

Christian Harbor Established in 1881

Blind Preacher Sparked Church's Beginning

CHRISTIAN HARBOR — "Mill Neck," they called the section of rich farmland below Swain's Mill on the Chowan, cut off by Taylor's Pond and Deep Swamp Branch on the northwest and the Bertie County line on the south.

This was an isolated section of Hertford County in the early 1800's, with the easiest access made by boat to Winton or upriver to Murfreesboro.

A few families owned most of the land in Mill Neck, dividing it into large holdings on which sons and daughters settled as they married.

Shipments of produce, tar and naval stores were carted to the "warehouse landing" just below the "Big Mill," or to Mount Pleasant Wharf, just upstream from the Mill.

There they were loaded on the busy river steamers which sailed down from Murfreesboro to Winton to Eden and thence to Norfolk and points south.

A few miles downstream from the Mill was "the Harbor," from which a ferry ran across the Chowan to Holidays Island and then to Cannon's Ferry on the opposite shore in Chowan County.

The Harbor held no wharf, but served primarily as an embarkation point for persons who fish or sailed for pleasure, or came to catch the ferry.

The Mill Neck families were content among themselves, leading a pleasantly exciting, hard-working farm life.

Most of the families provided good marriage risks for the children, and few outsiders joined the ranks.

The Mill Neck school, a mile or so south on Lloyd's Crossroads, served for an education, and was a community meeting place.

Large Landholder
One of the larger landholders in Mill Neck was Isaac Taylor, whose name was on the detached militia muster roll for Hertford County in 1814.

Taylor's land was close to the river. He served the county for a number of years, and was appointed one of the inspectors of creeks and rivers at the May term of the old County Court in 1830.

His appointment covered the creeks and rivers "from Simmons' mill race to the Bertie line." One of Isaac's nephews, Hilary Taylor, followed his uncle's footsteps in militia service and farming. Better yet, he endowed his large farm with ten daughters and four sons.

So diverse were the ages of his children by two wives, that in the Civil War, Hilary Taylor served as a captain while one of his eldest sons was also in the service of the Confederacy.

Ninety-year-old James Edwin Askew of Christian Harbor lives across the road from Christian Harbor Baptist Church, built in 1883 on land given by the heirs of his grandfather, Capt. Hilary Taylor.

Young Ed Askew was 13 years old when Brother David Gilland, a blind minister of the gospel, came to hold a "protracted meeting" in the Mill Neck schoolhouse.



CHRISTIAN HARBOR CHURCH IS CENTER OF LIFE IN SOUTHEASTERN HERTFORD COUNTY

The novelty of a real preacher in the community drew crowds which overflowed the schoolhouse so that a bush shelter was thrown up to shade the listeners outside. This was the first religious meeting in the community, aside from a Sunday School then being held at the school, recalls "Mr. Ed."

The late J. H. Evans, a member of the Christian Harbor church, cast more light on the formation of the church in a history he wrote for the 44th annual session of the West Chowan Baptist Association when it met at Christian Harbor in 1926.

"This church was located in a community known in 1881 as an ignorant and backward community, with a few noble exceptions, who saw the need of a church," he said.

"Comparatively few were professed Christians and a large number were known as drunkards," Evans stated plainly.

And until that time, according to Evans, the church had never had a deacon, Sunday school superintendent or teacher who had as much as a high school education. Nonetheless, despite the hard-drinking habits of some folks in the community, the blind preacher turned them toward establishing a church. On June 9, 1881, the church covenant was drawn. The Rev. Cooper Overton was the first pastor. Deacons were Wil-

liam T. Taylor, George Matthews, and Perry White (Capt. Hilary Taylor's son-in-law). Among the charter members were Mrs. Martha Bunch, Mrs. George Matthews, and Mrs. Fruzze Sewell.

Church Site

Capt. Taylor's heirs gave a wooded site for the church building, on provision the land will revert to the estate if it ever ceases to be used as a church. In addition, the old Captain's daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Perry White, financed the bills for the erection of the building.

In 1883, the one-room structure was completed. There was little hard cash available in that post-war era, but the people determined to pay White back so that the church might be debt-free at dedication. As a result, he was paid in corn, cotton, potatoes, meat, peas or whatever they could spare.

How did the church get its name? There are many tales, but the most common tale says that one member, Jim Todd, said, "Well, we are all supposed to be Christians and we have a harbor on the Chowan River near here, so why not call it Christian Harbor?"

In this first church preaching services were held on the first Sunday, and on the Saturday before the second Sunday, a conference was held with a sermon

preceding. This custom was discontinued in 1947.

Three deacons were added to the original board in 1895—William T. Taylor, D. P. H. Hoggard and J. W. Holloman, who also served as Sunday School superintendent for 26 years.

In 1901, a Missionary Society was organized with Mr. Gilland as president, J. W. Holloman as vice president, John Sewell as secretary, and Mrs. Martha Burch treasurer. Meeting on the fourth Sunday afternoon, the first collection of the society was a total of \$1.11 from 82 members. The society continued until 1943, when the meeting was changed to an evening worship service.

New Building

In 1902, the church decided to build a new building and use the one built 20 years earlier for a schoolhouse. Ed Askew, one of the men who worked as a carpenter on the new building, had an especial interest in it. The day on which the first load of logs was hauled to the mill to be cut into timber for the new church, the old building caught fire from an overturned lamp and burned down. Only a few pieces of furniture, including the pulpit which is now in the beginner's room, were saved.

The fire occurred in March—but by the following November, a new one-room church structure was completed by the members and dedicated. Ed Askew was foreman of construction, and probably hurried for a reason: In April, 1903, he and Gettie Louira Ward were the first couple to be married in the new church.

Some time before 1908, Joe J. Fairless gave a plot of land for the church cemetery—for it was in 1908 that a committee composed of J. H. Evans, R. H. Holloman, E. V. Grissom and M. E. Burch, all deceased, put a fence around the lot which cost \$8.92.

In 1904, the late John W. Saunders of Norfolk donated collection baskets, and communion plates were given by Bismarck Hoggard in 1951.

In 1907, the new little church undertook the large task of playing host to the West Chowan Association.

Ladies of the church, eager to "outdo" themselves, disagreed over the manner of serving luncheon, and so two tables were spread—one in the old, elaborate way, the other in picnic style which has now become the fashion.

The church was host to the Association again, for the last time to date, in 1926, when it had more room by virtue of the eight Sunday School rooms added in 1925. Two more rooms were added in 1940.

It is interesting to note that a pulpit Bible bought in 1897 was replaced by a new one in 1937 but the old one is kept among the church's treasured possessions. Also in 1937, the WMU presented an individual communion set to the church. In 1953, the interior of the auditorium was redecorated and a heating system installed.

Eighteen Pastors

Eighteen pastors have served the church, and 17 deacons have been ordained. The Rev. R. B. Lineberry is particularly remembered for his 20-year pastorate, together with the Rev. Oscar Creech and the Rev. W. E. Carter, who served when the church was without a pastor.

Two men have been licensed from Christian Harbor to preach

the gospel, Wade Baker and Norman L. Blythe, who was also ordained by the church.

Today the area served by the Christian Harbor is still, in a sense, an isolated section of Hertford County. Farming is still the chief occupation, and the same family names are found which made up the original membership of the church, which remains the center of community life.

(This article was prepared from a history of Christian Harbor Church written by Miss Dorothy Askew in 1950; minutes of the West Chowan Baptist Association for 1907 and 1926; "The Ahoskie Era" by J. Roy Parker; and Winborne's "History of Hertford County.")

HERTFORDIANS

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Uriah Vaughan, my curiosity caused me to look for his grave. His granite vault was one of the largest in the cemetery, and showed that he was born November 29, 1813, and died January 18, 1890.

At the age of 15 he became interested in the mercantile business and left school, to become a clerk to William Rea. He was so successful that within a few years he launched out on his own, and then success crowned his efforts on every hand. Because of his excellent mind, high morals, and Christian life, he was loved and respected by all who knew him. He owned a large estate, but most of it was destroyed by the Civil War. With his undaunted spirit, however, he renewed his energies and, at his death was considered the wealthiest man in Hertford County.

His great life was aptly described by his epitaph: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Shadows had begun to fall over the calm setting before I had finished my tour. Birds were already seeking the sheltering branches of aged magnolia trees which cast their shade over the serene spot I suddenly felt proud, not only of the people whom I have mentioned here, but also the many others who lie interred in this graveyard. These citizens contributed their best to the economic, social, and cultural development of Murfreesboro and Hertford County.

The epitaph of Lewis Cowper Lawrence characterizes the lives of these men and women. "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright for the end of that man is Peace."

BANK

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ment Cashier; Mrs. Elaine Cooke, Bookkeeper; Mrs. Charlotte Robertson, Proof-Transit clerk.

Members of the local Board of Managers are: Joseph B. Burden, attorney; Ralph L. Basnight, president; W. H. Basnight & Co., Inc.; Cohen W. Parker; Rupert W. Massey, manager, Belk-Tyler Company; T. E. Ward, manager and partner, Ahoskie Motor Company; J. C. Sessoms, partner, Sessoms Brothers; W. B. Everett, farmer; Harold G. Veazy, partner, Basnight Warehouses, Inc.; H. H. Newsome, farmer.

Bryant Agency Young, Active

AHOSKIE—Working with people is one of Joseph R. Bryant's greatest pleasures, he admits.

It was this interest which occasioned his switch from the agricultural extension service to the insurance business in the winter of 1951.

A native of Rich Square, Joe Bryant took time out from his studies in agricultural engineering at N. C. State College to serve a hitch in the Navy during World War II. Returning to get his degree in 1948, he spent three years as assistant county agent at Elizabethtown, in Bladen County.

In December, 1951, Joe Bryant decided to return to the Roanoke-Chowan area as agent for Farm Bureau Insurance Company (now Nationwide). He served in the Ahoskie bureau of that firm for five years until January, 1957.

GROVE

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then called to the pastorate, and under his direction the church began a program of self-improvement.

In 1945, after 198 years, electric lighting finally came to Pleasant Grove. The church agreed to pay necessary costs of connecting with a new VEPCO line in the area, and for wiring the church for electricity. In 1946 the entire outside of the building was painted, and the inside got the same treatment in 1947.

Illness once again prevented the church conference from meeting in July, 1948, when the clerk noted that "infantile paralysis" had caused the conference to be canceled.

Today, 122 years after the founding of Pleasant Grove, the membership remains very much the same as it was in 1837. There are about 160 resident members on the church roll, and about 170 nonresident.

The building has a new coat of plaster inside and paint outside, and the light of kerosene lamps has given way to the incandescent bulb. But the spirit of "zealous Christians" continues to shine in the second century of the church's history.

—MARY ELLEN ALBARES

(Material for this article was gained by reference to the minutes of the Pleasant Grove church conferences, through the courtesy of the church clerk, Mrs. Edna Joyner Burkett; from the Hertford County Herald files of 1837; Winborne's "History of Hertford County"; Moore's History of North Carolina"; and articles in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. J. Raynor Moore of Powellsville.)

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