

The History of Union United Methodist Church

[Editorial note: The document below is a redaction from a summary of Union's history compiled by Mr. Sam Dusenbury for the From Jesus to Union history class (2012). This reposting should provide you, the reader, with a brief yet thorough understanding of this congregation's rich history.]

A Summary of Union United Methodist Church's History

A Historical Overview:

Union United Methodist Church is neither the oldest nor the largest church in Horry County, but it is one of the richest in tradition, fellowship and dedication of its members. Records indicate that the first church located on or near the present site of Union was a brush arbor "meeting place" which was established in 1756. This church was established because the five mile trip from what is now Toddville to Kingston, now Conway, was a long and difficult journey over the deplorable roads of that day.

Five families founded a church so that they could attend services on a regular basis and descendants of at least two of these families, the Dusenbury's and the Singleton's, are still members of the church today.

In 1765, John Singleton built the first permanent structure of logs on property owned by Wilmer Edmundson. This was replaced in 1775 by another log structure. The third church was located in what is now the cemetery located behind the present church and was used until 1790. During this period the church made the transition from a non-denominational church to that of a Methodist society. The fourth structure was built of sawed lumber on the same spot as the third and was known as Split Oak Church, since a large oak tree to the southeast of the building had been split by lightning. According to local historians, Lew Owens and W.L. Singleton, members of the church, decided to save the tree. They bored a hole through both sides of the tree, ran a long threaded rod through the tree and placed wing nuts on each end of the rod. By gradually tightening the nuts over a period of time they were able to draw the two sections of the tree together and it grew back together. This so impressed the church members that they renamed the church Union Methodist Church.

The fourth church was built by those in the community from lumber cut locally and by bricks donated by other church members. The tradition of members working on the church carried over into the present building, the fifth on the site, which was built in the 1950s under the leadership of Dr. M.B. Stokes, the pastor. Much of the construction work on this building was done by the members of the congregation. This tradition of working together and helping each other is one of the things for which Union and the Toddville community are known for even today. The history of Union is full of those who have given of their time and efforts for others to serve their church.

Union and the Independent Republic of Horry County



Horry County's nickname, "the Independent Republic of Horry County", which has been formalized onto the official seal of Horry County, is appropriate because in the early days of South Carolina colonial settlements Horry County was geographically isolated from other more populated locations by deep rivers, vast swamps and bays. Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury's writings give credence to the isolation and difficult travel in Horry County, as per his journal entries in 1785 and 1791:

"Monday, December 21, 1785. ...This country abounds with bays, swamps, and drains; if there were no sinners, I would not go along these roads..." and "Tuesday, February 8, 1791. We came a long dreary way, missed our road, and at last reached Brother Sessions'; a distance of twenty-five miles, which our wanderings made thirty miles I rejoice that this desert country has gracious souls in it....[i]"

This unique geographical, social and cultural isolation created an environment in which the residents of the land now called Horry County slowly developed their very different culture and lifestyle characterized by a strong spirit of self-

reliance and independence. Local author and historian, Rod Gragg, in his book, The Illustrated History of Horry County, describes Horry County in the early years as, "The Howling Wilderness."

Some commentary on paragraph one of the church history summary

- I. It is interesting that Hebron UMC, now inactive, located 3-4 miles from Union has an almost identical word history and is often mentioned in the early Methodist records but Union is not. So, were Union and Hebron the same church or "meeting place" at one time? Not sure.
- II. The early families at Union probably included the Singleton's, Harper's, Causey's, Green's, Woodward's and others but the Dusenbury's did not arrive in the area until the mid - 1800's.

Notes on paragraph two of the church summary

- I. John Singleton who built the first log church ran the ferry at Bull Creek (Port Harrelson) and kept an inn and tavern at the ferry there according to Dr. G. Bedford in 1796 married Nancy Harper, who is buried in Union Cemetery. Mr. Singleton is also said to have been a veteran of the War of 1812. Mrs. Bertha Staley describes the log church: "...a one room affair, covered by hand drawn shingles with a packed dirt floor. Its windows were wooden shutters that opened outward to let in light. The front door was made of slabs. The logs were notched and pegged with wooden pegs. The benches were half logs, hand smoothed and with wooden legs." [ii]
- I. There are two versions of the name origin for Union Church: The "Split Oak" legend written by W. Hal King about bolting the split tree back together saying, "Brother Singleton, it has made a union." Or the name, Union, meaning a non-denominational meeting place that was a union of various religious denominations. However, Dr. Bedford disclaims this idea saying, "Before 1800 there was no such thing for each denomination felt it had the only key to salvation and that all others were the instruments of the devil. There were buildings which were used by several different denominations; the churches within the building, however, were different." [iii]
- II. Bedford also writes about Bishop Asbury's visit through the area saying, "*The good bishop sped on his way, while Willis and Lee remained in the city. Worship was continued for awhile in the old Baptist meetinghouse. For a time they used it, but one Sunday they found their seats flung out into the streets, and doors and windows barred against them. This they regarded as a mild intimation that they were not wanted there any longer.*"

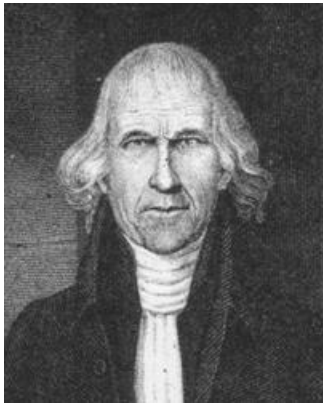
Did Bishop Asbury preach at Union?...Not likely, but maybe.



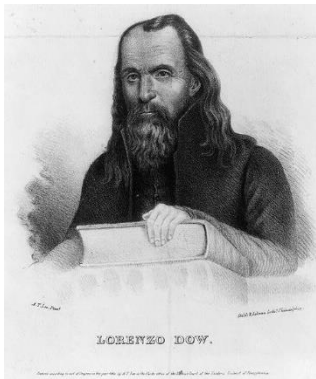
The former members of Hebron UMC claims Asbury visited there. At Union there is a tantalizing clue in a connection to Richard Green, a land owner and benefactor who is related to the Dusenbury's by marriage. Bishop Asbury wrote this, "*Sabbath day, 8 February 1801. ...We have been obliged to rest on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sabbath day and Monday 9, with Richard Green. Mr. Rogers will not give us an invitation. His kindness towards the Methodists is at an end.*"

Who were the pastors who served at Union?

The chart which follows lists the pastors from 1893 to date. Who were the earlier pastors? "Local preachers" were men in the area who either were without Methodist ordination or ordained ministers who refused to be moved by the conference decision and preached anyway and were not listed in the conference minutes. Here are a few possible early preachers at Union:



Rev. James Jenkins. Hebron claims he preached there in the 1790's. Dynamic in person and the pulpit, was called "Thundering Jimmy" and "Bawling Jenkins" but a bit austere as he is said to have expelled 13 ladies for "walking improperly".



Rev. Lorenzo Dow. He was a sometimes ordained minister, but more often not, and always eccentric... "his long hair and beard never having met a comb". The fact that dozens of males in Horry County with the names L.D., Lorenzo Dow, and Dow attest to his popularity. His Wesley-like journal records his journey through Horry County.

Rev. Samuel Dusenbury. Hebron records him as preaching the first sermon there when they opened their new church in the 1840-50's. He is buried in Union Cemetery. A review of Hebron's history could turn up the names other early preachers.

A 1902 article in the Horry Herald written by James Ira also gives names of three other Methodist preachers in Horry in the 1830-40-50's: **Rev. Lovet Pearce, Rev. Archibald Purifoy and Rev. John Pickett.**

1890-1892	Rev. John A. Mood	1923-1924	Rev. L.W. Shealy	1954-1961	Dr. Marion B. Stokes
1892-1893	Rev. Joseph E. Daniel	1924-1925	Rev. W.L. Staley	1961-1962	Rev. Ferol W. Lee
1893-1894	Rev. W. J. Dowell	1925-1928	Rev. W. H. Morrison	1962-1964	Rev. Van Bullock
1894-1897	Rev. G. S. Goodwin	1928-1929	Rev. J.L. Mullinix	1964-1965	Rev. R. C. Griffith
1897-1898	Rev. J. F. Way	1929-1930	Rev. W.S. Heath	1965-1966	Rev. Van Bullock
1898-1899	Rev. George G. Gatlin	1930-1932	Rev. J.R. Sojourner	1966-1969	Rev. T.S. Kimrey
1899-1900	Rev. W. F. Dukes	1932-1935	Rev. T. Kemmerlin	1969-1973	Rev. Zach Farmer
1900-1902	Rev. J. C. Welch	1935-1938	Rev. W.T. Bedenbaugh	1973-1977	Rev. W.B. Love, III
1902-1903	Rev. W.W. Williams	1938-1939	Rev. Fred Conley	1977-1981	Rev. J. Clark Hughes
1903-1905	Rev. F. E. Hodges	1939-1940	Rev. R.A. Berry	1981-1982	Rev. Ernie Nivens
1905-1907	Rev. H. L. Singleton	1940-1943	Rev. J.H. Eaddy	1982-1984	Rev. Julian Weisner
1907-1909	Rev. G. P. Penny	1943-1945	Rev. Blanton Doggett	1984-1994	Rev. Jeff Kersey
1909-1912	Rev. O. N. Rountree	1945-1947	Rev. G.A. Teasley	1994-1996	Rev. Lloyd White
1912-1915	Rev. W.R. Barnes	1947-1948	Rev. P.B. McLeod	1996-2000	Rev. Steve Jordan
1915-1918	Rev. W.A. Youngblood	1948-1950	Rev. Saireo	2000-2008	Rev. Troy Metzner
1918-1919	Rev. W.L. Guy	1950-1954	Rev. R.M. Tucker	2008-2014	Rev. Scott Johnson
				2014-2018	Rev. James Grubb
				2018-	Rev. Chris Arries

Building Church Buildings

- I. Following the three log churches the wooden frame church at Union is thought to have been built in the 1860's with wood, labor and bricks for the chimney and foundation largely donated. This church had a unique feature, a "courting bench", a plank built between two sturdy trees in the churchyard. An unknown author writes, "*The old folks did not mind the children courting, but it had to be done where they could be seen.*"^[iv]The bench was also used as seating for Sunday school classes which sometimes met outside.
- II. The fifth and present brick church and parsonage were built in the late 1950's, early 1960's on land donated and purchased from neighboring landowners, Edmundson's and Dusenbury's, and with donated materials, labor and oversight. For example, the construction donation ledger records donations of 50 bricks from little Phil Hucks and Sammy Dusenbury, age 10-11, among many others. The pews, windows, and many of the furnishings bear small brass plaques honoring their donors. The fundraising efforts of the church members were tremendous, including box suppers, cake auctions, fish fries, chicken bog and hog chitterling suppers...a truly remarkable accomplishment for a small, 120 member, country church in the 1950's.
- III. The Union/Bucksville Charge parsonage first was located in Bucksville, then on Pearl St. in the Jamestown section of Conway and finally in 1965 to the present site adjacent to the church. In 2008 church leaders and our pastor shared a remarkable vision for church program expansion and instead of renovating and redecorating the 50 year old provided the new pastor with a housing allotment and converted the parsonage into an educational building, aptly called "The Garden". This vision also fostered the novel concept that for every dollar we spend on our church facilities we will spend a like amount on outside ministries which gave birth to **Union with the Congo** which has provided several fresh water wells and latrines in Africa.
- IV. The fellowship hall was constructed in 1978 again with many donations of materials, labor and money. The church has continued to create capacity for church program expansion through the conversion of a storage building, also built by the membership in 2007?, into classroom space and through the purchase and renovation of a Horry County Schools portable classroom.

Union Becomes of Age

- I. Marion District Conference archives record some of Unions journey to station church status. From 1941-1967 Union, Hebron, Mineral Springs, and Willow Springs Methodist Churches were listed in the Bucksville Charge. In 1967-68 Mineral Springs disappears and El Bethel Church was added. In 1980 Bucksville was renamed Conway-Larger Parish and Poplar Church is added. In 1982 the name was changed back to Bucksville Charge and Poplar moves into a charge with Antioch and Salem Churches.
- II. In 1984 after many discussions, planning sessions and much prayer Union requests and receives station church status, purchases the Bucksville Charge parsonage and becomes a station church for the first time in its history.

The People of Union Today

That same spirit of independence and toughness of mind that drove those sturdy settlers and their offspring to overcome unimaginable adversity taming the "Howling Wilderness," surviving the Civil War, two world wars, the economic devastation of the Great Depression and losing loved ones in other military conflicts, while maintaining a spirit and house of worship worthy of God's blessing is the same spirit that today welcomes newcomers to worship in the Union community and is ever seeking new ways to serve our Lord God through service to our fellow man despite seemingly insurmountable challenges.

[i] Asbury, Francis (Rev.). Journal and Letters of Rev. Francis Asbury The Journal- 1771-1816. Epworth Press/Abingdom Press. 1958. Edited and digitized by Ben Burroughs, Coastal Carolina University. 2005 p. 2

[ii] Staley, Bertha P. Churches of Toddville, Bucksville and Bucksport. Independent Republic Quarterly, publication of the Horry County Historical Society: Conway, SC. Vol. 2: 4: pp. 9-13. October 1968. P. 9.

[iii] Bedford, A. Goff (Rev. Dr.). The Independent Republic: a Survey History of Horry County, South Carolina. 1st ed. 1985. 2nd ed. revised and enlarger by Catherine Lewis and the Horry County Historical Society: Conway, SC. 1989. p. 28.

[iv] Unknown author. Union United Methodist Church. Independent Republic Quarterly, publication of the Horry County Historical Society: Conway, SC. Vol. 11: 4: pp. 14-15. Fall 1977. p. 14.