

HERITAGE DAY
BELAIR CHURCH
by Lindsay Pettus
April 27, 1997

Our Belair United Methodist church was founded November 20, 1835, in the Catawba Indian Land section of Lancaster District.

The Trustees - Adam Ivy, John Mills, John Robinson, John Fincher and James Hagins - erected a place of worship called Mount Arrarat (now Belair Church), containing seven acres adjoining the village of Belair.

When this church was founded in 1835, Andrew Jackson, Boy of the Waxhaws, born on the Crawford plantation, Lancaster District, military hero of the Battle of New Orleans, was in the middle of his second term as president of the United States.

That year Jackson became the first American President to be a target for an attempted assassination which failed. In 1835 Andrew Jackson dominated the U.S. political scene.

David Hagins and wife Eliza Hagins bargained unto the trustees of Mount Arrarat all of their right and title for one dollar this tract of land that we are now on.

The trustees bargained with David Hagins for a part of his lease with the Catawba Indians in order to build a house of worship. Remember that when this church was founded, this property was part of the 144,000 acres, 15 miles square of land which was given to the Catawba Indians by the British Crown as part of the Treaty of Pine Tree Hill in July 1760 and ratified at the Treaty of Augusta in 1763.

Five years after the founding of this church the Nation Ford Treaty of 1840 was signed. By this treaty the Catawbas sold the Indian land to the state of South Carolina. Now it was possible for the white settlers to get a title to the land rather than pay rents to the Indians.

When the white settlers had first come to this area there were six known Indian villages in Lancaster County. One of the villages was called Turkey Head. It was the spiritual center of the Catawbas and had the graves of Catawba Indian kings.

Rev. Adam Ivy was the principal founder of Belair Church. He was what we would call a lay preacher. Occasionally in the newspapers they called him i .rev. Dr. Adam Ivy, but there is no evidence that he had earned the titles through college. Adam Ivy had a large plantation on the Van Wyck road and in the 1850s was the Indian agent representing the state of South Carolina in its dealings with the Catawbas. Adam Ivy was known as a friend and compassionate supporter of the Catawbas.

Rev. Adam Ivy's grandfather on his mother's side of the family was a man named Adam Clarke. Adam Clarke was a personal friend and associate of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church. Adam Clarke was author of an important book of his time: *Clarkes Commentaries*. Clarke was considered to be the greatest living scholar of ancient languages in England. Clarke is buried just a few feet away from John Wesley in City Park Church Cemetery in London, England.

Previously, I mentioned that the seven acres for Belair Church was adjoining the village of Belair - sometimes spelled Bell-Air. Belair Village was located at the junction of present Hwy 521 and Shelly Mullis Road. It only lasted a few years in the early 1850s. It was laid out with three streets (Main Street, Troupe Street, and Meacham Street). It was hoped that a railroad would run from Camden to Charlotte and that Belair would be on the route, but the railroad was laid west of the Catawba River and created the towns of Rock Hill and Fort Mill. (If things had been different would Belair have been as big as Rock Hill?)

Interestingly, Belair had its own gold mine. Hagins gold mine was west of here; Ezell gold mine to the east, and Hyatt gold mine just to the south on Van Wyck Road.

Belair had a post office which dated all the way back to May 15, 1813. Even before our Belair Church, there was the Belair Academy which was in existence at least by 1808 with Fowler Williams as principal. Our older church members went to Belair School which was located close to this church building until 1923 when a new school, Belair Elementary School, was built on highway 521 on land which was once part of David Hagins tract of land.

There was an interesting letter printed in the Lancaster Ledger on September 14, 1853. It reads like this: "Have you ever seen Belair? No, then you should not rest satisfied until you have. It is a considerable place. [It has] no fewer than nine families living in the village and many more in the vicinity. There are two stores. There is no courthouse but I observed one jail. In said jail are several individuals committed on a charge of burglary.

"The chief amusement is the hunting of deer which they never find.

"Mr. Bela Sizer has a 'water telegraph.' He can send a bucket about 200 yards and bring it back filled with water in about two minutes....."

It was signed "Yours, Carlos."

Our Belair Church, during the 1850s and 1860s, had closer ties to North Carolina than to South Carolina. We were a part of the Pleasant Grove Circuit of North Carolina. At that time, Belair was known for having a large camp ground and preaching in the arbor.

The Civil War or War Between the States was an especially trying time for our church family. South Carolina was in turmoil. The village of Lancaster was occupied in February of 1865 by federal troops under the command of Gen. Judson Kilpatrick.

Old letters of the Culp family of Pleasant Valley tell of hearing the movement of cavalry troops at night in Indian Land.

Such hard times had never been known by our Belair church families. Despair and gloom prevailed throughout the land. Returning soldiers were not sure that they would have a home to come to.

Desdemona Ivy, daughter of Rev. Adam and his second wife, Jane Phifer Ivey, wrote of the poor, ragged and bedraggled Confederate veterans as they came through Belair. She said their trousers were split to their knees; they were barefoot and sometimes polluted with vermin.

The Rev. Adam Ivy home on Van Wyck Road was open to all of them. Desdemona Ivy wrote of Lancaster County being desolated; many of the veterans found where their homes had been and found only ashes to mark the spot and graves that had taken the place of loved one.

The Civil War did not spare Belair Church. We don't have membership rolls from those days, so we cannot be sure, but some may not have returned from the battlefields, some came home wounded, others escaped injury. Men who were later buried in our cemetery across the road as heroes of a lost cause included the following:

Henry E. Carter, Co. H, 12th SC Volunteers

Green Berry Collins, Co. H, 12th SC Confederate Army, wounded in the eye, he became blind in his old age.

Henry J. Collins, Green Berry Collins' brother, also served in Co. H, 12th SC Confederate Army

William J. Collins was a third brother. He served in Co. E, 6th Regt. SC, Confederate Army Reserves

Perry R. Collins served also.

L. P. Gordon was in Co. E, 22nd SC Volunteers, Confederate Army

Franklin E. Lemons, was in Co. A, 17th SC, Confederate Army

Marion DeKalb Rodgers was in Co. H, 12th SC Volunteers, Confederate Army, with the Collins brothers

William T. Slagle was in Co. A, 5th SC Volunteers, Confederate Army

These are nine Confederate veterans buried in Belair Cemetery that we know of; there may have been more.

On August 23, 1883, in the Clerk of Court Offices, Lancaster Courthouse, there was filed a charter for Belair Methodist Episcopal Church of the South. This request asked that a charter be issued for Belair Church and Campground and the charter to include a territory extending one-half mile in every direction from said church and as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This charter had the names of J. R. Starnes, G. B. Collins, E. S. Howie, W. P. Paxton, D. C. Wolf, Lee Patterson, William Rodgers, Turner Rodgers and W. C. Patterson.

Speaking of Belair Campground, I would like to read to you a passage of a paper written by my mother, Bessie Rodgers Pettus, in February 1993. The following are her memories of camp meetings at Belair Church.

She said, "I first attended camp meetings at Belair Church, originally called Mount Arrarat, around 1910 or 1912. My grandparents, Marion DeKalb and Adeline Josephine Rodgers, lived near the church.

"My grandmother Rodgers said she helped to cook breakfast for forty people who had come from her old home at Catawba in York Count to camp meeting at Mount Arrarat. 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 a night service, they had to have lanterns in the trees to be able to see to get around outside.

"We had a lemonade stand and sold it for 3 cents a cup. After camp meeting was over, my grandmother Rodgers would sweep up corn spilled by the mules for her chickens and I would hunt for pennies in the sawdust where the lemonade stand had been.

"When you entered the church, you knelt and had prayer before you were seated. Next, you had the service and you sang and sang. Some would get up and say they were Christians and had faith in an eternal life."

My mother told me the Belair congregation's favorite songs were "Old Time Religion," "Amazing Grace," "Sunrise," and "Beulah Land."

My mother is 93 years of age so she is talking about the period before World War One.

On October 5, 1934, the Lancaster News had a write up of Homecoming at Belair M. E. Church: Homecoming day was observed at Belair Church and was attended by a large number of people. Rev. J. H. Bell, pastor of the church, gave the welcome address. Mr. F. W. Dickson gave the history of Belair Church and showed the deed whereon the late David Hagins deeded seven acres to the church.

Mr. John Harris of Pleasant Valley gave a short talk and presented a Bible that had been in use for over one hundred years, a horn that was used to awaken the people at camp meetings and call them in for services; and a basket that has carried the communion essentials to the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, Six Mile Church, Belair Church and Peaseant Hill Church. The address was given by Mr. O. Roddey Bell of Lancaster. At noon a picnic dinner was served on the grounds. Rev. L. D. Gillespie of Lancaster preached in the afternoon. Rev. J. P. Lupo, the presiding elder of Rock Hill District, was present and had charge of the church dedication service.

The Elgin quartet rendered special music throughout the program.

In closing, a few words about the cemetery which now has approximately 250 graves. The oldest tombstone that can be read at the present is that of Lelah L. G. Collins, Daughter of J. W. and E. A. Collins. She died December 18, 1873, at the age of three years.

You may wonder why it is that Belair Church was founded in 1835, but there are no graves for approximately 38 years. The answer is that the Six Mile Presbyterian Church cemetery was used as a community cemetery. So some of our Belair Methodists are buried in the cemetery at the Six Mile Church, but we don't know which ones because the records for Belair have been lost for many years.

Here are a few of the sayings that appear on tombstones in Belair Cemetery:

"Gone to a Better Land"

"Twas hard to give thee up but Thy Will O God be done."

"May God replace sad thoughts with memories that make you smile."

"Twas a flower too good for Earth transplanted to Heaven."

"God gave us memories that we might have roses in December." (This last is a large stone with no name or date.)

And last, the inscription that is used on more grave stones than any other

- "Gone but not forgotten."

Thank you. My mother sends you her love and God Bless you.