EXCERPTS FROM METHODIST RECORDS
Spanning One Hundred Seventy-five Years

WRITTEN BY MISS VIRGINIA WALSH

THE ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE OF GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

FRANK I. BALLARD, Chairman

On March 21, 1972, the Wilmington Star-News carried, in the column “Looking Backward,” a reference to the fire that destroyed Grace Methodist Church on the night of March 21, 1947.

The fire referred to occurred one month after the sixty-first anniversary of the burning of Front Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South, on February 21, 1886. The Wilmington Journal for Friday, February 26, 1886 in an extensive article, headlined “Disastrous Conflagration,” gave a vivid description of the fire, partly quoted:

“A Fearful Sabbath Afternoon—A large portion of the City is in ruins—Churches, Warehouses, Railroad Offices, and Dwellings destroyed—Nearly a million of dollars of property consumed.

“This city, which has been remarkably exempt for many years from disastrous fire, was visited yesterday by a conflagration which at one time seriously threatened the destruction of its entire northwestern section. The wind blew almost a gale all day and at about half past 2 o’clock in the afternoon when many of our citizens were either at or on their way to Hilton to see the ruins of the bridge and others, especially the women and children, were wending their way to the different Sunday Schools the alarm of fire was sounded and in an almost incredible short space of time the streets were crowded with a rushing, surging throng hastening to the scene where the fire was raging.

“The fire was first discovered on board the steamer “Bladen,” Captain Robeson, when she was nearly opposite the foot of Walnut Street coming down from Fayetteville. The “Bladen” had a number of lady passengers on board besides a freight consisting in part of 125 bales of cotton...”

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Thank You

Since 1957 this Bulletin has been printed by The Wilmington Printing Company and its most efficient organization. The present Editor would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Robert Little, the president and Mrs. Connie Brady for help and advice on many occasions, and especially Mr. Donald R. Jenkins, Composing Room foreman, who through the years has come to the aid of the Bulletin with more than routine concern. Mr. Jenkins is married, the father of three boys and is the Treasurer of his Church.

Gifts to Latimer House

We gratefully acknowledge recent gifts to our records collection now in the Ida B. Kellam Room in the headquarters building, the Latimer House.

History of St. Thomas Catholic Church, 1847-1947 and other items, given by Mrs. Rose Allen Pico; Etching of City Hall by Louis Orr, 1950, given by Miss Gertrude Carraway; Historical & Genealogical material collected by the late Miss Sue Hall, given by Dr. B. Frank Hall; Head Family records, 1735-1850, given by Robert S. Beckham; Xerox copies of Gore Estate records and other items, given by Lenox G. Cooper; and Vol. III, Pender County Gravestone Records, Leora Hiatt McEachern, compiler, given by the compiler.

Methodist Records

(Continued from Page 1)

Walnut and Red Cross . . . involving in its ruin the destruction of the dwellings of Mrs. V. Bunting, Col. E. R. Brink, Mr. Sol Bear and the residence of the late Mr. Henry Nutt.

"As the devouring element fastened itself to the inside of the structure (the M. E. Church) the bell of the church . . . gave one sad, solemn peal as if tolling its own destruction. It was a piteous sight which brought tears to the eyes of many of those who had worshipped there. . . . The old church bell which had become a tender part of the history of many lives, ringing out joyously a wedding peal or tolling sadly for the departed spirit of some loved and saintly one, now with one great throb tolled for its own destruction. . . ."

"The destruction of Front Street M. E. Church by fire last Sunday brings to mind the great fire of April 30th, 1843 when a large portion of Wilmington was destroyed. That fire also occurred on a Sunday and the Front Street M. E. Church, which was a wooden structure and stood on the site where the walls of that which was destroyed last Sunday now stand was burned. Singularly . . . every building standing on the square was burned except the parsonage, as was the case at the recent fire. It is a most perfect and singular coincidence which will be long remembered."

Many names were listed in the article above. They were insurance firms, names of those insured, property owners, and merchants. Though the citing of names of people and businesses will give interesting information, there is space to list only a few as examples.

Meeting

Time: October 13, 1972, 8:00 P.M.
Place: St. James Great Hall.
Speaker: Thaddeus W. Tate, Jr.
Subject: Academic Scholarship & the Local Historical Society.

Dr. Tate, a native of Winston-Salem, N. C., is the Director, Institute of Early American History & Culture, Williamsburg, Va. He was educated at the University of N. C., Chapel Hill and received his Ph.D. from Brown University. He has taught history in several Universities, been Historian for two of our National Parks and was the Editor of the William & Mary Quarterly for six years. He is a Phi Beta Kappa, a University Fellow, Brown University, and a Fellow, American Council of Learned Societies. It is with a great deal of pleasure that we welcome Dr. Tate to the Lower Cape Fear.

New Members

Mrs. Mary N. Kilburn, Wrightsville Beach
David Alan Jones, Wilmington
Mrs. Jacob Swart, Wilmington
M. H. Rourk, M.D., Shallotte, N. C.
Mr. E. H. Wyche, Wilmington
Mrs. Norman George, Wilmington
Miss Connie Smith, Wilmington
Mr. John A. Tiedeman, Wilmington
Mrs. Kathryn P. Tiedeman, Wilmington
Mrs. Edwin B. Josey, Wilmington
Mrs. Conne S. Davis, Wilmington
Mr. L. P. Stephens, Wilmington
Mrs. Zack Bacon, Jr., Raleigh, N. C.
Mrs. Earl T. Wilborn, Raleigh, N. C.

Membership dues should have been paid in May for the year 1972-73 and it will save your Society money and a great deal of effort if you will pay promptly.
The Church, burned in 1843 just after its enlargement, had been built in 1816 under the leadership of such men as:

- Jesse Jennett
- Junius Dunbin
- Christopher Wallace
- Richard Taylor
- Alexander Anderson
- William Love

After both similar fires, these men manfully bore the ill luck and proceeded at once to rebuild. Thus the Morning Star, Wilmington, N. C., Friday, May 13, 1887 carried an account captioned Grace Church.

"The corner stone of the new Methodist Episcopal Church on Fourth and Mulberry Streets, was laid yesterday afternoon by Grand Master C. H. Robinson of North Carolina. The Masonic Fraternity marched in procession to the place, headed by the Germania Concert Band. ... There was a gathering of at least one thousand persons present... the exercises were opened with prayer by the Rev. C. W. Godwin. The Choir sang "Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord" with organ and cornet accompanying... Mr. W. M. Poisson read a list of the articles deposited in the corner stone which included copies of daily newspapers and various other publications, a historical account of the Church in Wilmington, synopses of Wilmington from its foundation in 1737 to 1887, names of the present City and County Officials, names of the Ministers of the Conference who contributed to the erection of the Church, Masonic Code of North Carolina, Proceedings of the Grand Lodge, names of persons who bought memorial bricks, list of members of the Germania Concert Band, small coin of the United States, Confederate currency, etc. The articles were placed in a metal box into a cavity in the stone, the same corner stone, by the way, that was used in the Front Street Church." It was the night of March 21, 1947, as has been pointed out, exactly one month after the sixty-first anniversary of the burning of Front Street Church, when fire was discovered by a group of Boy Scouts in a storage room of Grace Methodist Church. Soon the fire spread from the Sunday School Chapel to the Church where the interior was hollowed out. As the roof caved in, bit by bit, only the walls, the organ, and the bell tower were left as sentinels of the devastation. Again the communicants gathered around their pastor, the Reverend J. A. Russell, and faced the challenge as they wept—just as their predecessors had done in 1843, under the guidance of the Reverend Whiteford Smith, and in 1886, led by Doctor Yates. As others had done, "They gathered around the ashes of that which was gone and made plans for their children and their children's children, and they erected a new church and a better church for the inheritance of their own."

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1950 the Church was presented by Mr. E. L. White, Chairman of the Building Committee, to Mr. S. D. Hurst, Chairman of the Board of Stewards. It was dedicated on May 15, 1955 when the Reverend Arthur L. Thompson was minister. Bishop Paul N. Garber delivered the sermon, and Mr. Roger Moore presented the church for dedication.

Thus we find records of three major fires in which the church was completely consumed. However, almost miraculously, most of the records have been preserved. These records are old, crumbling, and showing effects of water damage in many cases. They were in a bank vault at the time of the fire in 1947. In the early 1960's through the efforts of Mr. L. C. French, then Chairman of the official board, many records were microfilmed by the North Carolina Department of Archives. Since then the records have been available to a record committee for study.

These records are valuable to the present members of the church in acquainting them with the reasons for and difficulties faced in the founding of the church; in setting forth former goals and accomplishments of the church, especially in times of various crises; and in providing an inspiration for meeting the needs of the present time with an adequate program of Christian involvement.

The Methodist Episcopal Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, grew out of a circuit of the South Carolina conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. "In 1784 a
cultured, polished, and afterwards wealthy man was appointed to Wilmington. His was the unenviable notoriety of being the first apostate Presbyter of American Methodism, Beverly Allen. In 1785 John Baldwin was sent. He was a man of mark, undoubtedly. In 1786 the ministers in Wilmington were Joshua Hartley and Caleb Maxey. The Methodist Episcopal Church of America was an outgrowth of the Wesleyan Society formed in England—not as a separate church from the Anglican Church, but as a prayer group. The purpose was to carry the gospel to all men. It was after the War of the American Revolution that the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. After a circuit had been established in Wilmington, a former missionary to the West Indies came to Wilmington to work with the slaves. William Meredith bought property on what was then the edge of town and set up a mission. He was greatly persecuted, but he continued to preach. Although he was never admitted to the conference, Meredith willed his property to Bishop Asbury for the Methodist Episcopal Church. After his death in 1797, a small white society undertook to carry on the mission. Thus, having gained property, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Wilmington used December 24, 1797, as the founding date. The period was a difficult time for extending the work of the mission, and the attitudes in the community were not always friendly; but the mission grew, as strong men and women assumed responsibility. By 1802, additional property had been purchased, thus extending the property from Second Street to Front street on Walnut with a width of sixty feet. Later, two additional lots were purchased on Front Street. Thus, out of the mission grew the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1813, a young man, who later became Bishop William Capers, was stationed in Wilmington. He wrote in his notes: “Of churches in the town, claiming mine to be one, there was but one other, the Protestant Episcopal Church, of which I was the rector, and I have the advantage of Mr. Empie, having some ten or a dozen males to his one, while the females have been about equally divided as to number.” He further gave Doctor Empie and his church the advantage of property and pointed out that his church was poor, but that the members were strong in doctrine.

One of the oldest books valued in the records of the church is the Church Book, including the Stump Sound Mission—1815 through 1832. In 1815, Bishop Francis Asbury, who had been sent to America by John Wesley in 1771, came to Wilmington and gave orders for the building of a new church. He had preached ten years earlier in the small building, 60 feet by 36 feet, galleryed all around. In 1816, we find the fulfillment of that order by a membership of approximately one hundred, under the leadership of such men as: William McGee Kennedy, Presiding Elder; the minister, Samuel K. Hodges; Alexander Anderson; William Anderson; Jesse Jennett, referred to as the Saint John of Wilmington; John Howard; Junius Dunbin; Wm. J. Love; Wm. Wingate; Christopher Wallace; Thomas Gardner; Robert Smith; J. D. Gardner; Charles B. Morris; Junius Cassidy; and Timothy Radcliffe. In scanning the lists of communicants from then on into the early thirties, we find many names that we continue to find throughout later records as the descendants of those early leaders continued to serve.
1809 Paid Roger Hasell for lumber 2.51
1810 Paid for Church Sconces 4.00
1811 House expenses, including the Bishops
Stay (Foods) 8.00
listed in many places were priced as: Flour
at 7.75 per barrel, a half bag of coffee for
11.00, 1 lb. of butter for .37½, 4 lbs.
pork for .40, 6 lbs. sugar for .21½, 18 lbs.
bacon for 12.00, 12 fowls .20 each, etc.
The lists seem endless, including other
foods and household articles for the parsonage)
1815 Twenty-six cents in full payment for 52
pounds of nails
Passage of minister from Charleston 15.00
One hundred and twenty-seven dollars for
bricks, together with the expense of land-
ing them
“Received of J. C. Dunbibin, Treasurer of the M. E.
Church in Wilmington, one hundred and eighty dollars
in full for brickwork.
May 12, 1817
Signed D. O'Neill
“Received from J. C. Dunbibin, one hundred and
twenty-seven in full for bricks for new church.
May 12, 1817
Signed T. Cowan
(Uncertain about the initial)
“One hundred and twenty dollars in part pay for
building meeting house in said town.
Signed N. W. Hall
One of the main expense items was that for candles,
the cost varying according to the season of the year.
The candles in June might be listed as costing $2.76;
but in December, they were sometimes given as costing
$4.57. Service “At Candlelight” really meant just that,
as there seemed to be no other means of having light.
The communicants of the church were arranged in
wards for visiting purposes. These wards, designating
the parallel streets between which certain communicants
lived, changed from year to year, somewhat, as the mem-
bership grew greater. They are interesting in providing
information about streets and residence locations.
The interests of the communicants of Front Street
Methodist Episcopal Church, South extended both to
the civic welfare of the city and to the spiritual welfare.
From the establishment of missions, churches grew. In
1853, Fifth Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church was
founded; in 1883 Epworth Church was begun as a mis-
sion; and in 1889 a Sunday School was begun that de-
veloped into what is now Trinity Methodist Church.
In this Century, other churches have had their begin-
ings through the help of Grace Methodist Church.18
As one example of many who have extended their ac-
tivity in the church to activity in community welfare
we cite the life-long work of Mrs. Catherine Kennedy.
Before 1832 as Catherine delRosset, she was active as
a teacher in the Sunday school and, later on, worked,
tirelessly with the children of slaves in large numbers.
An In Memoriam written for a memorial service held
on December 29, 1889, partly quoted: “Whereas the all
wise Father has removed Catherine Gabriel Kennedy,
our beloved Mother in Israel and co-worker in every de-
partment of church work, from our midst and we, deem-
ing it eminently proper to express our love, appreciation,
and esteem for one who has spent such a long and in
every way useful life amongst us . . . as a Sabbath school
of which she was a faithful and zealous teacher for over
sixty years, give expressly of our love in this public
way. Therefore, Resolved that we will cherish her mem-
ory and endeavor to emulate her devotion.13 In 1834, she
married William McGhee Kennedy, a former minister
of the church who had moved to South Carolina, where
he left a very excellent record of accomplishments, ac-
ccording to Albert D. Beets in A History of South Carolina
Methodism and an article in the Southern Christian Ad-
vocate concerning a tablet dedicated to his memory by
the Members of Washington Street Methodist Church
in Columbia, South Carolina where he is buried in plot
157 in the church yard. The Reverend Derrill Hart is
buried in plot 69 along with his wife, Margaret E. Hart,
daughter of the Reverend W. M. Kennedy.14 He died in
1840; and Mrs. Kennedy returned to Wilmington “Her
husband having completed his work in his Master’s vine-
yard.”5 Her activities were many. She became the first
president of the missionary society and served for many
years. She founded what was known as The Old Ladies’
Rest, then as the Kennedy Rest, and, in 1895, as the
Catherine Kennedy Home.16 According to books DDD,
page 217; 000, Page 735; and 15, page 292, New Han-
over County Deeds, the Ladies Benevolent Society, in
1877, was granted title to property on the south side
of Orange Street and east side of Sixth Street, since the
deed for the lot in 1853 was lost and never registered.
The society bought at public auction for $900.00, a piece
of property on Seventh Street between Mulberry Street
and Chestnut Street in 1879; and on April 15, 1895
the society bought the property on Princess at Ninth
Street. That home is well remembered by many. Perhaps,
t here are a few people who remember the home on Sev-
enth Street. “Miss Mattie” (Mrs. M. L. Chasten) re-
membered it well and spoke about it frequently when
anyone interested in it inquired.
It is interesting to note from the will of Thomas Robert
Radcliffe, of the State, County, and City of New York,
dated July 8, 1891:
The income from rents of my real estate situated
in the City of Wilmington, County of New Hanover,
and State of North Carolina, and also of any property
or, interest that I may acquire subsequent to this will,
my wife aforementioned is not to sell . . . and upon
her death I bequeath the income from it to the Old
Ladies Home, a charitable institution in Wilmington,
North Carolina attached to Grace Methodist Episcopal
Church, of that City . . . It shall be known as the
‘Robert T. Radcliffe fund’.”
One of the early communicants of the church and a
strong leader until his death in 1871 was Timothy Rad-
The family, evidently, maintained interest in the Ken-
dey Home—The Old Ladies’ Home.
As early as 1831, the Methodist Church provided a
burying ground, located: “Behind Henry Nutt’s House.”
After the fire of 1843, when the church was built on
Front Street, the burying ground was between the church
and the parsonage, which was on the corner of Walnut
and Second Streets. That parsonage, built in 1859, serv-
ed the church until 1921 and still stands. Private vaults
were constructed and bought by members. A picture of
the church shows the grave yard, also. After the fire of
1886, the use of the graveyard and vaults had to be
abandoned, and the church had to be released from responsibility for them, after providing suitable locations for the remains for all those not taken care of by others.

Many of those re-interred were placed in Oakdale Cemetery, both on the Church lot and on private lots and, also in vaults. Stones were relocated or placed anew, dating much earlier than the establishment of the cemetery. Thus, we have a harmony of records in the church books and on the stones and monuments. As one browses through the books or wanders through the cemetery, he feels personalities come alive; and he lives among them, even as they lie close to each other now that the years have blended their stories into one of Christian living.

The old brick mausoleum on the road to the left of the entrance is that of Dr. R. L. Moran, a gifted minister of the Church in the years 1863, 1864, and 1871 through 1874. John T. Kennedy, of New York, executor of Dr. Moran’s Estate, had it constructed. The mausoleum was put under perpetual care in 1894 by John Kennedy and J. W. Taylor.

In the older section of the cemetery we can stand near those spots marked as the burial places of the earliest officials shown in the records from 1812 and to 1839. There we find the Howards, Andersons, Wallaces, Cassidys, Gauses, Willsons, Nutts, Loves, Radcliffes, and many of the old families. There near those hallowed spots, guarded by a few remaining iron fences, crumbling stones or sturdy monuments and moss draped trees, we feel their personalities come alive; and whether we are some of the few descendants left in the church or descendants scattered among other churches throughout the city we are gratified to be a part of that noble caravan of communicants of the church that was founded one hundred and seventy-five years ago as the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Editor’s Note:
In the old records are many names, including marriage, birth and death records. These lists are in the Church Office, the Wilmington Public Library and the Archives Room of the Historical Society for anyone who wishes to see them.

FOOTNOTES
1. The Wilmington Journal, February 26, 1866.
2. Quarterly Conference Reports, 1810-1872.
4. One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Anniversary, 1797-1966, Grace Methodist Church, Wilmington, N. C., Pages 11-29.
8. Copy of deed from George Logan to Bishop Francis Asbury, Feb. 27, 1802, p. 617, and copy of deed from Thomas H. Wright to the Trustees of the M. E. Church, Nov. 14, 1843, pages 37-39 in Record Book of Front Street Church, 1886-1888.
9. Chreitzberg, p. 16.
10. Church Book for the White Society in Wilmington and at the Sound, 1816-1823.
11. Ibid.
15. Register of the M. E. Church, 1833-1874.
17. Wills, Volume F, New Hanover County Registry, p. 522.
18. Oakdale Cemetery Records.