

# **A History of Tuckston United Methodist Church**

## **1889 – 1989**

by James Hefner and Elsa Ann Johnson

This year, 1989, Tuckston Church is celebrating its one hundredth birthday. The Centennial observance gives us an opportunity to look into the past to see how the church was founded and to consider our plans for its future. The Centennial theme is "Memories of the Past . . . Challenges of the Future."

In gathering the material to write this brief history, I was given a copy of Miss Elsa Ann Johnson's historical paper which covered the Church's history through 1960. In further conversation with Miss Johnson and others of the congregation, I was able to bring her history up to the present time.

Miss Johnson is a remarkable lady. Eighty-six years young, she has been a member of Tuckston for 74 years and an active member of the Stella Hancock Bible Class for more than 45 years. She taught school in Clarke and the neighboring counties for over 30 years, first at Henton Brown School near Bogart, and then for three or four years at Tuckston School in the early 1920s. Her work then took her to Gaines School, Bostwick, Winder, Winterville, and finally back to Gaines School. She has made a great contribution not only to the life of Tuckston but to the life of the entire community.

I am very grateful for her assistance in the writing of this history of Tuckston Church.

Jim Hefner, Chairman  
Centennial Committee

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## **The History Of Tuckston Methodist Church**

In writing the history of Tuckston Church, it seems appropriate to include something about the community prior to the organization of the first church to be located there. In most rural communities there is usually at least one progressive and forward-looking man or woman who is interested in the welfare of the community. John and Elizabeth Tuck were just this sort. Mr. Tuck was so concerned about the local children growing up in the neighborhood without a school that he secured a teacher, at a small salary, to teach during the three summer months, and the county agreed to pay the teacher's salary for three months during the winter. The school sessions were held in a small tenant house on the Tuck farm for several years. Later on, a one room school house was built on property now occupied by the Tuckston cemetery.

Elizabeth Tuck, wife of John Tuck, also had a great concern about the lack of a Sunday School and Church for the neighborhood, and with the help of Miss Emma Nabers, the school teacher, Mrs. Tuck set about to remedy the lack of a church facility. These two good Christian women spent much time in prayer for guidance in their plans. They began by inviting the school children and their parents to a Sunday afternoon meeting in the school house. A neighbor lady, Mrs. Mollie Greer, and the Rev. W.M. Coile, a Winterville minister, were asked to help organize a Sunday School. This first Sunday School was officially organized in the spring of 1889.

The founders of this Sunday School were about equally divided between Methodists and Baptists, so the founders decided to operate as an interdenominational school and to use Union Sunday School literature. After using this literature for one year, a decision was made to use both the Methodist and Baptist literature in alternate years. Throughout these early years the school and Sunday School seemed to operate hand-in-hand with teachers and community folk working equally hard for both causes.

After using the little one room school house for some time, the patrons and other interested citizens decided to remodel and enlarge it.

Among the first teachers to come to Tuckston was Miss Lillie Young, who taught music classes. Under Miss Young's leadership, the students and community adults began to put on various forms of entertainment to raise money for the purchase of an organ. Progress was being made. During the winter months when the roads were muddy and weather was cold, the Sunday School attendance decreased so much that it was decided to "go into winter quarters". With the coming of spring the Sunday School was begun again with great enthusiasm. In addition to Sunday School, preachers from various neighboring churches were secured to preach one Sunday afternoon a month. Each summer revivals were conducted, and often it was necessary to build a brush arbor in front of the school building to seat the enthusiastic crowds.

Mrs. W.H. Dean, who lived in a nearby community, and who was District Secretary of the Women's Division of Christian Service for the Athens-Elberton District, organized a women's missionary society in the home of Mrs. Mollie Greer. Later on, with the help of Miss Elizabeth Hale, Mrs. Dean organized a Children's Missionary Society. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for this work, and much good was accomplished with the youth of the community.

There were many willing workers in the early days of the Sunday School. Mrs. Greer and Mrs. Tuck were teachers in the Sunday School and often served as acting superintendent when no man could be prevailed upon to serve. An early leader in the Sunday School was Mr. Greene Bailey, who walked out from Athens each Sunday afternoon. Mr. Bailey was a faithful worker for several years until failing health forced him to give up his work.

The first regular superintendent of the Sunday School was appointed in 1892. He was John Prickett, who had been secured as the school teacher. Mr. Prickett had been studying for the ministry but lacked funds to continue his education. Under his guidance the Sunday School took on new life and for the first time did not close during the winter months. Mr. Prickett's life meant much to the community, and he was a great inspiration to the young people. After one year he returned to Vanderbilt University to complete his preparation for the ministry.

In 1893, the Rev. Asbury Church became the Sunday School superintendent, and his brother Felix served as the song leader. In 1896, Rev. Church resigned because of poor health, and Felix became the superintendent and served until 1898. The service of these two brothers had a very positive influence upon the religious life of the community.

During the "summer of 1895" a great revival was held in the little school house, and the congregation was stirred to organize a church. Mr. and Mrs. John Tuck had discussed the idea of building a church with Rev. John M. Sewell, the visiting preacher. Mr. Tuck offered to donate a building lot to the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Church. During the revival the Rev. Sewell asked for members to charter the new church, and when the "doors were opened," Evelyn Tuck, then a child, and ten other people came forward. This great revival ended and the Church at Tuckston began. Plans were soon drawn for a church building, and a committee was appointed to solicit funds for the building of Tuckston Church. Among those serving on the committee was Mr. Augustus Fambro, who with his wife and family had been among the first to join the new church. Mr. Fambro was a loyal and devoted worker and was tireless in his efforts to secure funds for the new building. He was also one of the first Stewards and could always be found working for the Lord's Kingdom here on earth.

With the aid of many volunteer workers and the success of the building committee in securing funds, the church building was begun in the summer of 1896. The walls and roof were soon completed, but funds ran out before the floor could be completed. Mrs. Ella Blackman, the teacher of the young people's class, contributed the money she usually spent for spring clothes to buy the floor. This floor is still in use today. The church building was completed in 1897. A short time after its completion, the first wedding took place in Tuckston Church. This wedding united Miss Eltha Tuck and Mr. John Hardemon in holy matrimony.

As the discussion of the history of the church continues to unfold, it may seem that too much attention is being devoted to the Sunday School and its leadership. One must remember, however, that our church had its beginning as a Sunday School and that the lay persons mentioned were by and large responsible

for the founding and growth of Tuckston Church. At the beginning Tuckston was one of four churches on the circuit with preaching services being held one Sunday per month. Later Tuckston became a two-church circuit with Winterville Methodist Church before finally becoming a "full-time church". The first pastor of Tuckston was the Rev. J.M. Sewell, who served from 1896-1899.

Among the outstanding men that the church was privileged to have as superintendent was Mr. D.C. Barrow, a professor at the University of Georgia, who walked out from Athens each Sunday afternoon. Under his leadership as superintendent and teacher of the adult class, the Sunday School grew in interest and attendance. When he was named Chancellor of the University, Mr. Barrow had to give up his work with the Sunday School which he had served from 1898 to 1906.

After Mr. Barrow gave up his work, Mr. N.B. Davis, Mr. Edward Burt and Mr. J.A. Hardy, all good men of the community, served as superintendents between 1906 and 1914. Mr. Robert David (Dave) Hancock became superintendent in 1914 at a time when attendance was very poor. Mr. Hancock was a man of prayer and faith in God and worked hard to build up the Sunday School. With the help of his daughter, Miss Bertha Hancock, attendance and enrollment increased until it became one of the best-attended Sunday Schools in the area. In 1930, Mr. Hancock, after fifteen years of service as superintendent, resigned because of ill health. Mr. H.A. Haygood became superintendent and, along with his wife, organized a Woman's Bible Class in October 1930. Mrs. John D. Hancock became the teacher and served in this capacity for over forty-three years, and this class even now bears the name "The Stella Hancock Bible Class."

In 1929, under the leadership of the pastor, the Rev. M.B. Sams, four rooms were added to the sanctuary. These rooms provided much needed space for Sunday School. Then in the early 1940s because of increased attendance, three more rooms were added as a second floor to the four rooms. Great strides were made in both interest and attendance between the years 1935 and 1948. Three men, Mr. George Wright, Mr. Ted R. Johnson and Mr. Wesley Whitehead, provided valuable leadership during these years while they served as superintendent of Sunday School. In 1948, the sanctuary was enlarged and remodeled to make it more attractive and comfortable.

Mr. Hubert Flanagan, Jr. became superintendent in 1948, but after one year of consecrated service he resigned to take a teaching position in Elberton, Georgia. After teaching and service in the U.S. Army, Mr. Flanagan accepted the call to the ministry and was ordained in 1952. Today Rev. Flanagan is an outstanding minister serving a church in Griffin, Georgia. From 1950 through 1958, Mr. Whitehead, Mr. Robert S. Johnson and Mr. Clarence Allen served as superintendents of this growing Sunday School. It was during this period that another "Tuckston Boy" accepted a call to the ministry: Archie Hayes accepted his first church in 1957 and is still serving in the North Georgia Conference. In 1958, Mr. C.W. Daniel became leader of the Tuckston Sunday School, and he was followed by Mr. John Cone.

Music has always been an important part of the Tuckston worship service. During these years of growth many people gave of their talent to the music program. A special mention must be made of the contribution made by Mrs. Wesley (Mary) Whitehead, who was church organist for 34 loyal years.

There were many pastors who served Tuckston Church well between 1896 and 1950. During this time Tuckston was on a four-church circuit, and the pastors were at Tuckston only one Sunday a month. A listing of all the pastors who served is included at the back of this writing. In 1950 or 1951, Tuckston became a two-church circuit with Winterville Methodist Church. During the late 1940s and early 1950s the possibility of becoming a full circuit was often discussed, but there were many problems to be worked out first.

Finally, on August 9, 1954, the Official Board of the church took positive action regarding the possibility of becoming a full station church by starting a fund to build a church parsonage. In May of 1955, the Board set a date of 1957 to become a "full time"; in the spring of 1957, the parsonage was completed, and Tuckston at last became a full station church in July, 1957. During this period of growth, Tuckston's pastor was the Rev. Marion J. Sherrill. The names of committee members for much of the work that was being done during these years are hard to determine, but surely most Tuckston members were serving when needed, just as they are today in 1989.

In July, 1959, a building committee was named during the first Quarterly Conference, and it proceeded with plans to build a much-needed education building adjoining the "old sanctuary." This building was

completed by the end of 1959, and the first Sunday School classes were held there in January, 1960. The building, complete with air-conditioning and furniture, was built at a cost of \$27,000. Tuckston was now a church growing beyond expectation, and the need for a larger sanctuary was apparent. On April 25, 1965, a called session of the Quarterly Conference took place to consider a preliminary study presented by a Sanctuary Planning Committee. The committee's recommendations were accepted.

On December 12, 1965, a conference was called to discuss the need to build a new parsonage before building a new church. The congregation voted to build a new parsonage. Funds were raised, and on September 11, 1966, the parsonage was dedicated. On this same day in September a Quarterly Conference voted to build a new sanctuary and fellowship hall, and in May of 1967, ground-breaking services were held. The new building was completed in December of 1969 at a cost of \$200,000, and consecration services were held on January 28, 1968.

The growth that took place during the mid and late 1960s was not in buildings alone. Under the leadership of Rev. Paul Hanna and Rev. Malone Dodson, the membership increased and spiritual growth was evidenced in community service. Church records show that during the 1968 conference year 62 new members were added to the church rolls bringing the total membership to 484. By the end of the 1969 conference year the membership was 532, and the growing Sunday School averaged about 200 each Sunday. The church had an excellent choir of some 35 voices and two children's choirs under the direction of Thomas Camp. The Vacation Bible School had 65 children in attendance, and a summer program was available to all children in grades one through twelve. A week-day kindergarten and nursery program had 42 kindergarten and 56 nursery children in the program. An active men's club of 35 members and a W.S.C.S. of 60 ladies were both strong groups in the church. In the words of Rev. Dodson, "Doing things together, in the name of Christ, is the purpose of our work," and surely Tuckston must have been doing HIS work during this period of time.

There has not been any intent to leave out of this brief history any period of time in the church life, any group or committee, or any person who may have made some outstanding contribution to Tuckston Church; unfortunately records of our past are hard to find, and much of our history has been lost with the passing of members long since gone from us. Many have served in the Lord's work, and all things are known to Him, if no longer to us.

Tuckston Church in the 1960s and 1970s was blessed with very good and adequately sized facilities, a full-time minister, a dedicated staff, and a growing membership of willing workers. A church bulletin dated November 8, 1970, stated "Since 1959, the Education Building had been completed, three more acres of land have been purchased, we have built a new parsonage, sanctuary, and fellowship hall, built tennis courts, paved a parking lot and remodeled "the old fellowship hall for class rooms." What great progress!

The early and mid 1970s brought Tuckston many dedicated and talented people. Rev. Marcus Martin, assisted by David Agnew, and Rev. James Turner were the pastors during this time. The music program was in the capable hands of Dr. Egbert Ennulat, Brenda Arrington, and Tom Granum. In 1973, a Kawai Grand Piano was purchased by the church. This was a major investment for the church of some \$2,500.00, but it has proved to have been a wise investment. Bill Arrington chaired the committee that purchased this instrument and ten years later would chair the committee to purchase a new organ for the sanctuary.

Church records show that in the mid 1970s there was a very active Senior Citizen program. There was also an active MYF (youth) program under the direction of Mrs. Ruth Caproni. Tom Granum left Tuckston in the spring of 1977, and was succeeded by Mrs. Suzanne O'Keefe as director of music. Mrs. Brenda Arrington Poss served as organist and assistant music director, and many fine singers filled the choir loft each Sunday. If time and space permitted, pages could be written about the dedication, energy and excitement these people put into the Tuckston music program over the next ten years. Their contributions are measured not only in their work but in the love we have for them.

Church news in the 1970s was much the same as it is today. The Youth Program, MYF and Youth Choir, were active. Men's fellowship, Senior Citizens, Circles, committee meetings, family night suppers, choir practice, prayer vigil, UMW, and many more activities make up the announcements in the Sunday bulletins. In February 1978, the Rev. Mike Henderson joined the staff as Youth Minister, and in July the

Rev. Robert C. Gillespie became the pastor at Tuckston. This was a busy summer at Tuckston with a large Vacation Bible School, a men's retreat to Rock Eagle to hear Dr. Cecil Myers and Rick Bonfim preach and sing, and several weddings among the church family.

In the fall of 1979, Mike Henderson returned to school and a student pastoral appointment; in June of 1980, Rev. Art Graves was appointed as Tuckston's first Associate Pastor. Underway were fresh and exciting programs such as Mountain T.O.P., Neighborhood Care Groups, Bell Choir, Bethel Bible Study, and Haiti Work Mission showing up in the "Tuckston Newsletter."

Tuckston was indeed growing and, as in the past, was a positive force in the community which itself was also showing signs of growth. In 1980, a sign of Tuckston's influence in the community became evident when yet another young man who grew up in the Church answered the call to the ministry. Wayne Smith received his first appointment that year. In August of 1982, a contract was signed with the Wickes Organ Company for the purchase and installation of a twelve rank pipe organ. The cost of the instrument and installation was approximately \$55,000, and all the funds were raised by the time the organ was dedicated on Easter Sunday, 1983. In December 1984, the outside Carillon Chimes and the organ chimes were dedicated. These beautiful chimes were given by the Flanagan and Crumbley families in memory of Mr. Hubert L. Flanagan, Sr.

Building programs and financial campaigns to pay for them are a necessary part of any growing church. The project that began in 1967 to build the new sanctuary and fellowship hall ended, on time, in February 1987 when the mortgage was paid off. Two members of the original building committee were present to share with the congregation in the burning of the "paid-off" mortgage; they were Dr Fayette McElhannon and Mr. Ted Johnson.

In January of 1987, Rev. Gillespie was assigned to a church in the Atlanta metro area, and his successor was the Rev. Hoyt Jenkins. Rev. Art Graves continued as the Associate Pastor, Mrs. O'Keefe as Director of Music, and Mrs. Brenda Poss as organist. Our beloved Choir Director Suzanne O'Keefe passed away January 28, 1987. She is missed and will be remembered for her untiring efforts in developing Tuckston's music program. After her death, Dana Brooks became Minister of Music in July, 1987.

For several years, there had been a move in the church to build much needed space for Sunday School rooms and recreation space. One proposal, which took in a more long range view, was presented to the congregation in 1984, but was voted down as being too expensive and not meeting the immediate needs. A second proposal was presented to the congregation and was approved in September, 1987. The building committee, chaired by Dr. Bob Lewis, was authorized to begin construction on the \$500,000 Family Life Center, and the hopes and dreams of the Tuckston congregation began to take shape.

Another important change took place at Tuckston in 1987: the beginning of the Tuckston (preschool) Learning Center, which is under the supervision of Director Anne Jones and Head Teacher Suzie Nutter. This center is considered a great asset not only to Tuckston but also to the community in general.

The year of 1988 brought changes to Tuckston Church. Both Rev. Hoyt Jenkins and Rev. Art Graves were moved to new pastoral assignments. Our new pastors are Rev. James Sanders, Senior Pastor, and Rev. Bill Jackson, Associate Pastor. We also lost our organist Brenda Arrington Poss, who had served over 20 years in the music ministry of Tuckston. Brenda moved to a new position with another church but is still with us in our hearts. Our new church organist is Mrs. Nancy Lough, who is no stranger to Tuckston having served a number of years as substitute organist. Our minister of music, Dana Brooks, accepted a position in another Methodist church in the fall of 1988. Carey Huddelston came as music director but after several months moved to another position. We are now proud to have Larry McLure as Music Director. Larry is well known for his music program at Cedar Shoals High School and for the work he has done in other community churches.

The year 1989, is a very special year, our 100th birthday, in the life of Tuckston and calls for much thanksgiving and celebration. The Centennial theme is "Memories of the Past . . . Challenges of the Future." Our first Centennial celebration was the completion of our Family Life Center and its formal consecration on March 5, 1989. The service was conducted by Bishop Ernest A. Fitzgerald. The Tuckston youth programs which have been a vital ministry over the years will no doubt be given added support by the addition of the Family Life Center. On May 21, 1989, a special Sunday School Sunday

was held to commemorate the organizing of that small community Sunday School in 1889, which would become the foundation for Tuckston Methodist Church. Classes were asked to combine and enjoy the teaching of guest teachers, who were Dr. Dilmus Blackmon, Mr. Doug McLaughlin, and Rev. Coy Hinton.

Our Centennial celebration continued with a great weekend of events on October 13 - 15. On the 13th an old-fashioned worship service was held with the Rev. Marion Sherrill, a former pastor, preaching the sermon. On the 14th a covered-dish supper and an entertaining program of drama, music, and interviews was held in the Family Life Center. On the morning of the 15th, the pastor preached a Homecoming sermon, and the evening service began a three day revival service with the Rev. Grady Wigley as guest preacher. The year was closed out with an "Old-fashioned Christmas" celebrating the birth of our Lord, a Christmas party for the children, a time for placing our gifts under the tree for those less fortunate than we are, and a yule log song fest. What a grand year for Tuckston! There have been many great years since our humble beginning in 1889 as a small interdenominational Sunday School. Today, we are still a growing and caring congregation with some 940 members ready to begin our second hundred years of service to our Lord and our community.

(Notes taken from bulletin, November 10, 1991) Dedication Service - "On the occasion of the renovation of Tuckston United Methodist Church's original sanctuary."

"In January 1968, the completion of the new sanctuary and fellowship hall brought to an end the regular use of the sanctuary portion of the church that had served the community for more than 60 years. For the next 22 years the old sanctuary was used as a 'youth center' and for Sunday School rooms, the other rooms of the church continuing in use for Sunday School rooms.

For several years many members of Tuckston have wanted the old sanctuary returned to use as an active chapel. In the fall of 1989, the cost of making necessary repairs was presented to the Board of Trustees; their approval was given in early 1990. In March 1990, the Administrative Board approved the project, appointed a working committee, and gave it the authority to raise \$20,000 outside of the regular church budget. The necessary funds were raised, and in February 1991, a contract was let to S & W Development Company. Both physical labor and generous contributions by church members made the restoration possible, and on November 10, 1991, a dedication service was held in the 'new chapel.'

From the 1991 service

Beloved in the Lord, we rejoice that God put it into the hearts of his people many years ago to build this house to the glory of his name. We further rejoice that in our time he has moved his people to restore and beautify this hallowed place that it may continue as a room for divine worship. Let us therefore, here assembled, solemnly rededicate this house to the continued worship of Almighty God and the service of persons.

Sunday, December 14, 1997 - Rededication Service on the occasion of the 100th year anniversary of the original Tuckston United Methodist Church building.

On this day the congregation of Tuckston United Methodist lift up the memories of our church's original sanctuary and rededicated it once again as the Tuckston Chapel for the continued worship of Almighty God and the service of all persons. Today our Chapel is used for weddings, special services, and Christmas Eve Communion Services.

We have gathered pictures and bulletins, postcards and deeds reminding us all that Tuckston has always been more than just a building, but a faith family. On display was a model of our chapel as it is today made by Mrs. Virginia Myers.

During our morning worship service Rev. Herbert Owen led us in the blessing and rededication of the Tuckston United Methodist Chapel