

# Lauderdale Mission Start of Methodism in County

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Methodism came to Mississippi from South Carolina in 1799.

Tobias Gibson, appointed by Bishop Asbury, coming by boats on various rivers, organized the first Methodist church in the Mississippi Territory of Methodism at Washington, six miles east of Natchez. The Mississippi territory embraced the present limits of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. Moses Floyd came in 1803 as Tobias Gibson's helper, and the same year Lorenzo Dow arrived on the first of his various visits to Mississippi. The Mississippi annual conference was organized in 1813 in the home of Newit Vick, for whom Vicksburg is named. He was a local preacher who had come from Virginia.

The next 20 years was time of expansion and development, and by 1832 there were six districts in three States -- seven pastoral charges in Louisiana, 20 in Mississippi and 16 in Alabama, with 64 preachers receiving appointments. The territory in Alabama, with some small portions along the Mississippi border, was set off into a separate annual conference in 1832.

## In Alabama Conference

Lauderdale County was in the portion of the Mississippi border in the Alabama Conference from 1832 to 1870. In 1839 Gainesville District was mentioned for the first time in the Alabama Conference Journal, and among the charges, it contained the name of the Lauderdale Mission. It is thought Meridian was part of this mission or circuit.

In 1856 the Gainesville District connection disappears, and the Macon District appears. Meridian is mentioned in 1859 in the Conference Journal, and alternated with Lauderdale for several years, hence we believe it was possibly a circuit.

In 1864 Alabama was divided into two annual conferences, and the Mississippi churches were put into the Mobile Conference where they remained until 1870 when all the Mississippi churches were placed either in the Mississippi or North Mississippi Conference. Meridian District has had a continuous history in the Mississippi Conference since 1870.

The "History of Methodism in the Mississippi Conference, 1846-1870" written by Rev. J. B. Cain, and "Methodism in the Mississippi Conference 1846-1870" written by the Rev. W. B. Jones, a paper by Mr. "Link" Brown, written for the Annual conference of 1919. Articles in the New Orleans Christian Advocate, and other papers, have furnished the basis of the remainder of this paper.

The deed to the first Methodist church building, lot, and graveyard, filed Oct. 23, 1852, shows that the property was obtained "for one dollar paid in hand to William Dearman" by Levi Barton, Ferdinand Snow, and James Arrington, Trustees of the Lauderdale circuit of the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. He deeded a parcel of land including a church house and graveyard, and the description in the deed and old map shows they were located on A St., between Ninth and 11th Avenues.

## Old Church Site Sold

In every thought of Methodism in Meridian, with hands uplifted in gratitude we recall the name of old Brother Dearman, local preacher, kind in heart, generous in spirit. He gave us a frame church and cemetery ground in the Northeastern part of town. The old building seemed to have served its day and generation, and when the high tide of commercialism struck Meridian, the trustees sold the old church site and the grounds. More than a thousand bodies were interred there, including many Confederate soldiers. The graves were leveled and the bodies were not moved, including that of the donor.

In 1860 a lot on the Northwest corner of 11th St. and 27th Ave. was bought from John T. Ball. In January 1860, a deed was given, contracted for in 1859, for \$200, by church trustees John H. Gibbs, I. S. O. G. Greer, R. Y. Rew, L. Gould and James Watts. On it was erected a hand hewed frame and log church building, Alexander McBryde, pastor. During the war this house was used for barracks, quartermaster and commissary department purposes. It was set on fire by Sherman's soldiers, but the fire was extinguished. When not occupied by the military, services were kept up by Confederate Army chaplains and circuit riders. Occasional services of the Protestant Episcopal Church were held in this building by Rector George Stewart.

The first quarterly conference for Central Church was held Jan. 15, 1866, with The Rev. O. P. Thomas, P. C. and The Rev. S. M. Cox P. E., I. S. O. G. Greer, Dr. Lyman Gould and R. M. Herbert, stewards. Upon the old records many years ago when the church rolls were being perfected, a name would be called, and the answer would be that "that brother went to Heaven from the Shiloh Battle Field" -- another name "He went to Heaven from Chattanooga" -- another, "He was burned in the Battle of the Wilderness," etc. Over and over again there was to be found in the records the urging of fasting and prayer before the meeting of the quarterly conference. All over the present Meridian District, and in Meridian, are to be found, and thanks be to God, are still living, children and their children's children whose lives reflect the power of such faithful lives and gospel seed sowers of the God-sent pioneers with their holy seal of those early days.

## Bought from Ragsdale

In Deed Book I, page 261, there appears a deed from Lewis A. Ragsdale to J. H. Gibbs, I. S. O. G. Greer, R. Y. Rew, L. Gould and James Watts, trustees, O. P. Thomas, Pastor, filed for record on April 1, 1867, for lots 9 and 10 in Block 84, Ragsdale Survey, and in Deed Book T, page 160, lots 11 and 12, in block 84, were filed for record on Nov. 3, 1873. These can best be identified now by saying Niolon's Corner, at the intersection of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. The frame and log church on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> St. and 27<sup>th</sup> Ave. had become too small and the lots had been purchased, and the frame and log house was hauled by ox teams to the new location by Bro. W. P. Montgomery, on credit. It is said that the receipt for \$110, that being partial payment for the expense of hauling, paid him by R. Y. Rew, is in existence, but it has not been found by the church committee.

At the second quarterly conference, 1867, under "what has been raised for the support of the ministry, and how has it been applied?" we

have the answer "Paid Presiding Elder \$446, paid preacher in charge \$56," and under the Spiritual; State of the Church" this answer, "We are greatly in need of a revival." In 1870, Meridian Station had 205 members. "The said frame-log church building, like the Ark of the Covenant, had to move again and give place for a new stately edifice of brick and stone. Other oxen were yoked up, the first ones have long since gone from old age to the butcher. It was hauled by the 12 yoke of oxen through town out Fifth St., this time to West End to be used as a worshiping place by the Fifth Street Methodist Church.

In 1885 a building committee was appointed, \$17,000 promptly raised, and with other sums that came in, the building was completed, cleared of all debt, and at that time was considered the best in the Mississippi Conference.

## Church Burned in 1913

There is on file a deed of trust from J. M. Ramsey, C. r. McQueen, R. M. Bourdeaux, G. C. Hall, W. C. Dobbs, W. G. Casteel, trustees, dated Nov., 3, 1873, it is in favor of Sam B. Watts and Ben Ormond securing an indebtedness of \$1,000 for money advanced and loaned to aid in the construction of the church edifice on lots 8 and 9, Block 84, Ragsdale Survey, and conveys lots 11 and 12 which were recited in the deed of 1873 to be bought for parsonage property. Dr. W. C. Black was the pastor 1885-1888. This church was sometimes called First Church then changed to Central during his pastorate.

This church building burned the latter part of 1913 during the pastorate of the Rev. John P. Jones and the work was carried on in the court house, city hall and other available places. There are many Meridian citizens who remember this fire and the next few years, until the present building was erected under the dedicated guidance of Rev. Herbert B. Watkins, pastor 1916-1921, when he died. The Rev. John Lloyd Decell, later Bishop Decell, was pastor in 1912-1924 and had the job of completing the church, with its magnificent pipe organ, so it could be dedicated on April 1, 1923.

Since that time the educational building just to the north of the main edifice has been added. It was planned by Dr. W. A. Tyson, and erected and completed during the pastorate of Rev. M. L. McCormick. In 1955-1956 the sanctuary was air conditioned and renovated by the gifts of the congregation under the guidance of Dr. Brunner M. Hunt, pastor, and Dr. H. Lowry Rush, chairman of the Board of Stewards.

There is much material filed in the office as to the selection of the lots, plans, etc., of this church. The Quarterly Conference minute book of 1917 and 1918 contains a statement read to the congregation as to the reasons for buying five lots on the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> St. and 23<sup>rd</sup> Ave. It seems unnecessary to lengthen this paper by giving details. Suffice it to say that this building was the result of hard work through and after the world War I days. The educational building is considered a memorial to the brave men and women of this church who served in World War II. It is a meeting place for the church school for children and young people. It contains a beautiful ladies parlor and a chapel seating 150 persons. It has lovely stained glass windows

and a Hammond organ, and, the pulpit furnishings were given by Robert Hall in honor of his mother, a faithful worker in by-gone days.

#### **Cemetery Lots Owned**

The Central Methodist Church owns Lots 101 and 102 in Rosehill Cemetery to the left as one enters the gates at the end of 7th St. They were bought by the First Methodist Church (later Central) in 1891 for the use of indigent preachers. A Miss Alice Woodward, pays the yearly upkeep on the spaces where her mother and father, the Rev, Robert Southern, having been pastor of Central 1894-1897, {*not pastor of Central according to listings from Alabama & Mississippi Conferences*} are buried there. Others buried in the lots are Ruth, a daughter of the Rev. M. M. Black, pastor of East End, 1904, the Rev. and Mrs. Warren C. Black, pastor of Central 1885-88 Dr. and Mrs. Charles Green Andrews and their son, Oscar Kearney

Andrews. Dr. Andrews was pastor of Central 1889-92; Presiding Elder of the Meridian District, 1897-1900, and secretary of the Mississippi Conference from 1865-1899, except for one session 1880, when he was the president of the Conference. Miss Cora .E. Black, daughter of Dr.W. C. Black, was buried there March 14, 11888,the first one of nine people buried on the Rosehill Cemetery lots.

The Magnolia Cemetery Association in 1902 donated the south half of Lot 1, Sec. 21, to the Epworth League of Central Methodist Church, J. M. Weems, pastor, although the deed was not given until Aug. 26, 1942, when Dr. T. M. Brownlee was pastor. On this six space lot are buried The Rev. Joe D. Newsome, 1919; Mrs. Joe D. Newsome, 1942; and infant Mary Wilkins, 1923. The Rev. Joe D. Newsome was a

superannuated preacher thought to have been a member of the North Mississippi Conference though we do not have authentic information.

There had been an active Woman's Missionary Organization in Central since the first society was organized in December 1879 by four women when Rev. E. H. Mounger was pastor. Miss Elizabeth (Betty) Hughes was sent out from Central to China in 1887. The Women's Missionary Society was reorganized into the W. S. C. S. by the United Methodist Church and the work has continued satisfactorily.

The chairman of the State Sunday School Executive committee says the first organized adult Bible class in the Mississippi Conference, if not in the entire South, was at Central Church, Meridian, with an enrollment of 60 members. The committee, however, has no details.