

First Baptist Church plans annual live nativity scene

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
Community News Editor

First Baptist Church on Highland Avenue plans to continue an annual Christmas tradition this year by presenting its 28th annual Outdoor Live Nativity Pageant.

The Pageant will be presented on the church lawn this Sunday

behind the scenes. The Pageant itself will consist of six different scenes, each lasting about 20 minutes. Taped Christmas carols will provide the background music, and the Rev. Wendell Johnson, pastor of First Baptist Church, will provide the narration.

The Outdoor Live Nativity Pageant has been a tradition at

now," said Smith.

Smith also recalled how successful the Pageant has been each year, and how in past years, traffic had to be directed by police officers. However, in recent years, the audience number has decreased. Smith attributes the drop to urban renewal.

"I think (the lack of) city

transportation, plus the removal of the residential area caused our attendance to drop," she said.

She said that during the 1960s, Highland Avenue and the surrounding area was mostly a residential area, along with some businesses and the Kate B. Reynolds Hospital across the street.

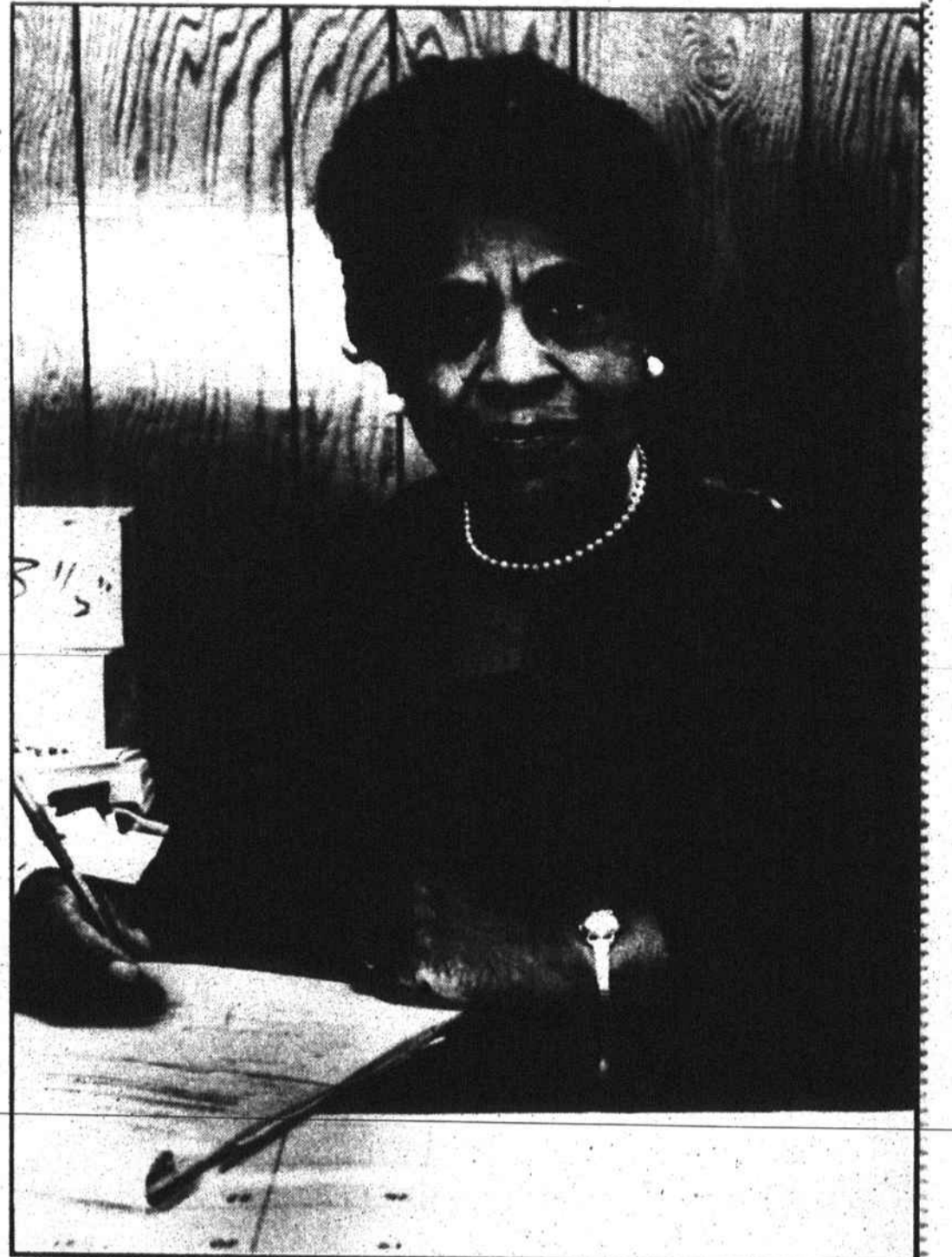
Because of the crowds coming to see the Pageant, it was originally presented on four consecutive nights. But, over the years, as the audience dwindled, so did the nightly presentations. This year will mark the fourth year that the Pageant has been presented on only two consecutive nights.

However, despite the drop in attendance, the Pageant is still considered a success, and Smith said that the congregation still enjoys doing it.

But an end to the tradition is possible because of the apparent lack of community interest and support. Other alternatives that have been considered include moving the Pageant inside the church, or having a singing Christmas tree. None of those possibilities have been ruled out, according to Smith.

Smith, on the other hand, though, would not like to see the tradition come to an end. "I would like to think that this will continue on," she said.

The Outdoor Live Nativity Pageant at First Baptist will be free and open to the public. The church is located at 700 Highland Avenue.



Louise Smith has been director of the Outdoor Live Nativity Pageant since its first presentation 28 years ago.



Pictured (left to right) are Kendra Peay, Margie Bohannon, Keith Bohannon, and Kathy Peay rehearsing their roles in First Baptist Church's upcoming Outdoor Live Nativity Pageant.

and Monday, Dec. 22 and 23, from 7-9 p.m., by members of the congregation and the church's Women's Progressive Club.

"We feel that we are giving a community service. After all that's what we want to do," said Louise Smith, director of the Pageant. "This is part of the outreach ministry of our church."

The Pageant will be a massive production by the church members, with over 60 participating in the Pageant itself, and over 50 working

First Baptist for 28 years now, first being presented in 1963 by the Women's Progressive Club. And according to Smith, who has been the Pageant director since the beginning, there is at least one participant of the very first Pageant, who is also in this year's presentation.

"When we had it in 1963, we used a live baby to make the picture for the paper. He was just about two or three months old, and he is in it. So, he's 28 year old

Local gospel singer receives two awards

Ruby Cunningham Glaspy, a local artist of extensive experience and versatility, recently received two awards, one from the Durham Parks and Recreation Department, which sponsored the 1991 Durham Gospel Music Showcase, and the other from the City of Lexington Parks and Recreation Department.

Mrs. Glaspy sings Southern Gospel, Country Gospel, Black Gospel and Black Country. She has performed at the Walkertown Fall Festival, Madison Square Garden in New York City, Love the Arts Festival, City Stage in Greensboro, and the National Quartet Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

She was also a winner at the North Carolina State Fair Folk Festival in 1990.



Ruby Cunningham Glaspy

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