

THE HISTORY OF CHESTNUT STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Chestnut Street Church can trace its roots to the days of those pioneering Methodist circuit riders, who traveled the new nation on horseback in the eighteenth century. In March 1787, just two months after the creation of Robeson County, Bishop Francis Asbury wrote in his journal: "Directed out course to the south; crossed Cape Fear, reached Drowning Creek (Lumber River) ... preached at Robinson's new court house." Lumberton had not then received its name. In 1800 Jeremiah Norman recorded that he rode to Lumberton and preached to a small congregation. "The people were serious and attentive. I hope that they will attend unto the things which they heard and so it may prove a lasting blessing to them." Again on February 1, 1803, Bishop Asbury wrote of visiting Lumberton and participating in services in the academy, which also served as a church. He concluded his entry: "We have a small society here." From this small society Methodism in Lumberton has continued to grow. It became the "Mother Church of Lumberton."

The First Methodist Church in Lumberton was a small wooden building on



First known Methodist church in Lumberton, which was located on Water street between the gully and Eighth Street. Used until about 1875.

Water Street approximately where the old Elks Club building stood. It was built on lands of Jacob Rhodes in the early 1800's, and there was no deed for the property,

but its existence was acknowledged in later deeds, and in the 1870's the church's ownership was established in a court action based on its long possession. In 1878 this lot was sold and another purchased at the southwest corner of Seventh and Chestnut Streets, and a new church was built. Tradition

is that timbers from the first church were used in this building. In 1884 the lot on which the present church is located was bought for the building of a parsonage. In 1911 as Lumberton became a station church with its own minister, the parsonage was moved and a new brick church was built at the location of the present sanctuary. It had entrances facing both Eighth and Chestnut Streets, and at that time, the name Chestnut Street Methodist Church was adopted. The cornerstone of this building is preserved on the church property. In 1948 the Educational Building was built with architectural features similar to the church. The sanctuary served until 1956 when a decision was made to replace it with the present building. During the year of construction, services were held in the Carolina Theatre.

The first service in the present sanctuary was held on July 7, 1957, and it was completely paid for and dedicated within three years. Additional property on both sides of Eighth Street has been acquired for church use. In 1963, a new parsonage was built at 302 West 32nd Street. During 1995 and 1996, a new fellowship hall, kitchen, choir room, and office complex was erected. It was named Asbury Building in 1998. In January 2001, the note for the building was burned.

This brief account of physical growth from "a small society" to a present membership of 1150 is only a little of the story of Methodism in Lumberton. The real story lies in the generations of dedicated members and the long list of consecrated ministers and staff who contributed throughout two centuries in advancing the mission of the church in all its aspects and in service to the community. Our heritage includes their struggles and triumphs over these two hundred years.

"Now if we can look back with understanding and pride, certainly we have every reason to look forward with a deep sense of obligation."



Second church building, which stood on the corner of Chestnut and Seventh streets, where N. P. Andrews home now is located. Used from about 1875 until 1911.



