

“A Historical Recounting of the First Structure Housing the  
Congregation of the  
Tennille Methodist Church”

Recounted by Robert Percy Northington, Jr. (Bob)

Recorded by Mary Margaret (Northington) Yeilding

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Tennille, GA

Tennille Methodist Church, as it was then called, was a part of the Methodist Church (South).

#### LOCATION

The location of the original church was on Smith Street just a short distance from its current site but on the opposite side of the street. Many long-time Tennille residents will remember that Washington Equipment Company, owned by Mr. Harold Morgan, occupied the original site for decades after the church relocated to its present position on the corner of West Adams Street and Smith Street.

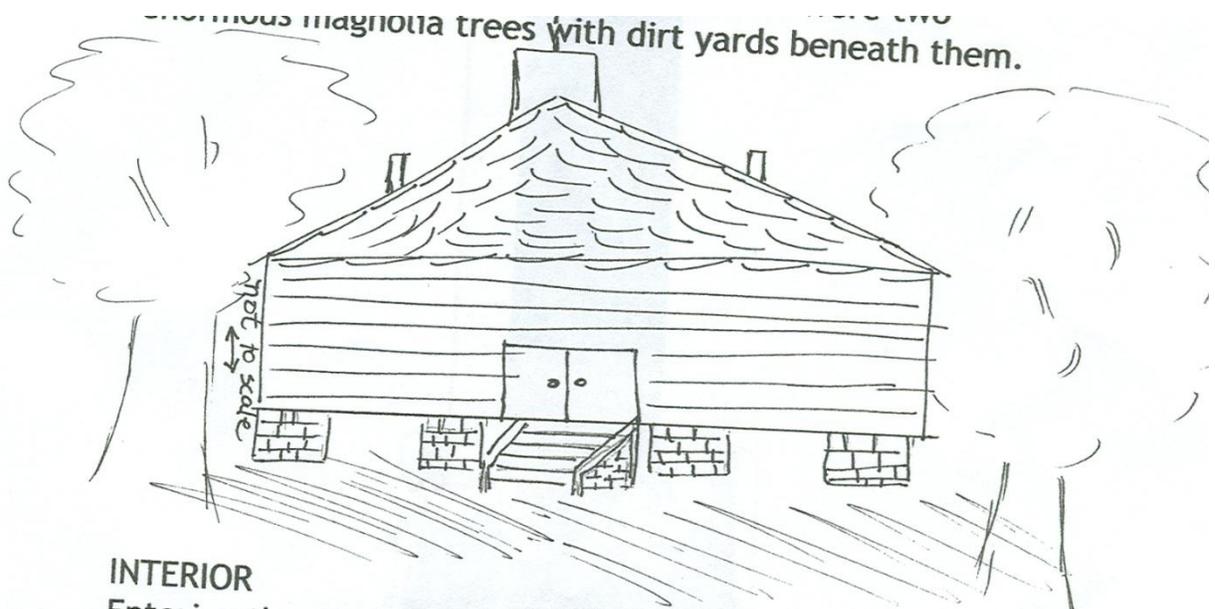
The parsonage was to the left, or south, of the church, approximately 25-50 feet away. This would later prove devastating during the fire that destroyed the church in 1941. There were no houses after the parsonage on the way to downtown Tennille.

The land for the original church, two acres, was given by Captain James D. Franklin, a leading citizen of the town and major property owner. At that time there were a number of Franklins in Tennille. Captain Franklin's daughter-in-law, Helen, married to his son, Herb, would later become the church pianist for many years.

The street in front of the church was dirt and there were dirt sidewalks as well. Streets in Tennille were not paved until 1927.

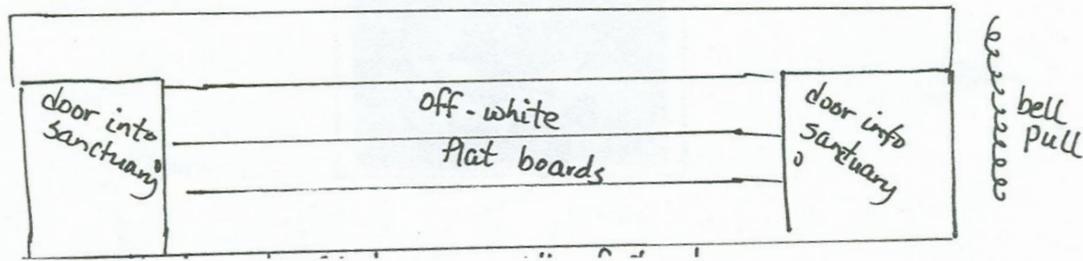
## EXTERIOR

The church was built out of fat lyder wood with white weatherboard. It was probably 50 feet wide. The entry was a set of wider than normal double doors painted white. Six to eight steps with no railings led up to the doors. Flanking either side of the entrance to the church were two enormous magnolia trees with dirt yards beneath them.

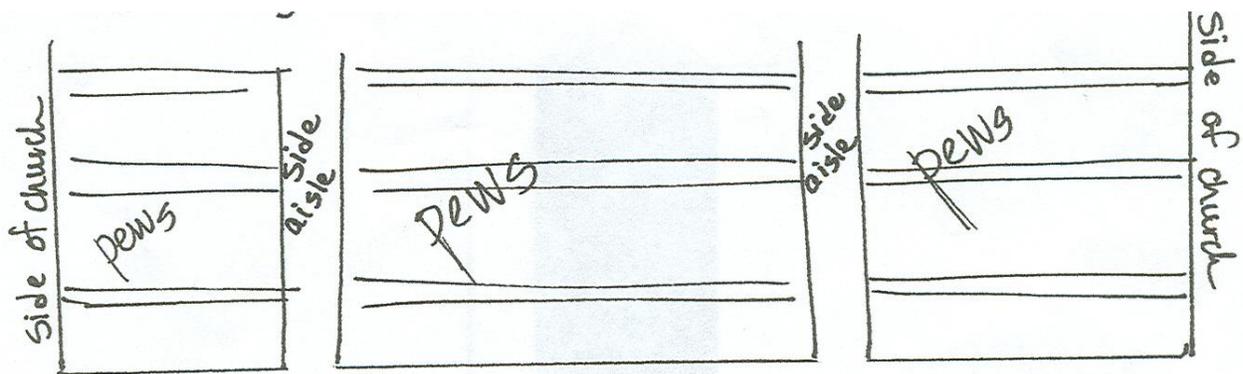


## INTERIOR

Entering the vestibule the rope for the bell was just to the side of the door on the right.

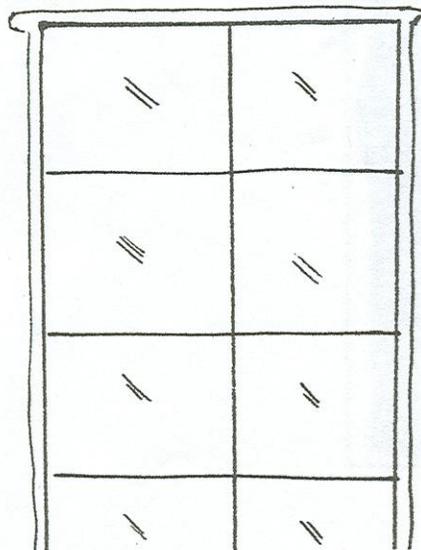


Sanctuary: There were probably 20 rows of pews divided into three sections - two side sections each about 10 feet across and a center section about 20 feet across. Perhaps 300 people could have been seated. The pews themselves were just two flat boards nailed together with no curves or shape and no cushions! The pews extended to the walls on the side sections so there were only two aisles. The floors were six inch heart of pine painted boards. The interior height was 14-18 feet.

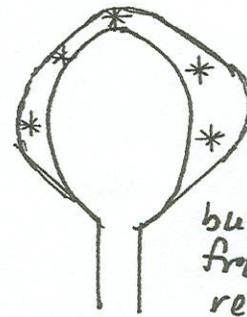


Windows and Lighting: The windows were 3 feet wide and started about 3 feet from the floor and extended up 14 feet - almost to the ceiling. The panes were plain clear glass, larger than normal and there were no shutters or curtains. Ten to 12 windows lined each side of the church.

The earliest congregation used natural daylight as a source of light. Later, bare bulbs placed in front of tin or aluminum reflectors were situated above and between the windows on both sides of the room.



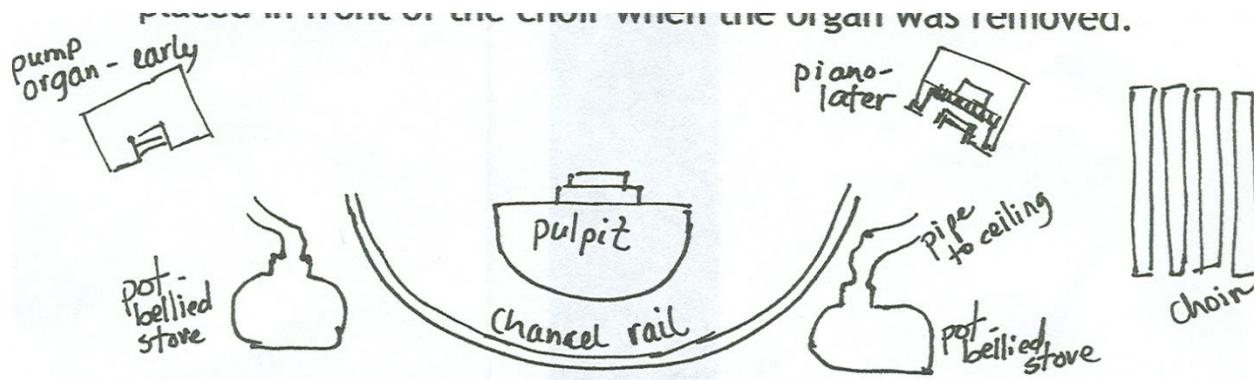
*original window*



*bulb in front of reflector*

Chancel Area: An elevated pulpit (2 steps up) was centrally placed in front of the pews. A chancel rail curved in front of the pulpit. The woodwork was stained brown. On either side and slightly in front of the pulpit were matching pot-bellied stoves with their pipes extending directly through the roof. As there was no janitor, the task of hauling in scuttles of coal fell to the men of the church. Most likely there was a coal bin around the back of the building.

To the congregation's right the choir sat in 4-5 rows of pews which faced the side of the pulpit. When the church was originally founded a pump organ was in the chancel area but opposite the choir. Later, an upright piano was placed in front of the choir when the organ was removed.



On the far left and toward the rear of the chancel was a small Sunday school room where the youngest children had their lessons. Mrs. Mary Helen Brown taught children beginning in the original church and continuing for many years in the present site.

Along the entire back of the chancel area was a large storage room which could be accessed through either of two doors.

### The Day of the Fire

On the morning of January 5, 1941, the first Sunday of the new year, as the congregation was gathering for worship, disaster struck the Tennille Methodist Church. The day was cold and wind was blowing from the south. An ember from the coal-burning stove blew under a shingle, set the room on fire and soon the entire church was consumed in a massive fire. Most unfortunately, the parsonage, located only a short distance away, was completely destroyed as well due to the intensity of the blaze at the church. At that time the only fire fighting equipment in Tennille was a hand pulled 2-wheel cart with a hose attached. The fire department consisted of volunteers.

Because of the intensity of the fire, there was really nothing that could be done to save the church. The congregation stood by helplessly and watched their spiritual home of 55 years burn to the ground. Mercifully, no one was injured in the fires at either building. It is doubtful that there was any insurance policy to cover the total loss of the church and the parsonage.

