

Seeded in pioneer times, Indian Land church continues to flower

Many of the churches in York, Lancaster and Chester counties were founded more than a hundred years ago. One of them is Belair United Methodist Church in Indian Land.

In 1835, David Hagins and his wife, Eliza, both Presbyterians, gave 6½ acres — in exchange for \$1 — to the Rev. Adam Ivy and some Methodist friends for the building of a church.

Ivy's maternal grandfather was the Rev. Adam Clarke, a personal friend of John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church in England.

One of David Hagins' grandfathers was Col. William Hagins, a Revolutionary War hero who may have been the first white man to live inside the Catawba Indian Land of Lancaster County. Col.



LOUISE PETTUS
Nearby History

Hagins died in 1790 and was buried in the old cemetery of Six Mile Creek Presbyterian Church.

The acreage given by David and Eliza Hagins was part of their tract in the Catawba Indian Land. The land was surrounded by Hagins' land, but was within walking distance of the "Great Road" and Hagins' Inn, which served as a stagecoach stop between Lancaster and Charlotte.

Ivy and the other founders named their church Mount Ararat.

Tradition has it that the first church was an "arbor," a rudimentary shelter made of saplings and tree branches. But a 1937 Works Progress Administration survey of churches reports that the first church was constructed of logs.

In 1841, Belair Village was laid out between the church and the "Great Road." A plat shows that Belair Village had three streets and 98 lots. The village is known to have boasted several stores, as well as a tavern and post office. Dr. Charles L. Clawson opened a medical office in the village.

A history of Pleasant Grove Church, Union County, N.C., states, "Around 1850-1860 there were 17 churches on the Pleasant Grove Circuit with four campgrounds in connection with them.

One was a 'Bellair' Church in South Carolina. Not much is known about its size but more than likely it was small."

The late Alice Collins Dickson, a life-long member of the church, collected some facts about Mount Ararat (the name was changed to Belair Methodist Episcopal Church of the South in ~~1883~~ 1883).

Dickson reported that a second church building, circa 1882-84, was a one-room building with two doors in front (there are still two front entrances). At that time, women customarily entered the left door and the men the right door.

Camp meetings attracted crowds from surrounding areas who arrived on foot, as well as in wagons and buggies. The people

would be summoned to services by someone blowing on a "conk" (conch) shell used for a horn. Dickson says that at camp meeting time, there were three services a day, each lasting several hours.

Bessie Rodgers Pettus, 91, a life-long member, recalls camp meetings when she was a child living with her grandparents who lived near the church.

In 1994, Pettus wrote: "My grandmother Rodgers said she helped to cook breakfast for 40 people who had come from her old home at Catawba in York County to camp meeting at Mount Ararat. People would come in wagons with their children and stay overnight. The men would sleep in the wagons. These wagons were loaded with chickens, eggs, food, quilts for the children, and feed for the

mules.

"Some that lived near enough would go home for the night, leaving their wagons and buggies at the church. They would unhitch their mules from the wagons and tie them to trees in the woods.

"Services were morning and afternoon. If they had night services they had to have lanterns in the trees to be able to see to get around outside."

The church Pettus first knew as Mount Ararat is today called Belair United Methodist Church. It's still a country church — but with a lovely sanctuary far removed from its humble beginnings.

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.