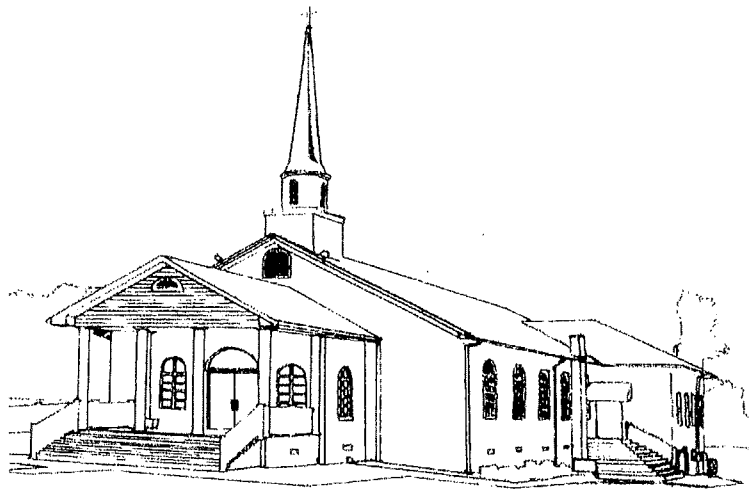


History of

Bethlehem

Original Free Will Baptist Church



1913-2013

Bethlehem Original Free Will Baptist Church

One hundred years ago, in the community of what we now call Browntown, there were several young men and women interested in church and church activities. These people decided to organize a church, since the closest one to them was several miles away and transportation was mostly by mule and cart. There were not many automobiles at that time.

These people had no church building, so they met in a rural schoolhouse and organized under the capable leadership of Reverend G.W. Kennedy. They elected Rev. Kennedy as their pastor for 12 months; Laurence Mobley as clerk; Zackey J. Jones as deacon; Johnny N. Craft, L.F. Jones and J.W. Brown as ruling elders; and George W. Mobley as treasurer. They agreed upon the name of Bethlehem. No records available show why this name was chosen.

Some of the charters members were:

Johnny N. and Missouri Craft
George W. and Lucy Jane Mobley
J.W. and Katherine Brown
Laurence and Elizabeth Mobley
Amos and Martha Jones
Zackey J. and Lizzie Jones
L.F. and Mary Jones

We are certain there were more charter members, but have been unable to establish how many more or who they were.

Minutes of the first meeting are as follow:

October 12, 1913

State of North Carolina

County of Duplin

The Church at Bethlehem of the Free Will Baptist Order did organize together, as a body of Christians to transact and do the business of the Lord and to be governed by the word of God and the Constitution and Discipline of the Original Free Will Baptist of North Carolina, do constitute this body to transact the business of the faith, asking God to sit as their Moderator in all. Moved and agreed that we elect Brother Laurence Mobley, Clerk. Moved and agreed that we elect Bro. J.N. Craft, L.F. Jones, J.W. Brown as ruling Elders. Moved and agreed that we elect Brother (unreadable) being duly organized, prayer by G.W. Kennedy. Moved and agreed that we elect Bro. G.W. Mobley and J.N. Craft our delegates to the Union Meeting at North East, Wayne Co., and send \$1.00 for retired ministers and 50¢ minutes. Moved and agreed that conference close until next time in course.

E.V. Thomas, clerk

G.W. Kennedy, moderator

As soon as they could, they bought lumber and built the church with everybody working and doing their part.

This group of dedicated men and women continued to enjoy their new church and more members slowly were added.

Records show that quarterly meeting was held every three months, the business was conducted in a Godly manner, and those that departed from the faith were properly dismissed, for they adhered to strict puritanical principles in that day.

As time passed and more members were added, it was decided to build an extension

to the church. This was done, new pews were made, another piano was purchased, a new pulpit stand was built and an oil-burning Heatrola took the place of the old pot-bellied stove. Carpet was put down in the aisles and on the rostrum, electric lights were added, and the building was greatly improved.

When the oil-burning Heatrola was installed, Norwood Fountain contacted James Rose of Rose Oil Company and asked would he service our oil tank and let us pay him as we could. Mr. Rose told him not to worry about paying — and he kept us oil there all the time and never would take the first penny for it.

A Ladies Aid Society was started, with both men and women as members; dues were 10 cents per month. Later dues were collected in October and each member paid his or her \$1.20 for the year. Leona Fountain was treasurer. Money collected through the society was used miscellaneously, including funeral designs for deceased members.

In February 1950, the Ladies' Auxiliary was organized under the leadership of Bertha Smith. Officers were elected and the organization became affiliated with the Women's Auxiliary Convention of the Eastern Conference. Along with the support of the auxiliary program, sick visits were made, trays carried to sick and shut ins, and the project of serving dinner at the home of a deceased member or neighbor was started. This has continued until the present time for members, neighbors and friends.

About this same time some members began to talk about moving the church out on the highway near Fountaintown. As usual there was controversy. Some were ready to do this, others were not. After much discussion of pro's and con's, it was decided to attempt the move. Then another problem came to surface immediately. We had no land on the highway and could not buy a spot from anyone. Some were getting discouraged, but we kept talking and trying. Then Brother Norwood Fountain said he had a small frontage strip across from his field he would give if Sister Lizzie Jones would give the land back of that. (This land is now cleared in front of Vernie Bryan's.)

Some members went to look it over and decided it would not make a suitable foundation. Sister Lizzie Jones told them she would give a lot where the present building now stands. All heard this joyous news. And then another problem: Money.

Experience had taught a long time before this that if one wanted anything enough to put forth an effort and ask God's help, through prayer and having faith in that prayer, wonderful things could be accomplished.

In February 1952, the Ladies' Auxiliary decided to have a barbecue supper. Everything for the supper, with the exception of cabbage for slaw, was donated by various members and neighbors. The first pigs were donated also and cooked under the barn shelter at Brother Lloyd Jones. The group cleared \$225 that night. This was the beginning of many more suppers. Fried chicken soon was added to the menu. These plates sold for 50¢ and \$1.00. A barbecue house was built and the suppers continued every Saturday night. The Lord surely must have been in agreement with the efforts and goals, for \$3,000 was cleared in the first year.

When we finally were able to start the building, we had \$3,900. A man was hired to go ahead with the building, and the members supplied needed labor. It really took a lot of hard work, sacrifice, sweat and sometimes tears to keep things rolling. Brother Jerry Williams stood firm through thick and thin and was the booster when we became discouraged, for everything did not run smoothly all of the time.

We were fortunate to be the recipients of generous donations from various businessmen. Large and small gifts were received and we feel that no matter what the size, the Lord looked down and blessed those who gave — and those who wanted to and couldn't. And we know He surely blessed us in our huge undertaking.

In February 1955 we moved into our new church using our old furniture.

Gradually we were able to acquire enough money to pay for new furniture. In 1961 this was added.

Guy and Hazel Williams gave a vacuum cleaner to take care of the new carpet we had been able to install on the rostrum and down the aisle.

Soon members began to think about homecoming. After discussing the matter, everyone thought it would be nice for those who were former members and pastors to come back and visit. On Nov. 22, 1964, we had our first homecoming service. Reverend Bruce Barrow, who was our pastor at the time, brought the morning message. Everyone enjoyed the noon hour with fellowship and food. After lunch we held a memorial service for all of our deceased members. This was a day everyone enjoyed and one long to be remembered. This marked the beginning of the annual homecoming, which is now observed on the second Sunday in October.

Rose Oil Company donated \$50 on chimes and with help of other contributors these were installed in 1965.

The picture that now hangs behind the pulpit was a gift from Dulan and Grace Sellars.

A committee was appointed to begin on a steeple fund in January 1965. Brother Clarence Bryan was chosen as chairman and \$90 was in the fund.

In 1966, through efforts of members who were really interested, a heating system replaced the gas furnace we had been using since the church was built. In 1968, Brother Darrell Edwards was the driving force behind insulation and air conditioning being added. Also, much-needed repairs were beginning to be taken care of.

The Ladies' Auxiliary had the acoustical panels installed overhead and we began to save for carpet. Each third-Sunday offering in Sunday school was put aside in a separate fund. Finally, after many Sundays of saving and almost as many days of deliberation, a color was chosen. In August 1972 Brother Sutton Fountain, his wife Joyce and others installed the carpet we are now enjoying.

Sherwood and Ella Fountain gave a vacuum system and Brother Sutton Fountain installed it.

Quarterly meetings were changed to Saturday night instead of an all-day service.

July 1973 marked a first in the history of Bethlehem church. We began full-time service the first Sunday in July.

Although the busy world spins on, we are moving along slowly. We are receiving some new members while others are leaving us. We hold many future plans in our minds and hearts for the continued growth of Bethlehem church. We should like to see Sunday school rooms added, the ground graded and planted, drives and walks made. We would like to be able to build a parsonage so our pastor can stay in the community and work with us daily, but our greatest desire is for the spiritual growth of each church member. We know that with the help of God, and the love and cooperation of each one here, these goals can be met.

written by Marie Jones, clerk (1973)

Since the writing of the history in 1973, some goals we had in mind are being slowly accomplished. Drainage tile has been installed and is working as desired. Sutton and Joyce Fountain donated and installed water fountains in the hall. A parsonage fund has been started and at present there is \$3,483.67 in it.

Another year having elapsed, we find ourselves moving slowly along as predicted and hope to soon be able to see blocks and bricks delivered to begin a long-time dream: a parsonage.

Bethlehem history continued, 1974-1991

Since writing the history of Bethlehem church in 1973, so many goals have been set and most have been accomplished.

We had high hopes of building a parsonage, but the Lord smiled on us and made it possible for us to buy a house near the church. This I firmly believe. The Tony Lanier

house was put up for sale and we were able to purchase it. We began repairing, painting, etc., and finally had a nice parsonage.

In July 1975 the church called Reverend Robert Fader to pastor, but since he lived in Kinston he commuted and we rented the parsonage for the two years he was with us. Reverend Fader served us well and was the instigator of several projects and changes that we really needed. His first suggestion was starting a steeple fund, then beginning a unified budget and selecting a finance committee. All monies would be disbursed by church treasurer as allocated by the committee. Ronald Lanier, our treasurer, set up the budget and we finally knew what we were doing and where our money was going.

Under Rev. Fader's leadership we had our first bazaar (1975). The Ladies' Auxiliary organized this and it was a great success, earning about \$1,300 clear of expenses the first year. We enjoyed it and continued having one for several years.

Extra land was given by Vernie and Zoa Bryan and Lib Raynor. This allowed us to straighten the existing lines, which were incorrect, and the church yard was surveyed to correct old deeds. Coy Fountain did the surveying and prepared the new deeds, for which we were grateful.

In January 1977, Rev. Fader resigned effective June 30, the end of the fiscal year. He said he lived too far away to serve adequately as pastor and he found himself hurrying too much. He had to take care of his health. We regretted very much his leaving, but time and tide waits for no man, so we began looking for another to fill the pulpit starting in July.

In July 1977, Bill Futch was called and he and his family moved into our parsonage. We were so glad to have our pastor living in the community. Linda, his wife, resumed her teaching career at Southwest High School in Onslow County. Trumilla, their daughter, then 14, began at Chinquapin Elementary and Michael, their son, age 5, started kindergarten.

We pause to say this about Bill. He was not only a good pastor and leader, but became

involved in various activities, teaching seniors and young adults. As well as taking time with young people he also had time for the elderly. Under his leadership spring revival was shared with our two sister churches, Mount Zion and Lanier's Chapel.

We also started our first candlelight communion services at Thanksgiving and Christmas, which we have continued through the years.

We became a mother church for Silver Creek Mission in Carteret County.

A scholarship fund in the amount of \$1,500 was established by Mount Olive College for all Free Will Baptist churches. In the event anyone wanted to apply for the scholarship, they would have to meet the approval of and be recommended by the church. Olivia Fountain, Karen Jones and Michelle Brown were recipients of this scholarship. Karen Southerland was eligible, but she did not choose Mount Olive College.

In October 1977 the indebtedness on the parsonage was paid in full and a letter of thanks was sent to Mrs. James Rose since she held the deed of trust. We received a letter from her stating the deed of trust had been cancelled.

Until now we held our quarterly business meeting and communion on Saturday night before second Sunday. We decided to divide the services and have the business meeting on Wednesday night before second Sunday and communion on the following fourth Sunday night.

In April 1978 the church voted to send a floral design to the immediate family of any member who passed away. This continues until the present.

Stanley Craft was ordained as a deacon in May 1978.

Phillip Wood felt the call to preach and petitioned the church to recommend him to the examining board. He went before the board and was granted a license to preach.

Phillip attended Mount Olive College and then earned his bachelor's degree in religion at North Carolina Wesleyan College in Rocky Mount. He earned his master of divinity degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest.

On May 12, 1979, at Bethlehem church, Phillip Wood was ordained by the Eastern Conference as a Free Will Baptist minister. The service was conducted by Rev. Bill Futch, pastor of the host church, and the ministerial examining board of the Eastern Conference. Bethlehem gave a reception in Phillip's honor and presented him with a set of reference books.

After all the years since our church was established, Bethlehem at last gave a son into the ministry.

Over the years many improvements have been made. Our bulletin board sign was erected and with thanks to Cleo Fountain for the inscription. John and Wanda Southerland donated an organ for which we are so grateful and we express many thanks to them for the gift and the thought.

We have begun to take care of some much-needed repairs and improvements and over the years have accomplished many things. The back steps were rebuilt and wrought-iron rails were installed at the front and back steps and to the steps leading to the basement fellowship hall; gas heaters were installed in the basement; a restroom with half-bath in the kitchen, tables and two electric stoves were given by the Ladies' Auxiliary; kitchen cabinets were built; walls panelled; floors painted; recessed lights installed over the choir; a new copy machine purchased (\$1,200 of which was paid by the Ladies' Auxiliary); air conditioner put in the basement; heating and cooling system installed for Sunday school rooms; and tables in Sunday school rooms were covered to make them more attractive and durable.

In 1980, two new deacons were ordained: John Wayne Southerland and Clifton Fountain.

In October 1984, Estelle Craft brought to the church the Ladies' Auxiliary's desire to start a baptistry fund. The Ladies' Auxiliary gave \$500 to start the fund. Since that time the church and auxiliary have combined the baptistry fund for a total of \$3,525.48.

The community started talking county water and the church and parsonage were signed up for it.

Aluminum siding was put on the boxing of the church in 1986. Guy, Hazel and Ted Williams donated funds to build a porch on the church in memory of Guy's parents, Jerry and Mary Williams. It was completed and dedicated in July 1987.

After several meetings, suggestions and committees appointed, the pews were padded in 1988.

In 1988, the pastor informed the church of his intention to enroll at East Carolina University to further his education. In April 1990, Bill Futch resigned effective June 30, the end of the fiscal year. His resignation was accepted and his pastorate terminated on that date.

Reverend Joe Ard was elected in July 1990 as pastor for the remainder of the year. He was affiliated with Davis Free Will Baptist Church and had to serve a 90-day notice. He began his pastorate on Nov. 4, 1990. He commutes so we are once again renting the parsonage.

New hymnals and carpet were purchased and dedicated in July 1991.

Vernie Fountain was ordained as a deacon in August 1991.

Since last writing the history in 1974, 96 members have been gained by letter or baptism, 27 lost by death, and 30 dismissed by letter.

written by Marie Jones, clerk (1991)

Bethlehem history continued, 1992 to 2013

The baptistry was dedicated July 23, 1992.

In 1993, land behind the church was purchased for future buildings and a new sound system was installed.

A new sign for the church was installed in 1995.

Danny Brown was recommended to the Eastern Conference ordaining council in 1997 for examination for license to preach.

New chandeliers were put up in 1999.

Danny Brown was licensed as a minister for one year in 2000. A benefit for Jessica Wood was held in 2000.

In 2002, plans for the education building and fellowship hall were approved. Also in 2002, adjacent land east of the church was purchased for parking; the purpose statement was adopted; and a benefit was held for Belinda Fountain.

The tape ministry and prayer chain ministry were begun in 2003.

Homecoming on Oct. 6, 2004, was the first use of the new fellowship hall.

A benefit was held for Linda Simpson in 2007. Also in 2007, a donation was received for paving of the parking lot and funds were approved from the church budget.

The senior ministry began in 2008.

Crandall Fountain was granted a one-year minister's license in 2009 and was ordained Nov. 28, 2010.

— compiled by Marcia Jones, Mary Jo Brown and Sandy Miller (2013)

Bethlehem pastors

R.C. Kennedy	1913-1917
J.R. McKaskey	1918-1919
Solomon Duff	1919-1920
G.W. Kennedy	1920-1928
H.C. Williams	1928-1932
G.W. Kennedy	1932-1942 (re-elected)
Lloyd Vernon	1942-1944
D.W. Hansley	1944-1946
R.C. Kennedy	1947
S.A. Smith	1947-1951
Johnnie Vernelson	1951-1953
T.P. Ellis	1953-August 1963
Bruce Barrow	October 1963-1966
W.H. Willis	1966-1971
Jessie Mathis	1971-1972
Joe Barrow	1972, half year
Lloyd Barnette	1972-1975
Robert M. Fader	1975-1977
William B. Futch	1977-1990
Joseph N. Ard	November 1990-November 2013

Bethlehem deacons

Zackey J. Jones	1913
Bess Jones	1925
J.R. Lanier	1935
Walter Simpson	1942
Alvis Fountain	1947
Fernie Wood	1948
Jerry Williams	1949
Ralph Jones	1952
Norwood Fountain	1958
Lloyd Jones	1961
Ervin Simpson	1963
Sherwood Fountain	1963
Clarence Bryan	1967
Darrell Edwards	1971
Arthur Brown	1971
Bill Nobles	1974
Horace Stroud	1974
Stanley Craft	1978
John Wayne Southerland	1980
Clifton Fountain	1980
Vernie Fountain	1991
Byron Fountain	1995
Jan Jones	1995
Randy Jones	1997
Danny Brown	1997
Reid Southerland	2003
Eric Simpson	2003
James G. Fountain	2005
Crandall Fountain	2006
Freddy Jones	2009
Ricky Dempsey	2010

Bethlehem clerks

E.V. Thomas	1913
E.L. Mobley	1914-1920
L.E. Mobley	1921-1959
Sutton Fountain	1959-1964
Hubert Jones	1964-1974
Marie Jones	1974-1982
Reba Fountain	1982-1996
Reba Jones	1996-1998
Rita Fountain	1998-2004
Gail Walton	2004-2008
Marcia Jones	2008-2012
Bonnie Jones	2012-

Bethlehem treasurers

G.W. Mobley	1913-1942
Walter Simpson	1942-1963
Jimmy Southerland	1963-1968
Garland Craft	1968-2000
KONWILD CRAFT Diana Jones	1975-2000 2000-2007
Mary Ann Hudson	2007-2011
Nancy Ripley	2011-