

History of Philadelphia United

Methodist is not a simple matter

Many of our local churches have created the office of church historian. The historian's duties are generally light — until a landmark date is reached.

In this area, those dates can range from the 25th anniversary of a church's founding to an event commemorating several centuries. For instance, the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church in Lancaster County celebrates its 240th year this year.

Many churches, as they approach an important year in their history, plan to publish a history. The historian, who may work with a committee, is immediately con-



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*Nearby
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fronted with some questions.

When was the church founded? Where was the first church located? Who were the founders? Who were the ministers? How many church buildings have there been? What major events have occurred in the church history? Are there records and, if so, where

are they located?

Research problems will vary from church to church. Philadelphia United Methodist Church in Fort Mill township of York County demonstrates some of the problems facing the church historian.

When was Philadelphia founded? The church's historian, Ruth C. Adkins, immediately was faced with the fact that the name "Philadelphia" first appeared in Methodist records in the First Quarterly Conference of Sugaw Creek Circuit, March 17, 1832.

It would seem that the founding date is clear, but the entry actually read, "Philadelphia, formerly

Felts."

Indeed, in the previous year, 1831, there is a reference to "Felts Meeting House." The name William Felts turns up in Methodist records both before and after 1832. In 1819, at Harrison's Methodist Church (in Mecklenburg County, south of Pineville), William Felts, steward and class leader, was disciplined. It seems that Felts "had not renewed his license according to the Discipline." So, some time before 1819, Felts led a congregation of Methodists.

Further research by Adkins showed that on Oct. 25, 1816, when the Sugaw Creek Circuit met at

Harrison's, the note was made that "There is one from Thyatyrah Society, Brother William Felts, who is not present on account of sickness."

Thyatyrah Society? Indeed, there is an account in 1815 that mentions William Felts of Thyatyrah Society. Adkins comments, "We do not know where the Thyatyrah Society was located, but we do know that Mr. Felts owned the property where the first Philadelphia church building was located."

So, we have three names for a Methodist congregation in the same vicinity — Thyatyrah Society, Felts' Meeting House and Philadel-

phia — and dates ranging from 1815 to 1832 as candidates for the founding of Philadelphia United Methodist Church and at least two locations.

Adkins chose the least debatable date, 1832, as the founding date and titled her history "150 Years of Methodism in Fort Mill, S.C., 1832-1982."

Had she chosen 1815 as Philadelphia United Methodist's founding date she could have claimed her church to be the oldest Methodist church in York County — older than Yorkville's 1824 founding by the Rev. William Gassaway and the Rev. Joseph Holmes.