

# Historical Sketch of the Tennille Methodist Church

Shortly after the War between the States a group of Methodists conducted services at stated intervals in an old school building, presumably located where the present church building currently stands. Encouraged by additions in membership and an increase in means, the homeless congregation dared to dream of a permanent house of worship. After delays, debates, and discouragement, the initial steps were taken. The records show that on December 1, 1884, Capt. James D. Franklin, of Tennille, did grant and deed a lot for the new structure to the Trustees: Dr. M.G. Hatch, J.T. Cook, R.G. Hyman, S.F. McIntyre, and G.P. Parker. The original building which was made of wood combined two qualities of good architecture - - majesty and grace.

The Reverend J.R. McClesky, pastor of the Sandersville Methodist Church, served the Tennille Methodists from 1883 to 1885, and under his leadership the church was promoted and the deed secured. The Reverend George S. Johnston saw the completion of the church, and the building was formally dedicated on June 6, 1886.

The original building, flanked by its lovely magnolia trees, remained a landmark and sentinel for fifty-five years. A pageant of Methodism passed through its doors - - parents dedicated their infants; couples pledged their marriage vows; the reverent and the heavy-hearted gathered to pray; and from its doors marched the bereaved.

The year 1941 brought recognition as a full-station church, but it brought tragedy as well. On January 5, 1941, fire swept away the church and the parsonage. At once the people felt an impelling duty and necessity to rebuild. Funds were solicited, blueprints were studied, a new lot was purchased, and a foundation was established. Then came World War II with its priorities and its years of uncertainty. Services were temporarily held in the Woman's Clubhouse, in the Erin Theatre, and in the Christian and Baptist Churches. These accommodations - - though so generously offered - - left much to be desired.

In the summer of 1944 the dream of re-building was revived, and the issue was met with determination. Serving as a Building Committee were Mr. W.B. Smith, Sr., Chm; Mrs. W.B. Smith, Sr.; Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. T.R. Simmons, and Dr. and Mrs. O.D. Lennard. The architect was

Mr. W. Elliott Dunwoody of Macon and the contractor was Mr. Carroll Griffin of Atlanta.

The church cost \$22,000, and the funds came largely from the local membership with substantial donations by friends near and far. The dedication services for the new church building were held on April 29, 1945. Mrs. W.B. Smith, Jr. and Dean Jordan Lennard were the first two new members announced within these hallowed walls.

In the post-war years the Tennille Methodist Church prospered and grew - - the children of a new generation were baptized within the church.

In 1951, one decade after the disastrous fire, the church was busy completing the second stage of its building program. In special services held on April 29, 1951, the Tennille Methodist Church dedicated the new Church School Annex which had been begun in 1949 and completed in 1950. The Building Committee was: W.B. Smith, Sr., Chm., C.F. Brown, T.R. Simmons, Dr. O.D. Lennard, Paul F. Thiele, and James D. Reese (pastor when work was begun). At the dedication service, Dr. S.T. Senter, a former District Superintendent of the Macon District, conducted the dedicatory rites. Dr. I.E. McKellar and Reverend James D. Reese, both former pastors, spoke at the service. Reverend J. Frederick Wilson, pastor of the church, officiated.

During 1951 considerable alterations were made in the sanctuary of the church. A beautiful new Allen organ, a gift to the church from Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Smith, Sr., was placed in an organ pit and the sound box located in the wall and covered with wrought iron grillework. The March 18, 1951 church bulletin reported that installation work was completed, and on December 9, 1951, Dr. Jack Broucek, Professor of Music at the college in Statesboro, was presented in an organ recital at the console of this new and beautiful addition to the sanctuary.

In the sixties the Tennille Methodist Church continued to build and improve its facilities.

In 1964 a new Tellers pipe organ was presented to the church in the memory of William Holder Smith by Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Smith, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. C.V. Smith, Sr. and Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Smith, Jr. The instrument was designed for the church by Herman J. Tellers in collaboration with C.V. Smith, church organist.

On October 4, 1964, the beautiful new organ was used for the first time during the morning worship service. On March 21, 1965, special services were held to dedicate the new organ. Bishop John Owen Smith conducted the dedicatory service, assisted by the Rev. Joe Bridges, District Superintendent. On the following Friday night, March 26, 1965, Mr. Jack Jones presented the dedicatory recital.

On May 18, 1965, authorization was given by the South Georgia Conference to secure the plans and funds for additional educational facilities.

The building committee was Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Smith, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. T.R. Simmons, and C.V. Smith. The planned addition would provide three new Sunday School classrooms, a parlor, a pastor's study, a kitchen, and a fellowship hall.

At the Administrative Board meeting on May 1, 1966, Chairman C.V. Smith reported the total cost of the new building to be \$70,932. At this meeting T.R. Simmons offered the resolution that the new building be named the W.B. Smith Building. This resolution was unanimously accepted and a framed copy of the resolution was given to Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

The W.B. Smith Building was completed and dedicated in a special service of consecration on May 7, 1967. The pastor, Thomas E. Long, gave the dedicatory sermon entitled, "Building for God". Following the last hymn the congregation left the sanctuary and gathered at the entrance to the new building for special consecration rites.

The indomitable spirit of the Tennille Methodist Church continued to be evident. Within the next year, plans were being made to build a new parsonage. The gift of four acres of land by Mr. T.C. Wylly, Mr. G.W. Wylly, Mrs. Mariella W. King, and William B. Wylly initiated the project. The \$30,000 cost of the new parsonage was reported by the Building Committee: C.V. Smith, Chairman, Mr. and Mrs. T.R. Simmons, Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Brown and Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Smith, Sr. Work was completed on the new parsonage and the Thomas Long family, the first pastoral family to occupy the new parsonage, moved in on December 9, 1969.

Having completed the building of some of the finest church facilities in this area, the Tennille Methodist Church in the next decade turned its attention to the building of programs of church ministry. Church records of this period show a church active in meeting and attempting to adapt to the changing times of the seventies.

Disaster again visited the Tennille Methodist Church when on Thursday, April 23, 1981, two teenaged boys broke into the church and vandalized the property. The sanctuary sustained the worst damage. Paint was thrown over walls, doors, pews, carpets, altar and organ. After investigation by the legal authorities, conjecture was that the vandals had been interrupted just prior to setting fire to the church. The estimate of damages was \$35,000. From April 26, 1981 until the Oct. 25, 1981 worship services were held in the social hall of the W.B. Smith Building.

Visibly shaken by this act of violence, the membership of the Church set about with renewed zeal to restore this lovely church to its original beauty. Restoration was under the direction of the Church Trustees: C.V. Smith, Sr., Paul Thiele, and W. Chandler McMaster, Sr.

On November 15, 1981, the John Wesley Sunday School Class sponsored a church-wide project to help secure funds needed for the restoration of the

Church. Tickets were sold for a Thanksgiving Turkey Dinner served at the W.B. Smith Building. An amount exceeding \$1,000 was raised toward the realization of the goal of restoration.

While the church is indebted to numerous individuals and church groups for their efforts in the restoration project, there is a special debt of gratitude due Charles V. Smith, Sr. for his untiring efforts and his personal supervision of the work of restoring this lovely edifice to its present beauty.

On February 14, 1982, Bishop Joel D. McDavid and Rev. William Key, District Superintendent, officiated at the special service for the Rededication of the Sanctuary. At this time the entire indebtedness on the W.B. Smith Building and the parsonage was cleared, and these notes were burned in special ceremony following the Rededication Service.

The year 1983 found the church still pursuing building and restoration projects. In July of 1983 the young people of the church initiated a project to refurbish and redecorate the church nursery. With the aid of members of the Adult Sunday School Class and the John Wesley Class, these college students and young adults gave many hours of their time to complete this renovation.

On December 11, 1983, the John Wesley Class sponsored a Candlelight Tour of Homes. Plans are currently being completed to utilize the \$2,000 raised by this project in an effort to restore and renovate the Church School Annex.

Thus, the Tennille Methodist Church enters the decade of the 1980's and this centennial celebration with a restored building, a restored spirit, and a restored faith in God and the future.

This history was compiled and edited by Mary M. Moye from earlier historical sketches done by Rev. I.E. McKellar and Hazel M. Miller. It was updated and revised by research into church records. Indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged to C.V. Smith, Sr. and to Donald R. Youmans for their assistance in the research. This has been an attempt to chronicle the building efforts of the Tennille Methodist Church, rather than a history of its organization, growth and service. This work is rendered by the editor with love and appreciation for the inspiration of those who have gone before us and who have afforded us such a rich heritage.