

History
Of the
COKES CHAPEL UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH

3rd his servant found his body. He had died of apoplexy. His remains were committed to the sea with all solemnity.

The life-work of Thomas Coke was accomplished. Certainly no man since Wesley's death had exercised an influence so wide and profound on all Methodism. Not until the far-reaching and ultimate results of human character and action are disclosed, will it be known how much is owed to these two men: John Wesley and Thomas Coke.

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PROLOGUE

Today, Americans judge Americans of the past harshly and with a really notable lack of understanding. In 1833, the United States of America, our nation, consisted of an uneasy union of very sovereign states. It had a population, including Indians and bond servants, of less than the population of New York State today.

The Church, which was established by her founder, the Rev. John Wesley, was known as The Methodist Episcopal Church. Until the year 1830 the Methodist Churches in the state of Georgia were in the Georgia District of the South Carolina Annual Conference. In 1830 these churches in the Georgia District were removed from the South Carolina Annual Conference and placed within the newly formed Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

From the Christmas Conference of 1784, the Methodist rule had been "Let men and women sit apart in the congregation." To insure obedience usually a partition ran the length of the church, dividing the seats into two sections (men on the one side and women on the other). Most often there were two front doors to the churches; the men entered by one door and the women and children were to use the other. The membership rolls of the churches were also divided, listing the men first and then the women and their children.

Alfred M. Pierce, "A History of Methodism in Georgia," pages 57 and 58, states that Methodism came, "jubilantly declaring that God loved all, redeemed all, invited all and saved all who would come. Good news, indeed! It was too

good to be quickly received by people steeped in the opposite faith. So the battle was pitched. Methodism insisted its gospel was true, stood its ground boldly and met arguments with superior arguments. There was no temporizing, no half-heartedness, no appeasement, no weak apology as though Methodist doctrine was an unwarranted intrusion upon the sacred preserves of another faith (namely Baptist and Presbyterian). Those early Methodist itinerants (traveling preachers) proclaimed an universal atonement as if they believed it; exulted in preaching it; rarely delivered a sermon that did not ring with the all-inclusiveness of the Gospel's invitation. The hearts of the people, as they came to understand that strange story, were made glad by the knowledge that they were not the victims of an unjustly imposed doom, but the sharers of a great love that played no favorites."

Often these itinerants, traveling preachers, men of faith, did not live near to the circuit which they served. The circuits were composed of many churches, sometimes as many as eight. The circuits were about forty to sixty miles in length. Only a few parsonages were available. Some itinerants only saw their families two or three days a quarter. They traveled over rough terrain and streams not forded by bridges. Sometimes, they had to swim across the flooded streams to get to their places of worship. A large percentage of the itinerants never reached the age of thirty-five years old. They ate simple foods, barely enough to keep soul and body together. Many times they would go twenty-four hours without nourishment. The itinerants rarely became men who appreciated the wide spectrum of the culture of their days. They were persistent students of the Bible, carefully selected literature, the hymnbook, and the Methodist Discipline. (These rules were made to be learned and obeyed.)

If these itinerants were to become the shepherds of the people, they had to understand the people, (their outlook of life, their thought patterns, their needs and limitations) and the most simple way to make their meaningful messages heard and understood. Their manner of speech, more frequently than not, was uninhibited and noisy and they often screamed and stamped their feet. There can be no worthy history of Methodism, which does not recognize and magnify the great contributions, which they made in those early days and down through the ensuing years.

The General Conference is the world-wide Methodist conference, which makes the laws and establishes the rules governing all Methodists as to the Articles of Religion and church government and polity. The Annual Conferences are divided into Districts and the spiritual leader over the annual conference is the Bishop. Each district has a Presiding Elder, who oversees the pastors and churches within the area of the District. The title of a pastor serving a church, or churches, is the Pastor in Charge. The first Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held in Macon, Bibb County, Georgia, on January 1, 1831.

According to the Journal of the Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1829, this church parish fell in the bounds of the Fayette Circuit in the Columbus District, but there was no Cokes Chapel. In the Fall of 1831, when the Annual Conference met, the Reverend William W. Steagill was appointed Pastor in Charge of the Coweta Circuit (newly formed) in the Columbus District of which the Rev. A. Hamill was Presiding Elder.

The Reverend Mr. Steagill was re-appointed in 1832 to serve the calendar year of 1833. This year, 1833, has been remembered as the "founding year" of Cokes Chapel. Cokes Chapel grew out of Methodists living in the Fayette Circuit parish. They felt the need of a church nearer than the nearest Methodist Church on the circuit. Cokes Chapel was located on the Lower Fayetteville Road on what was known as the "Burt Hill Farm," about four and one-half miles east of Newnan. (This land later belonged to Robert Nash in 1962.) It was located across the road opposite the "Manget Peach Farm." Sunday school was held each Sunday and the third Sunday of each month was "Preaching Sunday."

The land upon which the present church now stands is just down the highway from the former church building. This land was deeded by Mark Smith for twenty-five dollars to the Trustees: George Glass, Caleb Cook, J. E. Hunnicutt, Joshua Shropshire and L. M. Hunnicutt. The congregation used a log cabin after they moved to this new location. The present main body of the church was built in 1850, behind the log cabin, by R. D. Cole Manufacturers.

The church was built as a frame building on rock pillars with four doors: one door in the front, two in the rear, and another on the east side. The pulpit was constructed around the wooden post in the center of the church and built by Robert L. Smith and Edward M. Smith. The church was divided into four sections around the pulpit with the partitions high enough not to see over. One section was for white men; one for white women, one for negro women and one for negro men. Each group used one of the four doors which opened to their own section. (Negro was a term used to identify African Americans in those days.) The church was heated by a pot-bellied stove and lighted by kerosene lamps.

Dr. J. E. P. Hunnicutt was Superintendent of the Sunday school for fifty-three years. This was the home church of Dr. George Edward Smith, a beloved Local Preacher, who believed that wives should call their husbands either "Mr." or "My Lord." Dr. Luther Smith became the first graduate of Emory College from Coweta County, Georgia. Later, he became its president. As a boy and then as a young man, he belonged to this church to which many of Georgia's greatest men of Methodism preached.

APPOINTMENTS

"Where shall the preachers serve next year?" At the close of the annual conference, the question is put forth and the answer comes with the Bishop reading the appointments for the coming year.

KEY:

- B = Bishop
- P.C. = Preacher in Charge
- P.E. = Presiding Elder
- D.S. = District Superintendent
- SLP = Student Local Pastor
- MEC = Methodist Episcopal Church
- MECS = Methodist Episcopal Church, South
- MC = The Methodist Church
- UMC = United Methodist Church

Until the year 1830, the Methodist Episcopal Churches in Georgia were in the Georgia District of the South Carolina Annual Conference. In 1830 these churches in the Georgia District were removed from the South Carolina Annual Conference and placed within the newly formed Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The church buildings have been described by G. G. Smith, History of Georgia Methodism, page 271, as: "People rode in elegant carriages, with servants in attendance, from homes where every comfort was found, to a weekday appointment in an unceiled and unpainted barn, called a church." An editorial in the Southern Christian Advocate, dated June 2, 1859, page 120, is quoted as saying: "It may be in the open forest.... a shell of a house, unceiled, unplastered within, shutters that will not close, doors that hang by a hinge, benches narrow, high and straight-back, covered with dust, openings here and there in the weatherboarding, or between the logs, panes (if panes at all) broken....a house wanting in every comfort; in all appearances and appointments offensive to good taste."

From the Christmas Conference, 1784, in which the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed, the Methodist rule had been, "Let men and women sit apart in the congregation." To insure obedience usually a partition ran the length of the church, dividing the seats into two sections (men on the one side and women on the other). Most often, there were two front doors to the churches; the men were to enter by one door and the women and children were to use the other. The membership rolls of the local churches were also divided, listing the men first and then the women and their children.

Alfred M. Pierce, A History of Methodism in Georgia, pages 57 and 58, states that Methodism came, "Jubilantly declaring that God loved all, redeemed all, invited all and saved all who would come. Good News, indeed! But too good to be quickly received by people long steeped in the opposite faith. So the battle was pitched. Methodism insisted its gospel was true, stood its ground boldly and met arguments with superior arguments. There was no temporizing, no half-heartedness, no appeasement, no weak apology as though Methodist doctrine was an unwarranted intrusion upon the sacred preserves of another faith (namely Baptist and Presbyterian). Those early Methodist itinerants (traveling preachers) proclaimed a universal atonement as if they believed it; exulted in preaching it; rarely delivered a sermon that did not ring with the all-inclusiveness of the Gospel invitation. And the hearts of the people, as they came to understand that strange story, were made glad by the

knowledge that they were not the victims of an unjustly imposed doom, but the sharers of a great love that played no favorites."

The Methodist doctrine, ritual and government that was adhered to in the State of Georgia the last year that Georgia Methodism was a part of the South Carolina Annual Conference was the same Methodism, in every detail, that was advocated in the newly created Georgia Annual Conference in 1830. If the preachers were available, two men were sent to the same circuit (more than one church), the more experienced man as "Pastor in Charge," and the less experienced man as the Assistant, or "Junior Preacher." According to the size of the circuit, these preachers sometimes preached several sermons during the week and also on Sundays. Alfred M. Pierce, ibid, page 70. recalled that "Unrestingly they moved out among the people. Of these early itinerants, one could not make comparisons, for all types were useful. Of some of the men, it could be said that they were men of defiant energy, unyielding zeal, and matchless courage, who laughed at hardships, welcomed perils and triumphed over the indescribable difficulties of an unsettled and undeveloped country."

Often these men of faith did not live in, or near, the circuit which they served. The circuits were composed of many churches, sometimes as many as eight. The circuits were about forty to sixty miles in length. Only a few parsonages were available. Some itinerants only saw their families two or three days a quarter. They traveled over rough terrain and streams not forded by bridges. Sometimes they had to swim across the flooded streams to get to their preaching appointments, or places of worship. A large percentage of the itinerants never reached the age of thirty-five. They ate the more simple foods, barely enough to keep soul and body together. Many times they would go twenty-four hours without nourishment. The itinerants rarely became men who appreciated the wide spectrum of the culture of their days. They were persistent students of the Bible, of carefully selected literature, of the hymnbook, and of the Methodist Discipline (These rules were made to be learned and obeyed.). If they were to become shepherds of the people, they had to understand the people, their outlook of life, their thought patterns, their needs and limitations, and the most simple way to make their meaningful messages heard. Their manner of speech, more frequently than not, was uninhibited and noisy and they often screamed and stamped their feet. There can be no worthy history of Methodism which does not recognize and magnify the great contributions which these itinerants made in those early days and down through the ensuing years.

The organizational structure of the United Methodist Church has come down through the years to the present time. The General Conference is the world-wide Methodist Conference. It is this conference which makes the laws and establishes the rules governing all Methodist churches as to the Articles of Religion and church government and polity. Under the General Conference, there are the Jurisdictional Conferences, which are composed of Episcopal areas. An Episcopal Area is made up of Annual Conferences, which are presided over by bishops. An annual conference is made up of Districts, which are supervised by presiding elders, or District Superintendents. A Pastor could be assigned to a circuit, which consists of two or more churches, or to a church, which is called a station. The Presiding Elders, or District Superintendents, supervise the appointed pastors and the individual churches, which make up the district.

Cokes Chapel is a station in the LaGrange District of the North Georgia Annual Conference, which is in the Atlanta Area, which is in the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

The following is a "KEY" to understanding the abbreviations in the listing of appointments.

KEY

GaConf.:	The Georgia Conference
NGC	: The North Georgia Annual Conference
MEC	: The Methodist Episcopal Church
MECS	: The Methodist Episcopal Church, South
TMC	: The Methodist Church
TUMC	: The United Methodist Church
B	: Bishop
Dist	: District
P.E.	: Presiding Elder
D.S.	: District Superintendent
P.C.	: Pastor in Charge
J.P.	: Junior Preacher
Assoc.	: Associate Pastor

The dates listed for the appointments are the years of the meetings of the annual conference sessions, not the year in which the preachers served. The year of serving the church would then be the following year after the annual conference meeting.

The years in which the annual conferences met; the names of the various circuits in which Cokes Chapel was placed; and the preachers (pastors), districts, presiding elders (district superintendents), conferences, and bishops are listed.

At the conclusion of each regular session of the North Georgia Annual Conference, this historic question was asked: "WHERE ARE THE PREACHERS STATIONED FOR THIS YEAR?"

1832	Coweta Circuit	William W. Steagall, P.C.
	Columbus District	Andrew Hamill, P.E.
	Georgia Conference, MEC	B

This year, 1833, is recognized as the "founding year" of the Cokes Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. *They met under a grape arbor about 3 miles west of the present structure on the Bust Hill Farm.*

01-02-		
1833	Coweta Circuit	Richard J. Winn, P.C.
	Columbus District	Ignatius Alphonso Few, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MEC	B

01-08-		
1834	Newnan Circuit	John C. Carter, P.C.
	Junior Preacher	J. F. Steagall, J.P.
	Columbus District	Charles W. Hardy, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MEC	John Embry, B

01-07-		
1835	Newnan Circuit	John Hunter, P.C.
	Junior Preacher	Morgan Bellah, J.P.
	Columbus District	Charles W. Hardy, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MEC	James Osgood Andrew, B

01-13-		
1836	Newnan Circuit	James Jones, P.C.
	Columbus District	George Asbury Chappell, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MEC	James Osgood Andrew, B

12-07-		
1836	Newnan Circuit	James Jones, P.C.
	Junior Preacher	Elias W. Story, J.P.
	Columbus District	George Asbury Chappell, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MEC	James Osgood Andrew, B.

12-13-
1837 Newnan Circuit Phillip Groover, P.C.
Junior Preacher Harris Sterns, J.P.
Cherokee District John Walker Glenn, P.E.
Georgia Conf., MEC Thomas A. Morris, B.

12-11-
1838 Newnan Circuit John Collinsworth Simmons, P.C.
Junior Preacher One to be announced.
Cherokee District John Walker Glenn, P.E.
Georgia Conf., MEC James Osgood Andrew, B

The Rev. Robert A, Johnson was appointed as the
Junior Preacher for the year 1839.

12-11-
1839 Newnan Circuit John Collinsworth Simmons, P.C.
Junior Preacher Robert A. Johnson, J.P.
Cherokee District John Walker Glenn, P.E.
Georgia Conf., MEC Thomas A. Morris, B

1840 The 1840 session of the Georgia Conference was
scheduled to meet on December 9, 1840. However, with
the session meeting on December 11, 1839 and the 1841
session to meet on January 20, 1841, it was decided
not to hold a 1840 session, but have the appointments
to stand for another year.

1840 Newnan Circuit John Collinsworth Simmons, P.C.
Junior Preacher Robert A. Johnson, J.P.
Cherokee District John Walker Glenn, P.E.
Georgia Conf., MEC Thomas A. Morris, B

01-20-
1841 Newnan Circuit Noah Smith, P.C.
Junior Preacher Morgan Bellah, J.P.
Cherokee District John Walker Glenn, P.E.
Georgia Conf., MEC James Osgood Andrew, B

01-05-
1842 Newnan Circuit Young Fletcher Tignor, P.C.
Junior Preacher Martin Andrew; Neese, J.P.
Cherokee District William J. Parks, P.E.
Georgia Conf., MEC Beverly Waugh, B

1-18-

1843 Newnan Circuit
Junior Preacher
Cherokee District
Georgia Conf., MEC

John Wesley Yarbrough, P.E.
Joseph T. Smith, J.P.
Peyton P. Smith, P.E.
James Osgood Andrew, B

The Methodist Episcopal Church became divided over the political issue of States' Rights that swept over these United States of America. The point in question was, "Does the federal government have the right to declare a state law (namely slavery) illegal?" Delegates were elected to the General Conference, which met in New York in 1844. A Plan of Separation was adopted by the General Conference.

1-17-

1844 Newnan Circuit
Junior Preacher
Cherokee District
Georgia Conf., MEC

John Wesley Yarbrough, P.C.
Morgan Bellah, J.P.
Willis D. Matthews, P.E.
Joshua Soule, B

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was organized at a convention of delegates from the southern annual conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Saturday, May 17, 1845 was the birthday of The Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The churches in the northern states, who were advocates of a strong federal government, kept the name: The Methodist Episcopal Church. Four bishops made up the episcopacy of The Methodist Episcopal Church, South; they were William Capers, Joshua Soule, Robert Paine and James Osgood Andrew. There were in the southern church fifteen annual conferences.

1-18-

1845 Newnan Circuit
Junior Preacher
LaGrange District
Georgia Conf., MECS

Abraham Pennington, P.C.
Morgan Bellah, J.P.
Willis D. Matthews, P.E.
Joshua Soule, B

The General Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was composed of two ministerial delegates from each conference, totaling thirty members; there were no lay delegates. Its first session was held in 1846.

1846 Newnan Circuit
Junior Preacher
LaGrange District
Georgia Conf., MECS

Claiborne Trussell, P.C.
William A. Smith, J.P.
James Blanton Payne, P.E.
James Osgood Andrew, B

1847	Newnan Circuit	Noah Smith, P.C.
	Junior Preacher	Daniel J. Myrick, J.P.
	LaGrange District	James Blanton Payne, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	James Osgood Andrew, B

The Georgia Annual Conference did not meet during the calendar year of 1848. The 1847 conference met in December; the 1848 conference met in January of 1849.

1848	Newnan Circuit	Abraham Pennington, P.C.
	LaGrange District	James B. Payne, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	B

1849	Newnan Circuit	John W. Talley, P.C.
	LaGrange District	James B. Payne, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	B

The congregation had been meeting in a log cabin church; in 1850 the present main sanctuary was built to the rear of the log cabin church at a cost of \$1100.00. *The building was divided by walls into 4 sections. for white men - white women - black men - black women. Each section had a private door. The raised pulpit was around East post in building.*

1850	Newnan Circuit	John C. Simmons, P.C.
	LaGrange District	John B. Payne, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	B

1851	Newnan Circuit	Claiborne Trussell, P.C.
	LaGrange District	G. Jefferson Pearce, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	B

1852	Newnan Circuit	W. A. Smith, P.C.
	LaGrange District	John C. Simmons, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	B

1853	Newnan Circuit	Daniel Kelsey, P.C.
	LaGrange District	John C. Simmons, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	B.

1854	Newnan Circuit	William H. Evans, P.C.
	LaGrange District	George Bright, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	William Capers, B

1855	Newnan Circuit	William H. Evans, P.C.
	Junior Preacher	W. S. Turner, J.P.
	LaGrange District	Samuel Anthony, P.E.
	Georgia Conf., MECS	John Early, B