

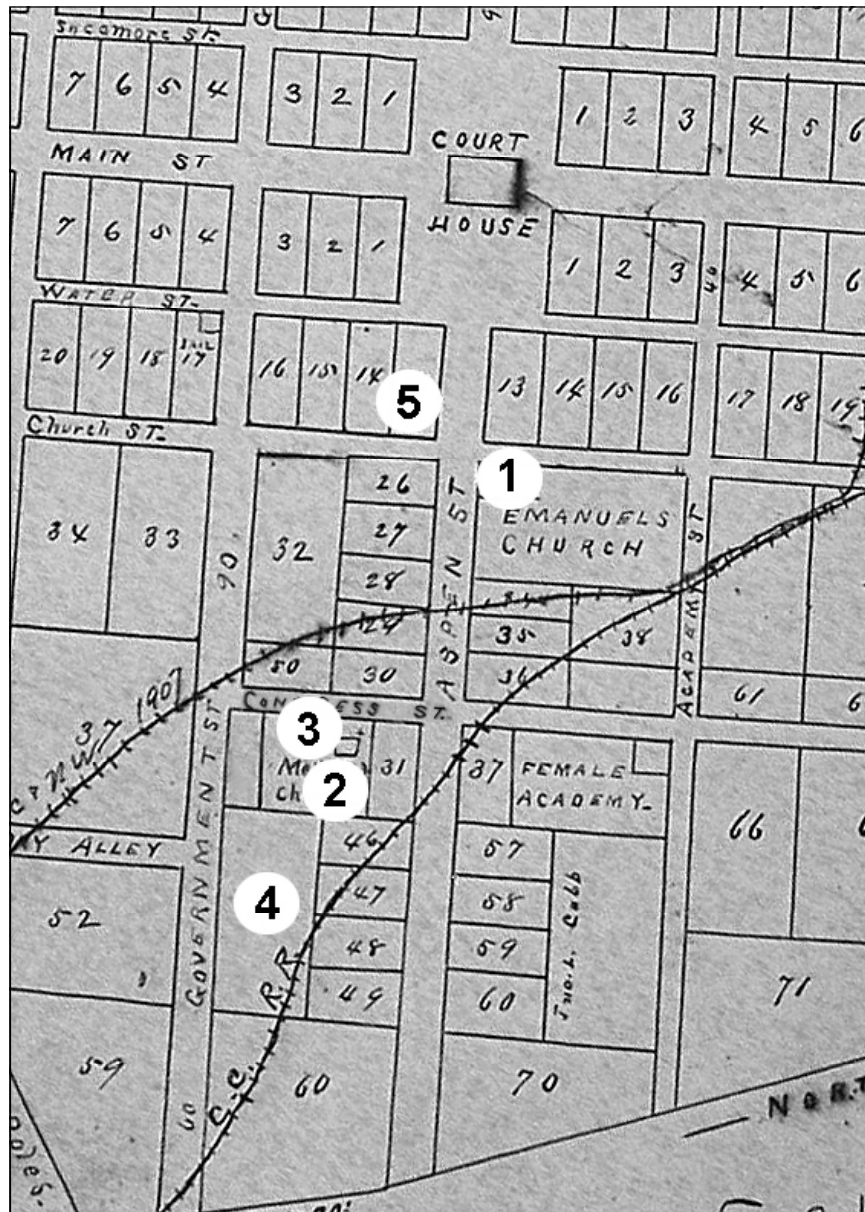
2

Church Buildings

In the course of its history the congregation of what is now First United Methodist Church has erected three houses of worship in Lincolnton. The first church was started between 1816 and 1822, on a lot one block deep, fronting on the west side of South Aspen Street, on the south side of West Congress Street and on the east side of South Government Street in the southwest section of town.

Later construction of the railroad cut off the southeast corner of the lot. This first building was a wooden structure, painted white. It was situated near the southern boundary of the lot about 100 feet west of Aspen Street. There are a number of graves in that area now, but none of the death dates are prior to 1880, so the building apparently stood for a number of years after the second church was erected, and perhaps served for Sunday school purposes. The name was Bethel, and it was referred to in conference records as "Bethel at Lincolnton," to distinguish it from another Bethel on the Lincoln Circuit near Denver.

Its first minister, the Reverend James Hill, who had married and settled in Lincoln County, presented the first sermon in the new church. He, along with others, was assigned to the Lincoln Circuit from 1815 to 1828, after having served other circuits in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. He died in 1828 and is buried in the cemetery in the first church site. More about Rev. Hill may be found in Chapter 3.



This map, based on a small portion of a map of Lincoln drawn in the year 1900 by Alfred Nixon, shows the approximate location of church sites in south Lincoln: 1. the Old White Church; 2. the original frame Methodist church; 3. the brick Methodist church completed in 1862; 4. the old Methodist cemetery; 5. location of the present Emmanuel Lutheran Church.

The Red Brick Church

To accommodate continued growth, and because of the construction of the railroad over the southeast corner of the property near the original church, a new and more permanent building was begun on March 27, 1856, and completed in 1862. The church was near West Congress facing South Aspen Street, north of the original church.

According to an article by Col. W. A. Fair, Pinkney Shidal contracted the building for \$3,280, to be “of the very best material, brick, stone and wood of the best heart pine.” It was a red brick structure, larger than the first, with a gallery or balcony on the south, east and north sides for second story seating. A bell tower over the narthex was added in 1896.

It was called “Trinity” for many years. Later, in the late 1890s the records refer to the “Lincolnton Church” although no name change records have been found.



This is the second building erected by Lincolnton Methodists, located on South Aspen at Congress Street. It was completed in 1862 and was used until the present building on East Main Street was built in 1920. Photo courtesy of the Lincoln County Museum and Historical Association.

Trustees for the new church were Samuel Lander, J. E. Jenkins, J. E. Boger, Lawson H. Kistler and C. Blackburn. The building committee included Samuel Lander, J. E. Jenkins, J. E. Boger, H. W. Abernethy and M. H. Michael.

It would be more than 30 years before members dedicated their new building. The Book of Discipline states, "Before any church-owned building is formally dedicated, all indebtedness against the same shall be discharged" (§2545). This would indicate that considerable time lapsed while the loan was being repaid. The dedication service was held on Sunday, July 1, 1894. The Rev. J. J. Renn, presiding elder of the Shelby District, delivered the sermon.

Move to Main Street

In a special Quarterly Conference on May 18, 1838, visionaries in the church were planning for growth and expansion, and resolved that "the church in the suburbs of Lincolnton be moved to some convenient lot in town for the accommodation of our people and those who may attend our church, as soon as a suitable lot may be



The Vardry Alexander McBee house at East Main and Academy Streets, torn down in 1917 to make way for the future Methodist church building. The house had stood on the corner about 100 years

obtained...” (It is interesting that the existing church at that time, just south of Congress Street, would be considered “suburban.”)

But in 1856 the new red brick church was built on South Aspen Street, and the 1838 resolution was all but forgotten until October 11, 1915, when a special Quarterly Conference voted to purchase the Rudisill property (then known as the Vardry McBee property) on East Main Street, for \$9,000. The property was bounded on the south by East Main Street, on the west by Academy Street, on the north by Sycamore Street and on the east by the railroad tracks. The purchase was consummated on October 27, 1915, and is recorded in Deed Book 117 page 401.

It was decided that the church would retain only the western portion of the tract, and the eastern portion was subdivided and sold. In a Quarterly Conference on February 15, 1917, a committee consisting of Pastor Z. Paris, C. A. Jonas, J. L. Thompson, W. M. Sherrill, Raymond Browning, Plato Miller and C. D. Thompson was authorized to erect a new church building. The same year, to increase space available for the church, a fifteen-foot lot at the southeast corner



First United Methodist Church as it appears today

was repurchased from J. E. Kale. That transaction may be found in deed Book 125, page 442.

Construction of the new First Methodist Church was part of a building boom in Lincolnton, driven by a revival of community pride and new financial ability following the end of World War I. Among the new structures were Emanuel United Church of Christ in 1913, First Presbyterian in 1917, Emmanuel Lutheran Church and First Methodist in 1920, First Baptist in 1921, and the beautiful Grecian Lincoln County Courthouse in 1922.



Construction underway

The building is laid out in a modified square, with the altar, pulpit and choir areas in one corner of the sanctuary, the entrance and vestibule in the opposite corner. The pews are arranged on a slightly inclined floor in a radial manner, divided by two aisles, with a second story balcony. This was intended to enable the preacher, choir and congregation to better see and hear each other. A third story room was in the dome

Additionally, the plan for First Methodist provides two floors of rooms behind the choir area, and a full basement with rooms being about half above and half below ground.

The *Lincoln County News* of September 15, 1919, reported that “The excavating for the new Methodist Church building has been completed and the first brick was laid this morning at 8 o’clock. A large number of the Methodist congregation and other citizens gathered at the church lot this morning to witness the laying of the first brick. Short exercises were conducted by the pastor, Rev. D. M. Litaker, consisting of scripture reading and a short prayer. The large number of citizens present were each invited to get a brick from the pile on the street, and lay same in the foundation...”

It is believed that Jane Goode Ward, while a babe in arms, was one of the few recent church members who attended that ceremony.

In another article published October 9, 1919, the *Lincoln County News* provided a detailed description of the building then being erected. It noted that the building would include 30 Sunday school classrooms with average seating of 60 persons per room. Six rooms in the church were to have fireplaces.

Among some of the remaining original documents of the church is a hand signed subscription list of the first group of contributors to the new undertaking: Charles A. Jonas, Plato Miller, R. A. Houser, Lineberger Bros., J. E. Kale, W. C. Asbury, Chas. E. Robinson. H. A. Jonas, R. C. Goode, F. P. Barkley, G. V. Wilson, W. M. Sherrill, Kemp B. Nixon, S. W. McLean, C. V. Tilson, L. A. Howard, H. B. Camp, T. H. Thompson, I. R. Self, M. M. Rudisill, G. L. Clendenin, R. J. Sifford, J. L. Thompson and J. M. McLellan. While no contract for the original building has been found, in his article Col. W. A. Fair reported the price was approximately \$86,000. The general price range can be approached by a contract in the church records for the purchase of all of the interior sanctuary furnishings including the pulpit, tables, chairs, railings, and seating which were purchased from American Seating Company, and shipped by rail from Chicago, Ill., at a price of \$3,150, which included an allowance for hiring installation locally.

Construction proceeded quickly, and by January the three-ton granite columns at the front of the church were being placed on their foundation.

As work progressed on the new building, its imposing appearance was the subject of much interest in the community. The large dome on top drew special attention. The *Lincoln County News* of January 8, 1920, quoted one puzzled observer who commented, "Well, it looks like a church, and it is a church, but I can't understand why they are putting a water tank on top of it."

One of the real mysteries of the church is who made the six tall stained glass windows in the sanctuary, which are clearly irreplaceable at any cost. These might well have been imported from England or Italy, but no records have been found. More on the windows may be found in Chapter 9.

By the end of July 1920 the building was completed. On Sunday, August 1, the first service was held in the new sanctuary. Bishop U. V. W. Darlington preached the first sermon. A number of former pastors and members were in the pews. The *Lincoln County News* estimated that as many as 1,200 people attended the service.

In 1994 the Main Street building, as well as the old cemetery, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Church Postcards

Like many churches, Lincolnton's First Methodist had postcards printed showing off its new building. An item in the *Lincoln County News* in April 1921 informed readers the cards could be purchased for five cents each from Mrs. Plato Miller, Mrs. B. C. Lineberger or Mrs. J. T. Perkins. Elsewhere on the page another item quoted the reaction of a man in New York upon receiving one of the cards. He called the church "...quite pretty, very unique in design," adding, "I should think one ought to worship there quite to his satisfaction..."



One of several postcards picturing the church, this is believed to be the one published in 1921. Another card (not pictured) was printed in the 1950s. Note the caption on this card is "First M. E. Church, South."

Old Church Sold

On July 20, 1923, the old red brick church building and the eastern portion of the lot on which it was situated were sold to E. A. Huffstetler for \$3,500. The deed may be found in Book 149, page 145, Lincoln County Public Registry.

It is said that the church pastor, J. T. Mangum, insisted the sale proceeds be applied to reduce or retire the debt on the new East Main Street structure during his tenure. His goal was achieved, for on Sunday, September 16, 1923, Pastor Mangum announced to the congregation that the debt had been paid in full. The dedication of the new building was held the following Sunday, September 23. Bishop Collins Denny delivered the dedicatory sermon.

After the sale of the old church property, a service station was erected in the northeast corner of the lot, and the old church building was rented for use as a machine shop.

Then, on April 9, 1944, the trustees were authorized to reacquire the old church building and lot, with the exception of the filling station and lot at the east end of the original lot, for \$2,600. At the same time, a cemetery fund was established “to beautify the old church property when the war [World War II] is over.”

In 1963 the old red brick church building was considered to be hazardous, and was torn down. During the demolition, wood from one of the beams was saved and made into a gavel for the Women’s Society. More about the gavel may be found in Chapter 6.

In 1967, Dorothy Crowell, Frank Crowell and C. D. Stroup Sr. made a listing of gravestones in the old cemetery (see Appendix D). Mrs. Crowell wrote: “The broken tombstones have been repaired. A number of graves were marked only by fieldstones, with no markings, and a number of the bodies and headstones had been moved by their descendants to new locations in Hollybrook Cemetery after it was established in 1905.”

In 1998 the N.C. Highway Commission acquired the filling station lot and demolished that building in the process of constructing new railroad bridges over Congress and Aspen Streets. The old church

lot is now protected by a chain link fence and is maintained by the men of the church.

The First Educational Building

At a quarterly conference on May 31, 1936, during the pastorate of Rev. Leland Stanford, church leaders agreed that additional Sunday school classrooms should be built. The two story brick building, on the west side of the church property, was designed by Charlotte architect J. M. McMichael. The cost was approximately \$8,000. McMichael, a leading church architect of that period, had previously designed the First Baptist Church in Charlotte, now a part of the Spirit Square arts complex, and numerous other imposing church buildings.

The building committee was B. J. Ramsaur, Plato Miller, S. M. Roper, M. H. Hoyle, M. H. Cline, B. C. Lineberger and C. R. Jonas.



The first educational building, erected in 1936, now called “the Middle Building.”

The first floor assembly room, which became known as the Men's Bible Classroom, was completed and occupied in 1936. According to *The Lincoln Times*, the complete building was ready for occupancy on Sunday, January 31, 1937.

Tragically, Pastor Stanford passed away in August 1939, before completing the third year of his appointment, and was succeeded by Rev. Beverly Wilson.

When it was built the addition was commonly known as the "Sunday School Annex." But according to a church bulletin from that period and a newspaper account, when the building was formally dedicated in 1943, it was named in honor of Rev. Stanford. The late pastor's family was present for the ceremony, officiated by Bishop Clare Purcell. Obviously, the name "Stanford Sunday School Annex" did not persist, and no one is now aware of signage identifying the structure by that name. After construction of the second educational building, the 1936 facility came to be known as "the Middle Building."

A Second Educational Building

The church continued to grow and prosper. By 1954 the church had over 900 members and the need developed for additional



The second Educational Building, completed in 1954

educational space. On May 2 of that year, with Cecil Hefner as pastor, construction of a new educational building was authorized. The building committee consisted of Thomas Morton, Jack Thompson, Claude Nantz, N. C. Sappenfield and B. J. Ramsaur, with E. C. Land, Jr., chairman of finance. The handsome two story and basement structure in the northwest corner of church property was designed by Marsh & Hawkins, architects, and constructed by Seth Construction Co. of Lincolnton at a contract price of \$108,486.

Over the years this has proven to be a most worthwhile facility, serving as Sunday school classrooms, church offices, and areas for Methodist Youth Fellowship meetings, scout troops and other local activities.

The Fellowship Hall

When the main sanctuary basement was vacated by Sunday school classes in the 1950s it was rearranged and used as a fellowship hall with kitchen facilities. The move was not without drawbacks. It



was badly arranged, contained many pipes and load bearing poles, and was accessible only by steep steps. Almost at once the addition of a family life center became a part of the long range plan for the church.

For several years in the late 1990s, the Official Board and church members began concentrated planning for a new fellowship hall, to be erected on the old fire station lot, which had been purchased from the City of Lincolnton for \$25,000. The transaction is recorded in Deed Book 613, Page 345. This lot adjoined the church educational building on the north, but was separated from the main church building by a brick building which at the time was a jewelry store.

After this purchase, the church property fronted 198 feet on Sycamore Street to the north, 198 feet on Academy Street to the west and 163.46 feet (except for the jewelry store) on East Main Street.

Legal steps were required to close an alleyway running east and west through the church property, dividing the space among adjoining owners. It had been laid out in the church subdivision in 1915, but was never opened. Because of the pressing need, meetings and discussions continued on construction of the new fellowship hall.

Under the leadership of Pastor Carrol Lindsey, these meetings resulted in 1999 in the appointment of a building committee, consisting of Bo King, chairman; Rev. Lindsey; John Anderson, Bryan Beal, Elliott Beal, Jill Bingham, Jodena Cronland, Hollis Henderson,



The Annex, formerly the Rankin Building, and the Fellowship Hall completed in 2001.

Pris Mauney, Harvey Jonas, Deanna Andrews Kirksey, Robert Lineberger, Walter Lineberger, Mike Owen, Joan Snipes, and Ed Willis, with James Mauney, chairman of the building fund. Each committee member diligently contributed his or her expertise. However, special thanks must be given for the untiring efforts of Rev. Lindsey, Chairman Bo King, Joan Snipes, Jodena Cronland and Jill Bingham, together with Hollis Henderson and John Anderson.

The committee employed C. L. Helt Architect, Inc., to design the building. Plans and specifications were let out for bids, and the White Fox Construction Company of Granite Falls was awarded the construction contract.

For some time, it appeared that construction would never commence in full force. A total of five underground oil tanks were discovered and had to be removed. Water, sewer, telephone and electric lines had to be located, removed and relocated, and various governmental agencies were involved.

The contractor began work in the fall of 2000, but it was not until November 2000 that the site was properly cleared, and full construction commenced. By November 2001 the building was completed. The 6,720 square foot building will accommodate seating for 300 persons, allowing the entire congregation to participate in a variety of church and social functions. The first event held in the new hall was a dinner for ministers and their wives from the Gastonia District. In December of that year the church held its first Christmas festivities in the new facility.

With the opening of the Fellowship Hall church members counted their building program complete. In the words of Harvey Jonas, its was hoped "...that we will be well positioned to serve our congregation and community; and that with the help and guidance of God our church will continue to prosper, serve the Lord, and fly the flag of Christian Methodism in our city center."

The Annex

The new Fellowship Hall facing Main Street was separated from the sanctuary by a small building, the Rankin Jewelry, owned by church members Bob and Mary Anna Rankin. After Bob retired, the

church bought the property, originally intending to tear it down. Members of the Crave Sunday School Class asked permission to refurbish the building for use as their classroom. Today the structure, now known as The Annex, is a well-equipped meeting space for the class as well as for other church functions.

Parsonages

During the early years of Methodism in America, there were no parsonages. Circuit riders relied upon the hospitality of friendly families along their way for food and shelter. This was the situation in our area when the Lincoln Circuit was designated in 1789.

The country was largely wilderness, it being less than fifty years after the first white settlers crossed the Catawba River to populate the area to its west. Frequently a circuit rider would find a wife during his travels, and would “locate” after marriage and take up farming, teaching or other similar occupation to earn a living for his family. His preaching would then be confined to his own community or local circuit or would stop altogether.

Bishop Francis Asbury, who never married, once made the comment, “I do believe that the devil and women will get all of my preachers.”

In referring to one preacher, he stated that he was “a good man, but entangled with a family,” and at another time, “we shall have no preachers but young ones in a few years because they will marry and stop.”

Because of such situations, in the hope of reducing the temptation of the preachers to “marry, locate and stop preaching,” Asbury advocated the “building of houses for preachers’ wives and supplying their family with food.” The record is unclear as to when or if a circuit parsonage ever existed in Lincoln County. In 1840 the circuit trustees purchased a lot on East Main Street, but sold it prior to construction.

The Lincolnton church was first listed in the annual conference journals as a station in 1864. E. G. Gage was pastor. For the next two years Samuel Lander Jr. was pastor. He was married and had his own home. It is not known what housing arrangements were made for pastors after Samuel Lander, but some owned their own homes.

Rev. J. F. Austin, who was appointed to the Lincoln Circuit in 1890, wrote in the *N. C. Methodist* (a conference publication) that a parsonage was one of the great needs in the circuit at that time. He added that he hoped one would be completed within a year. He was also quoted elsewhere as saying he probably wouldn't move his family to Lincolnton until a parsonage could be provided. A later article, while not entirely clear on the subject, suggests that a home was provided and that Rev. Austin did move his family to Lincolnton in May of 1891.

According to a newspaper account, the Methodists were building a parsonage in March 1895. But another item, in June 1895, reported that J. M. Roberts, editor of the *Lincoln Courier* newspaper, sold his home to the Methodists in 1895 to be used as a parsonage. The newspaper did not give the location of either home or clarify the connection of the two houses. It is also conceivable that one of the homes might have been for the circuit pastor, rather than the pastor appointed to the Lincolnton station (church).

Various accounts from former church members and other records describe a number of Methodist parsonages in Lincolnton.

Mrs. Crowell writes that she was told by Mrs. J. W. Barineau that a district parsonage was located on the south side of East Main Street in the second block. This would have been across the street from the present site of First UMC.

Conference minutes indicate that by 1897 the church owned a parsonage. Mrs. Crowell reports it was on the north side of East Church Street, the second house east of Academy, and opposite the Old White Church cemetery. This would have been just over two blocks from the location of the brick Methodist church in use at that time, pictured on page 19.

David Heavner was told by Hampton Childs and Sherwood Childs that a later parsonage was on the corner of South Poplar and East Main Streets, the house previously occupied by the Sumner family and later sold to their father Capt. C. E. Childs. This would also be near the present church. Another paper found in church files says this home was used by the pastors until 1917.

John E. Boger, a Lincolnton merchant active in the Methodist Church, was married but had no children. Mr. Boger died in 1901,



The old (Boger) parsonage, at 332 South Poplar Street

and willed to the church his house at 332 South Poplar Street, plus two vacant lots on the east side of the street. It is believed that Mrs. Boger, the former Mary Ann Ramsour, lived in the home until her death, prior to its use as a parsonage. When W. F. Womble became pastor of the church in 1918, he occupied the “Boger House” as the church parsonage.



The current parsonage at 303 East Congress Street, built in 1964.

In 1940 the church borrowed \$2,500 to remodel the “Boger” parsonage. In a short campaign three years later members raised funds to pay off the loan, in time for the remodeled home to be dedicated on September 12, 1943. The ceremony coincided with dedication of the Sunday School Annex, now called the “Middle Building.”

In 1918 the church had sold Mr. Boger’s two vacant lots on the east side of South Poplar Street to Plato Miller for \$900, on which he built a large brick home. The house was purchased from the Miller estate in the early 1960s by the M. M. Rudisill family and given to the church for its use as a parsonage. The old parsonage west of South Poplar was sold. Bernard Fitzgerald and his family first moved into the new parsonage in his second year as pastor, 1964.

The Old Methodist Cemetery

The Old Methodist Cemetery, located at the intersection of South Aspen Street and West Congress Street, belongs to First United Methodist Church. The 1.62 acre site, enclosed by a chain link fence, is about five blocks from the First United Methodist Church building.

In 1828, Reverend James Hill, the first pastor of what is now First United Methodist Church, was the first person to be buried in the picturesque cemetery. At the time of his burial, The Methodist church was known as Lincolnton Circuit, and it was a part of the South Carolina Conference. The last known burial was in 1944, for Nancy Elizabeth Mullen. According to the Find-a-Grave website, there are 242 gravestones in the historic cemetery. Of these, oral tradition says some mark the burying place for slaves. Two or three of the gravestones are outside the fence. Two gravestones are for Confederate soldiers: 2nd Lieutenant Henry W. Wells, Co. G, 52nd NC Infantry CSA (no date), and James Ford, Co. H, 23rd Reg. NC Troops January 14, 1844 - September 5, 1881.

After the last burial in 1944, interest in the cemetery declined greatly. Although the cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places, by the second half of the twentieth century many church members were unaware of its presence.

In a 1958 paper, Dorothy Crowell wrote “The Second Quarterly Conference, April 9, 1944, reports the establishment of the 'Old



Volunteers from First United Methodist cleaning tombstones in the Old Cemetery. Left photo, Brinkley Dedmond. Right photo, Jason Harpe, left, and Bill Beam, president of the board of directors of the Lincoln County Historical Association..

Cemetery Fund' to beautify the old church property after the war is over." Many people have contributed to this fund, especially those who have family members buried there, even though they were not members of this church at that time.

A revitalization project was begun in 2015 with several members meeting at the heavily shaded cemetery to learn how to properly clean gravestones. The gravestone of the Rev. James Hill, the first pastor, was the first one to be cleaned of dirt, moss, and lichens. Interested members repaired the gate and trimmed tree branches in addition to cleaning gravestones.

Many of the gravestones are firmly mounted to the ground, clean and lichen free while others are illegible and in need of repairs. Some have been broken, probably from vandalism or, more likely, growth of tree roots. Many markers are rocks with nothing written on them. Many are big obelisks, tall, stately monuments honoring loved ones. Two of the gravestones for a pastor and his wife display two birth

dates: one, the physical birth, and, second, the conversion date, i.e. born again.

The revitalization project is ongoing. First United Methodist hopes to have some church activities at the cemetery in coming years.

A transcript of markers at the old cemetery may be found in Appendix D.



The Old Methodist Cemetery