

**HISTORY
OF THE**



**FIRST METHODIST CHURCH
COMMERCE, GEORGIA**

Founded 1843

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By

Mera Gober Trawick
(Mrs. P.B. Trawick)
Church Historian

Compiled and Distributed By
COMMERCE METHODIST YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

June 7, 1964

\$1.00

FOREWORD

The history of the Commerce Methodist Church that we herewith present is not a full and complete one since the early records were misplaced or destroyed.

The Conference minutes at Emory Theological Library gave no account of such a church until 1880, although our first church was organized in 1843. This information that we have succeeded in collecting is, therefore, fragmentary and far from complete although we have spent some time in gathering material and have done so with care for accuracy of dates. Information has been secured from personal recollections recited by those whose forebears were members of this church and who recalled facts as related to them. The oldest minutes of meetings possible were secured.

It would be impossible to enumerate all those who labored and contributed to the physical and spiritual growth of the Commerce Methodist Church through the years since its organization, but for the meager facts furnished, I am sincerely grateful.

Mera Gober Trawick
(Mrs. P.B. Trawick)
Historian

The Commerce Methodist Church is a handsome cream brick structure of modified colonial architecture with imposing columns and is situated on a lot embracing one-half acre more or less on Cherry Street in almost the center of the little city of Commerce, Georgia.

It's interior is beautifully done with sanctuary walls a light blue color with darker blue carpeting and altar pad. The woodwork, pews, and organ are white. The windows were each given in memory of a former active member of the church, and although they are not picture windows, the stained glass is of the softer hues, which blend well with both the interior and exterior of the church.

The basement has a large central room where meals are served or, when tables are folded, may be used as a recreation center. Adjacent is the kitchen with range, refrigerator, cabinets, china, silver and other necessary kitchen equipment. One large room in the basement is used by the Men's Bible Class. There is also a small office and men's toilet and beyond its inside wall is the plant's heating equipment.

A stairway from the basement leads to a hall from which open the pastor's study, a toilet, the Women's Bible Class room, and the choir room.

The present pastor's study was given originally as a Beginner's room by the late Mr. and Mrs. J.T. Quillian, staunch members of the church and for many years active in its work and in its support. The room was so used until in 1954 an

annex was built on the second floor.

The main body of the present church was completed in the early 1920's at a cost of approximately \$50,000. The annex was built in 1954 at a cost of \$13,000. The annex is used for classrooms for Primaries and Juniors.

In 1958 an educational building was erected at a cost of \$40,000. This contains a lovely little chapel, a large well-equipped nursery with beds enclosed by sound-proof glass wall, small chairs, and toys, with adjacent little-folks toilet. The building also has rooms for intermediates, juniors, and seniors, and restrooms.

The main church building project was launched in 1919 when the former building was razed. The church indebtedness was paid in full under the ministry of the Reverend A. Lee Hale in the midst of the depression of 1932-33. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Bishop John M. Moore. Some years later Dr. W. D. Sheppard, husband of the late Mrs. W.D. Sheppard, assisted by her brothers and sisters and by the Woman's Society of Christian Service, bought, at a cost of \$5,000, and had installed a handsome pipe organ in memory of Mrs. W. D. Sheppard, the former Margaret Shankle, who had served the church many years as organist, member of the choir, and Superintendent of the Beginners Department of the Sunday School.

The organ was rebuilt in 1963 and new and better chimes installed at a cost of \$5,500. Air conditioning also was installed in the sanctuary during 1963 at a cost of \$7,100.

The present church is the third one on the same site. The site was donated to the church by the late Seaborn M. Shankle, father of a large family of Methodists including the late Rev. A. G. Shankle, member of the North Georgia Conference, who for many years served in some of its more important pastorates until his demise. All members of the family were active in the work of the church.

The deed to the church lot was made by Seaborn M. Shankle on the fifteenth day of November, 1879, to J. P. Hudson, G. L. Martin, W. S. Alexander, J. C. Campbell, and S. M. Shankle, trustees and their successors in office. It embraced one-half acre more or less and was witnessed by J. A. Seegar and W. J. Goss.

Some six years later the late Seaborn M. Shankle sold to W. M. LeMaster, A. L. Durham, J. T. Quillian, W. B. Hancock, and S. M. Shankle, trustees, and to their successors in office, for the sum of two hundred and forty-five dollars, a lot of one-half acre more or less to be used as a parsonage for the Harmony Grove Methodist Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, North Georgia Conference. This deed was witnessed by J. F. Gordon and L. W. Williamson, N.P.J.C. All deeds contain the trust clause.

On this lot a small but comfortable parsonage was built, which was enlarged and made more comfortable by insulation, gas heat and other comfort and served until razed and the present brick veneer parsonage was built in 1954. It contains a living room, dining room, den, three bedrooms, two baths,

and a kitchen with back porch, at a cost of \$22,000.

In 1961 a brick veneer house was built on a lot bought at a cost of \$10,000 and donated to the board of trustees of the Commerce Methodist Church by Mr. Mose Gordon. The same to be used for building a home for the church's retired Minister. The lot faces on Victoria Street to the rear of the church. The house contains a living room, den, kitchen, two bedrooms and two baths, and a side porch and is occupied by the Reverend Claude Hendrick, who is retired after serving the last seven years of his ministry in the Commerce Methodist Church. The cost of the building was approximately \$14,000.

A small plot of land in front of the church and belonging to the church was in 1963 encircled with low concrete posts through which was run a chain, and at one end was erected a 5-foot shaped wall of brick matching those of the church building; and it is centered with a white marble cross. The plot is sodded in grass.

The church owns no other property, although on February 11, 1908, a lot on South Broad Street was deeded to the church by Miss Emma L. Stapler, now Mrs. E. W. Jackson, a Presbyterian, on which was built Broad Street Methodist Church. This was in use from 1908 until 1912 but never became self-supporting and was abandoned and the lot was sold.

Other property donated to the church included the former home of the late Mrs. W. D. Sheppard, situated adjacent to the church. Mrs. Sheppard willed her home to be used as a

home for superannuate preachers, but the will was never fulfilled, and after a fire partially destroyed the home occupied by renters, the property was sold at the recommendation of Reverend R. A. Edmondson, the Executive Secretary of the Board of Pensions at that time. The property now belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Fred H. Tanner, who built and occupy a home on it.

The First Methodist Church was organized in 1843 and was known as Adeline's Chapel. The record shows that a Sabbath School was organized on the Eighteenth Day of June, 1843. This was located two miles south of town across the Athens Wagon Road (now the Commerce-Athens Highway) from the home and farm of the late Mr. T. P. Hudson, now owned by Mr. C. W. Hood, Jr.

The following officers were elected:

Christopher Sewell	President
Eli Shankle	Vice President
Reuben Nash	Secretary

The following Board of Managers was chosen: James W. Shankle, William Johnson, H. B. Gober, William LeMaster, Linton C. Dunson, and William Gober. James W. Shankle was elected superintendent. The constitution and bylaws of the Sabbath School were drawn up and adopted for the government of the school and the Board of Managers was to be elected annually thereafter on the first Sunday in September.

The study period for this school was no half-hour period, as will be seen from the rules which we copy herewith as follows:

"The school shall be opened every Sabbath morning at 9 o'clock and close at fifteen minutes before eleven o'clock and continue again after divine services and close at 3 o'clock in the afternoon for the day."

Thus six hours were devoted each Sunday to Sabbath School with the exception of the preaching service held once each month.

Literature was not easily obtainable; consequently, the old Blue-back Speller, the hymn book, and the Bible were depended upon for lessons, which were really studied. Rewards were offered as follows:

"The first class shall be rewarded for every six verses of scripture committed to memory, one blue ticket and for every hymn, one blue ticket. The Second class for every twenty words spelled correctly in three syllables in spelling book or hymn book, one blue ticket."

Money was not plentiful in those days and pennies were considered the child's regular contribution (if any) and for the majority of adults as well.

To this early church belonged as members, The Shankles, The Hargroves, some of the Hudsons, the Gobers, and the Butlers.

The Adeline church was torn down supposedly in 1851 and was moved to Harmony Grove, now Commerce, and was located on Shankle Heights opposite the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Billy White and belonging to the estate of the recently deceased Mrs. L. J. Sharp, the former Miss Pauline Shankle. Whether or not the name was changed, we do not know.

The church was again moved and was located near the old Farabee home on South Broad Street just outside the city limits,

some quarter of a mile on the East side of the railroad. The Church was known as Sandy Level. The site is marked by a small graveyard.

In 1874 the church was moved to its present site, where a one-room frame church was built and the name was changed to Harmony Grove Methodist Church. From the Sabbath School record, we glean the following:

"Harmony Grove Methodist Sabbath School organized in November, 1874, has been kept up continuously until the present May, 1880, when the classes were rearranged under Superintendent S. M. Shankle and M. L. Parker, assistant. May the Lord prosper the school in the future as he has in the past and may it prove a blessing to the rising generations for ages to come."

Signatures following the above are:

S. M. Shankle
J. M. Keith
W. W. Jordan
J. H. Gunnells
W. A. Quilliam
Mrs. W. H. Harden

In the Sabbath School record book of that time are listed February classes from No. 1, 2, 3, Testament classes from No. 1 through No. 5 and an adult Bible Class composed of men and women. Teachers are listed as Miss Cotter Park, M. L. Parker, S. M. Shankle, E. E. Culberson, J. C. Campbell, J. J. Bond, Miss Jennie Bond, Miss Jennie Butler, Mrs. W. O. Jordan, Mrs. S. M. Shankle, J. M. Keith, Mrs. J. E. Wilson and others.

The year 1864 is the first year recorded in minutes of the annual Georgia Conference. Reverend W. D. Anderson was the Presiding Elder of the Elberton District, which included Harmony Gove Circuit. Reverend J. T. Curtis was pastor.

In 1903 under the ministry of the late Reverend G. M. Eakes, the church launched a building project using the old church as the main body. Additions were made, and a larger more commodious building resulted. The building was completed in 1904. The name had become by now The Commerce Methodist Church, with the changing of the name of the town.

This was used until a campaign for the present edifice was begun in 1919 when the old church was torn down, a basement was excavated, and a modern cream brick structure was built.

The church has shown a healthy steady growth through the years. The financial report for the years 1880-1881 gives the pastor's salary as \$260; Bishops paid \$4; Conference claimants, \$30; Sabbath School , \$10; House rent, \$85. Membership for the Harmony Grove circuit numbered 257.

Seventy years later in 1950-51, the pastor's salary was \$4,000; pastor's secretary was paid \$523; Bishops were paid \$70.

Ten years later the pastor's salary had been raised to \$5,000, and he was given an expense traveling account of \$600. Other expense made up a yearly budget of \$23,000.

For 1963-64 the budget was raised to \$32,000, which amount included a Youth Director for the summer at a salary of \$700. Membership for the former Harmony Grove Church, which was changed to Commerce Methodist Church November 17, 1903, for 1963 totaled 578.

The women of this church were among the first in the

state to organize a Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. This was done in the year 1878 soon after the movement was begun in the state.

In 1909, led by Mrs. W. S. Robinson, wife of the pastor at that time, a Home Missionary Society was organized. The two were combined during the ministry of Reverend Frank Quillian in 1911-13. Today with the name changed to the Woman's Society of Christian Service, its three circles (two afternoon and one morning circle) is doing effective work.

In 1932 under the leadership of Mrs. A. Lee Hale, the pastor's wife, an evening circle for business women for the Woman's Missionary Society was organized. This grew into the Wesleyan Service Guild and has now been divided into two circle and is doing a splendid work.

Soon after the organization of the Missionary Societies for adults a juvenile Missionary Society was organized for the very young of the church. Leaders for these children for many years were: Mrs J. T. Quillian, Mrs. J. F. Shannon, and Miss Delia Hood. As encouragement for their work, each child was given a mite box for missions and occasionally each would be given a dollar to make grow, or a chicken, or a dozen eggs to find what could be accomplished. This resulted in a surprising amount of money for so small a group.

About this time a group of Intermediates known as the Gleaners was organized. Also the young adult group was organized into what was known as "The Young People." The group was later renamed and organized according to church rules into an Epworth League and has of later years become the Methodist Youth Fellowship--a strong feeder for the church in personnel and finances. A Senior M.Y.F. was formed then and in 1963 a Junior High M.Y.F. and a Junior M.Y.F. were formed. These have also become active and valuable adjuncts to our church. The Senior M.Y.F. has 37 on roll; the Junior High has 22 on roll; and the Junior has 32 on roll. Each M.Y.F. has two counselors.

A youth director, Rev. Sam Storey, a ministerial student was added to the church staff in June of 1963. He has been largely responsible for the growth and activity of the young people of our church.

In June 1963, twenty-five members and five counselors of the Senior M.Y.F. made a trip to Jekyll Island for their annual summer trip. They also engaged in a Bible study.

For two consecutive years, 1963 and 1964, a Youth Breakfast Revival has been sponsored by the Senior M.Y.F. with an average attendance of eighty each morning. The M.Y.F. also shares half of the expenses of the revival.

Two publications are published by the M.Y.F.: The Youth-O-Gram is a weekly publication. The M.Y.F. Pennant is a monthly publication of all of the M.Y.F. news.

Four Senior M.Y.F. members attended the United Nations Seminar in Washington D. C. and New York City from October 27, 1963 to November 3, 1963. The Senior M.Y.F. will have three representatives to attend the 6th National Convocation of the Methodist Youth Fellowship at Perdue University July 27 to July 31, 1964.

Two M.Y.F. choirs, the Youth and Junior, have been organized and each one sings every other Sunday at the evening service with Rev. Sam Storey directing. An Inter-Church Fellowship was also begun for the Older Youth in the summer of 1963. The groups meets on holidays and Sunday evenings following the evening service.

The Senior M.Y.F. will attend the New York World's Fair during the summer of 1964. Thirty-seven members and counselors will attend during the week of August 2-8.

The first Epworth League started the first Sunrise Easter service held in Commerce, which has since become a union service. It also contributed the first \$10 toward the building fund of our present church building.

From the Methodist Church have gone out those who have heeded the Master's call for full time service--a minister, the late Reverend A. G. Shankle, held important pastorates until his demise; the Reverend Rollin Gibbs, who is doing outstanding work in the North Carolina Conference, received his early training here where he was a member until his family moved to North Carolina; Miss Estelle Hood, a missionary for many years in Brazil, was a wonderful worker in her

home church after returning home to rear two orphaned children in her family; and several young people who pledged themselves to Christian service. One young man, Bobby Gardiner, great grandson of the church founder, Mr. Seaborn M. Shankle, is preparing himself for the ministry.

Memorable meetings held in the church were conducted by the late Reverend Marvin Williams and Dr. Pierce Harris. The latter held revivals for six consecutive years. One tent meeting held before the present church was built, was conducted by the late Reverend Charlie Tillman, preacher-evangelist, is still a favorite topic of conversation by the oldest members, as is the visit of the late Reverend Sam P. Jones.

District Superintendents and pastors serving the Harmony Grove-Commerce Church since 1881 are as follows:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS</u>	<u>PASTORS</u>
1882	G. W. Yarnrough	J. R. Parker
1883	J. Boring	W. W. Lampkin
1884	J. D. Hammond	J. R. King
1885	S. P. Richardson	J. B. Allen
1886	J. H. Baxter (Elberton Dist.)	J. S. Embry
1887	S. P. Richardson (Athens Dist.)	W. M. D. Bond
1888	S. P. Richardson (Athens Dist.)	W. M. D. Bond
1889	H. H. Parks (Athens Dist.)	G. W. Duval
1890	J. F. Mixon (Elberton Dist.)	G. W. Duval
1891	J. F. Mixon (Elberton Dist.)	W. H. Brannon, Jr.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT</u>	<u>PASTORS</u>
1892	J. F. Mixon (Elberton Dist.)	W. H. Brannon, Jr.
1893	J. M. Lowry (Elberton Dist.)	J. D. Milton
1894	J. M. Lowry (Elberton Dist.)	J. D. Milton
1895	J. R. King (Elberton Dist.)	G. A. Jamison
1896	J. R. King (Elberton Dist.)	G. A. Jamison
1897	J. R. King (Elberton Dist.)	G. A. Jamison & A. J. Sears (Harmony Grove & Mission)
1898	M. J. Cofer (Elberton Dist.)	Simeon Shaw
1899	M. J. Cofer (Elberton Dist.)	M. L. Troutman
1900	M. L. Underwood (Elberton Dist.)	W. T. Bell, Jr.
1901	J. W. Quillian (Elberton Dist.)	G. M. Eakes
1902	J. W. Quillian (Elberton Dist.)	G. M. Eakes
1903	Changed from Harmony Grove to Commerce and Broad Street and Mission	
1903	J. W. Quillian (Elberton Dist.)	G. M. Eakes
1904	J. W. Quillian (Elberton Dist.)	G. M. Eakes
1905	J. H. Mashburn (Elberton Dist.)	A. A. Tilley J. J. Pendergrass
1906	J. H. Mashburn (Elberton Dist.)	Walter Foote J. J. Pendergrass
1907	J. H. Mashburn (Elberton Dist.)	Walter Foote J. J. Pendergrass
1908	J. H. Mashburn (Elberton Dist.)	W. S. Robinson J. J. Pendergrass
1909	Fletcher Walton (Elberton Dist.)	W. S. Robinson J. J. Pendergrass
1910	Fletcher Walton (Elberton Dist.)	Frank Quillian Circuit W. L. Harrison
1911	T. J. Christian (Elberton Dist.)	Frank Quillian W. L. Harrison

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT</u>	<u>PASTORS</u>
1912	T. J. Christian (Elberton Dist.)	Frank Quillian W. L. Harrison
1913	T. J. Christian (Elberton Dist.)	J. T. Eakes
1914	T. J. Christian (Elberton Dist.)	K. Reed
1915	G. F. Venable (Elberton Dist.)	K. Reed
1916	G. F. Venable (Elberton Dist.)	V. P. Scoville
1917	G. F. Venable (Elberton Dist.)	V. P. Scoville
1918	G. F. Venable (Elberton Dist.)	J. E. Ellis
1919	W. L. Pierce (Elberton Dist.)	J. E. Ellis
1920	W. L. Pierce (Elberton Dist.)	Irby Henderson
1921	W. L. Pierce (Elberton Dist.)	J. R. Turner
1922	W. L. Pierce (Elberton Dist.)	J. R. Turner
1923	H. S. Smith (Elberton Dist.)	J. R. Turner
1924	H. S. Smith (Elberton Dist.)	J. R. Turner
1925	H. S. Smith (Elberton Dist.)	J. R. Jordan
1926	H. T. Edmondson (Elberton Dist.)	J. R. Jordan
1927	H. T. Edmondson (Elberton Dist.)	J. H. Allison
1928	H. T. Edmondson (Elberton Dist.)	J. H. Allison
1929	H. T. Edmondson (Elberton Dist.)	G. W. Barrett
1930	J. W. Veatch (Elberton Dist.)	G. W. Barrett
1931	J. W. Veatch (Athens-Elberton)	A. Lee Hale
1932	J. W. Veatch (Athens-Elberton)	A. Lee Hale
1933	J. W. Veatch (Athens-Elberton)	A. Lee Hale
1934	C. C. Jarrell (Athens-Elberton)	J. P. Erwin
1935	C. C. Jarrell (Athens-Elberton)	J. P. Erwin
1936	H. S. Bird (Athens-Elberton)	J. O. Brand
1937	H. S. Bird (Athens-Elberton)	J. O. Brand

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT</u>	<u>PASTORS</u>
1938	C. S. Middlebrooks (Athens-Elberton)	J. O. Brand
1939	C. S. Middlebrooks (Athens-Elberton)	F. E. Crutcher
1940	C. S. Middlebrooks (Athens-Elberton)	F. E. Crutcher
1941	J. Hamby Barton (Athens-Elberton)	F. E. Crutcher
1942	J. Hamby Barton (Athens-Elberton)	C. W. Fruit
1943	J. Hamby Barton (Athens-Elberton)	C. W. Fruit
1944	J. Hamby Barton (Athens-Elberton)	C. W. Fruit
1945	H. S. Smith (Athens-Elberton)	C. W. Fruit
1946	H. S. Smith (Athens-Elberton)	C. W. Fruit
1947	H. S. Smith (Athens-Elberton)	C. W. Fruit
1948	H. S. Smith (Athens-Elberton)	Hubert Dodd
1949	H. S. Smith (Athens-Elberton)	Hubert Dodd
1950	J. Clyde Callaway (Athens-Elberton)	Hubert Dodd
1951	J. Clyde Callaway (Athens-Elberton)	N. O. L. Powell
1952	J. Clyde Callaway (Athens-Elberton)	N. O. L. Powell
1953	J. Clyde Callaway (Athens-Elberton)	N. O. L. Powell
1954	J. Clyde Callaway (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1955	Harvey Holland (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1956	Harvey Holland (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1957	Paul Turner (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1958	Paul Turner (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1959	Paul Turner (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1960	Paul Turner (Athens-Elberton)	Claude Hendrick
1961	Paul Turner (Athens-Elberton)	W. Donald Gray
1962	William H. Ruff	Earl E. Seckinger
1963	William H. Ruff	Earl E. Seckinger
1964	William H. Ruff	Earl E. Seckinger

Mr. Seaborn M. Shankle served as Sabbath School Superintendent from the building of the Harmony Grove Church on its present site in 1874 until 1885. Other Church School Superintendents include:

W. W. Jordan	1886-1889
S. G. Shankle	1891
W. W. Jordan	1892-1894
J. W. Boyd	1894-1895
J. F. Shannon	1895-1902
A. M. Shankle	1902
J. F. Shannon	1903-1905
L. P. Shankle	1906
J. F. Shannon	1907-1928
F. E. Durst	1928-1929
R. M. Davidson	1929-1930
F. E. Durst, Jr.	1930-1933
R. M. Davidson	1934-1936
J. B. Sharp	1936-1938
F. E. Durst, Jr.	1938-1941
A. D. Bolton	1942-1944
Horace H. Head	1944-1945
W. E. Atkinson	1945
James Wilbanks	1946-1950
Mac Barber	1950-1964

CHURCH OFFICIALS 1963-1964

Bishop	J. O. Smith
District Superintendent	William H. Ruff
Pastor	Earl E. Seckinger
Minister of Youth	Sam A. Storey
Chairman Official Board	W. R. Lang
Chairman Board of Trustees	J. E. Jarrell
Church School Superintendent	Mac Barber
Church School Secretary	Swayne Garrison
Church Treasurer	Milton Nix, Sr.
Children's Division Superintendent	Mrs. Comer D. Fowler
Youth Division Superintendent	Mrs. William C. Wright
Adult Division Superintendent	Dr. W. A. Owensby
Official Board Secretary	Mrs. A. A. Rogers, Sr.
Head Usher	Pryor Wright, Sr.
Church Lay Leader	R. M. Davidson

CHURCH OFFICIALS 1964-1965

Bishop	J. O. Smith
District Superintendent	William H. Ruff
Pastor	Earl E. Seckinger
Minister of Youth	Sam A. Storey
Chairman Official Board	Dr. Joe L. Griffeth
Chairman Board of Trustees	J. E. Jarrell
Church School Superintendent	Mac Barber
Church School Secretary & Asst. Supt.	Swayne Garrison
Church Treasurer	Milton Nix, Sr.
Children's Division Superintendent	Mrs. Comer D. Fowler
Youth Division Superintendent	Miss Julia Langford
Adult Division Superintendent	James Seagraves
Official Board Secretary	Mrs. A. A. Rogers, Sr.
Head Usher	Pryor Wright, Sr.
Church Lay Leader	Hal Nix
Membership and Cultivation Superintendent	Thomas Benton