

# A History of the First United Methodist Church of Palmetto, Florida

*Dedicated to those Methodists who, by their work in this church,  
have promoted Our Lord's heritage in Palmetto*

As originally recorded by Church Historian and lifetime church member,  
Alice Myers (b. 1925 – d. 2007)

Unknown is the name of the first Methodist to come to the area which was to become Palmetto on the north bank of the Manatee River. The first Methodist settlers of that area, however, quite probably were Ezekiel and Abigail Glazier who came in 1843. The following year the Glaziers moved to the south side of the river. The Glaziers were said to have been instrumental in bringing to the Manatee River country the first Methodist missionary, Rev. Henry Minor, in 1845 and they were among the nine founders of the Methodist Society in Manatee in 1849.

There is no available existing record of the organization to the first Methodist Society in Palmetto. The earliest official record of Methodist activities here appears in a report of the Rev. E. J. Gates of Manatee who wrote "Methodists of Palmetto attended a district conference in Manatee in 1867." At one time Palmetto was a mission of the Manatee Church. Before Palmetto became an organized appointment of the Florida Methodist Conference in 1882, local pastors from Manatee conducted services in Palmetto. A 1940 history of the Palmetto church reports that, "On moonlight nights, young people from Palmetto would row or sail across the river to attend the evening services at the Manatee church."

Those involved with the making of history in pioneer times in our country were usually too busy with the life of survival to record that history. So it appears to have been with the Methodist settlers of Palmetto. For some periods of time, there is a wealth of data; but for other periods, there is either no information or merely sketchy recordings. The period of 1867-1882 is one of little information. No doubt, there was an organized congregation which sought the appointment of a pastor by the Florida Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (southern jurisdiction). If the names of that congregation were known, surely among them would be Samuel Sparks Lamb, founder of our town, and his wife Sarah, who were both Methodists.

Samuel Sparks Lamb and his family came to Manatee County in late 1867 and moved to Palmetto in early 1868. They have been closely identified with the Palmetto Methodist Church as well as with the City of Palmetto. The first church service in Palmetto, a Rev. Harrell preaching, was held in a log cabin owned by Samuel Lamb. The pioneer structure had been built by Ezekiel Glazier and later was used by Madame Joe Atzroth first as a temporary dwelling, and then for a store. S. S. Lamb, as he was known, used the cabin as a school building for his children. He hired J. W. Nettles to teach his children and invited the neighborhood children to attend the school. As the community grew, a building near the southwest corner of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue at 4<sup>th</sup> Street West (old Central or Church Street at Lay Street) served as a public school, with church and Sunday school services also being held there. The cabin stood under the six oaks on Riverside Drive, immediately west of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This information has been verified by Ernest W. Parrish, grandson of S. S. Lamb and lifelong member of the Palmetto Methodist Church.

Palmetto became an organized appointment of the Methodist Episcopal Church South when the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Florida Conference, which was convened at Monticello on January 18, 1882, sent the Rev. Thomas A. Branch to serve Palmetto and Oak Hill. (Oak Hill later became the community of Parrish.) According to the Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, both Rev. Branch and his successor, Rev. A. M. Samford (1883 appointment), were appointed to serve the Oak Hill Circuit on the Tampa District.

The oldest existing record of the Palmetto Methodist Church, written in clear script, appears in a journal which is locked in the church office. It reflects the first two years of the organized church:

*The church at Palmetto has been served as an occasional appointment by the Pastor in Charge at Manatee for some years past but no records of its transactions have been preserved. In 1882 it was served by the Rev. T. A. Branch as Pastor under Rev. W. C. Jordan as Presiding Elder. It was then attached to the Peru Circuit.<sup>1</sup> In 1883 it was served by the Rev. A. M. Samford as Pastor and Robert H. Burnette, Presiding Elder. In that year there was a Church Conference held on June 24<sup>th</sup> the minutes of which will be found recorded. It was taken from the Peru work and served from March by W. H. Parker, Pastor in Charge at Manatee, Rev. R. H. Burnette, P. E. During the year some members have been added. J. W. Collingham, Dr. A. A. Alston and Robert Willis (were) elected Stewards. A. A. Alston, S. S. Lamb and Robert Willis (were) elected Trustees and Hervy V. Curry, Secretary. Robert T. Young (was) elected Sunday School Superintendent, and a flourishing S. S. (Sunday school) has been kept up from May until the end of the year. S. S. Lamb has donated the year a lot in Palmetto to build a church and parsonage.*

This undated statement appears in the church register, immediately preceding the alphabetical roll and is followed by the Church Conference (report) for the Palmetto Methodist Episcopal Church South, dated June 24, 1883.

The following names appear on the membership roll in 1883:

Dr. A. A. Alston

Mrs. M. W. Alston (middle initial is not clear in Alice's documentation – could be an M, N or W)

Miss Julia A. Alston

Miss Maggie Alston

J. E. Collier

J. W. Collingham

Daniel Gillet

Mrs. M. M. Gillett

Samuel S. Lamb

Mrs. Sarah Lamb

Miss Lizzie Lamb

Miss Laura Lamb

Jessie Matthews<sup>2</sup>

Josephine Matthews

Mrs. Mattie Manus<sup>3</sup>

M. J. Willis

Mrs. O. E. Willis

V. Willis

Robert Willis  
Mrs. Robert Willis  
Jno. J. Wimbush  
Robert T. Young  
Mrs. Olive Young

Recorded beside these names but with the notation "1884 members" are:

Mrs. Zona Anthony  
Mrs. E. Ballard  
Hervy Curry  
Mrs. Lou C. Curry  
Mrs. Samanda Lowry  
Mrs. E. P. Lowry

<sup>1</sup>Peru was on the south side of the Alafia River in the vicinity of Riverview.

<sup>2</sup>Notation following Matthews name indicates he died in November 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs. Manus died on January 17, 1884.

A history written on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Palmetto Church and on file with the Commission of Archives and History of the Florida Conference at Lakeland states that some of these 28 members joined the church on profession of faith during a revival conducted by Rev. J. A. Castel of Manatee. This probably occurred in 1877 or 1878 when he first served the Manatee Church.

In his May 24, 1884 report to the Quarterly Conference, Rev. Parker commented on the gift of land by the Lamb family. He wrote, "We have a society of some 20 members and a flourishing Sunday school, but are not able to build a church at present. While we have a hold at that place which is destined to be a place of note and considerable population soon, they need help badly and now. If we do not occupy it, others will." The Trustees who accepted the land for the church were Robert T. Willis, S. S. Lamb and R. T. Young. Lot 4, Block G in the town of Palmetto was to be used... "for a place of worship for the member an ministry of" ... the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

The reports of Pastor J. N. Jones who served in 1885 are not available. Rev. Jones was followed by the Rev. S. B. Black who served as pastor in 1886, 1887, and again in 1895. The local pastor and storekeeper, son-in-law of S. S. Lamb, was affectionately known as "Uncle Benny Black." He served the church in many capacities – pastor, lay leader, representative to the Annual Conference and as Sunday School superintendent for at least 20-22 years. On May 28, 1886, in speaking for the "Palmetto Circuit," Rev. Black reported on "3 preaching places, 50 members, 2 Sunday Schools and 1 prayer meeting." There was temperance activity. The general spiritual condition of the church was good, but social meetings were not as spiritual as desired. Oak Hill (Parrish) and Ellenton were the other two preaching places.

1888 was the year of the yellow fever epidemic. There are no reports for the church or the pastorate of Rev. D. A. Cole in that year. All church and social activities were suspended.

The Manatee River Journal of January 31, 1889 tells of the arrival of... "our new pastor, Mr. George J. Kennelly and his lady on Friday's steamer. He preached for us Sunday morning and night. Everybody likes him very

much. He will live in Ellenton for six months and in Palmetto the same period of time." A subsequent issue of The Journal tells of Rev. Kennelly's efforts to raise funds for an organ for the Sunday school. During 1889 and 1890, Kennelly preached on the second and fourth Sundays at Palmetto with prayer meeting on Thursday evening at 7:00pm. He preached at Ellenton on the first and third Sundays. Superintendent R. T. Young presided over the Sunday School which met at 3:00pm each Sunday in Palmetto. Church membership had increased to 147 (presumably the total for the Palmetto and Ellenton congregations) by 1889, a majority of whom were received during the ministries of Rev. Black and Rev. Kennelly. In November 1889, Evangelists Rev. Smith and Rev. Willis held a successful revival. Palmetto Methodists were active in the temperance movement. Rev. Kennelly was mentioned several times in the local newspaper because of his criticism of Bradenton officials for permitting the sale of alcoholic beverages within that community. Later, he visited Bradenton and was quoted as "being please with what he saw."

"Because of poor vegetable prices" and "shortage of finance due to the scarcity of money in the County," as related by Rev. H. S. Miller in his quarterly reports of 1891, original efforts to raise \$1,500 to build the sanctuary failed and the \$1,000 raised was returned to the contributors. Ellenton, Oak Hill and New Hope, all agricultural communities, were a part of the Palmetto Circuit and the only church property was the Palmetto lot.

R. T. Willis, R. T. Young, E. B. Patton, S. S. Lamb and H'Enry Foy, Trustees of the Palmetto Methodist Episcopal Church South, exchanged with S. S. and Sarah Lamb the original lot plus \$100 for the lot (Lot 7, Block E) at Main and Myrtle Streets (northeast corner of 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street). It was here that the first church building was erected in 1892.

Spiritual renewal within the church came with the construction of the building. In his September 1892 report to the quarterly conference, Rev. Miller expressed hope "to use the new building shortly." He wrote, "interest and discipline in Sunday School has been very satisfactory. The school house is uncommodious and unattractive. The weather has been most unfavorable, hot and wet. Under these disadvantages the school has prospered which gives bright promise to great success and favorable conditions." By November, the building was in use. He told also of special revival meetings at both Ellenton and Palmetto for which "public schools were suspended to allow children to attend the 10:00am service." It was a time of renewed interest. "Special blessing to our S. School, both teachers and scholars. 81 scholars united with the church during the quarter." Efforts were being made to organize a women's missionary society.

Rev. Ira S. Patterson conducted a revival in the new building in 1893. There are few reports available for the church in 1893 and 1894, and none for 1895-1899 except in brief form in Annual Conference reports. By 1894 Palmetto had become a "Charge" and a committee had been appointed to look into the possibility of making Palmetto a station. The exact date on which that status was received is not known, but it appears to have occurred prior to 1900.

On February 9, 1894, the Women's Parsonage and Home Missions Society was organized "under the leadership of Mrs. R. F. Willis who had experience in that work in her former home, Memphis, Tennessee." The Trustees in that year were R. F. Willis, R. T. Young, S. S. Lamb, J. J. Haley and J. A. Lamb.

Pastor T. M. Strickland "preached to large and attentive congregations" in 1894, and "prayer meetings were well attended." June 4, 1894 a building committee was appointed of J. A. Lamb, J. A. Howze, and J. I. Gore. By

September 1, 1894, the Palmetto Methodist Episcopal Sunday School had become a Missionary Society. On that same date, it was reported that the Sunday School at Oak Hill “with patron approval had been suspended for the period of the rainy season.”

Rev. S. B. Black, who served as pastor again in 1895, acquired the 500 lb cast iron bell. It was purchased in Northfield, Michigan for \$40.00. It was removed from the steeple when the first church was moved. It was placed in storage until 1957 when the platform was built for it on the east of the present church. It was rung for many years for the opening and close of the Sunday School.

In 1896, Palmetto was served by the Rev. E. J. Gates, son of Rev. E. F. Gates and grandson of Josiah Gates, first settler of Manatee County. The first parsonage was built on property adjoining the church on Myrtle Street (5<sup>th</sup> Street). This served as the pastor’s home until about 1923. The first Epworth League was reported in 1896 and it had 30 members.

The Women’s Parsonage and Home Society was reorganized in 1898, with Mrs. J. W. Jones being elected president. The only existing local records for 1896-1899 are the records of the Women’s Society. They met monthly. They were the owners of an “ice cream shed” and apparently sold ice cream as a method of fundraising. They bought various furnishings for the parsonage including a safe. (One would presume this was a food safe.)

By 1900, Palmetto had become a station, beginning the year with a membership of 97. There were senior and junior Epworth Leagues. Rev. G. W. Mitchell was working to “raise the standard both as to members and piety.” Rev. Outland in 1901 described the League as being “in good condition in every way and doing splendid work.” He reported further, “the Sunday School is prospering under the efficient management of Superintendent Rev. S. B. Black.” There were 66 members and 8 teachers in the Sunday School.

Because of the “prevalence of scarlet fever in the community,” the activities of the church were suspended in December 1901. From 1901-1908, church and no doubt social activities were suspended because of various epidemics in the community. Scarlet fever occurred in 1901 and 1902, and typhoid fever and diphtheria were present in 1908. In the fall of 1918, public activities were suspended because of the influenza epidemic. Meanwhile, the congregation grew both spiritually and otherwise.

In August 1901, the eleven members of the Women’s Society were “making garments for our minister’s baby.” The Society’s membership was small, but their deeds were many. In one of his 1903 reports to the Conference, Rev. Honiker described them as “noble women” to whom he was giving “all help and encouragement.” During the first nine months of 1903, the now twelve members met eight times and made 80 visits to the “sick or strangers.” On August 7, 1903, Mrs. S. B. Brooks, Treasurer, gave the following report:

Monday collected:	\$48.65
Remitted to State Treas.	\$7.00
Spent on church	13.60
Rescue House in Tampa	2.00
Spent on parsonage	3.30
Relief of Needy	1.05
Local Work	5.90
Ybor City Parsonage	5.00

In January 1916, the church building and parsonage were valued at \$2,000. The Trustees voted to sell the property on the corner of Myrtle and Howze Streets (now 5<sup>th</sup> St and 12<sup>th</sup> Ave). A building committee was appointed and instructed to raise funds to construct suitable Sunday School rooms beside the church. Member of the committee were J. A. Lamb, R. F. Willis, T. A. Howze, A. M. Lamb, C. C. Lasenby, S. B. Black and C. H. Stebbins. There is no record of this work being carried out. A new committee was appointed with similar instructions in 1920. Ten classes were meeting in one room. This committee was composed of J. A. Lamb, W. E. Mann, R. F. Willis, A. M. Lamb and C. H. Stebbins; it had the authority to seek a loan and donation from the Florida Conference Board.

Music had been a part of the church since the beginning. The pastor in 1891 had noted in an official report "improvement in the quality of singing." By 1916, the church owned both a piano and organ, although the Trustees had been given authority to sell the organ. The first music committee to be mentioned was comprised of Mrs. Olive Lazenby, Mrs. W. A. Goddard and Dr. Nanney.

The spiritual quality of the congregation members was not always as exemplary as the pastor would have it. One minister wrote in 1916 of his discouragement, "as some members do not attend the services and others are worldly and others care more for the lodges and the picture shows than the House of God." In the same report, he wrote of the good attendance at Sunday School and prayer meetings.

In this same year (1916), the women of the church formed a Ladies Aid Society. According to their leader, Mrs. W. E. Mann, the Society had a dual purpose: to raise money for some badly needed improvements in the church, and also to bring the women of the church closer together socially, thereby creating a greater interest in church work. Both the Aid Society and the Missionary Society engaged in bazaars and other fund raising projects. They spent money on the parsonage as well. Through the Board of Trustees, funds were raised by pledges to "modernize" the parsonage bathroom.

1917-1919 were years of spiritual renewal and increased activity within the church. "Much good was accomplished" through Evangelist S. A. Cook's 1918 revival. Rev. Fountain praised the 1919 revival of Rev. W. H. McLeod as "one of the greatest Palmetto has ever known."

The summer of 1920 was a time of great innovation. Women were elected to the Board of Stewards. The first three to be so honored were Mrs. W. E. Mann, Mrs. E.W. Stoltz, and Mrs. P. C. Hackney. They remained active in church affairs throughout their lifetimes. Mrs. Ruth Barber, Mrs. Hackney's daughter, serves on our present administrative board.

Another innovation was the Sunday evening service in the city park. The City Council gave the Palmetto Methodists permission to use the bandstand in Lamb Park for the Sunday night services. After six weeks of park services, Rev. Funk recorded, "our attendance at night is about doubled. Also some who scarcely, if ever, attend our services in our church are frequent attendants now."

The Palmetto Epworth League had been instrumental in organizing a Union League with the Sarasota and Bradenton churches. It won the Manatee banner for having the highest percentage of attendance.

The Rev. W. B. Tresca, distinguished circuit rider and church builder, became associated with the Palmetto church. The minutes of February 12, 1922 listed him officially as Associate Pastor. Rev. and Mrs. Tresca served the church well. Their son Warren is an active member of the present church.

By the early 1920's, the need for a new facility became more urgent. The recognition of this need was demonstrated through the work of the various organizations of the church. The Ladies Aid Society, the Missionary Society, the Orange Blossoms (the girls of the church under the leadership of Mrs. Kinner Hollister, the pastor's wife), and the Girls' Missionary Society (led by Mrs. W. T. Harrison) were all engaged in fundraising activities. On one occasion, the Ladies Aid Society made a \$1,400 contribution to the building fund. They continued to provide for the upkeep of the existing church and parsonage.

On February 8, 1922, Mrs. Sarah E. Lamb, widow of Samuel S. Lamb, gave the property the church now occupies at 4<sup>th</sup> Street (Lay) and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Lamb St). Accepting the property as Trustees were A. M. Lamb, J. A. Lamb, R. F. Willis, J. W. Jackson, P. C. Hayworth, S. B. Black and T. A. Howze. A new building committee was appointed: J. A. Lamb, A. M. Lamb, W. E. Mann, A. C. Bilbrey, A. M. C. Russell, C. Wooten and J. S. Moore. The old church property at Main and Myrtle Streets was sold for \$12,000 in early 1923 and the old church building was reserved to be moved to the new property. Sometime between 1922 and 1923 the old parsonage was abandoned and the Rev. and Mrs. Hollister used an apartment over one of the store buildings on Myrtle Street just off Main Street. (At the time this history is being written, Mrs. Hollister is alive and well, residing in New Smyrna Beach. She is well remembered by former Orange Blossoms and music students who include Ruth [unknown], Frances Salle, Eloise Parrish and [unknown] Brown Baden.) In the 1923 records appear the first reference to "tourists" – the Golden Rule Class had done some work with "the tourists of the camp" and several of the visitors had come into the class. The second parsonage, another gift of Mrs. Sarah Lamb, was built in 1923. Mrs. A. M. Lamb, a Sunday school teacher for many years, rewarded her students for perfect attendance by depositing \$1.00 in their name in a savings account at the bank.

In May 1924, the new building committee called for bids for the new church, agreeing to "at least construct our walls, roof and subfloor to the point where the church may begin to be used for church and Sunday school purposes." Warren Tresca recalls that the plan was selected from a book about the twelve most beautiful churches in England. Only one wing of the model church was built. Construction began in 1924, and the cornerstone carries the names of this building committee: W. E. Mann, B. C. Floyd, O. O. Lane, C. E. Haley, A. M. C. Russell, Mrs. W. E. Mann, Mrs. C. Wooten, J. A. Lamb and A. M. Lamb. (Before the cornerstone laying, Council Wooten resigned from the committee and was replaced by Asa M. Lamb.)

The building was probably in use by 1925; however, the formal dedication did not occur until Sunday, May 24, 1925. The Monday afternoon, May 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the Evening Herald of Bradenton reported on the dedicatory exercises conducted by Presiding Elder Dr. J. F. Hilburn and prominent Tampa churchman Rev. Fred Turner.

**NEW CHURCH EDIFICE DEDICATED SUNDAY  
AT PALMETTO FOR THE METHODIST PEOPLE  
Dedication Exercises Are Presided Over by Dr. J. F. Hilburn**

*The beautiful edifice of the Palmetto Methodist congregation, which has been erected at the corner of Lamb and Lay Streets at a cost of \$35,000 was formally dedicated Sunday, the services being attended by hundreds of people both night and morning notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather.*

*Dr. J. F. Hilburn, presiding elder, of Tampa, preached a powerful and inspirational sermon at the morning worship hour. The choir rendered special music on this occasion. In the evening the pulpit was occupied by Rev. Fred Turner of Tampa and the large auditorium was packed to capacity with persons eager to hear the message brought by the prominent churchman.*

*The building is nearing completion. The auditorium has been finished and within a few weeks the Sabbath school rooms and other parts of the structure will be finished. Much credit is due to the Rev. T. H. Williams, pastor, for the great progress that has been made by the church since his pastorate.*

On February 2, 1925, the Ladies Aid Society had reported "paying out of \$250 for the Rose Window." (In a conversation with the author in 1982, Mrs. A. T. Brandon, a member of the Society, confirmed that \$250 was the total price of the beautiful round stained glass window above the main entrance to the church. When the suggestion was made that the window be placed above the altar, it was decided that the window should remain in its original place.) A 1926 report gave the value of the church buildings as \$45,000 with the indebtedness listed as \$1,500. This included the Ellenton church which had been valued earlier at \$2,000. The parsonage was then listed at \$12,000. The Ladies Aid Society spent \$300 on a new pipe organ (the only reference found to payment for it). This pipe organ was replaced by a Hammond organ in 1940, and that by a Baldwin in 1966. The first church bulletin was published on February 2, 1925.

It is not known how long Terra Ceia was a mission of the Palmetto Church but among references to it is the organization of a Sunday School at Terra Ceia on March 14, 1926. On June 3, 1926, J. H. Johnson was serving as superintendent.

The space within the new church and the old church (which then stood where the Fuqua building now stands) was immediately inadequate for the growing Sunday School. In 1926, S. S. Supt. L. T. Barber was emphasizing the need for an Education building for the primary and intermediate department, and Mrs. Ed Hayes was using a room over the Manatee County Bank building (southwest corner of 4<sup>th</sup> St and 10<sup>th</sup> Ave) for her class. In 1927, a house "across the street" from the church was rented to accommodate the senior and intermediate classes. Within the year, the Sunday School reportedly had paid all of its debts. On September 1, 220 attended the Homecoming Rally day with all Sunday school departments taking part.

Lay Leader Col. J. Henry Buttram, in 1926, organized the first men's group, the Wesley Brotherhood, with 26 charter members. These men sponsored a drive to pay off the indebtedness of the church. Reporting that year in the absence of the pastor, Rev. W. A. Fisher, Supt. Barber wrote all regular appointments had been filled by Rev. W. E. Tresca, Rev. T. J. Nixon and Rev. M. T. Bell. Rev. Nixon preached at Terra Ceia several years and in some reports was listed as an Associate Pastor of the Palmetto Charge. Rev. Bell was a retired minister who resided in the superannuate home.

Among the many people who have given extensive service to the Palmetto Methodists are two who began their service in 1926: Ernest Parrish, grandson of S. S. Lamb, who became a steward, and Mrs. Chester L. (Edytha) Smoak, who became church organist – a position she served for 40 years. Mr. Parrish has been the church's historian and is a member emeritus of the administrative board.

The Missionary Society, described as a “wide awake group,” organized into three study circles: the Prudence Vaughn Circle (a group of the younger women led by Mrs. J. C. McDugald, one of Mrs. Vaughn’s daughters); Mrs. W. A. Fisher and Mrs. W. E. Mann led the other circles. The aim of the Society was “deeper spirituality among our members.”

The Trustees were given authority in 1928 to negotiate a loan from the Manatee County Bank in the amount of \$3,500 to pay the balance on the mortgage on the property and “other obligations.” Some of the funds may have been used to correct “the acoustics of the church auditorium” and provide for other improvements at an expenditure of about \$1,800.

The economic depression from which the nation suffered did not spare Manatee County. On April 26, 1928, the pastor wrote, “The financial depression has hindered the work in all departments. Quite a few of our members had to move away on account of the depression in the business world.” October 1928 brought “stormy weather” which temporarily reduced attendance.

The systematic weekly plan of financing church business, the use of offering envelopes, began in 1929. Rev. Palmer was hopeful that “this plan will greatly help in catching up the slack that has developed.” Mr. A. M. C. Russell, Mrs. B. C. Floyd and Mrs. J. H. Buttram were appointed to serve as a special Temperance and Social Service Committee. (It is apparent from reading the old issues of *The Palmetto News* that Mr. Russell, its editor and publisher, remained a staunch temperance advocate.) Terra Ceia was no longer a part of the Palmetto Charge. Rev. Cook prepared each third Sunday service with the interest of “the children in mind.”

Evangelism continued to be a strong force. There are references to the successful “One Win One” revival campaign conducted by the Dr. J. N. Glenn of the South Carolina Conference.

Through the late 1920’s and the early 1930’s, special emphasis was placed on the children’s programs. In 1932 a junior choir had been organized among the children and other efforts were made to increase the children’s attendance. A youth orchestra played for Sunday school and league meetings. The first account of a Vacation Bible School appeared in the July 15, 1932 records, with an attendance of 65 boys and girls. The Women’s Society-sponsored “Boys and Girls of the World Club” continued to be active. Its growth was so great in 1934 it was necessary to move its service to the church auditorium. August 7, 1932, Rev. Wise had recorded that “our church auditorium has been screened during the quarter much to the comfort of those attending the services of the church.” Trustee and former S. S. Supt. L. T. Barber submitted his resignation at the Nov. 10, 1932 quarterly conference stating, “Now that the building and repairing debt has been fully paid, I wish to be relieved.”

February 15, 1933, the Palmetto Methodist Church went on record as being opposed to any “repeal or nullification of the prohibition laws, unless it be to strengthen them and make them more effective.”

Under the leadership of Rev. R. E. Rutland, Palmetto Methodists joined in a union revival. May 21, 1933, Rev. Rutland wrote, “We are planning a union revival. Baptists, Presbyterian and the Methodist churches are sponsoring the meeting. The services will begin on Monday evening, June 5<sup>th</sup>, in the high school auditorium.” There were now three “auxiliaries” of the Women’s Society and a young women’s circle.

Of the few records available for the years 1934-1939, the women's organizations continued to be very active. Priority was given to the Children's Home at Enterprise, the Wolfe Mission (later settlement house) at Tampa and the Rose Valdez Home also of Tampa. In every period of crises, the churches and particularly the women responded: funds, food and clothing where appropriate were sent to the Belle Bennett Fund, Scarritt College Programs, European Relief, Armenian Relief, Russian War Relief, Korean Relief, overseas clothing funds and migrant labor relief programs.

In 1938, the old church was sold to Mr. S. F. Devereaux for \$250. The lumber was used in the building of his home on the southwest corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a home later to be occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Chester Smoak for many years.

Mrs. Sydney Smith was elected in 1939 to serve as the last president of the Women's Missionary Society.

In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Churches South and North voted to merge. The Palmetto church in 1940 became the First Methodist Church of the Methodist Church Southeastern Jurisdiction.

On September 16, 1940, the Women's Society of Christian Service was chartered with 33 members. The Rev. A. L. Burgreen officiated at the original meeting and Mrs. T. B. McRee was installed as charter president. Before the year ended there were five circles, named for five outstanding churchwomen: Mary Willis, Sarah Lamb, Virginia Parrish, Prudence Vaughn and Lillian Mann. In 1943, the circles were identified by number rather than by name.

The church records available now for the World War II period and the late 1940's are mainly those of the organizations of the women. Some history has been gleaned from newspaper reports. During this time, Mr. and Mrs. A. M. C. Russell presented to the church the framed honor roll of the member of the church who served in World War II. Later, the names of some who served in the Korean Conflict were added. Then a roll of those who served in Vietnam and some from the Korean Wars was presented and it hangs now within the sanctuary.

Those whose names appear on the plaques are:  
(no names were provided in Alice Myers' account)

The Women's Society of Christian Service sent the Upper Room at all members who served in the Armed Forces. These ladies and Mr. Pelton shared the expense of the United States and the Christian flags which were installed in the sanctuary. The churchwomen began a volunteer-ran nursery (Children's Hour) so that mothers with young children could attend worship services. They responded to the needs of the times – giving receiving blankets to the county hospital, providing Russian war relief kits as well as overseas clothing relief and food for European relief.

On October 16, 1945, the business and professional women of the church, at a dinner meeting at the home of Mrs. B. M. Smith, organized the Wesleyan Service Guild. Mrs. Ernest Parrish was elected president.

The member of Circle One undertook to prepare and serve the businessmen's luncheons. At different times during the 1940's, the Palmetto Methodist women served luncheons for the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs as fundraising projects. They also prepared spaghetti suppers to which the people of the community were

invited. These projects provided funds for various programs including landscaping of the church and parsonage grounds, and providing for parsonage needs.

In 1947, Family Week was observed with a basket dinner on the grounds. The tradition of serving refreshments at the Youth fellowship meetings began. Also during the mid to late 1940's the church youth began a series of projects to raise funds for an educational building. They gave several productions of plays. Some mentioned in church and newspaper accounts as theatrical participants were Robert Myers, Jessie Burnett, Jimmy Parrish, Al Johnson, Shirley Smith, Barbara Caudle, Eleanor Sanchez, Dorothea McRee and Marjorie Myers. By 1948, the youth has raised \$300 to make a down payment on the property immediately south of the church. The late John Neil McClure, dedicated teacher who had served also as Sunday School Superintendent and Lay Leader, as well as in other offices, paid the balance on the property. On January 21, 1952, ground was broken for the "children's division" building which was erected at a cost of \$25,000. Member of the Building Committee were Warren Tresca, John N. McClure and Mead Smith.

Messrs. Tresca, McClure and Smith served on the 1954 Building Committee along with L. L. Prince. A campaign began to raise money to extensively remodel the church plant. Rev. Weaver was given permission to set up a study in the church basement, using one of the classrooms. The first public address system was used in the church sanctuary. The seasons of the church continued to be depicted by the use of panels hung above the altar. The Fuqua building was constructed by the Breakfast Class. Class president James Moore presided over the dedication of the building at which time the building was named for Col. J. B. Fuqua, beloved teacher of the class. (The Fellowship Sunday School Class renovated the building in 1970. In 1982, the Fuqua building was razed to make way for the new Fellowship Hall church addition.) Also in 1954, a kitchen was built in the present Fellowship Hall (downstairs); \$5,000 was borrowed for this purpose.

At some time during the pastorate of Dr. Royal Page, there was a mortgage burning ceremony when the Lamb Family presented the mortgage of the original church, a balance of which was assumed by the late S. S. Lamb. There was also a stewardship campaign dinner which was held at the Women's Club because the Fellowship Hall was inadequate for the occasion.

In November 1953, under the leadership of Dr. Royal Page, the unique interdenominational drive-in church ministry began. The concept of such a program was the inspiration of Roy D. Jones, a member of the Palmetto First Methodist Church. An outdoor service was held at Mr. Jones' drive-in theater each Sunday during the winter months. The pulpit was a small raised stage just below the theater's screen and the congregation, seated in their automobiles, utilized the theater's sound system. In the beginning, other Manatee County churches participated in the drive-in church ministry. Dr. John Dingley was one of the Palmetto Methodist pastors who preached the early service in his own church, hastened to the drive-in to preach its sermon, and returned to town in equal haste to preach the regular morning service in his home church. The drive-in church became the exclusive mission of the Palmetto Methodist Church, with a largely interdenominational congregation, until October 1982 when it was conferred status as a Methodist church within the Annual Florida Conference. (Construction of a new physical church plant will begin soon on Florida Methodist Conference owned land, north of Palm View on US Hwy 41.) Until the recent organization of a formal congregation for the drive-in church, the drive-in church was served by members of the Palmetto church. In early years, at the recommendation of Mr. Jones, drive-in funds were made a part of the building fund of the Palmetto Church.

Among the many successful evangelistic missions held at the Palmetto church, was one led by the Rev. Henry Stipes of Valdosta, Georgia, and Chief Silver Tongue, a tenor and member of the Hoopa Indian Tribe.

The Methodist Men's Club was chartered on December 16, 1956, with Frank Joyner serving as its first president. Earlier that year, a building committee had been appointed to raise funds for and to plan an extensive renovation of the church facilities. Its members were John A. Wooten, Mrs. Murray Harrison, Mrs. B. F. Mount, Ernest Parrish and Wendell Hunt, Chairman. Claude Shaw's name was added to the committee for the 1959-1960 year. Between May 1956 and March 3, 1957, \$51,591.57 in cash and pledges had been committed for the work on the church. The renovation began in 1958 with the sanctuary being remodeled first. In 1959, the Chapel, the present chancel area, pulpit, lectern, choir loft, office, pastor's study and Sunday School rooms were added at a cost of \$50,000. New pews were purchased. The renovation project was carried out during the ministry of Rev. J. Walter Cross. November 13 (presumed 1959), former pastor and now Bishop A. James Armstrong preached a revival service in which other former pastors participated. It was homecoming with a dinner on the grounds, following the worship service.

In 1958, agricultural Florida suffered a disastrous crop-killing freeze. Under the leadership of Mrs. Murray Harrison, President of the Women's Society of Christian Service, Rev. Robert Weaver and Mrs. T. B. McRee, the women of the church became the driving force in a relief program for local and migrant workers, alleviating the hardships caused by the freeze and spearheading a county-wide program providing food, blankets and clothing for needy people. The women were active in many programs, including one in which they joined together with mobile home park residents in sponsoring a sewing bee to provide towels and other items for the county hospital.

The church expanded its boundaries in 1963, when the Board of Trustees under Chairman Wendell Hunt purchased from the City of Palmetto property adjoining the church to the south of 11<sup>th</sup> Street (property measuring 166 ft x 268 ft). \$5,000 was borrowed from Palmetto Federal Savings and Loan Association for this purpose.

During the Presidency of Mrs. B. F. Mount, the Women's Society purchased robes for the acolytes and candle lighters. The Society helped with the operating expenses of Asbury Towers. The Wesleyan Service Guild and the Society pooled resources to purchase a mimeograph machine for the church office. The parsonage was remodeled and memorial plates were sold during the presidency of Mrs. McRee.

In 1964, the lighted cross was hung above the altar. Mrs. Mount had secured the mahogany from India and Cofer Lybrand made the cross. A Baldwin electric organ was purchased and installed. In March 1965, Rev. Miles DePagter led a "Spiritual Life Revival."

On October 12, 1966, Dr. Dingley announced the organization of a bell choir under the direction of Mrs. Colby Bartlett. Alice Bartlett's gift of music through her bells and her direction of the choir were enjoyed by Palmetto Methodists until her retirement as choir director in 1981. She continues to play on occasion with the choir and is presently teaching the members of the youth bell choir.

The merger of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren Church was an easier transition, no doubt, because of the exchange of meetings and services between the women's organizations and other groups.