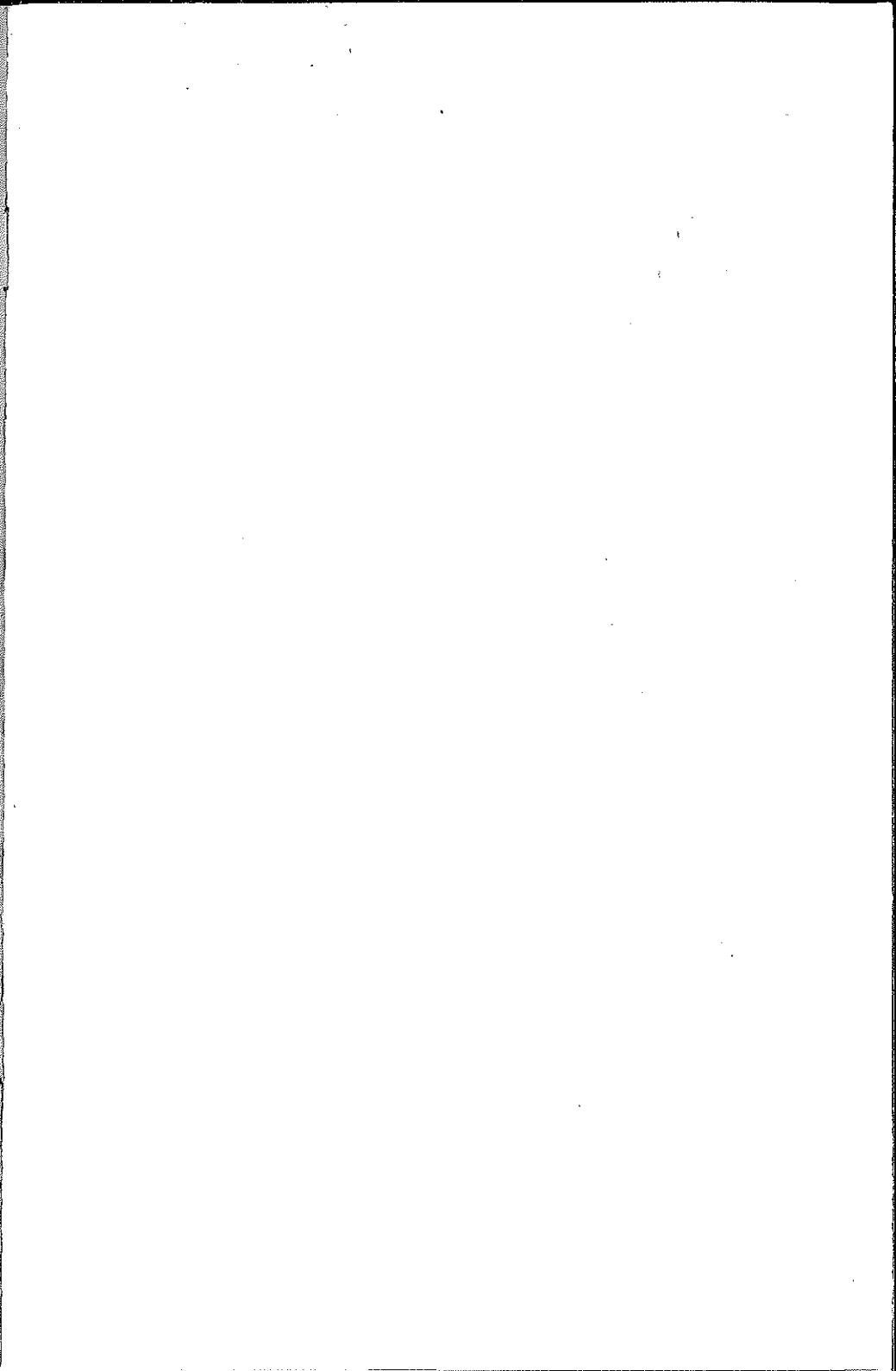
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KNOWN AS WHATLEY'S MILL
1785 - 1818



COMPILED FROM CHURCH RECORDS, DOCUMENTS,
AND OTHER AUTHENTIC PUBLICATIONS

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BETHESDA BAPTIST CHURCH



SECTION ONE

HISTORY OF BETHESDA BAPTIST CHURCH

BETHESDA CHURCH WAS ORGANIZED IN THE YEAR 1785, WITH THE NAME OF WHATLEY'S MILL. IT IS LOCATED FIVE MILES NORTH-EAST OF UNION POINT, GA.

IT OWES ITS ORIGIN TO THE UNTIRING EFFORTS OF REV. SILAS MERCER, ITS FIRST PASTOR. IT WAS KNOWN BY THE NAME OF WHATLEY'S MILL FROM 1785 TO 1818. AT THAT TIME THE NAME WAS CHANGED TO BETHESDA (MEANING BROTHERLY LOVE).

ALL OF THE CHURCH RECORDS ARE LOST FROM 1785 TO 1834 WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME DOCUMENTS. HOW THE DOCUMENTS WERE KEPT IS NOT KNOWN. THERE WAS SEVERAL EFFORTS MADE DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO FIND THEM WITHOUT SUCCESS.

THE CHURCH DOES NOT HAVE A RECORD OF ITS CHARTER MEMBERS, DUE TO THE LOSS OF THE EARLY RECORDS. THE NAMES MERCER, TOWNS, TUGGLE, MITCHELL, WEST, HUNTER, AND DAVIS ARE OFTEN MENTIONED IN THE RECORDS BEGINNING WITH 1834.

ONE MAY WONDER WHY THIS PARTICULAR SITE WAS CHOSEN FOR THE CHURCH TO BE LOCATED. MOST OF THE PLANTATIONS WERE FAIRLY LARGE, AND COVERED A LARGE TERRITORY. THERE WERE NOT MANY PUBLIC ROADS, MOSTLY TRAILS FROM ONE PLANTATION TO THE OTHER, THUS THIS SITE WAS CENTRALLY LOCATED IN THE COMMUNITY AT THAT TIME, WHICH THE CHURCH WOULD SERVE. THERE WAS NOT ANOTHER CHURCH WITHIN TWENTY MILES OF ANY FAITH, WHERE THE PEOPLE COULD ATTEND.

THE LOCATION SELECTED WAS NEAR A BOLD SPRING, ONE-HALF MILE FROM THE SOUTH FORK OF LITTLE RIVER.

THE ORIGINAL PLOT OF LAND GIVEN FOR THE CHURCH TO BE BUILT UPON WAS GIVEN BY SAMUEL WHATLEY, IN MEMORY OF HIS PARENTS, WHO WERE KILLED BY THE INDIANS WHICH ROAMED THROUGH THIS SECTION OF GEORGIA.

THIS IS WHY THE CHURCH WAS NAMED WHATLEY'S MILL.

FROM INFORMATION THAT WAS OBTAINED IT WAS FOUND THAT TWO MALE MEMBERS WERE APPOINTED AT EACH WORSHIP SERVICE TO GUARD AGAINST ATTACK BY THE INDIANS.

WE ARE LED TO BELIEVE THAT WHATLEY'S MILL HAD A FAIRLY LARGE MEMBERSHIP DUE TO THE LARGE TERRITORY IT SERVED. THIS WOULD LEAD ONE TO ASSUME THAT THE CHURCH WAS A FAIRLY LARGE BUILDING.

THE CHURCH WAS THIRTY YEARS OLD WHEN THEY BEGAN TO MAKE PLANS TO ERECT A NEW BUILDING. WE HAVE NO RECORD AS TO WHY THEY DECIDED TO REBUILD. IT COULD HAVE BEEN FOR THE NEED OF MORE SPACE, OR TO HAVE A BUILDING MORE SECURE FROM ATTACK BY THE INDIANS.

WE REALIZE THAT THEY HAD A GREAT VISION AND GOOD JUDGEMENT IN DECIDING TO BUILD A BRICK CHURCH AT THIS TIME.

SECTION TWO

THE FIRST RECORD THAT THE CHURCH HAS OF APPOINTING OR ELECTING DEACONS IS DATED MAY 20TH, 1815, WHEN THE FOLLOWING BRETHREN WERE CHOSEN AS TRUSTEES OF WHATLEY'S MILL. THIS IS THE FOLLOWING ORIGINAL REQUEST THAT WAS MADE TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE, ASKING THAT THE CHURCH BE INCORPORATED BY AN ACT OF THE LEGISLATURE.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT ON MAY 20TH, LAST, REDMAN THORNTON, JESSE MERCER, SAMUEL HUNTER, ELISHA HUNTER, THOMAS LYNE, JOHN MERCER, AND HERMAN MERCER WERE DULY CHOSEN AS THE TRUSTEES OF WHATLEY'S MILL CHURCH.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND THIS 30TH OF JULY, 1815.

(SIGNED) JESSE MERCER, PRESIDING PASTOR.

THIS IS THE OLDEST DOCUMENT THAT THE CHURCH NOW HAS OF WHATLEY'S MILL CHURCH.

THE CHURCH HAD ONLY TWO PASTORS WHILE IT WAS KNOWN AS WHATLEY'S MILL. THEY WERE REV. SILAS MERCER AND HIS SON REV. JESSE MERCER. REV. JESSE MERCER WAS PASTOR DURING THE PLANNING AND BUILDING OF THE NEW CHURCH. HE WAS ITS PASTOR FOR THIRTY YEARS.

AS FAR AS CAN BE DETERMINED BY WHAT RECORDS AND DOCUMENTS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS REVEAL, THE PLANNING OF THE NEW CHURCH WAS BEGUN IN 1815. THE BRICK WERE MOLDED AND KILNED NEAR THE CHURCH.

THE NEW BUILDING WAS TO BE SIXTY FEET LONG AND FORTY FEET WIDE, WITH THE CEILING TO BE THIRTY FEET HIGH. THE PULPIT WAS TO BE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE SANCTUARY. THE PEWS WERE TO FACE THE NORTH SIDE, WITH A GALLERY ON THE EAST END, SOUTH SIDE AND WEST END OF THE SANCTUARY. THE FIRST FLOOR WAS OF DIRT. THE WALLS WERE TO BE EIGHTEEN INCHES THICK, ABOVE THE FIRST LINE OF WINDOWS, OR APPROXIMATELY TWELVE FEET HIGH, THE REMAINDER OF THE WALL TO BE TWELVE INCHES THICK, UP TO THE TOP OF THE CHURCH.

WE HAVE NO RECORD OF WHO HAD THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DIRECTING THE BUILDING OF THE NEW CHURCH.

WE HAVE NO RECORD AT ALL OF THE YEARS 1816 AND 1817, BUT WE CAN BELIEVE THEY WERE BUSY WITH THE MAKING OF THE BRICK AND PROBABLY ERECTING THE CHURCH AT THE SAME TIME, SINCE IT WAS GOING TO TAKE SEVERAL THOUSAND BRICK TO COMPLETE THE BUILDING.

THE BUILDING WAS COMPLETED IN THE FALL OF 1818, WHEN PLANS WERE MADE TO MOVE INTO THE NEW CHURCH BUILDING.

THE CHURCH WAS NOTIFIED OF THE INCORPORATION OF THE CHURCH BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA, WHICH WE QUOTE FROM THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT THE CHURCH OWNS, DATED DECEMBER 17TH, 1818.

AN ACT

TO INCORPORATE THE BAPTIST CHURCH OF BETHESDA,
GREENE COUNTY GEORGIA.
SECTION ONE

BE IT ENACTED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY MET AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF SAME.

THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH FORMERLY KNOWN BY THE NAME AND THE STYLE OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT WHATLEY'S MILL, ON LITTLE RIVER IN GREENE COUNTY IN SINCERITY AND DEED, AS A BODY AND BE KNOWN BY THE NAME BAPTIST CHURCH AT BETHESDA.

SECTION TWO

AND BE FURTHER ENACTED BY THE AUTHORITY AFORESAID THAT THE DEACONS OF SAID CHURCH FOR THE TIME BEING AND THEIR SUCCESSORS IN OFFICE BE VESTED WITH ALL THE PROPERTY WHICH MAY BELONG TO OR CLAIMED BY SAID CHURCH, AND ANY WHICH HEREAFTER COME INTO THEIR POSSESSIONS IN RIGHT OF SAID CHURCH, BOTH REAL AND PERSONAL TO HAVE AND TO HOLD THE SAME FREE FROM TAXATION, FOR THE SOLE USE, BENEFIT AND REPROOF OF SAID CHURCH, IN THE PROMOTION OF THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD. AND THEY ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED AND EMPOWERED, AND THEIR SUCCESSORS IN OFFICE TO USE AND EXERCISE THEMSELVES IN ALL THE FUNCTIONS USUALLY CONVEYED BY ACTS OF INCORPORATION TO RELIGIOUS BODIES.

(SIGNED) BENJAMIN WILLIAMS, SPEAKER,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.
MATTHEW TALBORT, PRESIDENT,
OF THE SENATE.

(ATTESTED) 17TH, DECEMBER 1818.
WILLIAM RABUN, GOVERNOR.

ALL THE CHURCH MINUTES FROM 1785 TO 1833 ARE LOST. A

FEW DOCUMENTS AND DEEDS OF THE LAND THAT ARE STILL INTACT. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MINUTES OF WHATLEY'S MILL, WHICH NAME WAS CHANGED TO BETHESDA.

SECTION THREE

THE FIRST SERVICE WAS HELD ON NOV. 14TH, 1818, WHEN PLANS WERE MADE FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW BUILDING.

FIRST, THE APPLICATION HAD BEEN MADE AND TRANSMITTED TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE ASKING TO BE INCORPORATED WITH THE DEACONS AS TRUSTEES OF THE CHURCH, WHICH WAS GRANTED ON DEC. 20TH, 1818. THIS BEING ONE OF THE FEW CHURCHES TO BE INCORPORATED BY AN ACT OF THE STATE LEGISLATURE.

SECOND, DECEMBER 20TH, 1818 WAS SET AS THE TIME FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW BUILDING, NOW KNOWN AS BETHESDA BAPTIST CHURCH. THE REV. JESSE MERCER, THE PASTOR WAS CHOSEN TO PREACH THE DEDICATION SERMON.

THIRD, THE CHURCH WAS TO FAST AND PRAY FOR TWO DAYS.

AFTER REV. JESSE MERCER WAS CALLED TO THE PASTORATE OF THE CHURCH, HE MOVED HIS FAMILY TO A SMALL FARM APPROXIMATELY FIVE MILES FROM THE CHURCH NEAR THE FORK OF LITTLE RIVER, WHERE HE LIVED FOR MANY YEARS. ONE OF HIS CHILDREN WAS BURIED NEAR THE HOME WHILE HE WAS PASTOR OF BETHESDA CHURCH. ALMOST ALL OF THE PLANTATIONS HAD THEIR OWN CEMETERY IN WHICH THEY BURIED THEIR DEAD. MOST OF THEM WERE NEAR THE FRONT YARD OR IN THE GARDEN.

REV. JESSE MERCER GAVE UP THE PASTORIAL CARE OF THE CHURCH IN 1826. HE WAS SUCCEEDED BY REV. JONATHAN DAVIS.

ON JULY 14TH, 1827 THE CHURCH APPOINTED A COMMITTEE OF FIVE TO LOOK INTO THE ADVISIBILITY OF HAVING PREACHING ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH IN ADDITION OF THE THIRD SUNDAY, AND SATURDAY BEFORE THE THIRD SUNDAY. THIS WAS CONTINUED FOR A WHILE,

AND AGAIN FOR SEVERAL INTERVALS.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY SOCIETY WAS ORGANIZED AT BETHESDA CHURCH IN 1814, AT WHICH TIME THERE WAS ONLY ONE OTHER MISSIONARY SOCIETY IN THE STATE.

IN 1824 THE CHURCH PERMITTED A DAY SCHOOL TO BE TAUGHT IN THE CHURCH. WE DO NOT HAVE ANY RECORD AS TO HOW LONG THE SCHOOL CONTINUED IN THE CHURCH.

IN 1828 A GREAT REVIVAL WAS HELD IN BETHESDA CHURCH, WHICH LASTED FROM APRIL TO OCTOBER, IN WHICH TIME NO LESS THAN TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-ONE PEOPLE UNITED WITH THE CHURCH.

THE FIRST SUNDAY SCHOOL WAS ORGANIZED IN 1837. IT DID NOT SEEM TO BE A SUCCESS AT THAT TIME, AS IT WAS DISCONTINUED AT THAT TIME. IT WAS REORGANIZED LATER AND PROVED TO BE VERY HELPFUL IN TEACHING THE BIBLE, ESPECIALLY TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

IN 1836 BETHESDA CHURCH LICENSED A COLORED BROTHER TO PREACH THE GOSPEL. HE WAS KNOWN AS BROTHER SAM. HE WAS GIVEN PERMISSION TO PREACH IN THE CHURCH ON THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH TO THE COLORED PEOPLE.

IN 1834 THERE WERE FORTY-ONE PEOPLE BAPTISED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH.

SECTION FOUR

THE YEARS FROM 1834 TO 1850 WERE FRUITFUL YEARS. THE MEMBERSHIP INCREASED EACH YEAR ACCORDING TO THE RECORDS.

WE FIND FROM THE RECORDS THAT THE CHURCH HAD CORRESPONDENTS FROM THE NEIGHBORING CHURCH TO MEET WITH THEM ON CONFERENCE DAYS, AT WHICH TIME THE CORRESPONDENTS WOULD BE INVITED TO HELP SETTLE ANY DIFFICULTY THAT MIGHT COME UP IN THE CHURCH, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE CHURCH HAD TO DISCIPLINE ONE OF ITS MEMBERS. MANY TIMES THE MEMBER THAT WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE CONFERENCE WOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH. QUITE UNLIKE TODAY, THE

CHURCH MAINTAINED VERY STRICT DISCIPLINE WITH ITS MEMBERS. A MEMBER WOULD BE CITED FOR BEING INTOXICATED, DANCING OR ANY OTHER UNCHRISTLIKE ACT, COMMITTED BY A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH, THAT WAS AGAINST THE DOCTRINAL TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH. THE RECORD SHOWS THAT MOST OF THEM WOULD COME BACK AND INDICATE THEY HAD REPENTED AND WOULD ASK THE CHURCH TO REINSTATE THEM INTO THE FULL FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH, WHICH THE CHURCH WOULD GLADLY DO SINCE THEY SHOWED A DESIRE TO DO BETTER.

FROM 1834 TO 1850, THE FOLLOWING WERE CALLED AS PASTORS OF BETHESDA CHURCH: JONATHAN DAVIS FROM 1827 TO 1837; V. R. THORNTON FROM 1837 TO 1839, 1841 TO 1842, 1846 TO 1849. HE WAS CALLED TO PASTOR THE CHURCH THREE TIMES. ADIEL SHERWOOD FROM 1839 TO 1840, N. M. LUMPKIN IN 1843, I. S. BAKER FROM 1844 TO 1845, AND S. G. HILLYER FROM 1848 TO 1853.

IT WAS DURING THE PASTORATE OF BROTHER HILLYER THAT THE CHURCH DECIDED TO MAKE THE FIRST MAJOR RENOVATIONS AND CHANGES IN THE SANCTUARY. THIS WAS IN THE YEAR OF 1850 THE WORK WAS PLANNED.

THE CHURCH SECURED THE SERVICES OF ONE OF ITS MEMBERS TO DO THE WORK AS FOLLOWS:

1. TO INSTALL WOODEN FLOOR IN THE CHURCH, THE CHURCH FORMERLY HAD A FLOOR MADE OF BRICK.
2. TO MOVE PULPIT FROM THE NORTH SIDE OF THE BUILDING TO THE WEST END.
3. TO FILL WINDOWS WITH SASH WITH GLASS, WITH BLINDS ON EACH WINDOW. UP UNTIL NOW THE CHURCH HAD ONLY SHUTTERS ON THE WINDOWS.
4. CLOSE ONE DOOR AND MAKE IT INTO A WINDOW ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CHURCH.
5. TO MAKE TWO DOORS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE PULPIT ON THE WEST END OF THE CHURCH.
6. TO CHANGE POSITION OF THE PEWS TO FACE THE WEST END OF THE CHURCH INSTEAD OF FACING THE NORTH SIDE.
7. TO MAKE SIXTEEN PEWS SIXTEEN FEET LONG WITH A PARTITION DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THEM.

- THIRTY-SIX PEWS SEVEN FEET LONG. THE SHORT PEWS TO BE PLACED ON EITHER SIDE AND THE LONG PEWS IN THE MIDDLE, THUS MAKING TWO AISLES FROM THE EAST END TO THE WEST END.
8. WINDOW AND DOOR FACINGS TO BE REPAIRED AND PAINTED.
 9. THE GALLERIES ON THE NORTH END AND SOUTH SIDE WERE TO BE REMOVED, THUS LEAVING ONLY THE GALLERY ON THE EAST END TO REMAIN.

THE CONTRACTOR WAS TWO YEARS GETTING THE REPAIRS FINISHED.

THE PULPIT THAT WAS MOVED TO THE WEST END WAS TO BE BETWEEN THE TWO FIREPLACES AND WAS TO BE FIVE FEET HIGHER THAN THE FLOOR OF THE CHURCH. WITH FOUR STEPS ON EITHER SIDE LEADING TO THE TOP OF THE PULPIT. WITH A STAND ON EITHER SIDE TO BE USED FOR THE LAMPS, SO THAT THE PREACHER COULD SEE HOW TO READ FROM THE PULPIT.

THE CHURCH NEVER HAD ANY WEALTHY MEMBERS, AS MOST OF THEM WERE ENGAGED IN FARMING. MOST OF THE PASTORS DURING THE PERIOD FROM 1850 TO 1900 ALSO LIVED ON A FARM. HAD THEY NOT HAD THIS FOR SUPPLEMENT OF THEIR SALARY, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HARD FOR THEM TO HAVE PASTORED THE CHURCH. DURING THIS PERIOD THE CHURCH HAD DIFFICULTY IN MEETING ITS OBLIGATIONS, SINCE THEIR ONLY INCOME WAS FARMING.

FROM 1834 TO 1900 THE MEMBERSHIP NEVER FELL BELOW 176 MEMBERS AND RAN AS HIGH AS 230 MEMBERS.

IT WAS CUSTOMARY TO OPEN THE DOORS OF THE CHURCH FOR THE RECEPTION OF MEMBERS EACH CONFERENCE DAY WHICH WAS THE THIRD SATURDAY OR THE SATURDAY BEFORE THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH. THE RECORD SHOWS THAT MOST OF THE PEOPLE PRESENTED THEMSELVES FOR MEMBERSHIP ON CONFERENCE DAYS. MANY MALE MEMBERS WERE CITED FOR NOT ATTENDING CONFERENCE.

AS OTHER BAPTIST CHURCHES WERE ORGANIZED NEARBY, MANY OF THE MEMBERS AT BETHESDA CHURCH MOVED THEIR MEMBERSHIP SO THAT IT MIGHT BE NEARER FOR THEM

TO GO TO CHURCH. THEN TOO WE FIND FROM THE RECORDS THAT THE CHURCH LOST MANY MEMBERS FROM DEATH, WHICH WE FIND MANY PAGES IN THE MINUTES DEDICATED TO THEIR MEMORY.

PRIOR TO 1900 BETHESDA CHURCH ORDAINED THE FOLLOWING TO THE MINISTRY. REV. V. R. THORNTON, REV. W. L. TUCKER, REV. W. A. OVERTON, ADIEL SHERWOOD, AND A COLORED BROTHER CYRUS THAXTON.

SECTION FIVE

IN 1888 TWO MEMBERS OF BETHESDA CHURCH VISUALIZED THE NEED OF A CEMETERY AT THE CHURCH FOR THE MEMBERS TO USE INSTEAD OF BURYING IN THE FAMILY PLOTS NEAR THE PLANTATION HOMES, WHERE THEY LIVED.

THOMAS P. TUGGLE AND HIS WIFE KITTY G. TUGGLE DEEDED THE CHURCH ONE ACRE OF LAND ADJOINING THE CHURCH YARD TO BE USED FOR A CEMETERY. NO LOTS WERE TO BE SOLD, THE USE OF IT TO BE USED BY ANYONE WHO WISHED TO BE BURIED IN IT.

MRS. HARRIET MITCHELL WAS THE FIRST MEMBER TO BE BURIED IN THE NEW CEMETERY. THERE IS A BURIAL PLOT NEAR THE EAST END OF THE CHURCH THAT HAS SEVERAL GRAVES MARKED WITH MARKERS WITH THE NAME SANKEY ON MOST OF THEM. THIS CEMETERY IS NOT ON THE CHURCH PROPERTY. THE CHURCH HAS NO RECORD OF ANY OF THE PEOPLE BURIED THERE.

THERE IS BETWEEN FIFTEEN AND TWENTY FAMILY CEMETERIES IN THE COMMUNITY. SOME ARE WELL KEPT, THOUGH SOME ARE COVERED WITH BRIARS AND VINES SO THAT THEY CAN HARDLY BE FOUND. THE PUBLIC ROADS HAVE BEEN RELOCATED AND DO NOT GO NEAR THE OLD HOME-SITES WHERE THE FAMILY BURIAL PLOTS ARE LOCATED. SINCE MANY OF THE FARMS HAVE CHANGED OWNERS, SOME OF THEM SEVERAL TIMES, THE NEW OWNERS HAVE FAILED TO KEEP THE BURIAL PLOTS IN GOOD CONDITION SO THAT THEY MAY BE EASILY LOCATED. THE WRITER SPENT SEVERAL HOURS AND WALKED

MANY MILES TRYING TO LOCATE A GRAVE OF ONE OF HIS RELATIVES.

THE CHURCH ASSUMED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF KEEPING THE CEMETERY AT THE CHURCH IN GOOD CONDITION, AND KEEPS A GOOD FENCE AROUND IT. THUS IN THIS WAY HONORING THOSE WHO HAVE GONE TO BE WITH THEIR MAKER.

FROM 1850 TO 1900 BETHESDA CHURCH BURIED MANY OF ITS MEMBERS WHO HAD DEDICATED THEIR LIVES TO GOD AND TO THE ONGOING OF THE LORD'S WORK HERE, GIVING OF THEIR TIME AND TALENT AND FINANCIAL MEANS.

ON JULY 16TH, 1906 THE FOLLOWING COMMITTEE WAS APPOINTED TO BUILD A NEW POOL FOR BAPTISMAL PURPOSES, W. D. OVERTON, M. G. JACKSON, AND W. H. MURDEN. SINCE THE CHURCH WAS ORGANIZED THE CHURCH HAD USED A POOL IN THE SPRING RUN JUST BELOW THE SPRING. THE WATER FROM THE SPRING FLOWED THROUGH THE POOL CONTINUALLY, THUS MAKING IT REAL COLD ALL THE TIME. THE NEW POOL WAS TO BE LOCATED ABOUT FIFTY FEET WEST OF THE SPRING, AND WAS TO BE MADE OF BRICK AND CONCRETE. IT COULD BE FILLED AHEAD OF A SERVICE AND WOULD BE MUCH WARMER FOR THE CANDIDATES TO BE BAPTIZED. IT IS STILL INTACT AND IN USE.

ON JULY 20TH, 1907 THE CHURCH SENT THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE DIRECTED TO HON. R. E. DAVISON WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

BETHESDA CHURCH TODAY IN REGULAR CONFERENCE UNANIMOUSLY INSTRUCTED THE DEACONS OF THIS CHURCH TO WRITE AND ASK YOU TO GIVE YOUR ABLE SUPPORT TO THE PROHIBITION BILL NOW PENDING IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, PASSED BY THE SENATE; AND SHOULD THE SAME BE PASSED, THEY ESPECIALLY REQUEST YOU USE EVERY EFFORT TO HAVE IT GO INTO EFFECT AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE DATE.

SIGNED,

C. J. THORNTON
A. L. DICKINSON

S. HESTER
W. H. LUNCEFORD
F. L. ASBURY
W. S. HESTER
DEACONS, BETHESDA CHURCH

Oct. 17th, 1908- The church decided to meet on next conference day and cut the large trees in the cemetery and near the church.

Aug. 1910- The Sunday School requested permission from the church to purchase some new song books. The church in turn appointed a committee to decide what song books to purchase so that the proper songs would be taught in the Sunday School.

Aug. 20th, 1912- A conference was called in order to grant letters of dismissal to the following members to organize a Missionary Baptist Church at Robinson, Georgia:

W. H. MURDEN
OSCAR H. MURDEN
MARY G. MURDEN
RUFAS SHANK
RONNIE L. SHANK
LILLIAN SHANK
ANNIE MONK
WILLIAM F. HARVELL
MAGGIE C. HARVELL
RUTH C. HIXON

APRIL 1914- The Sunday School asked permission to place curtains in the east end on either side of the sanctuary, to make into Sunday School rooms. The permission was granted.

MAY 18TH, 1918- The church appointed a committee to paint the interior of the sanctuary, and to make other repairs that needed to be done. Also to make plans for the observance of the centennial of the church building. Mr. C. J. Thornton, Miss Eva Asbury, Mrs. Mattie Dickinson, Mr. W. S. Hester, Mr. J. V. Durham, Mr. J. C. Murden and Mrs. Lizzie Thornton.

AUG. 1918- THE CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE REPORTED A SPLENDID PROGRAM HAD BEEN PLANNED AND CARRIED OUT. REV. B. J. W. GRAHAM, EDITOR OF THE CHRISTIAN INDEX, PREACHED THE CENTENNIAL SERMON, READING HIS SCRIPTURE FROM THE BIBLE THAT WAS PRESENTED TO THE CHURCH BY REV. JESSE MERCER ON JAN. 1819. THE TEXT COMING FROM THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS, CHAPTER 1, VERSES 21 AND 22.

JUNE 1920- BETHESDA CHURCH ORGANIZED A B.Y.P.U. WITH MISS LUCILE WILLOUGHBY AS ITS DIRECTOR.

JULY 1922- THE CHURCH HAD PREVIOUSLY DECIDED TO HOLD THE ANNUAL MEETING IN JULY INSTEAD OF AUGUST, AS HAD BEEN THE SET TIME FOR MANY YEARS. THERE WERE SIX CANDIDATES FOR BAPTISM. THIS IS THE ONLY TIME OTHER THAN THE THIRD WEEK IN AUGUST THE CHURCH HELD THE ANNUAL REVIVAL.

SEPT. 1938- THE FOLLOWING COMMITTEE WAS APPOINTED TO EXAMINE THE ROOF ON THE CHURCH, AND DECIDE AS TO WHETHER THE CHURCH NEEDED A NEW ROOF: F. L. ASBURY, W. S. HESTER, SAM OGLETREE, MERCER DURHAM, AND VERNE MATHIS. AFTER CAREFULLY EXAMINING THE ROOF THE COMMITTEE REPORTED THAT THE ROOF NEEDED TO BE REPLACED. THE SAID COMMITTEE WAS INSTRUCTED TO PLACE A FIRST CLASS METAL ROOF ON THE CHURCH, HAVING BEEN PREVIOUSLY COVERED WITH SHINGLES SEVERAL TIMES.

MAY 1940- THE CHURCH VOTED TO ENTER INTO THE MINISTERS RETIREMENT PLAN. THE PLAN BEING OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME.

JULY 4TH, 1943- PERMISSION WAS GRANTED TO DR. T. B. RICE OF GREENSBORO, GA. WHO AT THAT TIME WAS COUNTY HISTORIAN FOR GREENE COUNTY, TO MOVE THE MARKERS ON THE GRAVES OF THE TWO CHILDREN OF REV. JESSE MERCER THAT WERE BURIED AT BETHESDA CEMETERY, AND PLACE THEM IN THE PENFIELD CEMETERY, SO THAT THE FAMILY MIGHT BE BURIED TOGETHER.

JUNE 1944- BETHESDA CHURCH HELD ITS FIRST VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL. THE NEWLY ELECTED ASSO. MISSIONARY OR FIELD WORKER AS THEY WERE CALLED AT THAT TIME, REV. W. R. JOHNSON, WAS ITS SUPERINTENDANT. THIS WAS THE FIRST FIELD WORKER THE GEORGIA ASSOC-

IATION HAD EMPLOYED. SINCE 1944 THE BETHESDA CHURCH HAS HELD A VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL EACH YEAR.

MAY 1945- THE RAYLE ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP COOPERATION NOTIFIED THE CHURCH THAT THEY WOULD EXTEND THE POWER LINE TO THE CHURCH FROM THE WASHINGTON HIGHWAY IF THERE WERE AS MANY AS THREE HOUSES WHICH WOULD AGREE TO HAVE THE HOUSES WIRED FOR ELECTRICITY, MAKING FOUR HOUSES FOR THE MILE OFF THE WASHINGTON HIGHWAY. THE CHURCH APPOINTED A COMMITTEE WITH MR. HENRY RUTHERFORD AS ITS CHAIRMAN TO TRY TO GET THE HOUSES WIRED FOR ELECTRICITY, SO THAT THE CHURCH MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET ELECTRICITY FOR LIGHTING PURPOSES. THE COMMITTEE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE HOUSES WIRED FOR ELECTRICITY.

THE LIGHTS WERE TURNED ON IN THE CHURCH ON JULY 18TH FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE COMMITTEE HAD WORKED FAITHFULLY TO GET THE LIGHTS IN TIME FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING THE THIRD WEEK IN AUGUST.

DEC. 1945- MR. MILLARD SWANN GAVE THE CHURCH A HALF ACRE OF LAND THAT WAS ADJACENT TO THE CEMETERY, SO THAT THE CEMETERY MIGHT BE ENLARGED, AS THE ORIGINAL CEMETERY WAS ALMOST FILLED.

AT THE SAME TIME THE CHURCH REMOVED THE OLD FENCE AROUND THE CEMETERY, AND PLACED A NEW NET WIRE FENCE AROUND THE ENTIRE CEMETERY, WITH STEEL POSTS.

SEPT. 1949- THE CHURCH VOTED TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS TO THE SANCTUARY:

TO PLACE CONCRETE FLOOR IN THE CHURCH TO BE COVERED WITH TILE.

TO PUT PARTITIONS IN THE GALLERY SO AS TO MAKE THREE SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOMS. THE FRONT OF THE GALLERY WAS TO BE ENCLOSED WITH SLIDING PANELS SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE RAISED FOR SEATING PURPOSES IN THE SANCTUARY.

TO ENCLOSE THE PORTIONS BELOW THE GALLERY, ON EITHER SIDE OF THE DOOR AT THE EAST END OF THE CHURCH, WITH PANELS THAT COULD BE RAISED FOR USE IN THE SANCTUARY FOR SEATING SPACE IF NEEDED.

TO PAINT THE INTERIOR OF THE SANCTUARY.

OCT. 1952- THE CHURCH VOTED TO INSTALL PROPANE

GAS HEAT IN THE CHURCH. THE CHURCH AND ALWAYS USED THE FOUR LARGE FIREPLACES FOR HEATING THE SANCTUARY. THE FIREPLACES WERE CLOSED AT THE TOP OF THE FIREPLACE WITH A PIECE OF SHEETROCK EXTENDING TO THE BACK OF THE FIREPLACE, PAINTED BLACK. ONE WOULD HAVE TO LOOK VERY CLOSELY TO OBSERVE THAT IT WAS STOPPED UP, SO THAT THE HEAT WOULD NOT ESCAPE UP THE CHIMNEYS, AND STILL LOOK AS IF THE FIREPLACE WAS OPEN.

FEB. 1954- MR. M. H. CALLAWAY SR. GAVE THE CHURCH THE PLOT OF LAND LYING ON THE SOUTH-WEST SIDE OF THE CHURCH SO LONG AS THE PUBLIC ROADS WERE NOT RELOCATED. THE CHURCH ACCEPTED IT ON THESE TERMS.

APRIL 1954- THE CHURCH PURCHASED NEW PULPIT FURNITURE WITH A CASH CONTRIBUTION GIVEN BY MR. MERCER REYNOLDS, WHICH BEARS A PLAQUE HONORING HIM IN APPRECIATION FOR HIS THOUGHTFULNESS OF BETHESDA CHURCH.

DEC. 1954- THE CHURCH VOTED TO PURCHASE NEW PEWS. THE ONES THAT WERE BEING USED UP TO THIS TIME WERE HAND-PLANED, AND HAD BEEN USED SINCE 1850. THE CHURCH PURCHASED TWENTY-TWO NEW PEWS, AT A COST OF \$2510.00.

THERE WERE TO BE ELEVEN PEWS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE SANCTUARY, AND AN AISLE DOWN THE CENTER OF THE SANCTUARY, WITH AN AISLE DOWN THE ENDS OF THE PEWS NEAR THE WALL.

MAR. 1954- THE CHURCH VOTED TO ENTER INTO THE MINISTERS RETIREMENT PLAN THROUGH THE RELIEF AND ANNUITY BOARD OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE PLAN WAS BEING OFFERED TO THE PASTORS AND CHURCHES.

MAY 1955- THE BETHESDA BROTHERHOOD WAS ORGANIZED WITH SEVENTEEN MEMBERS. THIS BEING ONE OF THE FIRST BROTHERHOODS ORGANIZED IN THE GEORGIA ASSOCIATION.

SECTION SIX

JUNE 19TH, 1955- A DEDICATION SERVICE WAS HELD DEDICATING THE NEW PEWS AND PULPIT FURNITURE TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE ONGOING OF THE KINGDOM'S WORK.

JULY 1955- THE CHURCH VOTED TO BEGIN HOLDING ITS REGULAR CONFERENCE ON SATURDAY BEFORE THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH, ALSO TO HOLD THE REGULAR DEACONS MEETING PRIOR TO THE CONFERENCE. THIS BEING DONE IN ORDER THAT THE CHURCH WOULD NOT HAVE TO ATTEND TO THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH ON SUNDAY MORNINGS.

JULY 1955- THE CHURCH VOTED TO BUILD A BRICK PLATFORM ON THE WEST END OF THE CHURCH WITH BRICK STEPS ON ALL THREE SIDES OF IT.

APRIL 1956- THE WOMENS MISSIONARY UNION WAS GIVEN PERMISSION TO BUILD A CHOIR LOFT AND REARRANGE THE PULPIT BETWEEN THE FIREPLACES ON THE WEST END OF THE SANCTUARY.

JUNE 1957- THE CHURCH VOTED TO ERECT GRANITE PICNIC TABLES ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CHURCH YARD, EXTENDING TOWARD THE SPRING.

SEPT. 1957- A BRONZE PLAQUE WAS ERECTED BY THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION, IN THE FORKS OF THE TWO ROADS LEADING INTO THE CHURCH YARD.

OCT. 1958- THE ASBURY METHODIST CHURCH LOCATED ONE MILE SOUTH-WEST OF BETHESDA CHURCH, HAVING DISBANDED AND MOVING THEIR MEMBERSHIP TO THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH OF UNION POINT, GA., VOTED TO GIVE THE BETHESDA CHURCH THE BUILDING AND GROUNDS, SO THAT THE BETHESDA CHURCH MIGHT CONVERT IT INTO A COMMUNITY CENTER FOR THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. THE CHURCH IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO IMPROVE THE PROPERTY BY DRILLING A DEEP WELL, CONSTRUCTING A BARBECUE PIT, ERECTING GRANITE PICNIC TABLES IN THE YARD, INSTALLING OUTDOOR LIGHTS, AND REST ROOMS, ALSO INSTALLING ELECTRIC STOVE, REFRIGERATOR, SINK, CABINETS, AND HOT WATER.

MARCH 1959- THE CORA DICKINSON MEMORIAL SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS PURCHASED A NEW PIANO FOR THE CHURCH, AND ASKED THAT THE ONE PRESENTLY BEING USED BE CARRIED TO THE COMMUNITY CENTER, WHICH WAS DONE.

AUG. 1959- THE ROAD LEADING FROM THE WASHINGTON HIGHWAY TO THE CHURCH WAS PAVED.

AUG. 1959- THE CHURCH VOTED TO BUILD AN

EDUCATION ANNEX ON THE NORTH-EAST SIDE OF THE CHURCH BUILDING, CONSISTING OF THREE CLASS ROOMS AND A HALL. ALSO AT THE SAME TIME VOTED TO ERECT BRICK STEPS ACROSS THE WEST END OF THE CHURCH BUILDING.

APRIL 18TH, 1960- DEDICATION SERVICES WERE HELD DEDICATING THE NEW EDUCATIONAL ANNEX TO THE GLORY OF GOD. THAT IT MAY BE USED TO TEACH THE WORD OF GOD AND THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE.

JUNE 1960- IRON RAILINGS WERE PLACED ON THE STEPS ON BOTH THE EAST AND WEST ENDS OF THE BUILDING, ENABLING PEOPLE TO GO UP AND DOWN THE STEPS WITHOUT FALLING.

OCT. 1960- MR. W. W. WILLIAMS, HUSBAND OF THE LATE MRS. IDA FLUKER WILLIAMS, PRESENTED BETHESDA CHURCH WITH A GIFT OF \$500.00 TO BE PLACED IN TRUST IN MEMORY OF HIS WIFE, MRS. IDA FLUKER WILLIAMS.

FEB. 18TH, 1961- THE CHURCH ANNOUNCED IT HAD MADE PROVISIONS TO KEEP A NURSERY IN THE BEGINNER SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOM, DURING WORSHIP HOURS.

MAY, 1961- THE ASSO. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED AT THEIR MAY MEETING THAT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF UNION POINT AND BETHESDA CHURCH BE CHANGED FROM THE THIRD DISTRICT TO THE SECOND DISTRICT, IN ORDER TO EQUALIZE THE MEMBERSHIP IN THE FIVE DISTRICTS WHICH COMPRISE THE GEORGIA ASSOCIATION. BOTH CHURCHES AGREED TO THE CHANGE.

AUG. 1961- THE BETHESDA CHURCH ENGAGED THE SERVICES OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY TO MICROFILM AND LAMINATE ALL THE CHURCH RECORDS AND DOCUMENTS UP TO THE YEAR 1925. THE CHURCH GAVE MERCER UNIVERSITY A COPY OF THE MICROFILM FOR THEIR LIBRARY.

JUNE 1965- THE CHURCH VOTED TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS IN THE SANCTUARY:

REPAIR OR REPLACE ALL WINDOWS IN THE SANCTUARY.

INSTALL CELOTEX OVER THE CEILING IN THE SANCTUARY.

REMOVE THE PARTITIONS AND PANELING IN THE GALLERY, RESTORING IT AS IT WAS BEFORE IT WAS MADE

INTO SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOMS. THE CHURCH DID NOT NEED THE SPACE FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOMS, WITH THE NEW ANNEX.

TO PAINT ALL OF THE INSIDE OF THE SANCTUARY.

APRIL 1966- MRS. LUCY T. FALKINBURG, MRS. ELIZABETH BOWMAN, AND MRS. MARGARET HILL, PRESENTED THE CHURCH WITH A NEW PULPIT BIBLE, IN MEMORY OF THEIR FATHER, MR. C. J. THORNTON, AND IN HONOR OF THEIR BROTHER, MR. CHARLES J. THORNTON. THE ONE THAT WAS IN USE PRIOR TO NOW WAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH BY REV. JESSE MERCER IN 1819. THE PAGES HAD BECOME TOO BRITTLE AND WORN TO BE USED ANY LONGER. MRS. KATHLEEN T. DOLVIN HAD IT REBOUND IN 1951. THE CHURCH CLAIMS THIS BIBLE AS ONE OF ITS MOST PRIZED POSSESSIONS.

NOV. 1966- THE CHURCH VOTED TO BUILD AN ADDITIONAL ANNEX ON THE NORTH END OF THE PRESENT ANNEX SO AS TO ACQUIRE SPACE TO INSTALL REST ROOMS AND TO INSTALL RUNNING WATER IN THE ANNEX.

DEC. 1967- THE CHURCH VOTED TO INSTALL A BAPTISTRY BENEATH THE CHOIR LOFT IN THE WEST END OF THE SANCTUARY.

DEC. 1967- THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS WERE GRANTED PERMISSION TO INSTALL A NEW LIGHTING SYSTEM IN THE SANCTUARY: MRS. LOTTIE DURHAM, MRS. BEVELYN McCOMMONS, AND MR. GORDON DURHAM. BOTH THE BAPTISTRY AND THE LIGHTING SYSTEM TO BE COMPLETED BY AUGUST 1968 IN TIME FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SESQUICENTENNIAL.

SECTION SEVEN

THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF THE PASTORS AND DATES THAT HAVE SERVED THE BETHESDA CHURCH AND WHATLEY'S MILL CHURCH:

REV. SILAS MERCER, 1785-1796
REV. JESSE MERCER, 1796-1826
REV. ENOCH CALLAWAY, 1827
REV. JONATHAN DAVIS, 1827-1837
REV. V. R. THORNTON, 1837-1839, 1841-1842, 1846-1849

REV. ADEL SHERWOOD, 1839-1840
REV. N. M. LUMPKIN, 1843
REV. I. S. BAKER, 1844-1845
REV. S. G. HILLYER, 1841-1853
REV. THOMAS MORGAN, 1856
REV. H. H. TUCKER, 1857-1870
REV. W. A. OVERTON, 1871-1874
REV. J. S. CALLAWAY, 1874-1914
REV. R. E. LEE, 1915-1917
REV. R. E. L. HARRIS, 1919-1920
REV. GEO. C. STEED, 1920-1923
REV. Z. M. LEVERETTE, 1923-1925
REV. R. L. ROBINSON, 1925-1932
REV. W. R. TAYLOR, 1933-1938
REV. W. G. VEAL, 1939-1950
REV. O. L. DUVALL, 1950-

THERE HAS BEEN OVER 1500 PEOPLE TO UNITE WITH BETHESDA CHURCH SINCE 1834.

DURING THE MINISTRY OF OUR PRESENT PASTOR THE REV. O. L. DUVALL, NINETY-FOUR PEOPLE HAVE UNITED WITH BETHESDA CHURCH EITHER BY EXPERIENCE OR BY LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FROM ANOTHER BAPTIST CHURCH.

GOD HAS RICHLY BLESSED BETHESDA CHURCH WITH A HOST OF DEDICATED PASTORS, WHO HAVE LED THE CHURCH FOR OVER A CENTURY AND A HALF. WHOSE MEMBERS HAVE GIVEN THEIR BEST FOR THEIR CHURCH AND FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST AROUND THE WORLD THROUGH MISSIONS AND THEIR PRAYERS.

WE MEMBERS OF TODAY, AS WE CONSIDER OUR HERITAGE, SHOULD ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE THAT WE HAVE TODAY, TO WITNESS BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD, TO THE SAVING POWER THAT IS EXTENDED TO EVERYONE THAT ACCEPTS HIM AS HIS LORD AND SAVIOR.

LET US REMEMBER THE WORDS OF PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS WHERE HE SAID: BUT THIS ONE THING I DO, FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND, AND REACHING FORTH TO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEFORE. I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.

AFTER ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS, THERE ARE STILL UNSAVED PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY, AND OVER THE ENTIRE EARTH, THAT SOULD BE A CHALLENGE TO US TODAY, REMEMBERING THE WORDS OF OUR LORD WHERE HE SAID TO US IN MATT. 28: GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND THE SON, AND THE HOLY GHOST.

THIS COMPLETES THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE HISTORY OF BETHESDA CHURCH WHICH IS TO OBSERVE ITS SESQUICENTENNIAL IN AUGUST 1968.