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First Baptist Church Anniversary Celebrations

First Baptist Church (Shelby, NC)

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The Shelby Star

Cleveland County's Home Newspaper Since 1894

THURSDAY, June 19, 1997

First Baptist Church celebrating 150 years with special service

CASSIE TARPLEY
Star Staff Writer

SHELBY — They've been scrubbing the floors, painting the walls and even laying new carpet.

Company's coming, and for a grand occasion.

First Baptist Church of Shelby is celebrating its sesquicentennial — that's 150 years of history — and everyone is invited.

A capacity crowd is expected at a special worship service Sunday beginning at 10:30 a.m.

The service will be followed by a fellowship meal equal to the occasion — the block of Lafayette Street on the church's west side will be roped off for "dinner on the grounds."

Bells were ringing today as the chimes tolled once for each of First Baptist's 150 years.

Music for the Sunday service includes a brass quintet, and a specially commissioned anthem by Shelby native and professional musician Mark Cabaniss. The work, titled "Anthem of Faithfulness," will be sung by the sanctuary choir.

Other singers will be church soloist Gina McWhirter, and five returning members of "The Generation," a women's ensemble formed in the late 1960s — Joann Yates Swartz, Carol Smith Greer, Susan McDonald, Debbie Rogers and accompanist Patty McBrayer.

Special guests will participate in a processional at the beginning of the service.

Months of preparation and a \$1 million renovation have prepared the church to welcome former members and staffers from as far away as Texas, said church historian Mary Lou Causby, chairperson of the Sesquicentennial Committee.

"We started planning with a breakfast brainstorming session 19 months ago," said Causby. "We wanted to get all the people interested in it."

Causby and fellow workers Rush Hamrick Jr., Jackie Davis, Becky Hamrick and Genny Spears met monthly since January 1996 planning, preparing, inviting and attending to the smallest details to highlight the rich history of the First Baptist congregation.

"The whole of 1997 is our celebratory year," said Causby, "and our theme is 'Foundation, Faith and Future.'"

Members' interest has been stirred with little doses of history in the weekly bulletin and during Sunday services.

In the five weeks leading up to celebration day, committee members have capsuled 25-year spans in five-minute "historical moments."

To set the stage for her reminiscence of the 1847 to 1872 era, Causby donned her great-grandmother Phoebe Hamrick's dress. The Civil War era widow's dress is part of the permanent collection in the historical room of the church.

A new pictorial directory, planned for release June 22, will not be ready until later this summer. It will feature group photos of more than 150 members who have been part of First Baptist for 50 or more years.

First Baptist Church was organized June 19, 1847, with the Rev. James Milton Webb as the first of 34 pastors.

It was the year Shelby's charter was repealed. Cleveland County was barely six years old, and James K. Polk from Pineville was president of the United States.

If founders had followed county direction

☆ Please see CHURCH/3A



Lee McLeod/The Shelby Star

Jackie Davis, donned in period costume, dresses a mannequin in Causby's great-grandmother's 1800s-style dress in the memorabilia room at First Baptist Church.

Church

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and built on donated land, the church would be where Shelby Savings Bank now stands.

But the leaders had different ideas and the church has stood in three different structures — where it stands now at Lafayette and Sumter streets for its entire life.

The first one-room structure, the 1889 building — whose poor construction led to its destruction 21 years later — and the present semi-Gothic structure with French and English influences are featured on a commemorative print available for framing.

Much of the church's history is preserved in a 1969 publication, *A History of First Baptist Church*. Causby's father, Hubbard Hamrick, was the book's historian.

The Rev. Robert Canoy, pastor since March 2, will deliver Sunday's sermon. Canoy said celebrating the church's 150 years with less than 150 days' experience here is no problem for him.

"There's some objectivity in newness," he said. "The longer you're here, sometimes you can lose that objectivity."

During the interviews process earlier this year, Canoy said, "I had a chance to come to look, to listen and to hear people describe the past, the pre-

sent and where they wanted to go in the future.

"Based on the foundation of the past, we'll set a course for the future — not a dramatic new course — and I'll be addressing that in my sermon Sunday."

Canoy will preach on "Running the Future Race."