



Warren Plains Baptist Church celebrated its 200th year of ministry Sunday with homecoming services and dinner on the grounds. More than 250 church members, former members, their families, and

friends of the congregation were in attendance. The sermon at the 11 a.m. service was brought by the Rev. H. V. Conner, pastor of the church from 1972 to 1975. (Staff Photo by Dianne T. Rodwell)



"A History of Warren Plains Baptist Church, 1785-1985" was available for the first time Sunday to those attending a bicentennial celebration and homecoming at the church. The first copy off the press was presented to Church Clerk Leonard Wilker (above, second from right) for the church archives. Other copies were presented to the Rev. John Woodard with the N.C. Baptist Historical Collection (left) and Dr. Joe Babb (second from left), director

of missions with the Cullom Baptist Association. The Rev. Clayton J. Shook, pastor at Warren Plains, is shown at right. (Staff Photo by Kay Horner)

Copies of "A History of Warren Plains Baptist Church, 1785-1985" are available for \$5 each by calling the Rev. Clay Shook at 257-1767 or Mrs. Peggy Allen, chairman of the church's Bicentennial Committee, at 257-3823.

Many Attend Sunday Service

Warren Plains Baptists Mark 200th Anniversary

By KAY HORNER
News Editor

In 1875, the members of Tanner's Church, located about two miles from Warrenton on the road to Norlina, were pitifully few.

A decade shy of its 100th anniversary, the church had seen better days.

In 1845, it had boasted a membership of 146, but the number had now dwindled to a mere 12.

The remnant of the once-dynamic Tanner's Church had a decision to make—quietly to close the doors of the church and align themselves with another congregation or to revitalize their dying body.

They opted for the latter and on Sept. 28, 1875, a majority met and appointed three trustees, William D. Weldon, John A. Hundley, and S. P. Fleming, to oversee the relocation of the church to a site somewhere in the bustling community of Warren Plains.

The congregation put the past behind them and agreed to be known as Warren Plains Church of Regular Missionary Baptists.

But even the most cursory reading of the recently-released "A History of Warren Plains Baptist Church, 1785-1985" gives credence to the notion that early members of that congregation were far from "regular."

It was with uncommon devotion and singularity of purpose that the 12—W. D. Weldon, Henry White, Alice V. Weldon, Sylvia White, Ann Laughter, Betsy Weldon, Harriet Lampkin, Ailsey T. Walker, Frances O. Riggan, M. L. Lampkin, Mary F. Weldon, and J. B. Weldon—determined that there would be a Warren Plains Baptist Church and that it would prosper.

This past Sunday, more than 250 members and former members, their families and friends of the congregation met for a bicentennial homecoming celebration.

After the morning worship service, they gathered for a covered dish meal on the church grounds beneath the shade of stately oaks and maples on the plot of land that 110 years ago was deeded to the church by Andrew and Elizabeth Wilker.

The narrative of the church's 200 years is punctuated by benchmarks of progress—remodeling of the church building in 1935 and again in 1951; construction of a church parsonage in 1949, dedication of the new educational annex in 1956; and approval in 1972 of plans for a 1,500-square-foot fellowship hall.

Leonard Wilker, grandson of the couple who donated the church land and church clerk for more than 30 years, noted during a recent interview that there have been times in the church's history when the worst of times brought out the best in people.

"In the earlier days, they had a hard time meeting the pastor's salary," Wilker commented. "One or more of the men would get together to pay the salary and then the rest of the church would come forward, giving what they could."

While in some churches the names of a select few appear on lists of memorial contributions and gifts, at Warren Plains such contributions have through the years been made by a broad base of church members.

A partial listing of gifts given during the past 30 years indicates that needs ranging from communion table and chairs to shingles for the Sunday School building have been given by church members.

The church history takes note of 88 memorial gifts, 22 of which were monetary, in addition to gifts of church pews and stained glass windows.

Church minutes show that the congregation has a history not only of cooperation in financial matters, but spiritual matters as well and its attention to discipline of church members in the 19th century is often recounted by amused members.

As was the custom in those days, transgressions against the church were not taken lightly.

In December 1883, the church appointed a committee of two to invite a certain member to appear

before the congregation and give reason for his "protracted absence."

By the following February, he had not appeared and in March the church voted to withdraw fellowship for "disorderly walk and conduct."

Transgressors who appeared before the church and asked forgiveness fared much better.

In 1890, the church granted its forgiveness to a member who admitted selling whiskey and to another member who admitted dancing.

In its two centuries of existence, the church has had only 20 pastors and five have enjoyed pastorates of more than 25 years.

The church's second pastor, The Rev. Thomas Gardner, served 35 years, from 1790 to 1825. He was succeeded by The Rev. Willoughby Hudgins, who served 26 years. Hudgins' successor, The Rev. N. Addison Purfoy, served 27 years and pastored the church during its move to its current location.

Two later pastors, Dr. T. J. Taylor and the Rev. R. E. Brickhouse, who also served a field including Warrenton Baptist and Macon Baptist churches, both served 30 years, from 1896 to 1926 and from 1926 to 1956, respectively.

The current pastor, the Rev. Clayton J. Shook, attributes the long tenure of past ministers to what he terms the "graciousness" of the congregation.

"I've been to seminary, and served for three years as a pastor before coming here three years ago," Shook said recently. "And although I treasure my seminary education, I've learned more about pastoring here at this church than anywhere I've been...These people were with me during my seminary years, at the time of graduation, at the birth of our son...their support of me and my family has just been immeasurable."

The congregation now numbers about 300, with 170 active members.

Wilker remembers when attendance at Sunday School was as high as 200. Today, the number hovers at half that.

The decline is due in part to the economics that have played on the little farming community.

"There was a time when textiles and tobacco were the life of this community, and now they're having problems," Wilker commented. "Now the farms are disappearing and people are going wherever they have to in order to find jobs."

"Once there was a train depot at Warren Plains, a post office, stores and three churches. Now only the churches (Warren Plains Baptist, Warren Plains Methodist and Cook's Chapel) are left."

While Wilker and others whose lives have revolved around their church recall past days with nostalgia, they also express their faith in the future of their church.

"I think we're doing right well," Wilker said with a smile. "Our members are faithful and things look good for us."

Shook echoed that optimism.

"We have a good cross section of young and old," Shook noted. "This summer we had an average daily attendance of 100 in Daily Vacation Bible School. There is a tremendous sense of cooperation among church members of all ages."

That cooperation was evident Sunday in the number of young couples who joined with older members in hosting the homecoming.

"In the book on our church history, our purpose in compiling the history is stated," Shook said. "We wanted to celebrate the church's 200th anniversary, honor the people who have been instrumental in the life of the church, preserve historical facts for those who love this place, and bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ."

"That last purpose is also our reason for being as a church," Shook concluded. "That's what we're all about."



Young Ashby Frazier (above) spent a good deal of time Sunday afternoon pondering the cakes and pies gracing the dessert table at Warren Plains Baptist Church's homecoming before making a difficult selection. (Staff Photo by Kay Horner)

tist Church's homecoming before making a difficult selection. (Staff Photo by Kay Horner)

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