

Antioch Church

Standing On A Hill For 150 Years

By Sherry Matthews

Antioch Presbyterian Church stands erect in the morning sun. It has survived battles of wind, rain, snow and hail and still stands much as it did over 100 years ago.

The church, which celebrates 150 years of existence May 1, stands on the hill overlooking the countryside, as it did 101 years ago.

According to Antioch's present minister Charles Ansley, Sunday's celebration will be a gallant and "joyous" event.

The celebration itself marks the year that a new building was erected.

Before that time, around 1757, the Raft Swamp Church was founded and erected some six miles from the present site of the church.

This church stood until 1825 when the building was burned and the remains disappeared or were destroyed.

The congregation then started assembling at McPhaul's Mill, a halfway point between the old church and the present site, and

were preached to by traveling ministers.

In 1832, the assembly place was once again moved. This time to the present "stand on a hill" where the church is now located.

Although the present building has been around only 101 years, the church itself was organized at its present site 150 years ago.

On March 10, 1833, Reverend Archibald Buie organized the new church and on May 19 of that same year changed its name from the Raft Swamp Church to Antioch.

This church has a lot of history, church member Sarah McNeill said.

According to a recently published church history summary, union troops on their way to the arsenal in Fayetteville and the textile mill at Rockfish spent the night at Antioch.

Tradition holds that the church pews were used by union soldiers as a method of making the road over the swamp accessible.

Another bit of history that remains in the church today is a prayer, written in the pulpit bible, by a union officer.

A copy of that letter remains in the "history room" of the church.

Also on display in the history room are old bibles, a pewter communion set, and letters from some of the first settlers and members of the church.

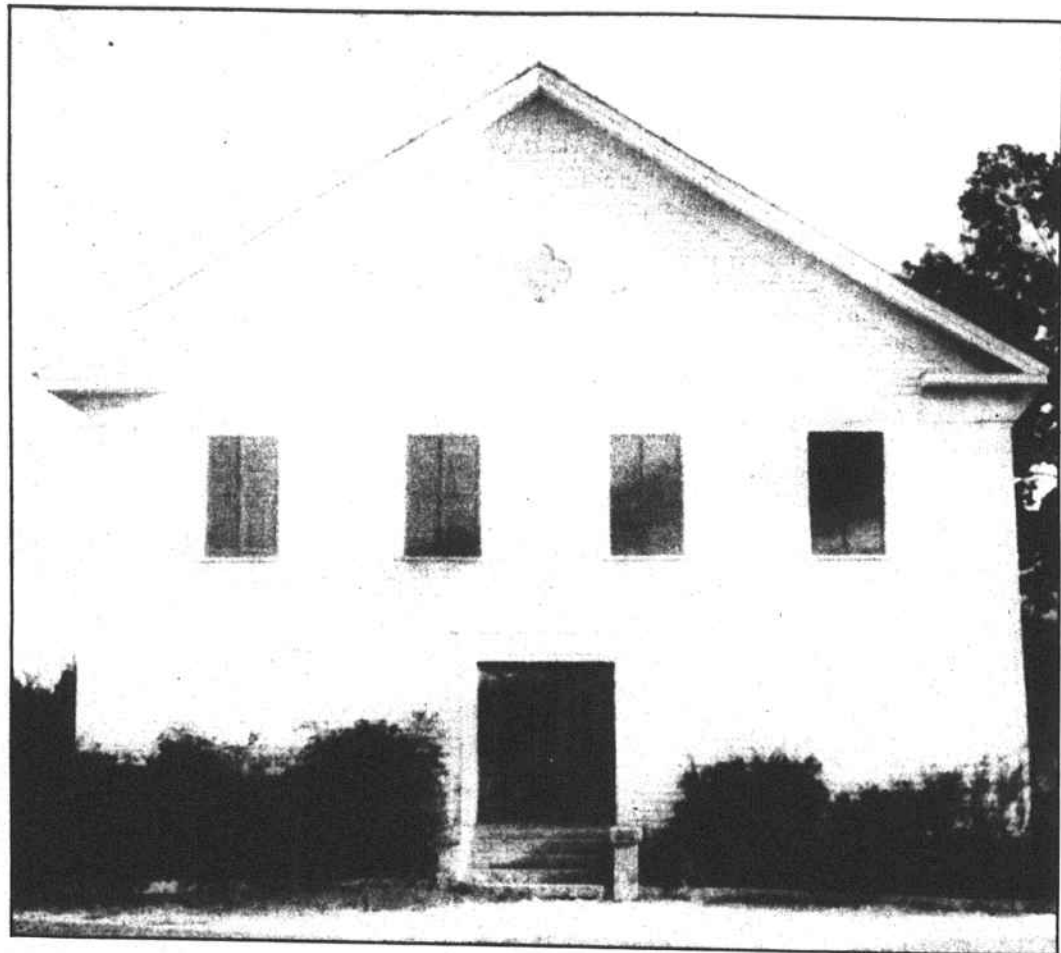
Since its beginnings in 1833, there have been 13 ministers and some traveling preachers who have taught the "gospel" in the Antioch church.

At the time Antioch was organized there were approximately 121 members, while today the church membership has risen to almost 200, Rev. Ansley said.

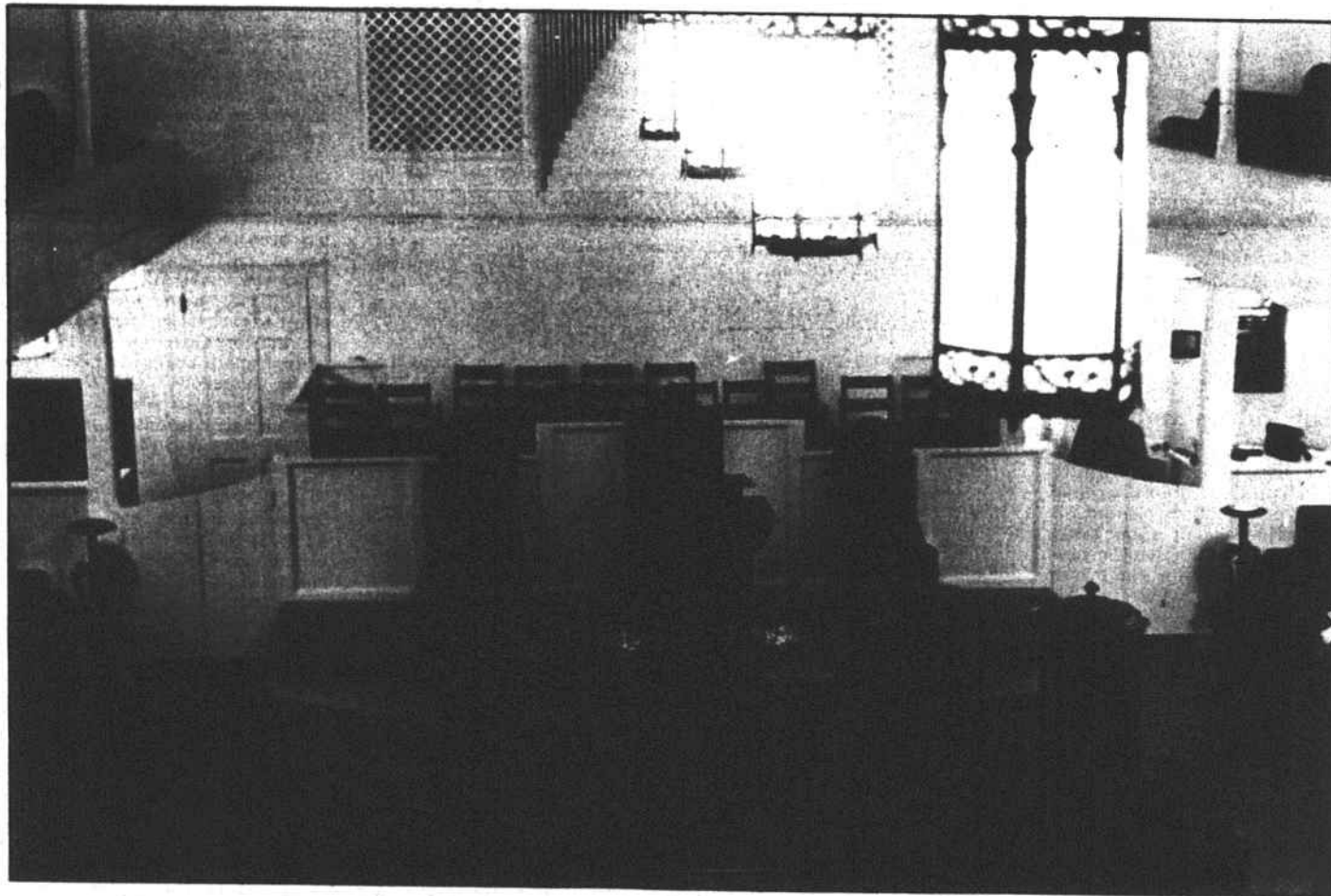
According to Rev. Ansley, the celebration of the church's sesquicentennial, will feature the only two living former ministers as well as old choir members of the church.

"We anticipate over 60 choir members for this celebration," Rev. Ansley said.

The celebration promises to be a learning experience for all who attend, Rev. Ansley said.

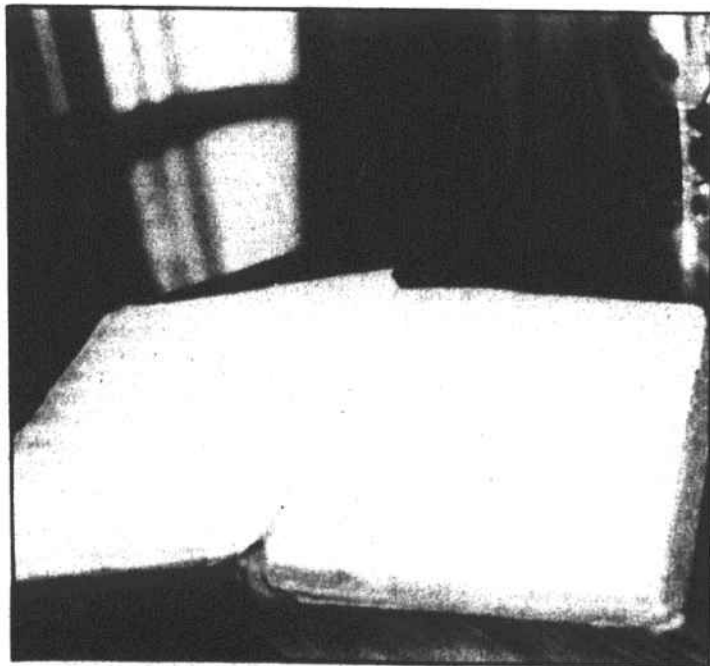


As it was
The Antioch Church in 1957. The picture was taken before the church received its porch and steeple.



A place for worship

The sanctuary of Antioch Church, where almost 200 members now worship, is not 150 years old, nor are the pews that now line the church. Pews that were in the church at one time aided Union soldiers in crossing the road over the Raft Swamp. The present pews in the church now are 30-50 years old, Rev. Ansley said. Older pews were destroyed without the realization that history too had been demolished with the first strike of a fatal match.



Restoration and preservation

Documents dating back over a 100 years lie atop a cabinet filled with old bibles, offertory plates, and diaries. One such book of documents, pictured here, holds history of the members of the old Antioch Church. Also among the documents stored in the "history room" is a prayer written in a pulpit bible by a union officer. "Pray for the Restoration of the Union. It must and shall be preserved." Captain ----- (unidentifiable) U.S.A. 10 March, 1865.



Denotes separation

The pewter communion set that, according to tradition, indicates Antioch's succession from Raft Swamp. This pewter set is said to have been brought over from Scotland by Rev. Campbell.