

May 31, 2009
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Sharon United Methodist Church named for the “Rose of Sharon” was founded 184 years ago in 1825 just up the road near the Silent Grove Cemetery at the corner of Oxpen Road and NC130. A small unheated log cabin school house was used for services. Services were not held in the cold winter months.

To put this in some perspective, 1825 was less than ten years after the death of Frances Asbury, the first Bishop of American Methodism. Also, I need to tie a small portion of Brunswick County History in at this point. In 1756 seven families from Cape May, NJ settled in the area of what is now known as Holden Beach. These families were Hewett’s, Holden’s, Leonard’s, Swains, Willett’s, Ludlum’s and Bass. Descendants of many of these families are members of the church today. By the mid 1800’s more families had moved into this area, included were Lewis’, Lancaster’s, Fulford’s, Kirby’s, Davis’ and Sellers’. Descendants of these families are in attendance today. I bring this up to show how the early settlers and generations of their families have remained with Sharon for almost 200 years.

Until 1849, Sharon was in the South Carolina Conference of American Methodism. In 1850 Sharon was transferred to the Wilmington District of the NC Conference. Wilmington District included the counties of New Hanover, Pender, Brunswick, Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson, Duplin, Richmond and Scotland. Sharon was in the Shallotte Society which was part of the Smithville Circuit. At this time there were three preachers assigned to Brunswick Co. for all Methodist Churches.

In 1858 Sharon Class had 20 members, with 1 leader and 1 exhorter. In 1859 Sharon class leaders were George Kirby and John Davis.

Sharon was moved near this present location in 1860. A 20 x 30 foot log structure located at the northwest corner of the present cemetery was used. Blacks and Whites of the community were members and worshiped together. The women sat on one side of the church and the men on the other. This may sound unusual but was normal for that time period. Taken from the “Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1858, Section V.” Under Public worship there is a question and answer section.
Question – Is there any exception to the rule “Let the men and women sit apart?”
Answer – There is no exception. Let them sit apart in all our churches.

In 1865 the present Cemetery at Sharon was started. Sarah Belle, a charter member was the first to be interned.

After the Civil War the Smithville Circuit became a Station Church. Sharon came under the Brunswick Circuit. In 1868 the Brunswick Circuit was again joined with Smithville which became the All-County Circuit.

Sharon Methodist Church was organized in 1873 with W. R. Ferguson as Pastor in Charge and with about 25 members. Some of the charter members were: George Kirby, George Washington Lewis, J.J. Bell, J.B. Davis, J.D. Davis, A.B. Robinson, R.E. Hewett, Martha Hewett and George Washington Holden and their families.

By 1886 the log structure had become too small and was replaced by a 40 x 60 foot frame building. The Rev. T.C. Lovin was Pastor in charge. In 1891 there were five Methodist Preachers working in Brunswick County and by 1900 Sharon had about 95 members with an average annual budget of \$75 to \$80. In 1899 the Southern portion of Brunswick Co. became the Atlantic Circuit. In 1902 the "Atlantic Circuit" became the "Shallotte Charge" with a total of seven churches. Their combined value was reported to be \$3000 and the parsonage valued at \$450 and \$354 to support the pastor for a year.

Between the years of 1901 – 1951, Brunswick Co. had 3 Ministers each year to serve the two charges and one station church. The Shallotte Charge included – Shallotte Camp, Shallotte Village, Union, Andrews, New Hope, Sharon and Concord.

By 1901 all Methodist Classes had been reorganized as churches and by 1914 all churches had Sunday Schools. At this time the Superintendent of Sunday School at Sharon was G.A. Robinson. In 1940 Sharon had 122 Church members and 81 Sunday school members.

In the 1930's Sharon's frame structure was in bad need of repair and plans were made to replace it with a new building. Land on the south side of the cemetery was purchased so the cemetery could be in the back of the Church. In 1939 a new building for Sharon was started and was completed enough for service in 1942 with William G. Lowe as pastor. The leaders and building committee were: Willie Kirby, Sam Hewett, Leander Kirby, Gus Holden, Willie Bellamy, George Robinson, Jessie Roach and Herman Gray. Mrs. Pet Lewis was Sunday School Superintendent. Mrs. Sidney Hewett was Secretary and Treasurer of the Church. Sidney Hewett and Herman Gray gave the first piano. Bedford Ludlum secured a bus so transportation could be provided to the Church. Peter Robinson gave a second piano. In 1951 and 1952 Elmer High built three classrooms.

In 1962 the building was found to contain termites and with The Rev. Harold Pickett a building fund was started. Mrs. Annie S. Potter gave the first \$1000. The Building Committee were; Clemit Holden, chairman, Herman Gray, Elmer High, Willie Bellamy, Tony Hewett and Hobby Davis. The first service was held in early 1965 and with the help of Duke Endowment Funds the building was completely paid for by the middle of that year.

On April 23, 1968, The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren were united and became "The United Methodist Church". Sharon became "Sharon United Methodist Church".

In the twenty years between 1967 and 1987 Sharon membership varied between 155 in 1967 to 147 in 1987.

In August 1979 Sharon began making plans for a full time pastor and a deed for 2 lots for a parsonage was donated by Earl Milligan and Frank Lennon. A building committee was appointed and the parsonage was started in 1980 with \$7166.20 in the building fund. The parsonage was completed in 1983 and was valued at \$79,000. In June 1984 the first full time pastor, The Rev. Donald Skinner, arrived. Followed by W. Clark Barfield, Robert E. Rattz, and Lynn T. Wall.

1984 marked the beginning of the men's club and in 1985 a cemetery committee was formed. In 1986 renovation of the sanctuary began with donations from many members. The painting of the old Sharon Church was done by Mrs. Ersell Long. In 1989 the parking lot was paved and lighting was added to the front of the Church.

A Building Committee for new Fellowship Hall was appointed in 1995 with Chairperson, Jay Hamer, members, Tom Horne, James Hobbs, Fred Parker, Patsy, Turner and Sylvia Ludlum. Groundbreaking was held on September 16, 1995, consecrated on April 27, 1997 and completely paid for in November 1999.

The recent growth of Brunswick County and Sharon's increased membership has shown a need for yet a new sanctuary. In 2009 with the recent Charge Conference and unanimous vote to build the new sanctuary we are now awaiting construction to begin.

In the March 12, 1981 Brunswick Beacon there was an article about Sharon United Methodist Church. The last paragraph says it all, "For over 150 years and several generations of families, Sharon United Methodist Church has kept the spirit of the Lord burning in the hearts of hundreds of Brunswick County residents."

