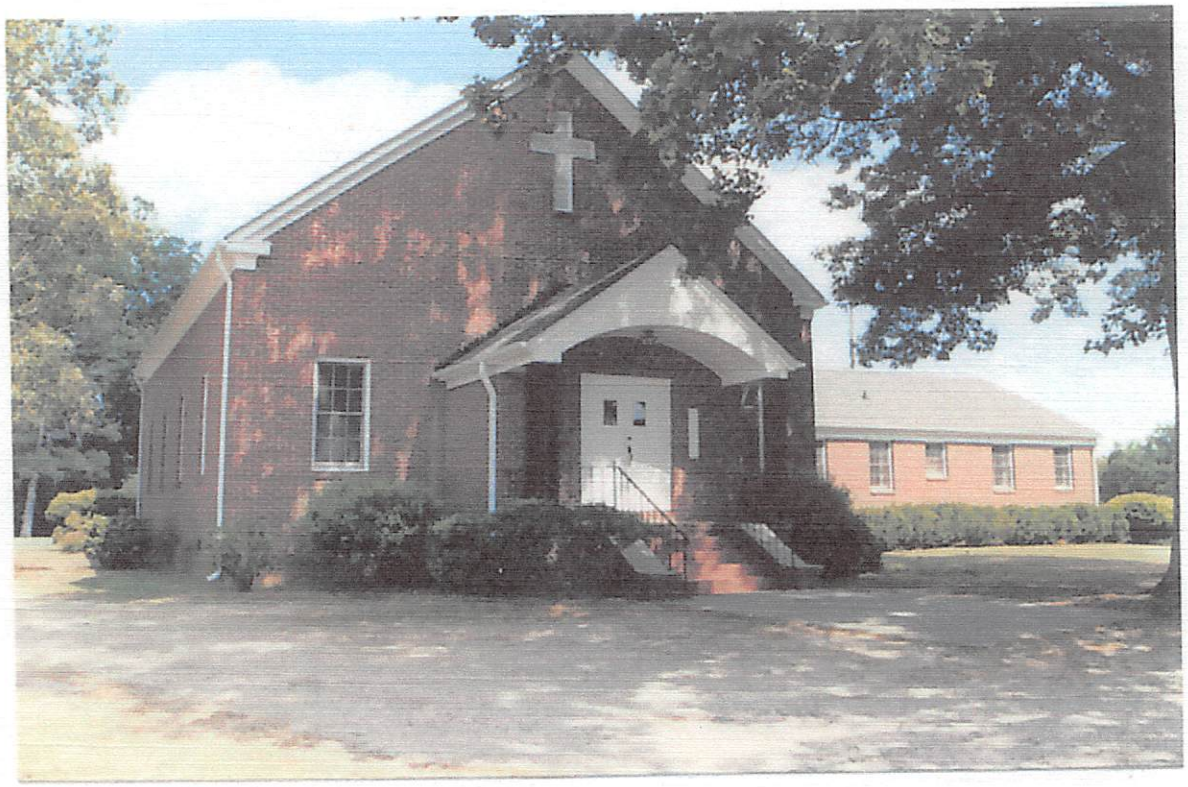
The History of Fishing Creek Presbyterian Church



Spoken by
Mary Saye Gaston
Compiled by
Mary Elizabeth (Beth) Gaston

May 19, 2001

I, Mary Saye Gaston, was born May 10, 1904 and was baptized at Fishing Creek Church in September by Reverend J.H. Wilson. My memories include hearing about the beginning of our church. Services were held on the banks of Fishing Creek. People gathered at the water's edge watching for a boat to bring a minister. They were thankful when Mr. John Brown arrived to preach.

Finally, a log church was built in 1751 at the far end of the present cemetery and in 1752 the present church was erected. We entered the church through a hall with two doors leading into the main sanctuary. We had kerosene lamps clamped to the windows. The original pews are in use today and it is said that we are still using the original poles with velvet bags attached for our collection. I remember the floor was covered with a tattered and torn rug. In the pulpit was a settee with black upholstery, which I thought might stick me if I sat on it. A marble plaque in memory of Reverend James Hodge Saye, my grandfather, hung between two small windows in the pulpit. He pastored the church from 1860 until 1891. A little tiny bell sat on the pulpit stand. It was rung by the preacher to call the congregation into the church. Between the congregation and pulpit there were two big heaters with a chimney in the middle.

The first songbooks that I remember were red and about 3 inches tall and 2 inches wide. The books used by the congregation did not have notes, only words. The copy used by the organist had notes as well as the words. Our next songbooks were paperback. They were much larger with the musical notes included. After those books were retired, we used bluish-green ones, which were even bigger. We wondered how we would get them paid for. Each family gave a book either in honor or in memory of a loved one. The cost was $2.50 for each book. Some of the members of the congregation were not happy with these books, so we purchased the ones that are currently used today.

Miss Gillie Neely was our organist. I remember her wearing pretty hats with lots of flowers on them. They would wiggle and jiggle as she played the music. Every Sunday after the church service she begged me for my pretty brown eyes and curly brown hair. I would always say, "I hope when Miss Gillie gets married she will have a pretty little girl with curly brown hair and big brown eyes." She finally married and had a little girl, but she didn't have either brown eyes or curly hair. After Miss Gillie left for school, Mrs. J. C. McFadden (Aunt Mary) and her daughter Martha (Matt) became our organists. In 1926 Mrs. J.H. Saye (Jean) became our full time organist and she played for 45 years.

The first officers that I remember of the church were Dr. R. L. Douglas, Mr. William R. Neely, Mr. W.W. Gaston, and Mr. James C. McFadden. The deacons were Mr. Harper Millen and my father, Mr. James McJunkin Saye. As papa passed the collection bag I always wanted to put my money in his.

Mrs. Jim Hicklin (Ms. Anna) was one of my first Sunday school teachers. I remember sitting in the back of the sanctuary with Amelia, my youngest sister, while Ms. Anna taught us the Catechism.

In 1911 or 12 we were all surprised and very excited to see an automobile appear on the church grounds. The majority of us had never seen one. Dr. Douglas and his family had arrived in a pretty little red two-seated convertible. The ladies wore hats with scarves holding them on. They each wore white coats, called dusters, to keep their clothes clean. After we all had a good look, everyone returned to their horse and buggy or mule and carriage. Papa unhitched our mules, Cheny and Hulda, from the cedar tree that still stands in the corner of the churchyard. We got into our carriage and drove towards home. We heard Dr. Douglas coming along in his car so Papa pulled off to the side because he did not know what the mules might do as the car passed by. Neither Cheny nor Hulda paid any attention. They acted like they had seen cars all their lives. We pulled out and went on up the road.

It was a treat when we stopped on our way home from church at the spring by Jeff Millen's pond for a drink of water. Papa would take his hat off and bend the rim of it letting each of us get a fresh drink. After a long period of illness, Papa passed away in 1915. I was completely lost, because I followed him everywhere he went.

We did not have a pastor from 1914 through 1916. During this time we attended the new ARP church in Rodman. We took part in all of their activities, as if we were members. Reverend John Jackson Brown from Ebenezer became our preacher in 1916. He pastored two churches. Mr. Brown alternated services between Waxsaw and Fishing Creek every other Sunday until 1936. During this period we had special services with visiting ministers. We had two sermons on Friday and two on Saturday with dinner on the grounds. We took two benches from the church covered them with table clothes and spread our food. After we got our bellies full, we would visit awhile and go back in for a second session. On Sunday, we took communion. My uncle, Mr. James McFadden, always provided the wine and crackers. He made it a point to save a few crackers in the basket for Amelia and me to have after the service.

Several of the young members were in the World War I. My brother, James Hodge Saye, was in the 42nd Rainbow Division. William Pinkney

Carpenter was a member of the 30th Division. Luckily they came home safely in 1919. This was a busy time for us. In 1922, Amelia and I joined the church. Several of the young people of the congregation were married in the early 20's. A few of the couples included Mr. Frank Hicklin and Miss Martha Mary Kee, Mr. Harry Hicklin and Miss Louise Simrill, Mr. James Saye and Miss Jean Hollis, Mr. Joseph Gaston Hollis (Jodie) and my sister Miss Augusta Saye, Mr. William Gaston and Miss Marion McCarter, and Mr. William P. Carpenter and Miss Bessie Kirkpatrick.

In 1924, after the church services, we were visiting and spreading news. Since we did not have any other means of getting news we would stand around and talk. Mama spoke and congratulated Porter Gaston. He had just graduated from Clemson University. She asked him what he expected to do and he replied, "I'm gonna try farming." Mama said, "Oh don't do that, it's too hard." She knew well what she was talking about because she and my brothers, James and Joe were struggling with all the problems since Papa's death. I spoke up saying, "I think farming would be nice!" The very next week he came to see me and asked me for a date. We were married on September 20, 1927 by Mr. John Jackson Brown at his home in Rock Hill. About a week after we were married Mrs. Hicklin, my sister Miss Margaret (Peg) Saye and Porter were put on the committee to

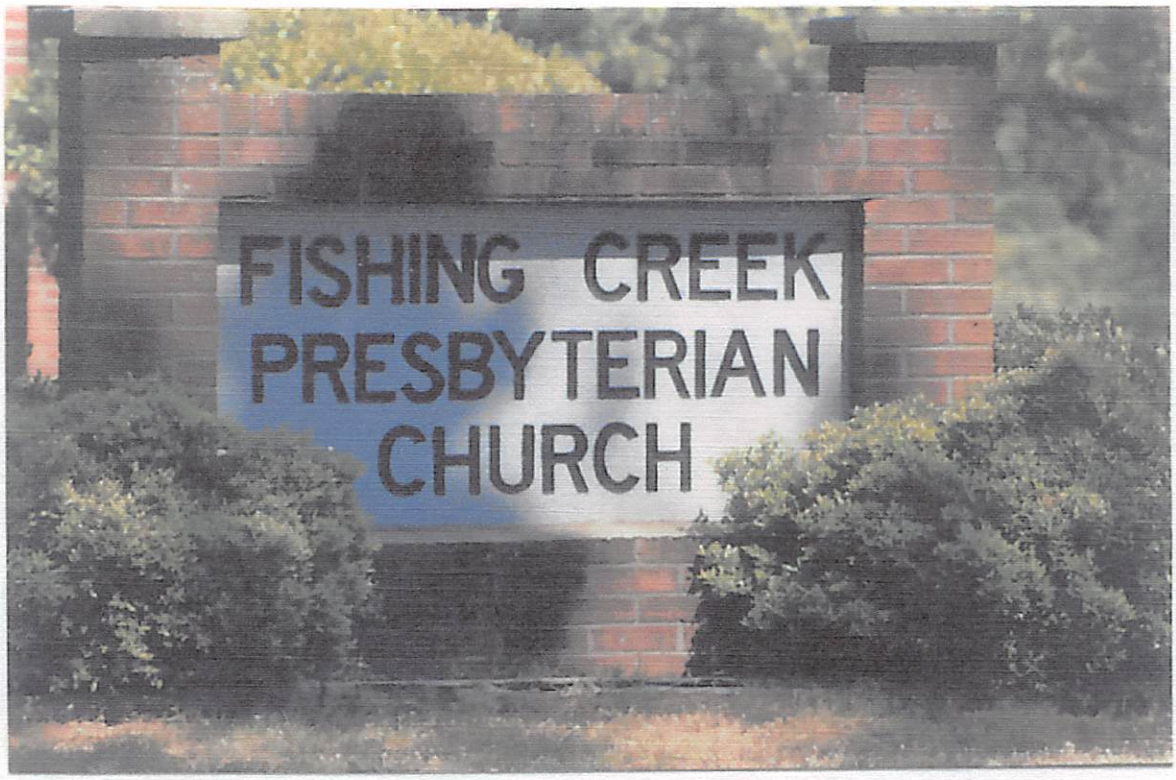
select furniture and carpet for the sanctuary. We spent all Saturday morning measuring and cutting carpet. While we were tacking the carpet, we heard somebody come in the front door. It was Mr. Ed Hicklin. He asked, "Do you need any help?" We replied, "we surely do!" He had his hammer in hand! After spending the day installing the carpet, Porter drug me across the floor by my feet to smooth the wrinkles. We placed the new furniture in the pulpit and removed the settee to Mr. Jimmy McFadden's house for safekeeping. We did not have a place to keep the communion set at church, so it was always kept at an elder's home. The set consisted of two silver goblets and two silver plates. It was destroyed by fire while being kept in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hicklin. We replaced the communion set with individual cups. The women of the church bought linen and my sister, Miss Margaret Saye, hemstitched the edges of the tablecloth and doilies. We still use them today.

A little white session house sat to the left of the church. It was used as a schoolhouse. In 1929, we used the steps from the session house, along with rocks to make a memorial for the confederate soldiers. We placed five small tombstones inside the wall. The little girls of the United Daughters of the Confederacy took part in the ceremony. They were dressed in pretty little

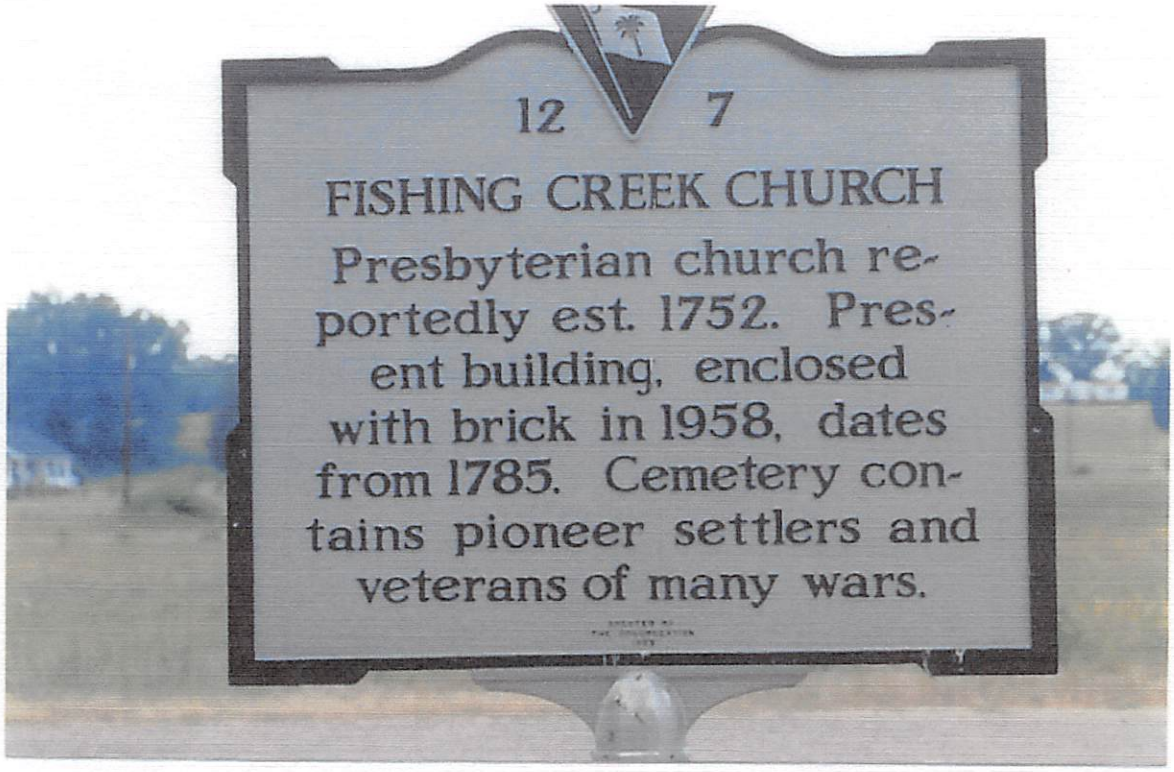
white dresses and they helped unveil the monument. The rock wall, was built by Mr. W.W. (Daddy Bill) Gaston and John Boyd, a faithful colored friend.

During the late 20's and early 30's Fishing Creek Church grew with lots of new babies. Aunt Mary McFadden used to say she hoped to see the day when the church would be full of children pity patting up and down the aisle. She sure lived to see many of those days. We continued to have weekend services with picnic lunches. Each family brought a covered dish and a jar of tea. Mama always brought damson pie and Mr. Brown called it "red pie". He would always want more red pie!

In 1937, a minister named Mr. Joseph T. Dendy moved to Rock Hill and we invited him to our church. One early Sunday morning in late May, I heard a knock at the door. I answered the door and there stood a nice looking man who identified himself as Reverend Dendy. He said, "I'm on my way to Fishing Creek Church to preach, do you know how to get there." I gave him directions and told him I was a member, but would not be attending today because I was staying home with my new baby, James McFadden Gaston, who was about two weeks old. Mr. Dendy remained our full time minister until 1954. Mrs. Dendy and their daughter Elizabeth were our assistant organists.



Given in memory of James Saye



Presented to the Church by Mr. & Mrs. Fred Hambright-April 23, 1995

Cedar tree where the horses and mules were tied

Memorial for the Confederate soldiers

My brother, Joseph McJunkin Saye, was made elder at a very young age. He served a short time and passed away in 1932, at age of 38. Some of the other elders, through the years, included Porter Gaston. He went in, as an elder in May 1937, while Mr. Dendy was our pastor. Others included John Gaston, James Gaston, William Gaston, James Saye, John Harvey Neely, Fred Hambright, Mr. H. Steele, Mr. Stan Oaks, Frank Hicklin, and Ladson Smith. The first lady elder was Mrs. Martha Mary Hicklin and others included Mrs. Nanny Craig, and Mrs. Reba Herdon.

Miss Margaret Saye taught the primary Sunday school class for at least 50 years and was very active in all of the church activities. I taught the adult Sunday school class for many years. After I retired from my position, Florence Quinn became the teacher. She was a newcomer to the community. She heard we needed an organist and volunteered herself. She was the nicest little lady and was always willing to help in any way that she could. Some of the other teachers included Porter, he taught the young people. Mr. Harry Hicklin and Mr. H. Steele were teachers for the adult class.

Joseph Gaston Saye, my nephew, died August 1, 1944. He was killed in action at St. Lo, Normandy, France. He was Pfc.E, 36th Armored Infantry, 3rd Armored division, WWII. His body was returned to the states and he was buried here at Fishing Creek. Other boys from our church were in the

services also. They were William Wylie Gaston III, James McCarter Gaston, Harry E. Hicklin, Jr., Cloud Harden Hicklin, James Hodge Saye, and two of my sons Joe Saye and William Newton. I was thankful when they all returned home safely.

The first wedding performed in the church was the ceremony of Mr. David Porter and Miss Margaret Hicklin. They were married on March 24, 1950. Other marriages of the 50's included my niece, Miss Augusta Saye and Mr. Ben Cox, July 25, 1953; Miss Mary Hicklin and Mr. William Rauch June 11, 1955; my niece, Miss Jean Saye and Mr. Stanley Wilkerson, August 10, 1957 and Miss Martha Hicklin and Mr. Anthony J. Sudal, November 29, 1958. Mr. and Mrs. Sudal's wedding was the first ceromony in the remodeled sanctuary.

Mr. Ted Beasly ministered from 1954 until 1959. During this period Urial and Fishing Creek yoked together. After his early service at Urial he would come to Fishing Creek. He was the first man to go to the new manse. Miss Margaret Saye, Mrs. Nanny Craig Neely, Mrs. Marion Gaston, and I prepared dinner and served it under the trees at the new manse for Mr. Beasly, his family and friends before the installation service. During these years the church was remodeled with the addition of electricity, a fellowship hall and Sunday school rooms. The exterior became brick for protection and

not beauty. The original siding was white planks, which required regular repair each year. The first shrubbery was planted around the church. It was given in memory of Mr. Harry Hicklin by his wife Louise. The original pews were refinished and new carpet was donated and installed by a member of the church. The interior walls and molding from the original pulpit remained. Mr. James Saye refused to let them be destroyed and replaced by sheet rock and new materials. He said, "Any church can have sheet rock but Fishing Creek will keep the originals."

For our dedication Miss Margaret Saye welcomed members and guests to the church and afterwards we had a big picnic lunch. Not long after the remodeling and dedication service our fellowship hall tables were purchased with memorial funds from Mrs. Fred Hambright (Jewell). Jewell was a faithful member and very active in our church. I remember she and I were sitting together during the dedication service. She wasn't feeling very well and I suggested we go outside. She said, "No we'll just sit still and I'll be alright." Several weeks later, Jewell had surgery for breast cancer and she passed away.

In the late 50's, we entertained the Bethel Presbytery. It was our first big occasion in the Fellowship Hall. During our planning, the day before, the weather was cool and we decided to serve hot coffee. By the time of the

meeting, the weather turned hot and we had to serve the coffee anyway. The men looked as if they enjoyed themselves and drank it all. My youngest daughter Susan was showing her 4H cow that day at the Spartanburg Fair. She was hoping to win a trip to Chicago. I wanted to see her but I had already promised to help with the preparation and serving of the meal. Later, I was very happy to find out she did indeed win the trip.

Reverend Ernest Severs became our new minister in 1959. He stayed with us until 1963. During a discussion about hiring him, the concern arose regarding him entering seminary without completing his college degree. I was criticized because I felt he had an extra feather in his hat by being able to go to seminary before completing college. He proved to be an excellent minister and very active with the youth.

In the Spring of 1964, our new minister Mr. William (Bill) Sistar and his family arrived. They had the prettiest little baby girl named Caroline. She looked just like a doll, all dressed in pink. She was just the prettiest, prettiest little girl! Later they were blessed with twin girls, Dorothy and Linda. One Sunday morning, Mr. Sistar opened his service by saying we were looking for a new baby and got two! He was very active with the children and young folks of our congregation until his retirement in 1968.

In 1964 the electric organ was purchased. Until then, our original one had been used since I can remember. We recently had the original organ restored and we enjoy it today.

During 1968, the pulpit committees from Urial and Fishing Creek churches were working together to find a new minister. A seminary student from Chester told them about another student by the name of Clarence Fouse. Mr. Fouse was invited to speak one Sunday. He came and everyone liked him so he returned the following Sunday and began preaching for us until he graduated. After he graduated, he moved into the community and became our new minister. He would often stop by our store to visit. One night we were getting ready to leave the store when he came in. I said, "Come on and go home with us and let's eat supper." He accepted the invitation and we enjoyed our quick pick up supper! Porter and I sort of adopted him. We shared a lot of good times and many meals. Mrs. Fred Hambright (Rose) was working at Winthrop College. She often invited students for supper and always included Mr. Fouse. He wasn't impressed with the first group of girls but he liked the next bunch. This is where he met Margaret, his future wife. Many of us attended their wedding and reception. I remember having a nice time when Mr. Fouse entertained the women of the church. He prepared and

served us refreshments. I was the group leader and the subject was stewardship. He joined in the conversation just like one of us!

During these years our Sunday school classes often got together for afternoon picnics. On one occasion my grandson, John Porter, and Jim Gaston fried chicken in the fellowship hall to go with our covered dishes. It was a beautiful, cool day and the children seemed to have a good time playing together. Another Sunday, we enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs. Mrs. Nanny Craig fried the burgers, making each one perfect! We all enjoyed a hymn singing and homemade ice cream on another Sunday afternoon.

One bright Sunday morning, we gathered at the church with some of the members from Urial. We went to Bethelwoods for our service. After the service we went outside for a picnic and we certainly enjoyed the beauty of the land.

James Saye died October 21,1971. We had a memorial service with our family and friends. Mr. Jodie Hollis presented James's life history. My sisters and our families gave the church a brick framed sign in his memory.

Mr. Fouse ministered to us until 1973. He has often returned for special occasions. Porter always said, he wanted Mr. Fouse to conduct his funeral services. Several weeks before Porter's death, Mr. Fouse dropped by

to see us. During our visit Porter asked him to take part in his funeral services. Porter died April 15, 1995 and the funeral services were conducted by Mr. Clarence Fouse, Mr. Bob Porterfield and Mr. Wilson Busick.

Mr. Fred Griffie became our minister in 1973. He came to us from the Charlotte area. One of our first services with him was during the Thanksgiving Season. He requested each of us to fill out cards listing what we were thankful for. In September, my son Joe had been injured in a serious accident. Many of the members had put Joe on their prayer list and were thankful for his recovery. Mr. Griffie was excellent with the children and very involved with the youth. One year, we had a special Christmas program. The children took part in the nativity scene. We lit candles and sang carols. We walked out into the darkness as we sang Silent Night. It was very impressive. Later at supper, we presented the children stockings filled with goodies.

We had evening services at the Church on Thursday before Easter. This night is called Black Night, because it is the night they planned to kill Jesus. The next day, Good Friday, we met with Mr. Griffie and another minister in Chester at Pundt's Restaurant for lunch. We did not have an official speaker. We just enjoyed talking and having lunch with each other. Afterwards, we all went home to prepare for our Sunrise service. We arrived

to church early on Sunday morning. We went into the sanctuary for a very impressive sermon. After going into the yard to watch the sunrise, we gathered for a delicious breakfast of grits, sausage, eggs, butter and jelly biscuits with juice, coffee, and milk. It was a special occasion.

Reverend Griffie performed the wedding ceremonies for three of my grandchildren. They include Mr. John Porter Gaston III and Miss Millie Curtis, Mr. James McFadden Gaston Jr. and Miss Elizabeth Porterfield and Miss Janet Gaston and Mr. Timothy Whitaker.

In the Spring of the year, we gathered at the Chester State Park near the water. The young people had charge of the service and communion. My granddaughter, Janet, led a very nice prayer. After we had eaten our supper, we stood by the water, thinking about way back when the people stood by the water, wishing for a boat with a minister to arrive. We were very thankful to have Mr. Griffie with us! He remained our minister until December 1981.

Mr. Donald Scoggins began ministering for us in January 1981 and remained with us until August 1982. Mr. Scoggins returned in October 1983 and ministered until November 1994. He was a lay minister and always willing to serve in any way that he could. Mr. Scoggins was very good to visit the sick in the homes and in the hospital. It was a pleasure to have he and his wife Mary, as part of our church family.

From 1982 through 1991 we had several ministers. Reverend Samuel Thomas provided worship services from August until October 1982. Reverend Ron Scott served us from October 1982 until October 1983. As of September 11, 1983 we have had 35 ministers and many visiting ones. Reverend Marcus G. Coker joined us in December 1984 and ministered until May 1988. It was during this time (May 31, 1984) that Fishing Creek and Urial re-yoked. Mr. Coker and Joyce Smith are responsible for the little plaque on the front entrance of the church, signifying that Fishing Creek is now a member of the Historical Presbyterian Churches. Our only lady minister was Reverend Ann Fitzgerald. She ministered in the summer of 1988 and we enjoyed having her. Reverend Larry Crocker was with us from September 1988 until February 1989. He left our church family and moved to the lower part of the state to work with unfortunate children. I wish we could have had him longer. He was very educational and I learned a lot from him. Revend Steve Sanders provided our worship services from March until August 1989. Dr. John Miller began his ministry with us in August of 1989. Dr. Miller resigned from Fishing Creek and Urial in March 1991 and continued to preach for us until October 1991.

In 1992, we had homecoming. We wondered whom we would have as a visiting minister. It was agreed that my grandson, Joseph, would be

invited, one of our own boys! It was a pleasure to have him with us. We had a good crowd of members and visitors.

Mr. and Mrs. Stan Oaks wanted to show their appreciation by providing the congregation with supper. Some of us offered to help, but they said no, they wanted to do it all for us. I offered to make the dessert and they accepted. I made apple pies and other members provided pies as well. It was a delicious meal. Rain was pouring outside, but the inside was full of love and friendship.

The women of the church (WOC) were small in number but were very active in the church as well as the community. We were responsible for keeping the church clean, planning and preparing church suppers, organizing fall bazaars and helping with the Christmas programs, Bible School, and many more activities. We purchased furniture, curtains and shades for the fellowship hall and Sunday school rooms, cushions for the pews, and dishes for the kitchen. Recently, the WOC had the floor of the sanctuary refinished and painted the outside windows and doorframes. The refrigerator and stove were also purchased by the WOC and the Sunday school classes.

After much consideration and many discussions regarding the need for a new piano, the WOC found one they liked. They came back with reports and other members of the church went to look. They all liked the piano. The

question of how will we purchase it arose. Mrs. Busick and Jim Gaston wrote letters to former members requesting donations, which poured in. The Grand piano was purchased in 1996 for $9,500. A dedication for the piano was held. My granddaughter, Beth, and I attended. We enjoyed the services very much. Mrs. W.W. Gaston, III and Mrs. Cloud Hicklin, both wives of former members, presented us with lovely selections of music. After the service we gathered for lunch in the fellowship hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hambright were preparing to leave Rodman and move to a retirement community in Columbia. They presented the church with a memorial on Sunday April 23, 1995. We gathered in the afternoon and several people spoke including Jean Agee, regarding the history of Fishing Creek. It was most enjoyable. Mr. Hambright and Augusta Saye Cook unveiled a very nice plaque and placed flowers at the base. After the unveiling, we enjoyed light refreshments.

In 1998, Mr. and Mrs. Hambright wanted to show their appreciation to the community and the church. Mrs. Hambright sent invitations to former and present members of the church and the community inviting them to a barbeque. Joseph Gaston was asked to conduct the worship service that day. The barbecue was served indoors as well as outdoors. It was a special time and we gathered outside to visit. I appreciated the luncheon and I will always

[illegible] to have [illegible] to purchase a house. Mrs. Baskin and her daughter was known to flower meadows regarding dandelions, which proved to be [illegible] and were purchased in 1996 for $9,100. A delicatessen for the place was held. Her grandaughter, Beth, and I attended. We enjoyed the [illegible] very much. Mr. W. W. Clayton, III and Mrs. Claud Hawkins, each [illegible] of [illegible] mornings, personal to with lovely selections of music. After the service we gathered for lunch in the fellowship hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Brown-Wright were preparing a large [illegible] and [illegible] in a delicatessen commonly in Lumpkin. They presented the [illegible] a [illegible] on Sunday April 23, 1961. We gathered in the [illegible] [illegible] people spoke including Jean Agee, regarding the history of [illegible] Grove. It was most enjoyable. Mr. Hamblight and Mrs. a [illegible] Club supported a very nice plaque was placed down at the [illegible] the [illegible], we enjoyed light refreshment.

In 1976, Mr. and Mrs. Hamblight wanted to show their appreciation to the community and the church. Mrs. Hamblight sent invitations to [illegible] and previous members of the church and the community for [illegible] to a [illegible]. Joseph Clayton was asked to conduct the worship service. The [illegible] The banquet was served outdoors as well as outdoors. It was a special time and we gathered outside to visit. I appreciated the luncheon and I will always

remember them. They were faithful members of Fishing Creek and I hoped they would have many more happy days ahead in their new home.

Mr. Wilson Busick's first sermon with us was November 10, 1991. Mr. and Mrs. Busick lived in Connecticut. She taught school and he was a minister. They decided to retire and move home to Rodman. After picking a spot in the pines to build a house, arrangements were made for them to return to Connecticut, during the house building for another year. It was a good day for Rodman and Fishing Creek when they came back and I am glad they have decided to stay! They have added so much to our community. They are always interested in the youth and preservation of our church.

When I was asked to write this story I did not know where to begin. I hope these memories will bring as much joy to the reader as they have to Beth and myself. Thanks to all of you who have provided and shared in these special memories with me. Thanks be to God for giving me the sound mind and pleasure in my 97th year to remember the years gone by.

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