



ANTE-BELLUM SERVICE—The silver communion service donated to the Mount Tabor Baptist Church in 1860 by Mrs. Sarah Moore Darden, wife of Alfred W. Darden, is now in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Gatling of Ahoskie. The pitcher and three cups were returned to Mr. Gatling as great-grandson of the Dardens, when the church purchased a service with individual cups. (Staff photo.)



Mount Tabor Church building, built in 1860, is county's oldest church sanctuary

Church Beside the Potecasi Started in 1839

Mount Tabor Church—Vigorous Offspring Is Now Venerable Hertford Congregation



FIRST CHURCH CLERK—Alfred W. Darden, first clerk at Mount Tabor Baptist Church after its organization in November, 1839, was an important figure in the history of Hertford County. At his home in Elm Grove, he supported a high school for young ladies in the decade before 1850. Mrs. Sallie Gatling, shown looking at a portrait of Mr. Darden which hangs in the home of her son, Lee Gatling, in Ahoskie, is the wife of the late Mark Gatling, who was the grandson of Mr. Darden. (Staff photo.)



GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMOTHER—Six-year-old Sheila Gatling, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Gatling of Ahoskie, takes a good look at the portrait of her great-great-grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Moore Darden, who was active in the affairs of the Mount Tabor Baptist Church over 100 years ago. The portrait, done in dark oil colors, is one of a pair hanging in the Gatling home. The second portrait is of Mrs. Darden's husband, Alfred W. Darden, and both are presumed to have been painted by an itinerant German painter during the Civil War. (Staff photo.)

The Meherrin Baptist Church, "mother church" of the Baptist churches in Hertford County, produced a number of offspring. One of them, Ahoskie, came into being in 1804 and branched out into organization of the Bethlehem Church in 1836. In the same year the Meherrin Church produced another offshoot, at Como, in the Buckhorn Church.

This development of two strong churches in one year inspired another group of Baptists, most of whom had been attending the Meherrin Church, to organize a fifth church in the county. They selected a site on a hill overlooking Potecasi Creek, midway between Murfreesboro and Winton, and gave their new church a Biblical name, Mount Tabor, suitable to its location.

There were 21 members who met on Saturday, November 23, 1839, to establish the covenant and rules of decorum of the church. Amos Raynor was selected as moderator and R. B. Cobb and Thomas Barnes were ordained as deacons. Alfred W. Darden, who lived at Elm Grove, was selected as clerk and his brother, William Darden, was named treasurer.

After approval of the rules of decorum, the clerk was instructed to send word immediately to the Biblical Recorder, Baptist paper in Raleigh, that the church had been formed. The ample sum of \$1 was subscribed to cover the expense of printing the minutes.

By 1840, the congregation had erected a small church building and membership had grown from the original 21 members. Their names were recorded in the first book of minutes: Thomas Barnes, R. B. Cobb, his wife, Temperance Cobb, A. W. Darden, Sarah Gatling, David Gatling, Millie Gatling, William Jones, Elizabeth Jones, A. J. Jones, Martha Jones, Mary Langston, R. Moore, Simon Murfree, Charlie Powell, Susan Powell, Amos Raynor, G. M. Tompson, William Darden, Martha T. Darden and Jane Darden. Also on the 1840 roll were the names of several Negro members—Allen of Charles Powell and Henry of James Powell.

New Building
The new little church took care of its housekeeping in 1840, by appropriating \$1 to "Sister Jones" to "keep the meeting house" for one year. By 1860, in the prosperous ante-bellum era, the church had outgrown its humble beginnings and members agreed to have a new building constructed. The committee named to secure subscriptions for construction reported to an 1860 conference that \$1,256.46 had been raised. This was enough to finance a handsome white edifice with large sanctuary, high belfry and Sunday school rooms in the rear of the sanctuary and in the balcony space.

The interior of the new building was furnished sumptuously for the times, with members of the church contributing various

amounts for specified articles of furniture. Each donor is given credit for the amount he gave, and the clerk meticulously listed in the records for what purpose the gift was to be used. Total funds were pooled, however, and the furnishings ordered from various manufacturers, with the freight charges added to the costs in the minutes.

For the total sum of \$134.35 Clerk Darden lists the following purchases: "One marble slab table, 2 sofas, 2 revolving chairs, communion set with box to hold it, oil carpet, 4 stone spittoons..." It is sad to note that the "marble slab table" donated in 1860, which stood for the ensuing 98 years before the pulpit in the sanctuary, was stolen last year. Thieves also took an antique wall clock which had been in the church many years, but no record of the clock can be found in the church minutes.

Communion Set

The communion set mentioned in the records was donated by Mrs. Sarah M. Darden, wife of Alfred W. Darden, church clerk. A. W. Darden was the son of the Rev. Jacob Darden, noted pastor of the Old Southquay Church in Southampton County, Va. With his brother, William, Alfred moved to this county, making his home on a large farm at Elm Grove, about four miles west of Murfreesboro at the edge of the county. He married Sarah Moore, daughter of John Moore. One of Alfred Darden's daughters, Lily, married John D. Gatling. Through the Gatling family, the original communion set given the church in 1860 has passed into the possession of Lee Gatling of Ahoskie. When a newer communion set was purchased in this century, the set donated by Mrs. Sarah Darden, Lee Gatling's great-grandmother, was returned to the Darden-Gatling family by the church.

Civil War Record

Mount Tabor is one of the few churches in Hertford County whose records reflect the difficulty of the days of the Civil War. Many of the churches note that some of their members were away in service, but the Mount Tabor minutes throw specific light on the progress of the war.

First mention of the war occurs in the minutes of the conference in October, 1861. "On motion resolved that the church and congregation worshipping here meet next Friday the 15th of the month, at the usual hour and observe the same as a day of fasting and prayer to Almighty God for the success of our cause," says the record.

In July, 1862, the church noted letters from J. B. Weston, A. S. Rowles and A. M. Darden, "now in the army," asking the prayers of the church.

In September, 1863, plans were going ahead as usual for a baptismal service. A committee was appointed to "clean out the

growth and water at the bridge, the usual place for baptizing." Later that year, in August, a collection was taken to send the Biblical Recorder "to our North Carolina troops, members of the congregation now in the field."

In October, 1863, church clerk John A. Vann noted: "No conference in consequence of a raid by the enemy the day of our November meeting. The bridge across the creek was burnt the same day by our own troops."

This may refer to the Battle of Mount Tabor about which Civil War historians differ in opinions. B. B. Winborne of Murfreesboro, author of "The History of Hertford County" in 1906, scoffs at the idea of battle: "... the 'bloody battle' of Mt. Tabor, when in the imagination the earth was covered with the dead bodies of Union soldiers, and the waters of the noble Potecasi Creek was running red with their blood, notwithstanding no one was hurt and no damage was done, except a cabbage cart distributed its cargo along the road from Hill's Bridge to Murfreesboro and the horses of the gallant band were soon windless from the speedy retreat from the ghost of Banquo."

There are, however, still remains of the entrenchments thrown up by troops near Mount Tabor Church, during the period in which Union soldiers marched from their landing at Winton towards Murfreesboro. Both sides fought back and forth in this general area.

Danger to Building

In the conference minutes of February, 1864, it is evident that the members were concerned about the safety of their new building. "W. Darden, P. Jordan and J. A. Vann to see Col. Hinton and ask protection of him for our meeting house and grove from being abused by his men,"

reports the record. "Col. Hinton" was commander of the 68th Regiment, North Carolina troops, two companies of which were raised in the summer of 1863 from Hertford, Bertie and Gates counties. Apparently the home-county boys were using the church building and the handy firewood in the grove for other purposes than the church desired.

Once again, in April of 1865, the clerk noted "no conference in April in consequence of a raid by the Federal army." The church survived the hectic state of affairs, however, and at the end of the war, in February, 1866, took note of the freedom of slaves. Simon of John Gatling and Isaac of John H. Griffith were selected subdeacons to keep order in the "gallery" of the church, by a committee including William Darden, A. W. Darden and John Gatling. Nine Negro males and 23 Negro females remained in the membership of the church at the war's end.

The Reconstruction period saw the Mount Tabor membership diminish, with the formation of churches at Winton and Union. C. L. Cobb of Kelford, now deceased, was 85 when he attended the centennial of Mount Tabor Church held in November, 1939. Mr. Cobb was born in 1854, the son of R. B. and Temperance Cobb, and reminisced on the fact that he was born only 15 years after the church was organized and had been baptized in Potecasi Creek along with 63 others. In 1885, Mr. Cobb had been one of a committee named to help organize Baptist churches at Union and Roxobel.

Association History

Mount Tabor Church was host to the old Chowan Baptist Association in 1845 and 1862 and entertained the West Chowan Baptist Association at its 12th annual meeting in 1894. The minutes of that 1894 meeting give a history of Mount Tabor: "This church was constituted in November, 1839, and so is two years younger than the Buckhorn Church, and three years older than the Murfreesboro Church. It was formerly much stronger than it is now, having in its membership a large number of the wealthiest, most cultivated and most influential people in all this section. She gave generously of her best material to form the Winton Church and not a little also to the Union Church. This church gave to the world the much-loved and talented R. T. Vann, D. D., now the faithful pastor of the Scotland Neck Church (Ed. note: Dr. Vann was ordained into the ministry at Mount Tabor Church, and served as president of Meredith College for a number of years); and also that experienced and successful educator, who has been the clerk of this and the old Chowan Association for 25 years and is now the popular principal of the academy for boys and girls at Seaboard, Brother W. C. Parker.

Drinking Whiskey!

"The old Chowan Association met with this church in 1845 and in 1862," continue the minutes. "At the session in 1845 stands were erected all about the grounds, from which confectioneries and whiskey were sold. In 1853 the old Chowan Association met with the Meherrin Church, convening, as had been its custom, on Friday. But there was at this meeting so much selling and drinking of whiskey and horse-racing in a field near the church, carried on, not only on the other days of the meeting, but also on Sunday, that the Association, to avoid this desecration of the Lord's day in connection with their sessions, decided at this meeting to convene afterwards on Tuesday, instead of Friday, so that all delegates and visitors to the Association could leave their homes after Sunday and return to them before the following Sunday. "Surely, then, in some things we have made progress," the record ends on a slightly wistful note. Further progress of the church was noted at the 1939 centennial, when Mrs. L. W. Holloman read a history of the first 100 years. The church still occupies the fine frame building built in 1860, serving a membership of about 220 active persons. Only the overgrown trenches in the woods nearby and some tracts and Bibles in the church library with Civil War dates inscribed, are evidence that Mount Tabor was once in the thick of an earthly, as well as a spiritual, battle.

Mount Tabor Church Facts

FORMED—1839. The fourth Baptist church in Hertford County, with membership primarily from the Meherrin Baptist Church.

FIRST PASTOR was the Rev. Quinton H. Trotman, 1843-54. Until the first pastor was called, G. M. Tompson and Simon Murfree "supplied" as preachers from 1839-43.

THE FIRST BUILDING was constructed in 1839, with the present building being erected in 1860.

PASTORS who served from the date of organization until the centennial observance in 1939 were: Quinton H. Trotman, 1843-54; John Webb, 1855-58; Trotman, 1859; Webb, 1860-65; R. R. Savage, 1866-68; W. C. Durham, 1868-69; Braxton Craig, 1880-82; T. G. Wood, 1893; Samuel Saunders, 1894-5; Dancy Cale, 1896; J. T. Riddick, 1897-8; George P. Harrell, 1899-1902; A. T. Howell, 1903-12; C. W. Scarborough, 1912-17; P. A. Underwood, 1918-20; R. E. Ingram, 1920-1; V. E. Duncan, 1921-3; R. B. Lincherry, 1923-8; E. C. Andrews, 1927-31; W. V. Tarlton, 1931-8; Dr. J. L. Carrick, 1938-.

CHURCH CLERKS numbered 16 by the 1939 centennial. A. W. Darden was the first, elected in 1839. After him came J. A. Vann, John P. Lee, John D. Gatling for three terms, Thomas M. Parker, John F. Newsome, D. F. Parker for two terms, John A. Parker for two terms, H. P. Gatling, M. D. Gatling, H. O. Boulter, Gladstone B. Storey, L. J. Parker, W. M. Forbes, B. W. Fisher, and H. W. Holloman.