

The History Of Shady Grove Wesleyan Church



“Sustained by your prayers, and in the name of my Savior, I will go to North Carolina.” With these words in September 1847, Reverend Adam Crooks, age 23, from Ohio, reluctantly launched a missionary trip from the Allegheny Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America (Indiana) to Guilford County to begin the first Wesleyan Methodist work in the South. With this anti-slavery missionary movement, it was inevitable

he would be persecuted for preaching against slavery, though his disposition was “mild and persuasive.” He was arrested at Colfax with bond set at \$1,000.00, and unbelievably high figure for that time. George W. Bowman, a non-slave holder, and a slave owner by the name of Davis, posted bond. Bowman saved Crooks from intentional food poisoning and took him, by night, to Virginia; but Crooks was never brought to trial. When Rev. Crooks left North Carolina in August 1851, he had begun six church houses with over 500 members.

Rev. Daniel Worth - a native North Carolinian was sent in 1857 to continue the ministry of speaking out against alcohol and slavery. He was jailed in Greensboro on Dec. 23, 1859 with four counties having brought charges against him. He was held in an open, non-heated jail until April 1860. Lightning struck the courthouse during the trial, which took place in Asheboro. He told the judge, “the next sound you hear will be cannon,” predicting the Civil War. His sentence was appealed and bond set. Two men, George W. Bowman of Colfax and David Hodgins, paid the bond. Rev. Worth left North Carolina, raised the money in the North, repaid his bondsmen in full, but never returned to North Carolina.

After the Civil War, many in the community expressed a desire for a meeting place where a Sunday School might be held. Mr. And Mrs. Jesse Sapp, Mrs. Malinda Stanley, Lewis Starbuck, Jim Pike, Delphina Whitehart, and Jesse Gray were some of the leaders in constructing a brush arbor, and soon a community reaching Sunday School was in progress. Occasionally there was preaching at this arbor by various visiting ministers. When Rev. Emsley Brookshire of the Indiana Conference and Rev. Lindsay Fisher arrived in North Carolina in the Fall of 1871, they were asked to conduct services in this arbor, thus, revival began that was destined to be the event that encouraged Wesleyans in the South to launch a campaign that greatly revived the church.

A strong work had begun at Sandy Ridge ten years before, but it was depleted; so when the Colfax meeting began, all former Wesleyans in Sandy Ridge lent their aid by walking from Sandy Ridge to Colfax twice a day for spiritual renewal. Many also walked from Bunker Hill and other communities as word spread of the revival. Jesse Gray and Zadok Stafford, two local ministers, assisted the visiting evangelists in conducting services. A class of forty-seven members was formed on November 13, 1871. This, Shady Grove had its beginning.

Eager to have a meeting house, local gentlemen (L. F. Davis, David Stack, M. L. Cude, and George Bowman) made arrangements to purchase the site where the brush arbor stood. The owner refused to sell. George W. Bowman, though not a Wesleyan, donated an acre of land covered by stately oaks for the location of the new

church building; hence the name “Shady Grove.” This location was near the site of the old arbor. Coincidentally, the existing (old structure) church of Shady Grove Wesleyan is in the approximate location of the original arbor. Under the supervision of Rev. Brookshire, these men and others hauled timber from across the Yadkin River for the new structure. The lumber was dressed by hand, wooden pegs were used for nails, and the building was erected one side at a time.

On Sunday, July 21, 1872, Rev. Adam Crooks (now age 48) returned from Indiana to dedicate Shady Grove as the first Wesleyan Methodist church built after the war. The church was built debt free and was described as “the best rural Methodist church in the three counties.” Over seventy members heard the dedication sermon, based on Ezekiel 3, come to an end with the words, “It is either turn or burn.”

On July 4, 1979, twenty-six Wesleyans met in a railroad box car near Shady Grove and formed the North Carolina Annual conference with Rev. Davie Crockett Linville as the first president. In the late 1880's Miss Martha Jones, less than twenty years of age, served as pastor of Shady Grove. A church parsonage was built between 1905 and 1910. Until after the turn of the century, the church was part of a circuit. In 1907, under the direction of Rev. I.O. Gray, it became a separate church. Led by Rev. T.L. Hill, assisted by Rev. J.A. Clament and Rev. W.C. Lovin, the Shady Grove Camp Meeting Association was formed and a tabernacle was built on land donated by William Edmund Bowman, son of George W. Bowman. The tabernacle, across the road, in front of our new church facility, burned in 1943.

From 1914 to 1934, Rev. Tom Hill pastored at Shady Grove. A new church was constructed as a community project in 1927-28 under his leadership. Rev. Hill had the reputation of being a hard worker both in the church and community. Dr. Roy S. Nicholson wrote of the dedication of the new building: “The house of worship..while not elaborate and expensive, is nevertheless, one which is a credit to any community. It has ample room for future growth, and the main auditorium seats approximately 500 people or will when the pews are installed.”



From 1935 to 1948, Lyman F. Lance ministered at Shady Grove. On November 21, 1937 our former sanctuary structure was dedicated during the Homecoming Day services and a \$3,000.00 note was burned. The Homecoming Day sermon was spoken by Dr. Roy S. Nicholson with special music presented by Rev. Frank B. Dennard. In 1947 the church purchased the Wendell H. Cude house across the road in front of the church for parsonage use. The old parsonage was given to Debro and Vesta McKoin who needed a house for a residence. Rev. Lance, chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol for over forty years, attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, was elected to the office of Conference President in 1948, leaving a vacancy to be filled by Rev. J.L. Bolen who came out of retirement to serve short term, followed by Rev. Dwight L. Zavitz in 1949.

Rev. Boyd Kistler, with his wife Bessie, ministered at Shady Grove from 1949 through 1952.

In August of 1952 Rev. Andrew Dixon Wood came from Rose Hill, N.C. In answer to the call of the congregation. During his years of pastoral leadership, the church grew to a record 267 in membership. Valuable adjacent property was purchased and existing buildings underwent improvements. New front entrances for the sanctuary were installed, and in 1962, the Education Building was added as a “wing” to the sanctuary. Outreach in education, missions, extension and evangelism developed and expanded. The church employed its first additional staff person as Music and Christian Education Director. In 1973, under Rev. Wood's leadership, the present parsonage, fellowship hall, and storage building were built simultaneously,

which represented at that time, the largest building program in the history of the church.

The buildings were partially financed by church bonds which were paid off ahead of schedule. During Rev. Wood's tenure, on June 26, 1968, the Wesleyan Methodist denomination merged with the Pilgrim Holiness denomination to become The Wesleyan Church. Rev. Wood retired in 1980 having served twenty-eight (28) years, the longest pastorate in Shady Grove's history.

Rev. Donald W. Milstead pastored Shady Grove from 1980 to 1991. His ministry was characterized by strong and dynamic preaching. Children's ministries were expanded, thus attracting many to Shady Grove. Rev. Milstead, also an outstanding soloist, led the church in many outreach ministry "firsts." Christian musicals were presented for the community, the patriotic "We Honor America" service was begun as well as the church newsletter. Staff was increased to include a full-time Youth Director and Music Director/Secretary. It was during Rev. Milstead's visionary ministry that a building fund was established for further growth. Initially 10% of all tithes and offerings were set aside for the fund and later increased to 18% - the beginning of what would one day be an extensive church plant.

In 1991 Shady Grove called Rev. S. Mark James to be pastor. He and his wife Anna, and children Joy and Ben accepted the invitation and moved to Colfax from the South Carolina Conference. God blessed the church with substantial growth during his pastorate, exceeding all previous records set in Sunday School, Worship and Midweek Services. Two Sunday Morning Worship Services were scheduled to accommodate the increase in attendance. Initially 75 families were asked to commit to attend the 8:30 AM service; which within a matter of weeks became the predominate service in attendance. As a result of Victory Day and a 40-week campaign, the North Carolina West District campground adjacent to Shady Grove property was purchased for future expansion.

Nineteen-ninety-six brought the opportunity to have a great man of God, Rev. J.W. (Jack) Phillips serve as interim pastor of Shady Grove, as Rev. James accepted the call to work at the Int'l Center Headquarters of the Wesleyan Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. Rev. Phillips ably provided continuity, focus and direction until the end of the 1996 conference year.

It was then that Rev. J. Wesley Brown, wife Terry and children Kyle, Amy, and Alex were welcomed to Shady Grove Wesleyan Church. Almost immediately a Capital Campaign was begun with the goal being the construction of a new 750-seat Sanctuary and Children's Department (Phase I), as part of a three-phase plant, with Education and Fellowship/recreation phases to follow in the near future. An additional 8 1/2 acres of land was purchased from Cyrus Bowman adjacent to the old ball field with construction beginning in Winter 2000. Celebration and Grand Opening Sunday was March 18, 2001. During this time, Shady Grove also played an integral role in planting the Wendover Hills Wesleyan Church - providing the pastoral family, additional church planting families and financial support. Rev. Brown continued the focus on Missions established by Rev. James by providing

missions trip opportunities. In June 2001, Shady Grove sent out their first family to serve in a long-term, cross-cultural ministry setting.

There is no way to place a value on the worth of a church in any community. Our outreach and witness continue as we work together to reach others for Christ. Plans for the future call for greater growth leading to greater service. God does enable us!

-Compiled by Jerold Stack