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Growth Of Religion In Area

Church Continues To Distinguish

The story of Cleveland county's past reads like a fairy tale of growth, progress, and success. In no field has the growth been more noticeable than in development of the religious denominations and the ever-widening influence of religion in the community.

Like Jack's beanstalk the religious activities began from a seed of religious gatherings on the banks of streams and in groves. Carefully nurtured it has grown upward and upward to become magnificent churches organized to give guidance in all phases of human activity. And, like Jack, the people have found that this powerful and wonderful plant which they have prized and cultivated has been their help in time of trouble and the means by which they have been able to progress and succeed.

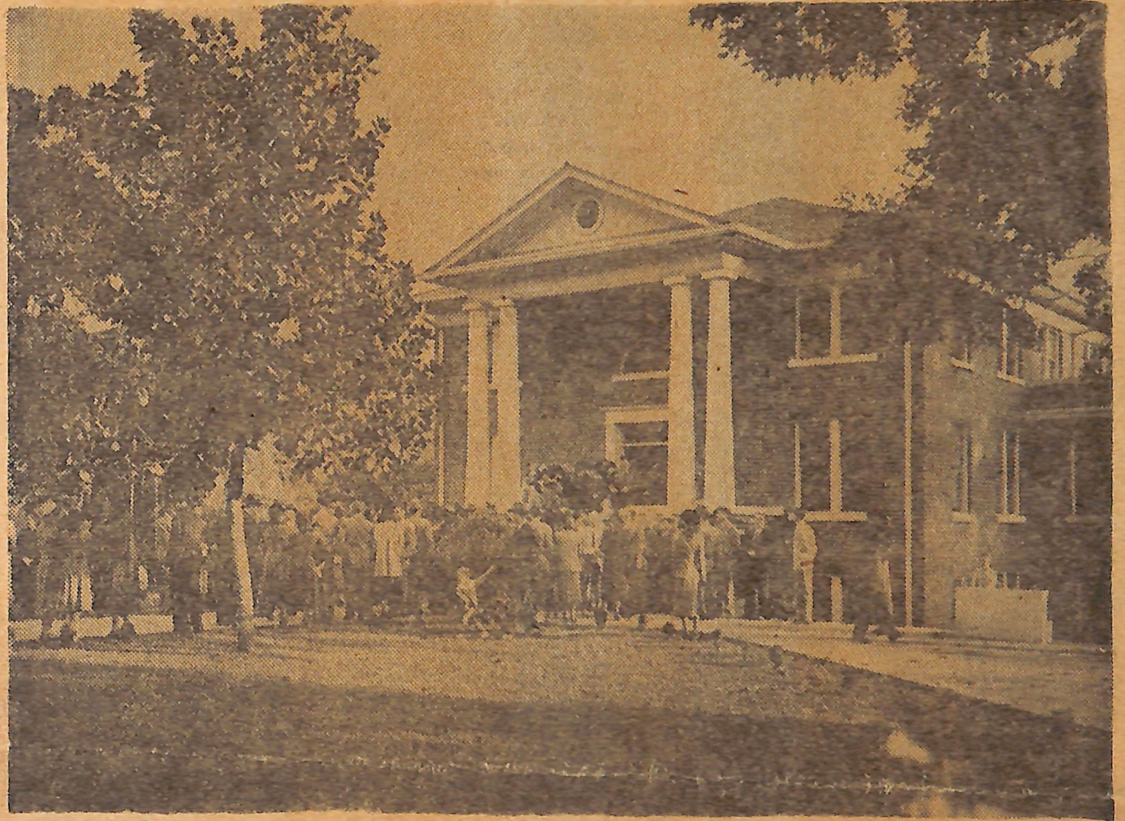
IN EARLIEST DAYS

The first religious worship in this area was held in the homes of religious persons and outdoors under the trees. Few records of these early times were kept. The ministers were the traveling ones who rode great distances on horseback to bring the Word of God to the people. There was no regular program for services. Even before the Revolutionary war, however, these religious services were held and various denominational groups had already become organized. The ARP church in Cleveland county, for instance, traces its beginning back to 1750 when a group of their ancestors fled Pennsylvania because of Indian attacks and settled on the slopes of Kings Mountain.

The oldest known organized evangelical church in Cleveland county is Shiloh Presbyterian church in Grover. The exact date of its founding is unknown but records show that it was in existence prior to the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780. Both Col. Benjamin Cleveland for whom the county was named and Col. Isaac Shelby for whom the county seat was named were elders in the Presbyterian church in their respective areas. The first church established by the Baptists in the county was at Sandy Run in 1788. The Pisgah ARP church near Kings Mountain was also established right after the Revolutionary war. Deeds show that the Zion Baptist church in No. 6 township existed in 1814, and Kadesh Methodist church was founded in 1833.

ASBURY HERE

Centers of worship prior to 1840, however, were rare. Services, for the most part, were confined to camp meetings and to services held in the homes or in public places by the circuit-riding ministers. The diary of Francis Asbury, first Methodist bishop to be consecrated in America, reveals much about religious activities in this section during the period prior to 1800. He preached in Cleveland, Lincoln, Rutherford and Burke counties at various times, stayed at the homes of his



A RURAL CHURCH—Shown is one of the many modern brick churches which reflect the sturdy

Christian devotion of Cleveland's countryside. (Hord photo).

church members, and traveled from meeting to meeting on horseback. He traveled about 6,000 miles a year, delivered from 300 to 500 sermons in that time, carried on a voluminous correspondence with his people, and was in charge of stationing about 300 preachers.

According to popular belief, these early days marked the time when religion was at a peak of fiery fervor, descendants of which have let their fire decidedly dwindle. Another impression is given, however, by Bishop Asbury who wrote while preaching supposedly in this section: "This country improves in cultivation, wickedness, stills, and mills; a prophet of strong drink would be more acceptable to many of these people . . ."

The first church built in Shelby was a wooden structure built by the Methodists in 1844 on the site where the present county jail now stands. The Rev. W. M. Kerr was the first pastor. The Baptists built a church in Shelby in 1847. The First Baptist church, located on its present site on North LaFayette street was then known as the Meetinghouse. In 1858 the Shelby Presbyterian church was organized. (They had formerly held their services in an old academy building and at the courthouse). Reportedly, the Rev. Jesse Rankin organized the church with nine charter members. Although the Episcopal parish was organized in that same year by the Rev. C. T. Bland, it was not until 1860 that the Episcopalians built a center of worship at the corners of South LaFayette and Graham streets. At that time there were 17 members. They had been holding services as early as 1842. St. Luke's Lutheran church in the northeast part of the county was organized

in 1895, but this denomination did not have a church in Shelby until 1923 with the organization of the Ascension Lutheran church with 13 charter members. It was not until 1937 that a Catholic church was erected in the county, St. Mary's, in Shelby. There are records, however, of Catholic services held in the county as early as 1884.

ARP AT KINGS MOUNTAIN

In 1876 the first ARP church in Kings Mountain was founded. The first pastor was Dr. E. E. Boyce. The present pastor is the Rev. W. L. Pressley. The oldest church of the Lutheran denomination is in Kings Mountain, St. Matthews Evangelical church, the cornerstone for which was laid in 1878. The Rev. J. L. Peterson held the first services for the 10 charter members and became their pastor. The Rev. W. H. Stender is now pastor. The first Presbyterian church in Kings Mountain was organized in 1884 with 18 members. The only other Presbyterian church in the county is at Duncan's Creek.

Since the time of these early churches, the people have continued to build places of worship and to increase their membership. There are now more than 100 churches in Cleveland county, approximately half of which are Baptist. The largest church of any denomination in Cleveland county is the First Baptist church in Shelby which has a membership of about 2600. Central Methodist church, Shelby, is second with a membership of approximately 1500. The evidence of growth, however, is found in churches of all denominations. The Shelby Presbyterian church, which began with nine charter members, now has a membership of 525. The Kings Mountain Presbyterian church, of which

the Rev. P. D. Patrick is minister, has increased from the original 18 members to 375 holding membership. The Episcopalians have grown from 17 to 60 church members. The Lutheran church in Shelby, which had 13 charter members only 25 years ago, now has 200 members. There are about 80 members of St. Mary's Catholic church.

IMPROVE FACILITIES

With the growth in membership and number of churches has come improvement in church facilities. The little churches of early days which were constructed from logs and, later, from hand-hewn timber have been replaced by beautiful edifices of brick and stone. They have grown from small one-room buildings into churches with rooms for graded Sunday schools, offices and studies for the ministers and their helpers, and space for guided recreation and wholesome social activity for the church members. Plans have been made and executed to make churches not only sacred places but beautiful places. Carpets have been laid, and stained-glass windows added. The church yards have been artistically landscaped. The church buildings have been renovated and enlarged. The Ascension Lutheran church is now planning an additional building for recreation and worship. More religious music is now possible in the church worship, because in several churches pipe organs have been installed. Increasing efforts are made to enable separate classes in Sunday schools to have pianos so that music can become a more vital part of worship.

AT THE CHURCHES

The First Baptist church, of which the Rev. Harlan Harris is minister, has the Women's Missionary Society

Quish With Its Services

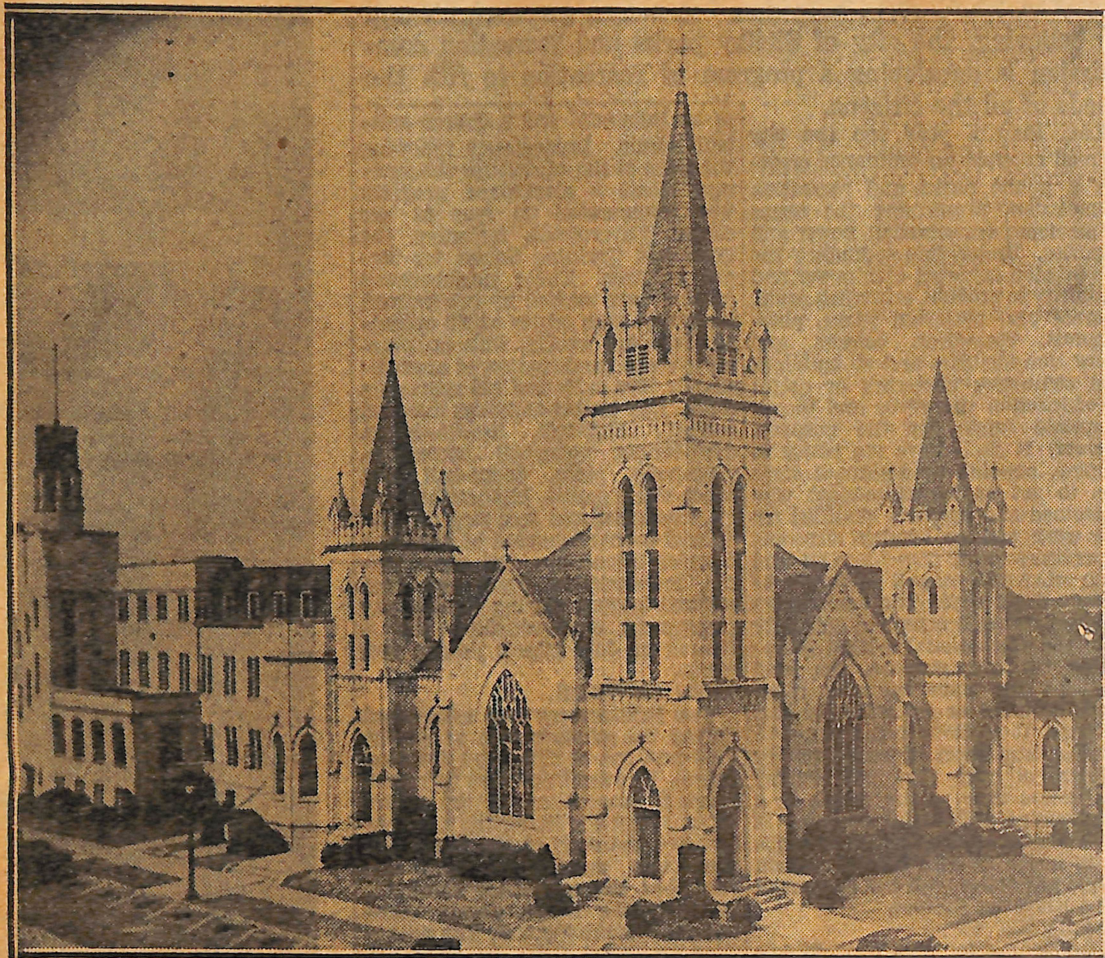
headed by Mrs. Fred Swift; the Baptist Training Union for youth, superintended by Wilbur Wilson who is also head of the Sunday school; the Veterans Brotherhood of which O. V. Hamrick, Jr., is president; and four Scout troops. O. M. Mull is chairman of the Board of Deacons. The Baptists of Cleveland county may also point with pride to Gardner-Webb college at Boiling Springs, an educational institution which owes its life to the generous hearts and unceasing labors of the Cleveland county Baptists and those interested in their work.

At Central Methodist church, where the Rev. W. A. Kale is pastor, Mrs. Judd Jones heads the Women's Society of Christian Service. The two Wesleyan Service Guilds are headed by Miss Elizabeth Roberts and Mrs. Morgan Lee Ivester. J. Horace Grigg is chairman of the senior board of Stewards, and Russell Laughridge is chairman of the junior board of Stewards. William M. Ficklen is superintendent of the Sunday school. Other organizations include the Young Adult Fellowship, headed by Bill Palmer, the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and the Scout work. This past year the Methodist church made the work with Scouting an official part of the church program. Central church also claims to have the most famous Bible class in the state—the Hoey Bible class, named for its teacher, Senator Clyde R. Hoey. These organizations are characteristic of most of the Methodist churches in the county, all of which are growing and increasing their work and services for the community.

Mrs. E. L. Kemper heads the Sunday school for the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, and Mrs. William P. Gheen is president of the Women's auxiliary. J. T. Gheen is warden of the church. The church has no minister at present, but members A. S. Roebuck and E. L. Kemper are conducting the regular services.

The Rev. J. D. Sheppard is now pastor of the Ascension Lutheran church, a position he has had for almost six years. Scout work is also an official part of the Lutheran work. The Lutheran young people have a meeting held on Sunday afternoon, and the Children of the Church, supervised by Mrs. Norman Dixon, meet once a month. The general president of the Women of the Church is Mrs. J. D. Sheppard, assisted by Mrs. P. V. Apple and Mrs. Paul Setzer. The Brotherhood, which meets monthly, is headed by Norman Dixon.

For the past two years Father Adler has been priest at St. Mary's Catholic church. Sisters from the Academy of the Sacred Heart in



LARGEST CHURCH — The many-spired First Baptist Church of Shelby is one of the state's

largest. It contains more than 100 rooms and accommodates a membership of 2300.

Belmont teach the children the catechisms on Saturday mornings. Miss Eva Faudell is head of the altar society. Social circle meetings are held in the homes of members once a month.

The Rev. Walter Brown has been minister of the Shelby Presbyterian church for the past four and one-half years. The church organizations include the Women of the Church of which Mrs. Herman Best is president; the Men of the Church, headed by Robert Barnett; the Young Adult Organization with J. L. Raymer as president; and the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship which Mrs. T. C. Stamey sponsors. Herman Best is superintendent of the Sunday school.

Throughout its growth and expansion the church in Cleveland county has continued to be the leader of thought among the people and the producer of great

religious and lay leaders. It has added another field to its sphere of service: it has become a leader in lay activities as well.

PROMINENT PLACE

Cleveland county is known throughout North Carolina for its religion and politics: it is known as "an excellent community of citizens." A person driving through Shelby and Kings Mountain immediately notices the large number of churches and the prominent places, materially, which they occupy in the community. The churches of the county are considered among the most beautiful in the state.

A resident of Cleveland county knows the prominent place which the church has in the hearts and everyday lives of the citizens. A minister of any denomination claims the respect, the courtesy, and the

friendship of all. What man is more honored in the county than the Rev. John W. Suttle, dean of the Baptist ministers, whom all the denominations claim as a man of God? No man or woman has yet risen to leadership in Cleveland county who did not receive his childhood training in the church and remain faithful and active in Christian service to the day of his death. Our outstanding men of business have always been leaders in the church of their denomination; our prominent women have been prominent in the church. They rose and are rising to places of trust and responsibility because the people, judging by their religious standards, have deemed them worthy; they are worthy because they have been trained in and continue to study the teachings of religion.