

# Churches few and far apart in early days of settlement

*Women and men often sat separated; many walked miles to worship*

As settlers began to arrive here around 1750 and well into the early 1800s, there were few churches built, mainly because of a lack of ministers.

Presbyterians, who dominated, required a seminary education for their ministers. There were only two Baptist churches (Flint Hill, north of Fort Mill, and Catawba, south of present-day Rock Hill) and no Methodist churches.

The sparseness of churches, however, did not stop worship. Simple log structures called meeting houses existed.

Inside the meeting houses, there were likely to be benches made from a heavy plank bored with a large auger and four pegs to serve as legs. There were no backs and no cushions. An exception was Ebenezer Presbyterian in its earliest years. It is said that the people sat on stools they brought from home.

Men and women sat apart, the men on the right and women on the left. Some churches, such as

## NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



Belair United Methodist, founded in 1835, have two front entrances that in their earliest days separated the men from the women.

At Six Mile Presbyterian in Lancaster County's Indian Land, there were special seating areas called sheds. Black members sat in an area on one side of the sanctuary where white members were seated. Catawba Indians sat on the other side.

Ordinary people most likely had two sets of work clothes and one they called "Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes." (Maybe the Flint Hill members didn't use that expression because they most frequently met on Saturday, sometimes on Friday, and on Sunday only if it were Communion day.)

Churches were so scattered that, typically, they drew members from up to 10 miles from the church. Most people walked. Small children might be carried for miles.

In 1877, the Rev. Robert Lathan quoted an old-timer as providing him with this memory: "Many of

the poorer classes of young ladies went on foot and carried their shoes and stockings in their hands, rolled up in cotton handkerchiefs, till they came near to the meeting house, then they would turn aside, equip their feet and ankles, and appear in the congregation as nice as a new pin."

Poor boys likely wore "copperas pants made of tow or cotton." (Copperas came from copper and when boiled with oak bark, a black dye formed. The fabric came from weaving flax and hemp fibers.) Moccasins were made of buckskin or hog leather.

Lathan's speaker stated, "I have seen many a starched young gentleman, with broadcloth, high-heeled boots, long watch chain, moving with an air of elegance, indicating that he belonged to one of the first families, and was the descendant of a long line of aristocrats, whose father, to my knowledge, wore copperas breeches on Sunday, and covered his unbrushed head with a wool hat."

Samuel Mendenhall, in his "History of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church," said that his church split over the issue of "psalmody."

At first, the Scots-Irish church members only allowed the singing of 12 tunes that were found in

Rouse's "Version of the Psalms." When some of the church members wished to add Isaac Watts' "Imitations of David's Psalms," opposition was such that the congregation literally split with a large number forming a new church.

Musical instruments were not present until well into the 1800s. As Mendenhall pointed out, there was a custom of "lining out" one line at a time by an individual. When there was an attempt to "line out" two lines at a time, again there was a great deal of opposition.

Sometimes there were fist-fights among members - generally not inside the church but over some issue that rose in the church. It was written that fighting in those days was "fist and skull."

In one description, "When one party was overcome and cried 'Enough!' his antagonist raised him up; they washed, drank together, shook hands and were friends. A man in those days who would have carried a concealed pistol or dirk would have been branded as a coward."

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

