

# St. Paul's On The Hilltop

By DOROTHY SKINNER WILLIAMS

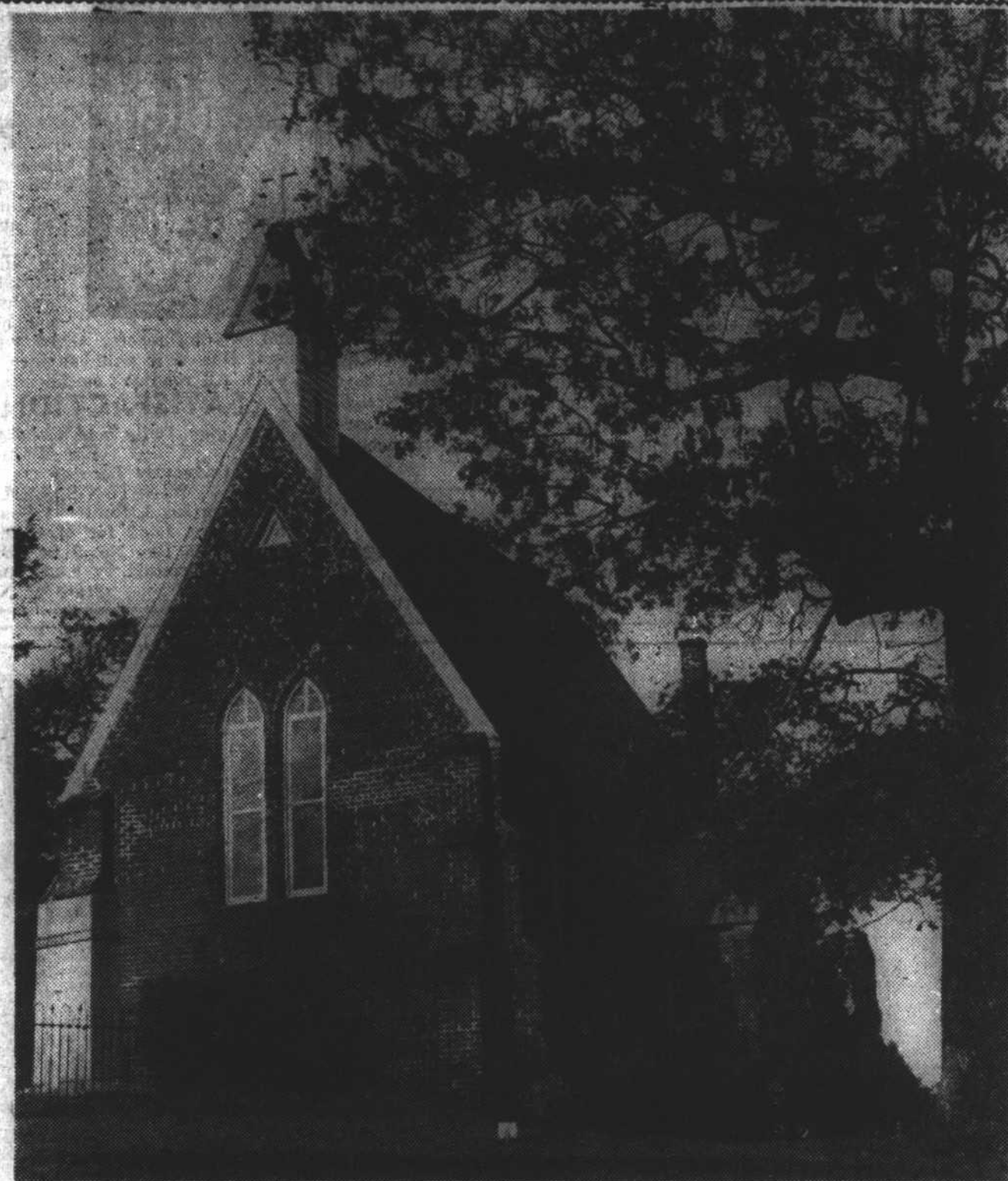
If you want to dip into the past to see what the Yadkin valley was like when your forebears lived, take an afternoon off and go to the hill in Wilkesboro where Little St. Paul's Episcopal Church is located. There you will get a perfect view of the valley and its surrounding mountains. The present activity of the Wilkesboros becomes incidental as you sit on this hill, looking down to the fields, and up to the mountains; on one side, the Brushies, carpeted with fresh green trees; on the other side, the Blue Ridge, a clear cut, and cool fringes of mountains in the distance.

From this knoll, the noise of automobiles and business life is muted. Suddenly you feel as if you are living in another age. Tractors and bulldozers are forgotten. Then you take a closer look at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and you know it is certainly of another age. Its pinky-red, uneven brick gives a clue to its antiquity. Its centennial is a thing of the past. This building is one hundred-one years old, completed in July 1849. Perhaps one of its charter members was your grandmother or a distant cousin. The names are all familiar here in the valley: Mr. and Mrs. James Gwyn, Dr. and Mrs. James Calloway, Miss Fannie Williams, and Mrs. Mary Taylor Peden.

You might expect St. Paul's to be built in the shape of a cross, which is often the case with Episcopal churches. Instead, this church is built to resemble an ark, probably symbolizing Noah's Ark. Inside, the beams are left exposed, so that the shape of the ark is more evident. The beams are solid walnut as are the front, the pulpit, and the pews, all the original equipment of the church. A contemporary member of the church recently praised the pews for the beauty of their wood and the simplicity of design, then reluctantly admitted a gross deficiency in their comfort.

The original members of this church meant for the congregation to sit up and worship alertly. They were an alert group! In 1836, thirteen years before the church was even built, the first

## ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN WILKESBORO



baptismal service of this group was held at the home of James Dodge, the nephew of Washington Irvin. Following this, services were held in private homes at intervals until 1847, at which time these Episcopalians decided to raise money for a church. Samuel Finley Patterson donated the site for the church. By May, 1848, the necessary

money for the building was collected and the contract was let. How simple as compared with the debts evolved from a church building program today! One of these Episcopalians slyly commented that soon after the money for St. Paul's was collected the Presbyterians and Methodists began to solicit money to build their own churches.

We can see the church today and know what it looked like in 1849 at completion because it has never been changed. Luckily, from various letters and commentary of the time, we can also have a real idea of one of the early services. Bishop Ives wrote in a Diocesan Journal in 1849:

"On the morning of the fifth Sunday after Trinity, consecrated in the town of Wilkesboro a church by the title of St. Paul's. Preaching on the occasion, and administering the Holy Communion. This is a beautiful Gothic structure of brick, erected at small expense, with free sittings and without debt."

The Bishop was evidently impressed with the "free sittings" which meant that there was no rent charged for use of the pews. You could sit free.

To assist the Bishop at this consecration service, the faculty and students of the divinity school at Valley Crucis walked forty-five miles to Wilkesboro. They entered town at sunset, July 7, 1849, each bearing a pilgrim's staff and chanting in unison the "Gloria in Excelsis." It must have been an inspiring sight to behold.

Picture another Sunday morning when members of the various prominent families came to be confirmed in the church. As they walked under the ivy-covered lichen-gate which still stands, the girls were probably wearing their daintiest dress and prettiest bonnets. Coming behind these parishioners were the slaves. The records tell of the "faithful slaves" Bynum, Phebe, Detsey, and Judith, who were confirmed in the church, perhaps on the same day as their master's son or daughter.

Exploring St. Paul's you feel the rich quality of its history. It breathes out the love that has been given to it its members. It also proclaims the dignity of the

Episcopal ritual. As you leave St. Paul's on the hill, and go back to the chase of modern life, you feel more confidence in the future. St. Paul's has seen the time of slavery, and has witnessed the lives of the people who now live in its quiet cemetery. Yet this little church still stands, giving Peace to its devoted parishioners and keeping watch over the valley.

More than 1,000 farm owners have received loan checks totaling \$4,563,000 from the Farmers Home Administration for construction or repair of homes and other buildings through the new farm housing program, according to the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

**SUPPORT THE CANCER FUND**  
ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE  
North Carolina, Wilkes County.  
The undersigned, having qualified as administrator of the estate of Mrs. Pearl M. Hardbarger, deceased, late of Wilkes County, this is to notify all persons having claims against the said estate to present them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of March, 1951, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.  
This 30 day of March 1950.  
JAMES E. HARDBARGER  
Rt. 1, North Wilkesboro, N. C.  
Administrator. 5-8-50(M)

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**\$39.50**  
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