



GLADYS HILL of Leland is helping re-open St. Mark Church in Shallotte, where her great grandfather worshipped around the turn of the century.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DOUG RUTTER



ST. MARK CHURCH was dedicated in 1917, but it was actually built five or six years earlier on property donated by the Rourk family.

Sisters Rekindling Spirit Of St. Mark A.M.E. Church With Love, Elbow Grease

BY DOUG RUTTER

Gladys Hill was saddened when St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church closed its doors three years ago. She had joined in 1953, and it had been the home church of her father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

Hill, with help from sister Julie, is working to reopen the 80-year-old church so it can once again serve families in the Shallotte area.

A Bible study has been started at the church every Saturday afternoon. More programs will be added later at the wood-frame church building that sits at the fork of N.C. 179 and Village Point Road.

In keeping with St. Mark tradition, the sisters arranged an old-fashioned homecoming at the church on Aug. 22. The Rev. James Nichols, pastor there from 1984 to 1989, returned as the guest speaker.

"Homecoming was always held the fourth Sunday in August," Hill explained in a recent interview. "People came from Wilmington and all around. It was always a joyous occasion. We wanted to start with a new beginning."

As part of the new beginning, St. Mark Church will be non-denominational from now on. Hill, a 1958 graduate of Union High School, said the church used to be Methodist.

The doors at St. Mark Church were locked in 1990, shortly before the death of its last surviving member, Katie Stanley. The Hill sisters decided to re-open the church since several generations of their family had attended. "That's why we wanted to come back and keep it open," said Gladys, a Leland resident who was born and raised in Shallotte.

Hill is the great granddaughter of Abraham Thomas, one of the early members of the church. According to his descendants, Thomas would have quite a story to tell if he were alive today.

He was born in Augusta, Ga., in 1844, and was captured by Sherman's Army during the Civil War. He was later freed in Shallotte. His funeral was held at St. Mark Church in September 1934.

Hill, who learned the family history and history of St. Mark Church from her 79-year-old mother, Corine Thomas Flowers, and 73-year-old aunt, Flossie Thomas, has fond memories of St. Mark from her childhood.

She can still remember how good the food smelled whenever she walked into that old, white-washed building on Homecoming Day. Dishes would be piled high on two wooden benches across the back of the church. Her mouth would be watering while the preacher gave his sermon.

"I remember coming to church and I couldn't wait for it to be over cause all that food smelled so good," she recalled.

Gladys said her sister, Julie Hill Wright of Wilmington, is the driving force behind the move to re-open St. Mark, which always had a small membership and catered to a few families.

"She said she was inspired by God," Gladys said. "We were talking about it and wanted to go back and pick up where those old people left off. It had been on my mind for a while, so we just got together."

Hill said St. Mark Church was originally located in an area known as Rasha Bay off Hale Swamp Road. Many of her relatives are buried in a family cemetery at Rasha Bay.

The existing church, just down the street from Brunswick County Bowling Center, was built around 1910. It sits on property donated by the Rourk family. "They said as long as the land was used for church purposes they could always have it," Hill said.

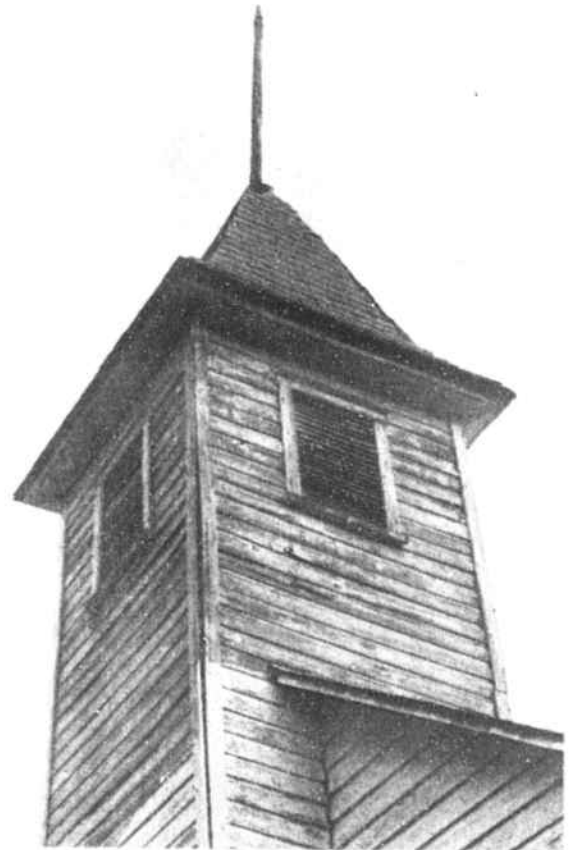
A cornerstone indicates that the church was dedicated Aug. 26, 1917, when trustees were Matthew Thomas, Dave Hill, Joe Frink and Gable Brown. Daniel Flowers was the secretary.

Also on the cornerstone is the name of the Rev. A.J. Hooper, who was pastor at the time and is one of 19 preachers who have served the church since the turn of the century.

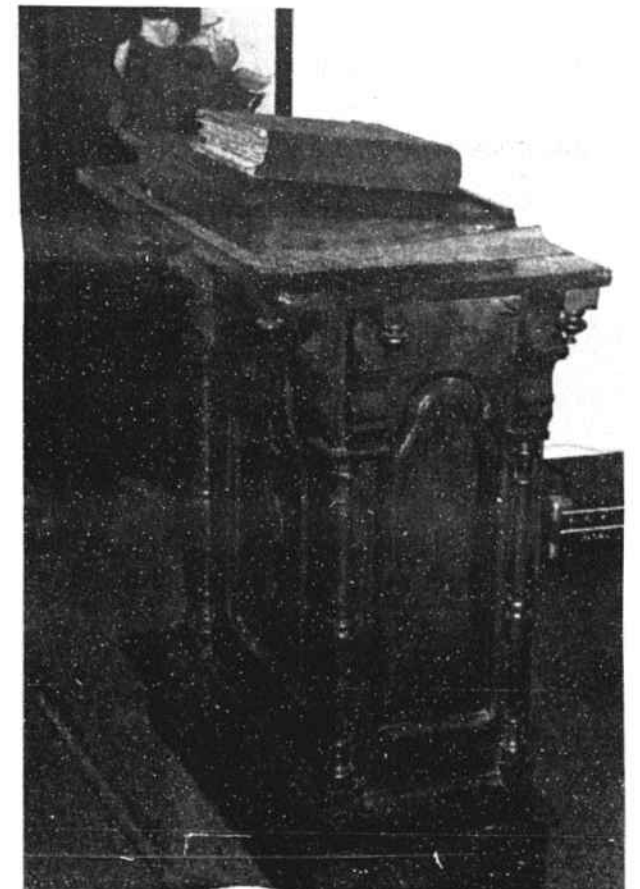
"It's the same building," Hill said. "It's not been remodeled or anything. The floors are just as solid as they always were."

It's taken some time and elbow grease, but the inside of the church looks as if it were never closed.

A dog-eared Bible rests atop a beautiful, hand-crafted



THE WHITE-WASHED CHURCH could use some work, but the wooden structure has held up remarkably well since being built some 80 years ago.



THE HAND-CRAFTED PULPIT was donated to St. Mark Church in 1930 by Shallotte Presbyterian Church.

wooden pulpit, which was donated by the old Presbyterian Church in Shallotte in 1930. The Presbyterians also donated the benches, which Hill says were probably built in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

An antique piano rests in a front corner of the church. "It needs to be tuned but it still plays," Hill says, running her fingers over the keys.

Leaning against a wall near the pulpit is a red broomstick with a cigar box fastened to the end, which served as the collection plate.

Over 3,000 new colors custom mixed.
See J.D. Morris,
your Glidden Paint Consultant
for custom mixed colors
Glidden Spread Satin



Our top-of-the-line interior wall paint

•Beautiful scrubbable flat finish •Easy water clean-up

\$13.99 gal.



Be ready for the future...
Spread 2000
No VOC Paint—The first environmentally safe, odor-free paint!
Coming in October—Glidden & The Discovery Channel present "The Spirit of the Rainforest"

MILLIKEN HOME CENTER
In The Shallotte Electric Stores—Bus. Hwy. 17, Shallotte • 754-6000

ONE HOUR EYE GLASSES

Complete Pair Single Vision Lenses \$12.95 Any Power CR-39 Plastic	Complete Pair Bifocal Lenses Any Type Any Power \$29.95 CR-39 Plastic
Complete Pair Progressive Any Type Lenses Any Power \$79.95 CR-39 Plastic	Complete Pair Trifocals Any Type Any Power \$39.95 CR-39 Plastic

Frame Size 54 Eye and Above Add Just \$10.00
Coupons Expire Sept. 30, 1993

CLEAR-VUE OPTICIANS

We can make arrangements to get your eyes examined today.
(919)395-6563 3901-A Oleander Dr., Wilmington
1-800-634-1085 Mon.-Fri. 9:30-7p.m., Sat. 9:30-5 p.m. Sun. 1-5 p.m.

Other locations—Kinston, Greenville, Jackson, Wilson, Raleigh & Goldsboro.



Transition lenses are the new plastic lenses that change into sunglasses.
Present this coupon and get \$25 off transition lenses.