

# It started as a meeting house

## The rich history of Bethesda Presbyterian began in 1769

Bethesda Presbyterian Church, located eight miles southwest of Rock Hill on S.C. 322, was founded in 1769. It was the second church in York County (Bethel is five years older).

Originally Bethesda was a "meeting house." To be called a church, the congregation had to be served by an ordained minister. Presbyterian ministers were few and far between on the frontier.

Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church (founded in upper Lancaster County in 1755 and the oldest church in the South Carolina Upcountry) was served by the Rev. William Richardson.

The original site was about a mile east of the present building. The first building was of logs. The log building burned in 1780 and was replaced by a wooden frame structure.

About 1820 the present brick building was constructed. It is now the oldest church structure and the oldest brick building in York County.

In 1785 the first meeting of the

South Carolina Presbytery was held at Old Waxhaw. Assignments were made for supply pastors.

The Rev. John Simpson preached at Bethesda once a month.

Robert E. Walker became the first full-time pastor in 1795, serving the church for 40 years. For 25 of those years Walker was also pastor of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church.

At other times he supplied various smaller churches. In 1835 Walker was succeeded by the Rev. Cyrus Johnston who served for five years.

Johnston, like so many of his parishioners, went "West." In Mississippi, Johnston established a Presbyterian church also

called Bethesda Presbyterian. Records show remodeling from time to time. The original church floor had been made of brick. In 1857 the brick floor was replaced by a wood floor.

In 1880 the present day altar was installed. In 1979 the church received a \$24,200 grant to apply new mortar to the old brick and to restore the pews.

The women of the church played a major role in improvements.

The Ladies Aid Society of Bethesda was organized in 1887. They raised money for a handsome chandelier (there was no electricity before the 1930s so kerosene was used for lighting).

The Ladies Aid Society carpeted the church several times, bought various items of church furniture, purchased a silver communion set, all of which contributed to the general attractiveness of the church.

An education building was completed in 1954. The first floor has

Any time of the year, but especially in the summer, passersby can see visitors amidst the cemetery's ancient tombstones.

The oldest known tombstone can no longer be read, but in 1937 was transcribed as, "William Neely, Dec. 8, 1776, 42 year old."

Also, still legible in 1937 were two others: "Elizabeth Neely, Oct. 25, 1785, 91 year old," and "Mary Neely, Oct. 16, 1815, 73 years old."

The oldest tombstone still legible is for Peggy Black who died Nov. 5, 1777, aged 28 years.

The names most frequently found that date before this century are: Adams, Ash/Ashe, Black, Bratton, Burris, Byers, Clinton, Crawford, Davison, Erwin, Gordon, Hanna, Johnson, Lindsay, Love, Lowry, Mendenhall, Moore (the most frequent of all), McConnell, Sadler, Sandifer, Wallace, Williams and Williamson.

Bethesda is on the National Register of Historic Places.

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