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THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

Land gift helped start little church

Volunteers cut trees for Mount Vernon M.E.

In 1908 James Strain of Western York County was asked to supply the history of a Methodist church in Hickory Grove. Strain had attended the church as a boy. He admittedly had little factual information about the establishment of Mount Vernon M.E. (Methodist Episcopal) Church but agreed to try.

After interviewing some of the oldest members of the church, Strain pieced together enough to write a sketch of the origins of Mount Vernon church.

In the 1830s there was no church in the Hickory Grove area, he was told, until a large landowner, Abram Smith, proposed to give land and the necessary timber to build a house of worship for the people of all denominations.

Volunteers cut trees and dressed the lumber by hand. The interior framework was put together with mortise and tenon and was considered a "model house" when completed. Only the nails and glass came from outside the community.

There was quite a discussion over what to name the church. Some held it should be a biblical name but they could not agree on what the name should be. Finally, they agreed to call it "Unity."

Preaching was rotated among Methodists, Baptists and members of the American Reformed Presbyterians, known as "Seceders."



**LOUISE
PETTUS**

Nearby History

The Methodist ministers were circuit riders; the A.R.P. minister also served other churches. The Baptists generally used laymen to lead services but had an occasional Baptist minister as a visitor.

Strain asked whether there had been friction among the various denominations but none was recalled. In fact, it was agreed that, as a rule, the membership attended each other's services.

Some time around 1856 or 1857, the Methodists decided they wanted a better and larger building. The Rev. J.W. North, the Methodist circuit rider, had courted and married Miss Dye, the daughter of Perry Dye, one of the most influential Methodists in the area. North put his heart and soul into persuading the Methodists to build a new church.

W.S. Wilkerson threw in his support with the remark that Unity Church had cost them little and since it was built not a penny had been spent on either repairing or beautifying. He felt the younger generation should exert itself to build a new, and better, building. The challenge was taken up by the younger folk.

The Methodists thought about a biblical name for their new church and finally agreed to call it Mount Vernon in honor of George Washington's home.

Mount Vernon's Sunday school attracted a large number of the young people of the community, no matter the denomination of their parents. The usual Sunday school pattern was a Bible reading, then a topic was chosen and the leader would quiz the youth. The session ended with vigorous singing of hymns.

Sunday school served to attract people to Mount Vernon. And so did other nonchurch events. The most famous occurred Dec. 21, 1860, the day after South Carolina seceded from the Union.

The Sons of Temperance had a rally at Mount Vernon with 150 Sons and Daughters of Temperance present and another 450 visitors. In spite of continuous rains and flooded roads, enthusiasm was not dampened.

However, a tall, dead pine tree was blown down and killed a horse owned by Amos Burns of Beersheba. Those present raised enough money to enable Burns to buy another horse.

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