

Long Creek Oldest Church In Gaston County

Story By Lib Stewart

Photos By Gary Stewart

BESSEMER CITY-Early Presbyterian, Puritan and Early American traditions have preserved the historic Long Creek Presbyterian Church and on its 200th birthday this month worshippers still worship in a sanctuary little changed over the past 100 years. The simple interior, without a cross and few vestments, is reminiscent of churches in New England.

The Long Creek Church was organized about the year 1780 on land given by Benjamin Ormand whose grandfather got his grant from King George II of England.

Original handmade pews, which date back to 1870, have been covered with red cushions but the handmade doors, windows and Bible stand in the sanctuary and the vestibule are unchanged, as is the cemetery which adjoins, a burying ground for four Revolutionary War soldiers and perhaps more. Tradition says that Joseph Blackwood was wounded in the Battle of Kings Mountain Oct. 7, 1780. He died a few days later and was interred Oct. 22, 1780. The Blackwood tombstone is the oldest marker in the ancient cemetery. Other Revolutionary War soldiers buried here were Lt. James White, Captain Samuel Espy, and Pvt. James Henry. The first wall around the old graveyard was built of rocks without mortar. In 1922 the cemetery was enlarged and the rock wall replaced by the present rock wall of masonry. Just outside on the south side of the cemetery is a slave graveyard.

Prior to the organization of the Long Creek Church, preaching services were held in the home of a Mr. Blackwood, who lived near the present church building. The first church building was made of logs and located below where the present structure stands and not far from the creek. The William Oates family, the James White family and the Benjamin Ormand family were charter members.

According to church historians, Mrs. Estelle Arrowood, a senior member of the present congregation, Mrs. Deriel Smith, Women of the Church historian, and Pastor Allen E. Morrison, Long Creek Church was a member of Orange Presbytery, the first Presbytery organized in the Carolinas, and many churches branched from Long Branch during the "Psalms controversy" when some groups formed other congregations to sing psalms, rather than traditional hymns.

Church histories reveal that

from 1836-39 the Long Creek Church was grouped with the Emmanuel Church and the membership numbered 50. During the years 1839-1871 the church was grouped with the Lincolnton Church. In 1872-1882 it was grouped with the New Hope church, from 1883-1888 it was grouped with the Kings Mountain Presbyterian Church and in 1899 the Bessemer City Presbyterian Church was formed from Long Creek congregation. Until 1919, when the First Presbyterian Church in Kings Mountain became self-supporting, Long Creek was grouped in a three church field. In 1919 the Long Creek and Bessemer City Presbyterian Churches began working together as a two church field and have been together since. Rev. Mr. Morrison became the pastor of the two churches in 1968.

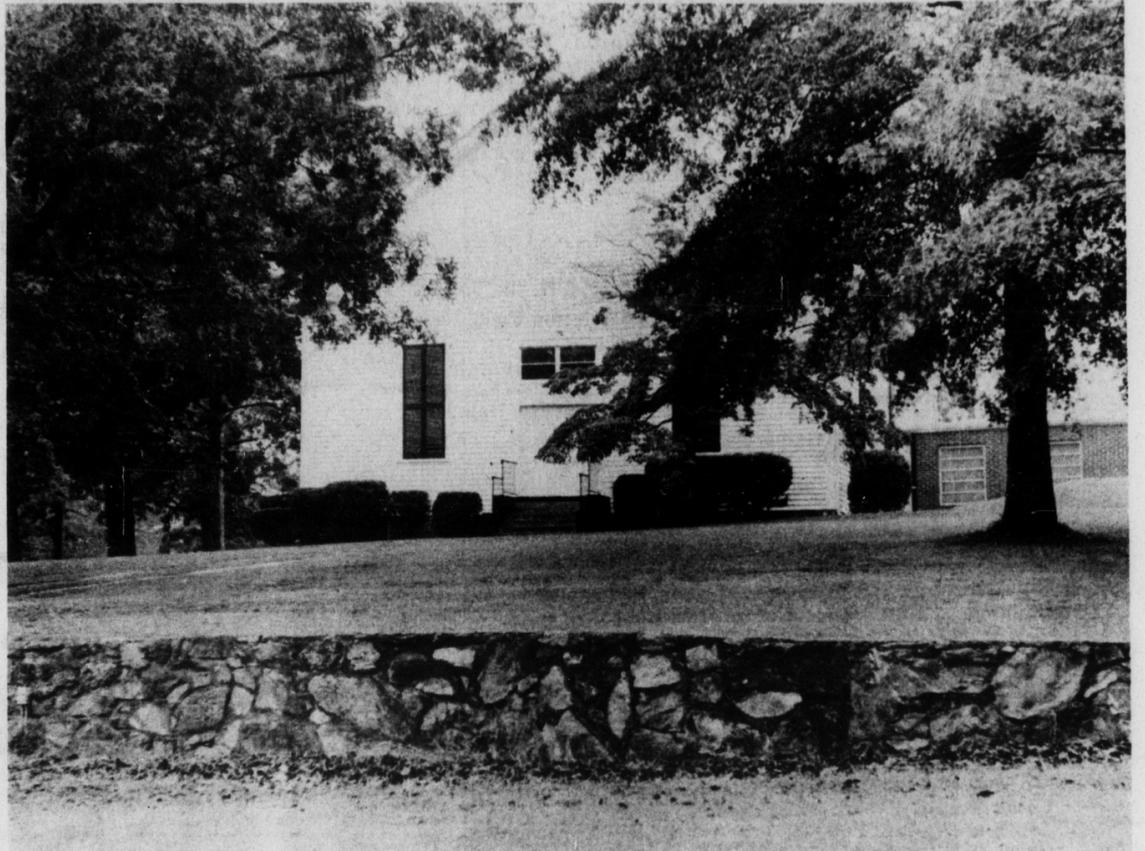
Little is known of the activities of the church the first 100 years as the sessional records were burned when L.R. Ormand's house was destroyed by fire in 1915 where the records were kept. One has to refer to Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly minutes and other records to find out about the data on the first 100 years. The sessional records are in existence from the early 1890's to the present. The earliest sessional record book is in the Historical Foundation in Montreat.

The second church building was built between 1840-45 and during the pastorate of Rev. Lemuel Murray. The building was a frame structure with a long aisle going across the church were log communion tables were placed. For a number of years all communicants gathered around the table to partake of the Lord's Supper. At the back of the church was an outside stairway that led to a gallery or balcony where the black slaves sat.

The first Sunday School was organized during the ministry of Rev. R.N. Davis in 1851. There were no lesson books but the Child's and Shorter Catechism.

The membership grew to 200 by 1873 and some of the family names of members at that time were White, Hovis, Roberts, Tiddy, Brown, Beatty, Oats, Ormand, Forney, Torrence, Ramseur, Dameron, Beam, Deck, Phifer, Rhome, Huffstetler, Whiteside, Ware, Bridges, Arrowood, Ferguson and Mauney.

By 1875 a building fund was underway and soon a new building was constructed at cost of \$1500. Crow and Beam were



Long Creek Presbyterian dates back to 1780...

contractors and Albert Torrence and Lee Ramseur were carpenters. J. L. Phifer and his father painted the church and finished the interior. In the summer of 1876 the third church building (the present sanctuary) was dedicated.

The first Sunday School rooms and kitchen were added in 1942. The brick was donated by

W. H. Belk and the lumber was cut off the church property. The men of the church provided all the labor with exception of bricklaying and in 1958 more Sunday School rooms and a fellowship hall were added. Construction on a new and larger fellowship hall began in 1976 and was completed at a cost of \$45,000 due to the volunteer

labor for the beautiful addition by the congregation. The plant has also been centrally heated and air-conditioned, a new organ has been purchased at cost of \$5,000, and extensive repairs have been done to the manse. During the past 10 years the congregation has spent more than \$90,000 for additions and repairs while annual contributions have totaled more than \$42,000 and the church has reached membership of 148. Seventy new members have been added in the past 10 years.

The church is the oldest Presbyterian Church in Gaston County in the Presbyterian Church U.S. and is located on seven acres of property on Long Creek church road. The oldest deed, which dates to 1838, is displayed on a table in the vestibule, an early Sunday School record book and a DAR plaque to Revolutionary War soldiers is on display in the Fellowship Hall.

Sunday School records from the turn of the century reveal that early offerings were as little as ten cents and as large as 98 cents. The church's giving to benevolences is evidenced by its mission minded congregation from which three of its sons entered the ministry, William Butler Arrowood, Robert Silvanus Arrowood, and William Chalmers Arrowood, and of its present membership, Miss Amy Robinson served a team as a mis-

sionary in Japan for five years in the late 1930s.

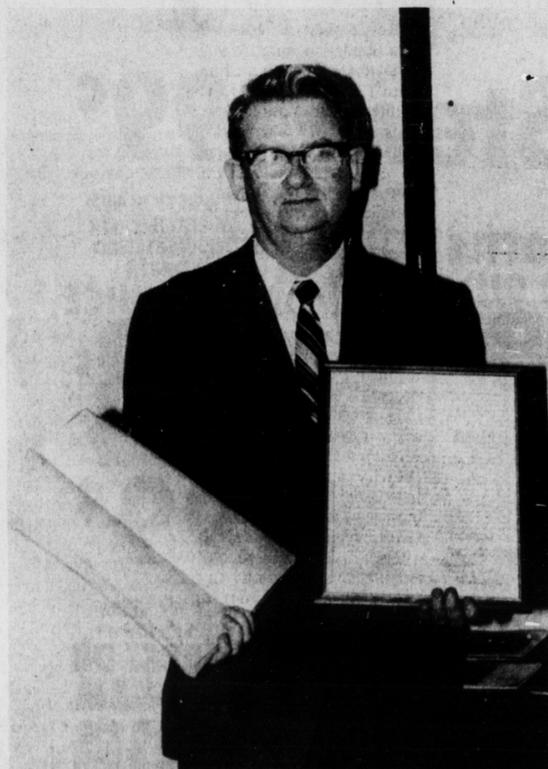
Long Creek has an active men, women's, and youth organizations, a Sunday School, Boy Scout troop, Men's softball team and participates in Meals on Wheels. Needy families are aided through a clothing closet, which is set up in the church, where staple food items are also stocked in the Fellowship Building for needy.

From rural churches like Long Creek have branched numerous city churches during the past 200 years and direct descendants of the early families remain as members of the Long Creek churches including descendants of the families of Arrowood, Long Creek churches plus the families of Absher, Bid-dix, Burton, Dellinger, England, Fredell, Greene, Guffy, Hager, Homesley, Humphries, Jenkins, King, Lingarfeldt, Lovelace, Moore, Myers, Morrison, Neal, Penner, Ramsey, Randolph, Rayfield, Robinson, Smith, Sneed, Styers, Walker, Whitehurst, Wilson and Wright.

Dr. Ben Ormand, native of the community, will return to Long Creek to deliver the 200th anniversary sermon at a service the last Sunday in November. Rev. Allen Morrison said that a new history will be read and that cataloging of the cemetery will be completed by a committee busy for sometime on compiling data on ancestry



Oldest grave is that of Joseph Blackwood



Rev. Allen Morrison displays old deed and Sunday School records...



Cemetery, also, dates back over 200 years...