

HISTORIC FAIRFIELD CHURCH

"Beneath those rugged elms,
that yew tree's shade
where heaves the turf in many
a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever
laid,
The rude forefathers of the
hamlet sleep."

—From Gray's Elegy

Illustrious men and women are buried in the church yard of historic Mount Olivet church. Among them are Scotch-Irish who emigrated long ago to the colony of Carolina, along with their descendants who continued their pious Presbyterian manner.

Guarded by an intricately-worked iron fence, the cemetery is undisturbed in its simplicity, though elaborate monuments, crypts and tombstones rise to attest to the goodness, faithfulness and religious austerity of those sleeping therein.

"For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening's care;
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share."

Mount Olivet has a distinguished history and its forebears have been of noble cause and purpose. Its ministers have been men of sterling character, from the first, the old Covenanter William Martin, to the late and beloved, Dr. Samuel Byrd.

Under the present ministry of the Rev. Arthur M. Martin, the church continues its good influence as his younger shoulders assume the leadership of the people. He is assisted in his work by such stalwarts as Charles A. Stevenson of Woodward, one of the older and more devoted members.

Mount Olivet, originally known as Wateree, taking its Indian name from the stream of the same name, is located northeast of Winnsboro, about seven miles.

Little is known of the first forty years of its existence, although reference is made in Howe's History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina that a meeting place had been established there by the Scotch Irish who emigrated to the neighborhood.

Apparently, the group had worshipped simply in their stern, religious faith, with no upheavals to mar the services, adding members as new families came in, as children grew up to attend church.

The Sabbath was spent listening to the plain gospel, preceded by Saturdays of great activity in

preparation for the next day, when only necessary duties were attended to.

About 1772, among the waves of Scotch-Irish and others filtering in was the Rev. William Martin, known as the "Covenanter," later head of the Reformed Presbyterians in the Carolinas.

He began his ministry by preaching in private homes, and is known to have served the original Wateree congregation at its meeting place called the "Wolf Pen" or "Wolf Pit," a quarter-mile from where the present church stands.

He apparently was a man of great charm, said to have been of fine stature, his only known fault a "bit of intemperance" for which he was banned from the church for some time. During the course of his life-time, he was married several times.

Martin, who was the son of David Martin, was born May 16, 1729, at Ballyspolen in County Londonderry, Ireland, was graduated from the University of Glasgow, and later came to America with a colony of his people to settle on Rocky creek. Evidently he was a man of some means, for instead of taking up bounty lands (100 acres for the head of the household, fifty for each of the others), he purchased a tract of land of about 640 acres and upon it built a house of stone. He is buried at this site.

It was Martin who was called upon to settle dispute in the Presbyterian church over the proposal that Issac Watts' metrical version of the Psalms should be substituted for Rouse's (which had been adopted by the General Assembly of Scotland).

The Rev. John Brown had introduced Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns in May, 1802, during the "great revival." It was also proposed that new and different tunes

should be added to the "Old Twelve."

The controversy waged strong, causing splits in some churches. Many changed over to the new version; others continued to use Rouse's, among those Mount Olivet.

Up until 1800, Mount Olivet had been called Wateree, but in the minutes of the Presbytery of that year, the society asked that in the future it be known as Mount Olivet. However, until today it is referred to as Wateree.

At that time (about the beginning of the 19th century), the presbytery was divided into two parts, the first and second presbyteries. Mount Olivet was a part of the first.

In 1829, dissension arose at Mount Olivet over certain religious ceremonies, chief of which was the subject of baptism. Heretofore, children had been baptised when presented, whether the parents were in full communication or not. Stern and uncompromising, some of the members felt all parents whose children were baptised should be in "good standing." The battle raged. Those who disagreed with the former rule withdrew and formed a church of their own, New Zion (which has been many times confused with Sion Presbyterian church in Winnsboro).

Other troubles plagued Mount Olivet. The frame building constructed only a few years before at considerable expense was burned, a blow to a people of not too extensive financial means.

It is not certain how many houses of worship have served for Mount Olivet. The first known one was built of roughly-hewn logs. Possibly two or more frame churches were built (one in 1800), another of brick which was razed and replaced in 1869 by the present structure.

Each time there was no shelter for meeting, the communicants held services in the nearby grove, their wagons and carriages parked in the shade, sometimes holding sleeping infants.

In front of the old church is a carriage stop, built for ladies. Of sturdy construction, it is built on a carriage level, from which the women descended the graduated steps in their hobble skirts or other fashions of the day.

Among Mount Olivet's more distinguished ministers was the Rev. Thomas McCaule, who received a call there in 1784 (the first year in which much is known about the history of the church). Mr. McCaule was the cultured, well educated first principal of Mount Zion college at Winnsboro which was incorporated March 19, 1785, in the same act which incorporated the College of Charleston and the College of Cambridge at Ninety Six.

The call to Mr. McCaule was presented to the Presbytery of Orange, and by it reported to the newly-formed Presbytery of the Carolinas which held its first meeting at Waxhaw church in April, 1785.

The brick building of 1869 at Mount Olivet stands in good repair today, its slave gallery intact (where formerly sat the Negroes whose membership quite often outnumbered the whites); its altar more beautiful than in the old days, now polished with time.

Hanging on the wall of the entrance of Mount Olivet are photostatic copies of deeds, plats, surveyor's instruments and certifi-

cates showing how Mount Olivet's congregation acquired its lands.

In all the periods of the church, only rarely have there been years when no regular pastor was assigned to the society. However, during such times, the people were always fortunate in having supply pastors of esteem, among them such as the late Dr. Oliver Johnson, Associate Reformed Presbyterian minister of Winnsboro, and in more recent years, the late Dr. Samuel Byrd.

Concessions to modern day improvements have been made in the physical appearance of the church in the last decade. The interior has been painted, and electric lights installed. Still hanging on the walls are old-time lanterns.

During home-comings, at Christmas, Easter and at other religious events, the old church is re-dedicated to the service of the Lord, and despite the fact that now its membership is small, it still yields a tremendous influence for good in the community.—The State

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Kindness of:
Mr. Wade B. Roddey
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