

A COLLECTED HISTORY

OF

CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Meridian, Mississippi

by

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1986

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The History Committee wishes to express appreciation to Betty Box Deen for the art work on the cover depicting our three buildings.

FOREWORD

The year 1984 marked the two hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church and so merited a bicentennial celebration. The Bicentennial Committee of Central United Methodist Church proposed that the various extant pieces of historical information be brought together into what may be called a "collected history." Certainly this is in keeping with the Jubilee celebration of the "Two Hundred Years of Methodism in America" developed by the Council of Bishops and the Bicentennial Planning Conference of the United Methodist Church. To a limited extent, this effort will include Central's antecedents in American and Mississippi Methodism.

As a member of the History Committee, the writer views his task as selecting pertinent details collected by this committee and using them in narrative form to mark highlights in the progress of the church from its early days to 1986. The History Committee was composed of the following people and grateful acknowledgment is due them: Eva Mae Edwards, Chairman; Martha Wright, Staff Representative; Nettie Bush Adams, Otto Coleman, Emma Ruth Corban, Frank Crumbaugh, A. C. Gossard, and Augusta Whitener. Appreciation is also given to Robert H. Farrar, Representative from the Bicentennial Committee, for research assistance and to editors Winifred H. Farrar and Anne D. Sanford.

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ANTECEDENTS

The year 1799 marked the beginning of Methodism in Mississippi. The Methodist persuasion had already been brought to Savannah, Georgia, by John Wesley and organized there in 1736. Francis Asbury and Richard Wright brought it to Baltimore, Maryland, in 1771. On December 24, 1784, a conference was held to consider the future of the Methodist movement. Dr. Thomas Coke presided. Francis Asbury was present and noted in his journal that "much business was done in a short time." A decision was made to form the Methodist Episcopal Church. Upon its organization, four-fifths of its membership was in the South below the Mason and Dixon Line, which ran westward from the Delaware River between Maryland and Pennsylvania and separated the "North" and "South" before the Civil war.

The early Methodist preachers who came to America from England went southward shortly. "When Thomas coke landed in this country as Wesley's representative, Asbury hardly let him catch his breath before he mounted him on a horse and sent him off on an evangelistic tour of one thousand miles through Virginia and Maryland." The first North Carolina Circuit was formed in 1777. South Carolina followed soon. The first circuit in Georgia was established in 1785.

A frail young man by the name of Tobias Gibson brought Methodism to Mississippi from South Carolina in 1799. He set off for "the Natchez Country" without any appointment. He traveled six hundred miles on horseback to the Cumberland River where he took a rowboat down the Ohio to the Mississippi and then by flatboat to Natchez. He organized the first Methodist church in the new Mississippi territory at Washington, six miles east of Natchez. He made the trip back four times, appealing for missionaries. His constitution was not strong enough to stand the strain he put on it, and he died at the age of twenty-eight. The Mississippi Territory included the areas now comprised by the states of Alabama,

Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.

In 1803, Moses Floyd came to serve as Tobias Gibson's helper, and Lorenzo Dow arrived on the first of several visits to Mississippi.

The Mississippi Annual Conference was organized in 1813 in the home of Newit Vick, for whom Vicksburg was names. He was a local preacher who had come from Virginia. The territory in Alabama, with some small portions along the Mississippi border, was put into a separate annual conference in 1832. From that year until 1870, Lauderdale County was in that portion of the Mississippi border that was in the Alabama Conference. In 1839 the Gainesville (Alabama) District was mentioned for the first time in the Alabama Conference Journal. Among the charges named in this district was the Lauderdale Mission. Meridian is thought to have been part of this mission or circuit.

In 1856, no mention was made of the Gainesville District connection, but a report of the Macon District was included instead. As Meridian is mentioned in the Conference Journal of 1859 and alternated with Lauderdale for several years, it seems likely that they were on a circuit.

In 1864, Alabama was divided into two conferences, and the Mississippi churches were put in the Mobile Conference. They remained there until 1870 when the Mississippi churches were placed either in the Mississippi or North Mississippi Conference. The Meridian District has been in the Mississippi Conference since 1870.

BEGINNINGS

The first Methodists who came to the Meridian area purchased a lot from Richard McLemore in 1852. It was located on what was then "A" Street, between 9th and 11th Avenues, near where the old Alabama Great Southern and the Mobile and Ohio railroad tracks crossed. Here they build a log cabin in which to worship. Having no permanent pastor, they depended on circuit riders for their services. There was a graveyard beside the cabin. When the property was sold and the church moved in 1860, the graves were leveled but not moved. Another account of the 1952 transaction is almost identical except that it states that the property was purchased for "one dollar paid in hand to William Dearman by Levi Barton, Ferdinand Snow, and James Arrington, trustees of the church of the Lauderdale Circuit of the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South."

In 1860 the congregation moved from its "A" Street location to the northwest corner of 11th Street and 27th Avenue on property purchased from John T. Ball. In January 1860, a deed for \$200 that had been contracted for in 1859, was given by John T. Ball to church trustees John H. Biggs, I. S. O. G. Greer, R. Y. Rew, L. Gould, and James Watts. They constructed a new log and frame church building on this lot, as the old "A" Street building had become too small. The old cabin was hauled somewhere by ox team; the account does not say where. The Rev. Alexander McBryde was the first pastor in the new church. During the Civil War this building was used as a barracks and for quartermaster and commissary purposes. General William T. Sherman's soldiers set it on fire, but the fire was quickly extinguished and the building saved. When it was not occupied by the military, confederate army chaplains and circuit riders kept up the services. Rector George Stewart of the Protestant Episcopal Church held occasional services there.

At this point the old accounts are confusing, but one, taken from a paper written by Mr. Lincoln P. Brown at the request of the Annual Conference of 1919, refers to the First Quarterly Conference

of Central Church held on January 15, 1866. At the time to which he referred, the church was called just "The Methodist Church," but not yet "Central." That addition came later, thus Mr. Brown doubtless was using the term he was accustomed to using in 1919. At the Quarterly Conference of January 15, 1866, the Rev. O. P. Thomas was the Pastor in Charge, and the Rev. S. M. Cox, the Presiding Elder. I. S. O. G. Greer, Dr. Lyman Gould, and R. M. Herbert were stewards.

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; and O. P. Thomas, Pastor. It was filed for record on April 1, 1867, for lots nine and ten in block 84, Ragsdale Survey; and in Deed Book T, page 160, lots 11 and 12 in Block 84 were filed for record on November 3, 1873. These lots were located at what is now the southeast corner of 8th Street and 23rd Avenue where Niolon's coffee store was located for many years. The frame and log church on the corner of 11th Street and 27th Avenue had become too small and the lots too restricted, so these four downtown lots had been purchased, and the frame and log house was hauled by ox teams to the new location by Brother W. P. Montgomery, on credit. It is said that the receipt for \$110, as a 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 \$46, paid Preacher in Charge \$56;" and under "Spiritual State of the Church," this answer, "We are greatly in need of a revival." In 1870, Meridian Station had 205 members.

The congregation decided to build a new brick and stone building on the corner lots, but could not think of destroying their old log and frame building, so once again it was moved by oxen, (twelve yoke) out Fifth Street to Fortieth Avenue where it became the Fifth Street Methodist Church.

In 1885, a building committee was appointed and \$17,000

was promptly raised for the church building soon to be erected on what was later called Niolon's corner. With other sums contributed, this building was completed, cleared of debt, and admired as the "best in the Mississippi Conference."

There is on file a deed of trust from J. M. Ramsey, C. R. McQueen, R. M. Bordeaux, G. C. Hall, W. C. Dobbs, W. G. Casteel, trustees, dated November 3, 1873, 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 9 and 10, Block 84, Ragsdale survey, and conveying 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 in 1885-1888; and during his ministry, this church, sometimes called First Church, became known as Central.

This church building burned during the early morning hours of Sunday, November 2, 1913, during the pastorate of Rev. John P. Jones. The disaster provided front-page news coverage by *The Meridian Star*, and details about the fire have been obtained from newspaper files with direct quotations reprinted from the Sunday, November 2, 1913 issue.

The fire was discovered shortly after one o'clock in the morning by an employee of a restaurant on Eighth Street. Every available piece of fire-fighting equipment responded to the general alarm, but firemen found the building a hopeless mass of flames and quickly diverted their efforts toward saving the Threefoot Brothers Building, the Heiss Building and several frame houses which had been ignited by flying sparks. The fire burned so rapidly that within half an hour the interior of the church was gutted and only crumbling brick walls remained. A reporter described the scene for *The Meridian Star's* front-page story: "the flames furnished a beautiful, though awful, sight to witness, bursting with fury from windows, from roof, from belfry, and from the tall steeple which threatened to fall at any moment. It was the burning steeple that held the gaze of hundreds of onlookers who came to the scene from all directions. As the flames worked their way up this old steeple, inch by inch, lap by lap, each lap kissing the other as it followed in the wake, the

crowd began to scatter. They were afraid of the steeple falling, and of course, they knew not which way its fall might be. After the roof fell in, several portions of the steeple gave a quick lurch and fell in a southwesterly direction. It was a spectacular sight, one that will long linger in the memory of those who witnessed it." The steeple fell into Twenty-third Avenue, breaking telephone, telegraph, trolley and electric wires. The city was left in total darkness, and in the offices of *The Meridian Star* reporters hastily prepared their copy by candlelight.

There was much praise for the city's fire fighters who prevented serious loss to adjoining buildings, but the origin of the fire which had totally destroyed the church remained a mystery. In the same front-page story, *The Meridian Star* reported: "Some hold the belief that the fire originated from a stove in the lower floor of the church which is known to have contained a fire Saturday night during choir practice. On the other hand, it is pointed out that the main fire was in the top of the building when discovered and burned so rapidly that the efforts of the fireman were of little use. Others express the opinion the fire originated from an explosion. This theory is based on the rapid consumption of the building, it apparently catching on fire in every part at one time. Another fact that adds to this theory is that the tin shingles with which the church was covered were scattered all over the street and must have been forced off by an explosion and thrown in every direction. One gentleman who passed the church just before the alarm was turned in said that he had seen no fire in the building when he passed but that he distinctly heard an explosion and the rattling of glass. The exact origin of the fire may never be known"

Against an estimated loss of \$25,000, there was insurance coverage of \$10,000 on the building and \$1,000 on the pipe organ. Among the views expressed by members of the devastated congregation, *The Meridian Star* reported this one: "One young lady, evidently interested in Sunday School work, stood in the doorway of one of the buildings opposite the church, and, with tears streaming from her eyes, cried, 'Oh, what will we do for our Sunday School today? It's too bad, too bad!' Another lady, standing near, soothingly replied, 'Never mind, dear. Don't you know that we are

taught to believe that the Lord will provide. He will find us a place somewhere.” On the following day church officials met in the home of the pastor, Dr. J. P. Jones, and discussed plans for continuing the work of the church in a temporary location. During the six years prior to the completion of the new church, most of the services were held in the Lauderdale County Courthouse. In note prepared in 1940 the late Mrs. J. H. Rush related an amusing incident from this period. It seems that a young boy had delayed joining the church, and finally an adult expressed concern as to his intentions. The boy replied: “Well, I’d like to join the church, but I’m not going to join the courthouse.”

Mr. L. P. Brown’s 1919 account relates that “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 the Rev. Herbert B. Watkins, pastor, 1916-1921, when he died. The writer of this “collected history” had heard it said that the Rev. Watkins worked himself to death pounding pavements and knocking on doors to collect money for the construction of the present Central Church building on the northeast corner of Tenth Street and Twenty-third Avenue.

RECOVERY AND PROGRESS

Ground was broken for the present Central Church on April 15, 1918, and the cornerstone was laid on August 11, 1918. A year later, on August 10, 1919, the new building was opened for use. After the death of Rev. H. B. Watkins in 1921, there was a strong feeling that “Central Church” should honor him and his pastorate in a special way. Consequently, at the Quarterly Conference of May 16, 1921, the name was changed to “Watkins Memorial,” but, after warm and sincere discussion, a special called session of the Quarterly Conference on November 4, 1921, changed the name back to “Central.”

The Rev. J. Lloyd Decell, who was elected to the College of Bishops after his pastorate at Central, served the church from 1921 until 1924 and had the honor of presiding at the dedication service on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1923. This historic service opened with the singing of the hymn, “Come, O Thou God of Grace.” Dr. H. W. Featherstun of Jackson, a former pastor, offered the morning prayer, and Dr. A. A. Little, pastor of the neighboring First Presbyterian Church, read a Psalm. The presiding elder, Rev. P. D. Hardin, read the New Testament lesson. Music under the direction of Mrs. J. D. Tucker, pianist and choir director, featured a large choir with Miss Geneva Hutson as soloist.

The dedicatory sermon was delivered by Bishop William Newman Ainsworth of Macon, Georgia, who chose as his text Acts 20:28, “Feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood.”

After the bishop’s sermon, the Building Committee, composed of C. W. Cochran, Chairman; Gus C. Kendall, Treasurer; W. E. Hopkins, Dr. T. K. Barefield, and Dr. G. B. Clements, stood at the altar and through the chairman said: “We present to you this house, free of debt, to be set apart from all unhallowed or common uses for the worship of Almighty God.” Thereupon the bishop pronounced: “For as much as God has put it into the hearts of His

people to build this house for His worship and has blessed them in their undertaking, we solemnly dedicate it to His service for the reading and expounding of His Holy Word, the administration of his ordinances, and for all other acts of religious worship.”

Following this act of dedication, the mortgages which had been held against the church and the parsonage were burned. Mr. L. P. Brown, who was oldest in years of membership, and Miss Sara Jones, youngest in membership, burned the mortgage on the church. Dr. H. F. Tatum, president of the Board of Trustees, and Miss Ella Wayne Ormond, president of the Woman’s Missionary Society, burned the mortgage on the parsonage. Mr. J. A. Gulley and Capt. S. E. Watts also participated in this portion of the service.

The total cost of the building program was approximately \$100,000, and only through sacrificial efforts of the congregation under inspired leadership was it possible for such a large sum to be raised during the economically difficult years during and immediately following World War I. This keystone achievement was well summarized by Rev. Decell who stated during the dedication service: “The christening of a battleship is an important event for a nation, the opening of a bank or factory is so for a city, but the dedication of a church, a character-factory and promoter of world peace, is high over all in its importance. It is the foundation of all our security here and hereafter.”

After the church had been dedicated, the congregation turned its attention toward the purchase of a pipe organ, and installation of the magnificent three-manual Pilcher instrument was completed in September 1924. In describing the organ, one article in *The Meridian Star* stated: “This is not a stock organ but one which has been specially designed for Central Church. The case, of colonial design and decorated with French golden bronze pipes, completes an impressive symmetry in the sanctuary. There are 2,000 speaking pipes; the largest pipe is 16 feet in length while the smallest is about the size of a lead pencil. The three manuals and the pedal keyboard are contained within the matching console, while the echo organ, chimes, and Vox Humana are upstairs on the south end of the church. There are 22 couplers and 21 adjustable

combinations. A five horse-power blower in the basement supplies the current.”

The organ was used for the first time on Sunday, September 21, 1924, and the initial offering was “Onward, Christian Soldiers” played by Mrs. J. D. Tucker as the entire Sunday School marched into the sanctuary for the annual Sunday School Rally Day.

On Tuesday evening, September 23, 1924, the dedication recital was played by Dr. Charles A. Sheldon of Atlanta, a member of the American Guild of Organists and a highly-recognized teacher and recitalist. He was assisted by Mrs. H. Lowry Rush, soprano, and Mr. Fred Templeton, bass. The recital was broadcast, and this was the first time a musical program had been transmitted by radio from Meridian. The newspaper gave interesting instructions as to how listeners within a fifty-mile radius of the city might pick up the program on their receiving sets.

The console was replaced and relocated during the 1960 renovation of the sanctuary, but, except for minor changes, the organ mechanism is basically unchanged from 1924. In 1956 Mrs. Tucker was honored by the congregation for her service of fifty years as pianist, organist, and choir director. Others who served as organists at various times were Mrs. W. A. Bledsoe, Miss Mary Lou Moody, George K. Evans, Miss Nancy Patty, and Miss Charmaine Bosarge. Mrs. Rudolph (Virginia) Matzner was organist from 1957 to September 1985. Mrs. Mike (Lora) Tucker followed for a short period, and Mrs. Charles (Nancy) Collins is currently serving in this capacity.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Christian Education has always been given a high priority in Central Church. In his paper written in 1919, Mr. L. P. Brown stated: "..., 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 sixty members." A "Go-to-Sunday-School Sunday" was observed in Meridian in May of 1917 among the Protestant churches. Attendance at Central church was 1,320.

The following excerpts from an article about Central Methodist Church appeared in the Mississippi Methodist Advocate for June 28, 1950. "The latest step in the progress of this church is the beginning of the construction of an educational building. This three-story structure costing \$150,000 will be a memorial to the young men and women of this church who served in World War II. It will serve as a meeting place for the church school for children and young people, and will also contain a lovely chapel. Work on this building is progressing rapidly. The years ahead look bright for Central as she plans for the Christian development of the youth of today and of the future. Plans were first formulated for the new building in 1945 when Dr. W. A. Tyson was pastor. With the very able assistance of our architect, L. L. Brasfield, plans were drawn up to meet the specific needs of Central church. The contractor was L. B. Priester, Jr." One of the influential leaders in this endeavor was Dr. Lowry Rush, Sr., chairman of the building committee.

Reading further in the *Advocate* we find this description: "The new building will include a bassinet nursery, a nursery for four-year-olds, meeting space for the for the kindergarten, and assembly and classrooms for the primary, junior, intermediate and senior and older youth departments. The senior assembly will be a small auditorium fitted for other purposes such as dramatics, parties, etc.

"The chapel in the new building will seat 150 persons and will be beautifully furnished. (The seating capacity in reality is

approximately 100.) A stained glass window will grace the end window of the chapel facing the street.

"The groundbreaking ceremony for the Memorial Christian Education Building was held on Tuesday afternoon, May 30, 1950, with Bishop Marvin A. Franklin presiding and bringing the messate. The Adult Choir sang and the following preachers were present: Pastor M. L. McCormick; Assistant Pastor G. R. Childress; Rev. J. W. Leggett, Jr., District Superintendent; Rev. A. L. Meadows, Pastor Fifth Street Church; Rev. M. H. Wells, Pastor East End Church.

"Church School officers were: Superintendent A. C. Gossard; Assistant Superintendent, William H. Entekin; Secretary, J. D. Tillman, Jr.; Assistant Secretary, John Watts; Treasurer, Miss Madge Stuart; Superintendent Adult Division, P. K. Clark; Youth Division, W. R. Wiener; and Children's Division, Mrs. Leon Renfroe." Mrs. Erna Gilmore was director of Education.

At the beginning of Central's Centennial year 1959-60, an extensive remodeling program of the main building was undertaken. The sanctuary was completely redecorated with a new altar, stained glass windows, theater seats and a new organ console. A stained glass window that can be lighted from behind, depicting Christ praying at Gethsemane, was placed behind the pulpit. A new choir loft was offset to the right of the rostrum as one faces it from the seats. These changes were largely designed and beautifully sketched by Dr. Leslie V. Rush, Sr.

Continuous growth was also evident in other ways than in building additions and improvements. A new parsonage was purchased for the senior minister in 1961; and in 1968 a second parsonage was purchased for the assistant pastor. In 1973 the first of two 15 passenger vans was purchased for the use of all church groups. A 25 passenger bus was purchased in 1983. One of the groups that has put the conveyances to good use is the retired members group called the XYZ's (Extra Years of Zest).

October 1981 saw the groundbreaking for a lovely new Family Life Activities Center and extensive remodeling of the

Education Building. The planning and construction were done during the pastorate of Rev. John M. Case, and under the guidance of Jim McRae, Chairman of the Building Committee. On November 7, 1982, the first church meeting - a congregational dinner- was held in the new Activities Center. Records indicate that 650 people attended the dinner.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH SCHOOL

There is no longer a Church School Superintendent, not is one required by the Methodist Discipline. There may be a Coordinator of Studies, but his or her appointment is optional. There is none in Central Church at present. There are Divisional Coordinators for preschool, elementary, youth, and adult divisions. The adult division also has coordinators for older adults and single adults. Over-all guidance is given by a Commission on Education. Mr. Blair Mitcham serves a Church School Secretary.

A resumé of the Church School classes in alphabetical order follows.

BIRDIE BROOKS CLASS

In the 1920's a new class for young women was organized out of the Young Peoples' Department under the leadership of Mrs. C. W. Cochran, who was the first teacher. In 1930 Mrs. Neville Brooks became the teacher, and in 1938 Mrs. Joseph Smith's class joined the group. Mrs. Brooks taught the class for many years and it was named to honor her. After her death in 1962, the class established the Birdie Brooks Scholarship Fund as an expression of the love and esteem its members felt for her. Her daughter, Mrs. Leslie (Katharine) Rush, is still a faithful member, and several others have been loyal and devoted members for more than thirty years.

JOHN COOK CLASS

This class for young couples was organized in the mid-1970's and was named in honor of the pastor of Central Church at that time. Mrs. Joy Carr was an early teacher.

RAE HARTLEY CLASS

This class had the distinction of being the first couples class in the church and also the first mixed class in Meridian. It was

organized in 1941 in the home of Sara and Chuck Curtis with Mr. Curtis as the first president. Originally named The Wesley Fellowship Class, the group quickly grew from the twelve charter members to approximately seventy-five before the onset of World War II. Jim Baxter was one of the first teachers, and he was followed by Mrs. Rae Hartley, who kept the class together through the difficult war years. When she died on Easter Sunday afternoon, 1946, after having taught the lesson, the class name was changed to honor her. Other early teachers, following Mrs. Hartley, were Selva and Tom Breazeale, Gerald Adams, Dick Lord, and Robert Farrar.

HERITAGE CLASS

This class was formed in 1978 from members remaining from the Belle Bennett and Lowry Rush classes as both groups were facing membership losses through failing health or death. Mr. Jimmy Carr, Director of Program and Christian Education, worked with leaders of both groups in the organization of the new class.

ROBERT HUNT CLASS

Three young couples made up the membership of this class when it was organized in 1956 by Robert Hunt, for whom it was named. Among others who led the class during its formative period were Glynn and Billy Fort and Mai and Joe Sanders. During the 1960's the membership increased to about fifty, and today the class is a large and very active one. Marvin and David Williams were early teachers, and, later, volunteers within the class assumed the teaching responsibilities.

H. M. IVY CLASS

The H. M. Ivy Bible Class (formerly called The Baraca Class) is the only all men's class in the Church School, a carry-over from the days when men and women were segregated. In the 1920's and

1930's it had an enrollment of around two hundred. Some of the first teachers were these: Judge A. B. Amis, Dr. H. H. Ellis, Hon. Thomas L. Bailey, who later became Governor of Mississippi; Mr. Monroe Byrd, and Dr. H. M. Ivy, for whom the class is named. Present teachers are Otto Coleman, A. C. Gossard, Henry Dixon, and Mrs. Barbara Tatum.

UPPER ROOM CLASS

In 1952, a nucleus from the Rae Hartley Class organized the Upper room Class with eleven members. Selva and Tom Breazeale were the first teachers. The class grew both numerically and spiritually, and, by the time the newly-redecorated classroom was dedicated in October 1955, there was an enrollment of fifty-seven. Mrs. R. M. (Eva) Castle was one of the early teachers, and George Shannon has taught one Sunday each month for many years.

LULA WATKINS CLASS

The Lula Watkins Class, one of the two remaining women's classes, was organized in 1926 and was named for Mrs. A. F. Watkins, its first teacher, whose husband was pastor of Central Church from 1924 until 1928. Others who taught the group in the early years were Mrs. Karl Brittain, Mrs. Lloyd Decell, Mrs. Thomas L. Bailey, Mrs. H. M. Ivy, and Mrs. L. H. Conard. This class has been very active throughout its history.

WESLEY BIBLE CLASS

This adult class with no age limit was organized in the mid-1970's. Paul Booth and Dr. John McEachin were two of the first teachers, and, as the membership increased, others within the group assumed teaching responsibilities. When the class began the study, "Walk Through the Bible," in 1979, attendance continued to grow.

WILLIAMS CLASS

Organized in 1951 for young couples, the Williams Class was named for Marvin Williams, its first regular teacher. He taught the class for many years; later, class members shared the teaching duties. Among the couples who were instrumental in the organization of this class were Glynn and Billy Fort, Mai and Joe Sanders, Kathryn and Bobby Coggin, Betty and Bill Compton, and Annie Ruth and Herbert Whitfield. This class has provided leadership for many key positions in the church.

Some more recently organized classes are these:

COLLEGE CLASS
SINGLES I CLASS
SINGLES II CLASS
LOFTIN CLASS
LOWER ROOM CLASS
WALTON FELLOWSHIP CLASS

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

There has been an active Woman's Missionary Organization in Central Church since the first society was organized in 1879 by four women when Rev. E. H. Mounger was pastor. The following officers were elected: Mrs. S. A. Brett, President; Mrs. E. H. Mounger, Secretary; Mrs. R. B. Hoskins, Treasurer. Rev. E. H. Mounger and Rev. R. J. Jones, Presiding Elder, were made honorary members.

The first operational meeting was held January 9, 1880. Only these five were present. The membership grew to 13 in 1880, to 26 in 1881, and to 44 in 1882.

In 1887, Central Church sent out Miss Elizabeth (Betty) Hughes as a missionary to China. Miss Nevada Martin went to China as a missionary in 1910 and, for five years, was supported by the Central society. Then in 1915, Miss Olive Lipscomb went to China from Central Church.

In 1895, a Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society was organized by Miss Addie Purnell of the Conference society. Among the first members were these: Mrs. May Kendall Lipscomb, Mrs. Kate Watts Ormond, and Mrs. Lena Queen Gully. On February 13, 1906, thirteen women met at Central Church and organized the City Mission Board with Mrs. Lizzie Sanford Cochran as president. Rev. J. E. Carpenter was pastor at the time. Mrs. Clara Pope was elected City Missionary and served four years.

In 1908, Dr. W. H. LaPrade became pastor of Central Church. He was missionary minded and would tell the women as they joined the church that they automatically were members of the Missionary Society unless they resigned. Mrs. LaPrade was a devout Christian and a wonderful organizer. In 1909, she organized the women into a General Society, holding on to three departments of work: Foreign, with Mrs. Wilhelmina Streeter Brown, President; Home, with Mrs. T. A. McCaskill, President; and Local, with Mrs. Robert Brown, President. Mrs. Stanley E. Wilson was elected

President of the General Society, Mrs. W. G. Casteel, Treasurer; and Mrs. Cliff Watts, Secretary.

On April 28, 1912, at Capitol Street Church, Jackson, the Conference Woman's Foreign Missionary Society and the Conference Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society met in joint session and united, becoming the Woman's Missionary Society, with Mrs. B. W. Lipscomb, President. Following the lead of the Conference, in June 1912, Mrs. LaPrade reorganized the women of Central Church into The Woman's Missionary Society with Mrs. J. H. Rush as President.

Then Mrs. LaPrade felt the need, as did many others, of an organization for our younger women. So, that year, an organization, known as the Young Woman's Society, was perfected by Mrs. LaPrade and Mrs. Kendall. Its first president was Mrs. Charles Hight. It grew rapidly, but the senior society did not increase in membership because all newcomers wanted to join the Young Woman's Society. It was finally decided to have the two societies come together and to divide the membership into circles. This was done in the fall of 1922, and the work began in 1923. Miss Ella Wayne Ormond was the first president.

The eight circles were arranged geographically and given geographical names as follows: Belmont, Bethany, Lebanon, Sharon, Hermon, Carmel, Hebron, and Marion Park. When some circles became clannish, it was thought best to reorganize. This was done in 1926, and the names were changed to those of living missionaries. This arrangement still exists, with some slight changes being made from year to year.

In 1939, the three branches of Methodism were merged to form The United Methodist Church. The uniting churches were the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Church. As a consequence in 1940, Dr. Roy H. Kleiser, Central's pastor, met with the women, declared the Woman's Missionary Society obsolete, and reorganized them into the Woman's Society of Christian Service. Mrs. Jesse H. Graham became its first president. Dr. Kleiser also organized the

young women into the Wesleyan Service Guild in the same year. These two groups were re-chartered in 1973 as a single organization, the United Methodist Women.

The stated purpose of the UNITED METHODIST WOMEN is to "be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministry of the church."

In addition to mission projects supported by the United Methodist Women, Central Church contributes to the support of Ed and Edna May Shields, missionaries to Burma, and to the North Star Mission in Alaska and to other mission projects.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION

The church staff consists of:

Rev. J. Willard Leggett, III	Senior Minister
Rev. Jimmy Dabbs	Associate Minister and Minister of Leisure Activities
Edgar J. Walker	Minister of Music and Education
Jim Wall	Director of Youth Ministries
Rev. Harold Miller	Minister of Evangelism
Donna White	Pastors' Secretary
Martha Deese	Education Secretary
Betty Deen	Membership Involvement Coordinator and Church Hostess
Martha Wright	Church and Financial Secretary
Joyce Tillery	Organist
Ressie Lee Waters	Cook and Maid
J. L. Jones	Custodian
Edward Hodges	Custodian

Delma Curtis served as Education Secretary almost seventeen years, from September 1969 through June 1986.

Central Church has an active program for its members of all ages and interest groups from elementary to senior adults. This and the friendliness of its people have contributed to a continuous growth in membership.

CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH has a long and distinguished history. It has brought to the present generation of members and constituents a tremendous spiritual heritage to pass on to future generations.

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SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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Jones, W. B., *Methodist in the Mississippi Conference, 1870-1894*.

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PASTORS OF CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1860	Alexander McBryde	
1861	J. E. Newman and R. Y. Rew	
1862	John G. Rush	
1863	To Be Supplied	
1864	To Be Supplied	
1865-1866 -	O. P. Thomas	Meridian Station
1867-1868 -	William E. Mabry	
1869-1870 -	J. Barber	
1871-1873 -	John A. Ellis	Meridian Station
1874-1875 -	Joshua T. Heard	
1876-1878 -	Ransom J. Jones, Jr.	
1879-1880 -	E. H. Mounger	
1881-1884 -	R. D. Norsworthy	
1885-1888 -	Warren C. Black, D. - Church Rebuilt	
1889-1892 -	Charles Green Andrews - First Church	
1893 -	C. F. Evans - Meridian, Central	
1894 -	R. S. Woodward & Dan Scarborough	
1895-1896 -	R. S. Woodward	
1897-1898 -	H. Walter Featherstun	
1899-1901 -	J. W. Weems	
1902-1903 -	J. W. Lewis	
1904-1905 -	W. B. Lewis	
1906-1908 -	J. E. Carpenter	
1909-1912 -	W. H. LaPrade, Sr.	
1913-1915 -	John R. Jones	Church burned
1916-1921 -	Herbert B. Watkins (died in 1921)	
1921-1924 -	John Lloyd Decell	
1925-1928 -	Alexander F. Watkins	
1928-1931 -	B. L. Sutherland	
1932-1934 -	L. L. Cowen	
1935 -	T. M. Brownlee	
1936-1938 -	Joseph A. Smith	
1939 -	J. H. Nicholson	
1940-1941 -	Roy H. Kleiser	
1942-1944 -	T. M. Brownlee	B. B. Rogers, Assoc. 1944
1945-1947 -	W. A. Tyson	
1948-1953 -	M. L. McCormick	G. R. Childress, Assoc. 1950
1953-1959 -	Brunner M. Hunt	R. M. Waddell, Assoc. 1957

PASTORS (Continued)

1959-1964 -	R. M. Matheny	Brooks Hudson, Assoc. '60-'62
1964-1965 -	John H. Cook	
1965-1968 -	Norman U. Boone	Byrd Hillman, Assoc. '68-'73
1968-1972 -	David A. McIntosh	Byrd Hillman, Assoc.
1972-1976 -	John H. Cook	Byrd Hillman, Assoc. '73 Jimmy Carr, Dir. Christian Education '73-'79
1976-1983 -	John M. Case	Jimmy Carr, Dir. Chris. Ed. '79 James Loftin, Assoc. '79-'83 Richard Hunter, Minister of Music & Education '80-'85
1983-	J. Willard Leggett, III	Jimmy Dabbs, Associate Richard Hunter, Minister of Music & Education '80-'85 Edgar J. Walker, Minister of Music/Education '85-

CHAIRMAN OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD

(formerly Board of Stewards or the Official Board)

1919-1920 -	Dr. D. C. Hull
1921-1926 -	Dr. H. F. Tatum
1927-1929 -	Mr. W. E. Hopkins
1930-1932 -	Mr. F. Y. Whitfield
1933-1934 -	Dr. H. H. Ellis
1935-1937 -	Mr. J. W. Dement
1938-1939 -	Mr. C. E. Luter
1940 -	Mr. Robert L. Blanks
1941 -	Mr. James W. Dement
1942-1944 -	Mr. D. R. Thornton, Sr.
1945 -	Mr. V. M. Hasson, Sr.
1946 -	Mr. John F. Egger
1947 -	Mr. Eckford L. Summer
1948 -	Mr. J. D. Tucker, Jr.
1949-1950 -	Mr. James E. Baxter

CHAIRMEN OF ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD (continued)

1950-1951 -	Dr. Winter W. Dawson
1951-1961 -	Dr. H. Lowry Rush, Sr.
1961-1963 -	Mr. Marvin Williams
1963-1965 -	Mr. George E. Shannon
1965-1967 -	Dr. Dan R. Thornton, Jr.
1967-1968 -	Mr. R. M. Castle
1968-1969 -	Mr. David Williams
1969-1970 -	Mr. Robert H. Farrar
1971-1972 -	Mr. Marvin Williams
1973-1974 -	Mr. Billy Fort
1975-1976 -	Dr. John D. McEachin
1977-1978 -	Mr. James L. McRae
1979-1980 -	Mr. Russell Walton
1980-1981 -	Mr. W. H. Entrekin
1982-1983 -	Mr. H. Wingfield Glover, Jr. (Wink)
1984-1985 -	Mr. J. F. Thompson, Jr. (Bud)
1986-	Mr. Jerry Mason

SUPERINTENDENTS OF SUNDAY SCHOOL

Mr. J. H. Whitfield
Dr. T. K. Barefield
Dr. H. M. Ivy
Mr. W. L. Elkin
Dr. H. H. Ellis
Mr. A. C. Gossard
Dr. J. O. Carson, Jr.
Mr. Russell Walton
Mr. George Teunisson