



Olivet Presbyterian Church
A History
1842 – 1986

By Mary L. Wells

OLIVET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: A HISTORY

BY MARY L. WELLS

Olivet Presbyterian Church was founded by Rev. Robert Young Russell on September 17, 1842 as a part of the old Independent Presbyterian Church. This denomination had its center at Bullock Creek, with other churches in York County and in North Carolina and Tennessee. Rev. Russell had been born in Antrim County, Ireland in April 1800, and was settled with his family at the age of one in York District. As pastor of Bullock Creek, he held many meetings where three or four sermons were given daily. Many converts were made during these meetings and it is assumed that Olivet was organized from the new members.

After the first organization, a small group of worshipers would meet and have any preacher who would come to preach to them. In 1843, Rev. R. A. Ross was called by the Sharon and Smyrna Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches and he also preached for Olivet during this period. The first church was a small wooden building situated about three miles west of McConnells on what is now Highway 322. Mr. Thomas Burris, a member of the church, made the pews which are still in use today.

Reorganization

The old Independent Presbyterian Church maintained its independence until 1863, when it united with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, later known as the southern Presbyterian Church. Olivet was reorganized August 2, 1868, with twenty-five members. Rev. W. W. Ratchford, from Fort Mill, who was a member of Bethel Presbytery, helped with the reorganization. To assist, Bethel Presbytery appointed a commission composed of these members: Rev. W. W. Carothers, Rev. J. S. Bailey, and Ruling Elders J. G. Lowry and S. G. Hemphill. At that time the following Elders were elected: J. M. Bnison, R. L. Lindsay, A. Hood, and Jacob Lucas. Deacons elected were: R. W. Love, J.D. Guin, and R. M. Burris.

In November 1868, Rev. Ratchford held a twelve-day meeting which resulted in forty-seven converts, thirty six white and eleven colored. It was the custom in those days for the servants of landholders to be received as members along with the whites. This was continued until 1882, when most of the colored members joined churches of their own.

This was in the days when horseback was the means of travel and "Father" Ratchford rode from Fort Mill, a distance of thirty miles, to preach the Word of God. Stated supply ministers filled the pulpit from time to time.

Session records of October 5, 1879 state that it was adopted that Olivet people and people of Zion Presbyterian Church in Lowrys unite in erecting a parsonage to be occupied by the minister of the two churches. On August 1, 1880, Olivet secured the ministerial services of Licentiate W. T. Matthews. A commission appointed by Bethel Presbytery met at Olivet Church on October 14, 1881 and after ordaining, installed Rev. W. T. Matthews as the first pastor of Olivet Church. The commission was composed of the Rev. J. L. Wilson, Rev. C. A. Trenholm, Rev. J. C. McMullen, and Elders J. C. Lowry, C. L. Harris, and John Moore.

Building the New Church

On August 23, 1885, records indicate that a building committee had work under way on a new church. Session members listed are James S. Gourley, James M. Lindsay, R. L. Lindsay, William B. Love and W. A. Robinson. The names of the building committee are not listed. According to the best information and recollection available, two of the men on the committee were S. A. Crawford and R. Walker Burris. A receipt given to G. W. Foster on December 23, 1885 for a donation to the building fund was signed by E. P. Love (Eaton P. Love), "Treas. of Committee". We believe that this indicates E. P. Love to be a third member of the building committee.

The lot for the present church building was bought from John D. McConnell for \$100.00. Two women of the church congregation, Miss Mary M. Ashe and Miss A. Lou Ashe, gave fifty dollars each to pay for it. (The land for the present cemetery, located diagonally across from the church on S. C. Highway 322, was given by Mr. Dan Crawford.) The brick for the church were made by William Newton Ashe at a location a short distance down the old Chester highway which is now known as M. D. Lever Road.

It is recorded in the August 28, 1885 Session minutes that the building committee was ordered to press forward with their work. Also, the records of September 7, 1885 tell of the Board of Deacons discussing a matter concerning the progress of work on the new church in McConnellsville.

The August 29, 1886 records read that the Session ordered that "Olivet's" place of worship begin at the new church on the third Sabbath in September. The old church building was abandoned and worship began in the present building on September 19, 1886. Accounts read that "the new brick church is in the town of McConnellsville not far from the railroad. It is of Gothic style and is beautified with shrubbery, green lawns, and cement walks." Pride in the new church is evident from the church records.

Being Sessioned

The Elders took their responsibilities as officers of the church very seriously. Records indicate that elders visited members regularly to encourage spiritual life and Christian character. When members erred by breaking the Third Commandment, becoming intoxicated, neglecting the practice of infant baptism, or otherwise failing to behave in a pious Christian manner they were admonished by the Session in a serious but tender way. Failing repentance and amendment, however, the erring member was dismissed from the congregation. Any act of discipline was concluded with prayer that God would bless the action taken.

Later History

Various presbytery records survive to give us glimpses of Olivet during this period; we read that on March 26, 1887, Olivet's Pastor, the Rev. G. A. Blackburn, requested permission to speak on Sabbath afternoons at various outposts around McConnells.

On May 6, 1899, a congregational meeting passed a resolution to sell the old church lot to W. B. Love for the sum of \$35.00.

In the summer of 1925, Olivet and Bethesda Presbyterian Church sponsored a tent meeting which was held at Guthriesville, three miles to the north of McConnells. Many enjoyed the privilege of hearing the Rev. Wade H. Boggs from Columbia, South Carolina.

After some years we find that in 1945 to 1946, church members were working faithfully toward repairing the church building as material became available after the shortages of World War Two.

The 103rd anniversary of Olivet Church was celebrated on September 16, 1945 with more than two hundred persons attending. The morning sermon was delivered by Rev. W. D. Ratchford of Duncans Creek, North Carolina, a grandson of the Rev. W. W. Ratchford who had been instrumental in the reorganization. Rev. John Bailey of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church spoke of the Independent Presbyterian Church. Mr. James Russell, son of the Rev. Robert Young Russell, brought his father's diary and papers and narrated many incidents from the early history of the church. York County's Solicitor Gist Finley spoke in the afternoon and the Olivet Cemetery Association was first organized. Finally, a marker was erected on the front lawn and dedicated to the honor of those persons from Olivet who were in the United States Armed Services in World Wars One or Two.

Four of the charter members of the Ladies Aid Society, Olivet first woman's group, were present: Mrs. Agnes Ashe Aycock, Mrs. Fannie Burris Harshaw, Mrs. Maggie Lindsay Burris, and Mrs. Addie Ashe Williams.

Repairs and Additions

In 1946 to 1947, services were held in the auditorium of the McConnells school which was located on a lot adjacent to the present manse on S. C. Highway 322. During this time, the church underwent repairs. Work was slow due to the scarcity of materials after the war.

The church building was reoccupied for the first time on May 4, 1947, after extensive work was completed. A new oil-burning furnace was installed. The pulpit area was rebuilt and the main floor patched, sanded and refinished. The windows had needed panes added, were re-puttied and weather-stripped. A new ceiling was installed and the walls were repaired and painted. The whole church presented a clean, new and pleasing appearance.

In 1948 to 1949, memorial stain glass windows were installed and a new broadloom carpet was placed on the aisles and in the pulpit and vestibule.

A small lot adjoining the church property was purchased in 1950 to 1951, and during the same period much needed restrooms were added to the church.

The Educational Building

At this period, members of Olivet Church had for some time felt the great need for an educational building.

For several years they had worked toward raising funds. In 1952, the Session appointed a Building Committee composed of the following persons: E. B. Bankhead, R. W. Harshaw, T. E. Burris, Jr., Mrs. James F. (Josie) Love, and Mrs. J. R. (Ruth) Hawley. In 1953, Mrs. John N. (Louise) Aycock was appointed by the Session to serve on this committee after the resignation of Mrs. Hawley. In 1954, the sum of Five-Thousand and Five-Hundred dollars was received as a bequest from the estate of Mrs. Ione A. Williams and added to the Building Fund; a plaque in honor of Mrs. Williams was placed on the completed building.

On Sunday, November 14, 1954, Groundbreaking Ceremonies for the new building were held. The then current pastor, Rev. Charles E. Kirkpatrick, was in charge. Mr. Joe D. Smith of Clover was the building contractor and Mrs. Elizabeth (Lizzie) A. Moore of Van Wyck donated 25,000 brick for the building from the Ashe Brick Company. A 126-foot well was drilled on church property. Gifts, memorials and aid from the Women of the Church helped furnish the new building.

A New Manse and More Additions

At this time, the old manse in McConnells, which was bought in 1920, was sold and the Four Thousand dollars received was placed in a fund for a new manse.

A Steinway piano was purchased for the sanctuary in 1955. Its work done, the Building Committee for the Educational Building was dissolved in 1956.

A new manse was built on the lot to the right of the church in 1958. The committee who led this work was composed of: H. J. Harshaw, chairman; Perry W. Aycock; William R. Currence, Jr.; Mrs. R. L. (Lilla) Foster; and Miss Mary Burris.

In 1961, a Conn electric organ was purchased for the sanctuary; a bequest of Seven-Hundred Fifty-Nine Dollars and Ninety-Three cents was received from the estate of Daniel Crawford and the balance donated by the congregation.

A Memorial Room was established in 1963 in the small room to the left off the vestibule which was originally used as the Session room. A lovely cabinet was donated by Mrs. W. A. Love in memory of her husband; this cabinet displays articles of historical interest pertaining to Olivet. Pictures of pastors Rev. G. A. Blackburn and Rev. J. B. Swann through our present pastor are hung in this room.

The old pulpit Bible was rebound, restored and added to the Memorial Room in 1964. A new pulpit Bible was given to the church in memory of Mrs. J. E. ("Miss Fannie") Harshaw by her family in March 1964. In this same year, the choir area was raised to pulpit level and connected by a door to the new choir room.

A Kimball piano was received as a bequest from the Macie P. Sealy Estate in 1969. Olivet Church gave the old piano to the newly-organizing McConnells Baptist Church. During this same year, a Memorial Fund honoring Elder Marion Davis Lever was established. This fund, with other memorials, was used to air condition the church.

New organ chimes given by the family and friends in memory of Robert W. Harshaw, Jr. were dedicated on June 20, 1971.

A New Denomination and the Present Day

An Olivet congregational meeting on July 1, 1973 voted, to sever the church's affiliation from Bethel Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (P.C.U.S.). By resolution, the church joined Calvary Presbytery in the establishment of a denomination which is now the Presbyterian Church in America (P.C.A.).

The Session approved a recommendation of the Women In the Church Committee on May 25, 1975 that seat cushions be purchased for the church pews. This project was financed by a special offering from the members. A fund of One-Thousand Eight-Hundred and Fifteen dollars was completed in August, 1975 and the seat cushions were purchased.

A congregational meeting on August 28, 1977 voted to buy a lot across S. C. Highway 322 from the church. Church repairs were completed this year, including reinforcement of the stained glass windows, painting the exterior of the sanctuary and repairs on the wall and floor structures.

In 1978, the Educational Building and the manse underwent extensive repairs. A new gable-end A-type shingle roof was placed over the leaking roof of the Educational Building. Windows, gutters, painting and other minor repairs were done at the manse.

The nursery and kindergarten classrooms of the Educational Building were carpeted in August, 1981. This was done as memorials to Mrs. E. B. (Lucile C.) Bankhead and Bruce B. Love, Jr.

For many years, Olivet had shared a pastor with Zion Church in Lowrys, South Carolina. Early in 1985,

Zion indicated a desire to have a full-time pastor. On May 26, 1985, a congregational meeting of Olivet voted to amend their call to the Rev. Sam B. Hoyt, Jr. to ask his full time service. This change was made effective on August 4, 1985.

Olivet Women: The Ladies Aid Society

There is no record of women taking any active part in church affairs prior to 1885. On September 5, 1885, the Ladies Aid Society of Olivet Church was organized at the home of Mr. William McGowan Bailey, about four miles from the church. These were the good old horse and buggy days — twenty-five ladies attended and became charter members. They generously contributed to Home and Foreign Missions and distinguished themselves by buying of the church then being built pulpit furniture, carpets, lights, collection plates, a communion service, and other items.

In the Session records of January 30, 1887, we read that a committee was appointed to draft resolutions for the Ladies Aid Society. Serving on the committee were Elders W. B. Love, Dr. William G. Campbell and the pastor, Rev. G. A. Blackburn. The committee's report was: "Resolved that the Ladies Aid Society be required to make a report of their work, their methods of raising money, the objects to which it is appropriated, to the session at their last meeting of each year and whenever else in the judgment of the session it may be deemed advisable"; this report was adopted by the Session.

Olivet Women: The Missionary Society

For a period of time there are no records, but thirty-three years later in 1920, with the help of Miss Mattie White, a missionary, the Ladies Aid Society was changed to the Missionary Society and divided into two circles.

Olivet Women: The Women's Auxiliary

In 1922, the Women's Auxiliary came into existence with forty members. Mrs. Mason Carroll of York was the President of Bethel Presbytery Auxiliary. Each year the Auxiliary birthday was observed with contributions to the special objective of the year. Prayer bands and mission study classes were stressed.

At the August, 1948 meeting, the six living members of the Ladies Aid Society were honored. At that meeting, Mrs. J. M. (Ione A.) Williams, Jr. spoke of the progress made in the sixty-three years from such an obscure beginning. In that earlier time, women were not allowed to lead in public prayer; the minister or an Elder had to be present to offer prayer at the ladies' meetings.

Olivet Women: The Women of the Church

At Montreat in 1948, the name of the Presbyterian women's organization was officially designated "The Women of the Church". By whatever name, the group of Christian women continued their Bible study, witness and hospitality. We read of the Bible Schools they conducted each summer and the impressive pageants presented at Christmas. Flowers were arranged for all church services, the sanctuary was housecleaned yearly, and food was prepared for many occasions. They raised funds for many projects, sent gifts and money to Thornwell Orphanage and shipped bags of clothing to mountain schools, bandages and contributions to the White Cross. Donations were given to the Joy Gift, to support a Bible teacher in the York schools, to Missions and other worthy causes. Bridal showers have been given to all Olivet girls when they married.

The women contributed to the improvement of church property by having the pulpit chairs, communion table and flower stand refinished in 1949 and the piano refinished and tuned in 1954. An additional flower stand was purchased in 1957.

When the Educational Building was erected, the Women of the Church paid for the cabinets and supplied other kitchen furnishings. They also bought the stove for the manse kitchen in 1958 and provided draperies for the manse in 1959.

In 1960, the Women had the communion plates re-silvered, purchased brass flower containers for the church, and had the collection plates relined. A new refrigerator was purchased for the manse in July, 1963, and thirty-six new hymnals for the church in 1971.

Olivet Women: The Women In The Church

With the change of affiliation in 1973 from Bethel Presbytery and P.C.U.S. to Calvary Presbytery and

P.C.A., the name of the women's group was changed to Women In The Church. The group continued on in their faithful manner, striving to learn and teach and show Christian love in action. Some new members have adopted missionaries to pray for and support financially.

In January 1983, the Women In The Church began a project of a quilted wall hanging. Fifty blocks were made, each one showing a Christian symbol and a family name. The individual family blocks were combined into one as a symbol of Olivet's faith in our Saviour and of the unity of the people of Olivet Church; these blocks surround an appliquéd, embroidered picture of Olivet Church. The wall hanging was completed and dedicated in September 1983; it has been framed and hangs in the Fellowship Hall of the Educational Building.

Olivet Sunday School

Although the records of Olivet Church from 1842 to 1868 are not available, there are a few accounts of the Sunday School. Mrs. Seraphina Love, who was the great-great-grandmother of James F. Love, Jr., one of our Elders, was a teacher in the Sunday School of Old Olivet.

Session records of January 1, 1887 state that it was moved and seconded that a Sunday School be commenced immediately. It was voted to use the collection for two Sabbaths in January 1887 to purchase literature. Mr. W. B. Love was elected superintendent of the Sunday School on March 26, 1887, and Mr. J. A. Patrick was his assistant. On October 7, 1887, there were favorable reports from a branch Sunday school by J. S. Gourley, Elder, who was the Superintendent of the branch school. This branch group was mentioned again in the 1889 records.

Through the years many persons have served well and faithfully in Olivet Sunday School. One notable servant was Mr. J. E. Brandon, who was elected Superintendent April 14, 1908 and filled that position for twenty-five years. His assistant was Mr. Robert McCleave, who was elected Superintendent on June 18, 1933 and served for approximately fifteen years. Mr. E. B. Bankhead was assistant during that time. Another of these faithful servants was Mrs. Janie Currence Harshaw, who taught the Beginners Class for more than forty years. In 1984, she was honored for her service with a commemorative plaque.

Sunday School officers and teachers are now elected on a rotation system. With the example of those who have gone before, we should be inspired to greater service.

A clipping from the *Christian Observer* of May 10, 1922 states:

Olivet Sunday School is active and efficient. Much memory work has been done. The books of the Bible, five Psalms, I Corinthians 13, and five hymns have been recited by the entire school. Nine children have recited the Child's Catechism.

The Christian Endeavor Society of Olivet Church has just been awarded the trophy cup at the state convention as the most efficient society in South Carolina. The Society is the best in the entire United States according to Mr. Charles Evans, the All-South Secretary of the organization. Olivet's group has 136 members, practically every member of the church being active workers. The efficiency success is probably due to the fact that young and old are hand-in-hand in the exercise of their gifts.

Many of us who are here today can remember when the Sunday School divided into small groups, all meeting in some corner or spot in the main sanctuary for our classes. Today we have a much-improved physical situation with classrooms, ample literature, blackboards, tables, and other items. We need to work towards the example that was set for us by those Olivet Sunday School teachers of days gone by.

Pastors who have served Olivet are:

Rev. Robert Young Russell		Helped with organization in the Independent Presbyterian Church
Rev. W. W. Ratchford		Helped with reorganization in 1868 in the Southern Presbyterian Church
Rev. W. T. Matthews	1881-1884	First Pastor
Rev. C. A. Blackburn	1885-1887	
Rev. Chalmers Frazier	1888-1891	

Rev. J. B. Swann	1893-1920	Longest tenure of any minister
Rev. Richard C. Wilson	1925-1924	
Rev. C. K. Douglas	1925-1926	
Rev. J. C. Neville	1928-1932	
Rev. R. E. McCaskill	1933-1934	
Rev. C. R. Bailey	1935-1946	
Rev. C. O. Groves	1947-1950	Supply Pastor
Rev. Charles E. Kirkpatrick	1952-1957	
Rev. John D. Love	1959-1962	
Rev. Gary Howell	1963-1971	
Rev. Samuel B. Hoyt, Jr.	1972 to present	

Many devoted ministers have served as shepherds of the Olivet congregation. One of these was Rev. John B. Swann, who was pastor at Olivet and Bullock Creek simultaneously from 1893 to 1920. He was a noted student, sermonizer, personal evangelist and faithful pastor. His jovial wit and personal charm endeared him to those privileged to know him.

Many other ministers preached at Olivet during the years as visiting ministers, filling the pulpit between pastors or holding meetings. In 1971, Rev. Lewis Russell, who was a grandson of Rev. Robert Young Russell, filled the pulpit in the absence of a full-time pastor. Preparatory services before the May and September Communion Services have been customary for many years.

In the words of Olivet Session in November, 1868, "Whereas it has pleased the Almighty God to pour out His Spirit in rich abundance upon and for the comfort and joy of this group of believers, therefore, resolved; one, that we as a church accord to the Lord our devout love and gratitude; and two, that we dedicate ourselves anew to His service, praying that we may be more diligent in future days for the sake of our Eternal Father, to whom be all the glory."

Written by Mary L. Wells
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Information from:

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