

THE HISTORY OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

PORT NORRIS, NEW JERSEY

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PREFACE

I wish to thank all those persons who have helped me compile this history. Without their help such a project would have been impossible. The vast amount of material available makes such an endeavor very difficult. Frustration, in the selecting of the material to be used, was a frequent emotion. There were so many little facts, which seem wholly disjointed from any other, and yet they were of interest. Yet to fit these facts into a well-knit story was a real problem. Not all of the facts of interest about the history of the church have been included in this work. Such a feat is beyond human ability. There are several items, in this category, which I shall mention at the end of this book. They shall be recorded, but not in the full content of their relevance.

The history of the Port Norris Methodist Church, as I have presented it, is traced up to the building of the present church in 1925. Realizing that there is still more of a story to be told, I hope at some future date to deal with those troubled years from 1929 to 1946. This particular period demands consideration all by itself. Therefore, I did not feel it should be a part of this work.

Once again I wish to express my appreciation to all who have helped and encouraged me in the production of this work. My only prayer is that The Church of Jesus Christ at Port Norris may be deepened in its spiritual life by a better understanding of its existence and mission.

David I. Naglee

Pastor March 1962

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Methodist Church of Port Norris, New Jersey, can only be appreciated when the Church is seen as a Faith Community venturing through peace and adversity. The unfolding of this history will show periods of peace in which spiritual and material prosperity overflowed. It will also point out those many periods of adversity which made for a deeper spiritual contribution to its total life. This cyclic pattern seems to recur several times: Peace and prosperity, adversity and leanness. It would be a great mistake to reduce God's workings with this Church on such a mechanical and fatalistic pattern. Though this basic pattern seems to underlie the unfolding life of this Church, it must be seen that a dynamic God was at work. In His wisdom, and at inappropriate times for man, adversities came to do a spiritual work which peace and prosperity could not accomplish. It has been said of old that "adversity strengthens character." If this is a truthful statement, the intermittent visits by adversity must be seen as a means of grace by a God of Love. They are to be seen as tools by which the Church of Jesus Christ is "perfected" for more effective service. Hence, there can be no fatalism or mechanical pattern which determines when "peace" should be "turned on" and when "adversity" should be "turned off". It is a matter of God at work, doing in mysterious ways His will. The end result is always to be "a Church, living for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". (Eph. 4:12-13, RSV)

CHAPTER 1

THE BIRTH OF A VILLAGE

The life of the Port Norris Methodist Church cannot be properly interpreted apart from the community itself. Let us see how the town of Port Norris came into existence. Port Norris lies on the eastern shore of the Delaware Bay, close to the mouth of the Maurice River. The Delaware Bay was discovered by Henry Hudson on August 18, 1609. He made his initial contact with the New World somewhere in Maine, probably at Pennobscot Bay. There several of his crew attacked a band of peaceful Indians and barely escaped the massacre. In fear, Hudson turned the Half Moon southward. Shortly, he found his position to be at the mouth of King James River in Virginia. Once again he changed his course, but now to the north. Quite by accident, Hudson entered the Delaware Bay. He was amazed at its size and began to explore it. With great difficulty, he navigated its waters. The Half Moon ran aground several times on the numerous sand bars scattered throughout the bay. After finding the mouth of the Delaware River, Hudson left the bay and turned northward. It was on September 3, 1609, that he found the New York Bay and the Hudson River. While in the Delaware Bay, Hudson had not bothered to explore the Jersey mainland. Had he done so he would have been amazed at the flourishing life at the mouth of the Maurice River. Indian relics are still to be found in great quantities in the area. This points to the fact that the Maurice River area contained one of the most densely populated regions in the state of New Jersey. These original inhabitants were called, "Leni-Lenape" Indians. They had affectionately named the Maurice River, "Wahatquenack", which implied "abundance of life". Wahatquenack meant just that to them. There was enough fish and fowl at the river to sustain the total Indian population the year around. Theirs was a prosperous life on the Wahatquenack.

In 1623 a Dutch vessel entered the Bay under the command of Captain Mey. It is stated by some historians that it was Mey who named the Wahatquenack the "Maurice River". Another Dutchman, a Captain DeVries, is likewise credited with naming the river the "Maurice River" in 1631. Still another version of the naming of the river claims that a Dutch ship, "The Prince Maurice", was attacked, burned and sunk by the Indians in the river. As a result of this incident, the river became known as the "Prince Maurice River". A map of "Nieuw Nederlandt", published in Amsterdam in 1676, names it "Mauritus Rivier".

The first colonist to the Maurice River area were Swedes and not Dutch, as might be expected. Their entrance should be dated somewhere between the years 1637 and 1654. Their foremost settlement was at the Buckshutem, and two lesser ones were at Leesburg and Dorchester. Suddenly, the Swedish settlement vanished from the Maurice River. Only a few graves, dotting the banks of the river, bring to remembrance that by-gone era of colonization.

John Fenwick established his colony at Salem in 1675. He proceeded to secure the land now known as Salem and Cumberland Counties. He purchased the same land from the English Proprietors, and then sought to purchase it from the Indians. The sale with the Indian Chieftains was made successfully. The amount paid by Fenwick was: 4 guns, powder, and lead; 10 ½ ankers of rum, equal to about 336 gallons; some shirts, shoes and stockings; 4 blankets; 16 matching coats; one piece of match coating and other English goods. The purchase was made in 1675 and 1676.

Dr. James Wasse, of London, England, soon came into possession of the portion of Fenwick's estate found between the Maurice River and Dividing Creek. He in turn sold it in parcels in the year 1738. A William Dallas purchased the parcel in which Port Norris would be established. Dallas established a ferry business which enjoyed prosperity until about 1810. The small village which had grown up at the ferry station was called, "Dallas' Ferry". This marks the birth of the village of Port Norris, though that name was not given the village for several years.

In 1810, Joseph Jones of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, came and established his residence at Dallas' Ferry. Upon arrival, Jones started a Tavern in the village. Later, Jones began a shipping industry using Dallas' Ferry as his port. Gradually Jones became the recognized leader of the village. Slowly but surely all rights of land ownership came into his possession-he owned the village lock, stock and barrel. Shortly, after this, Jones changed the name of the community. The change was not made because of personal reasons it was just a coincidence that his son's name was "Norris". But the change in name seemed to do something for the community. From that time on the village began to grow. At first it was known as a port for shipping cordwood. Later in its development, oysters were discovered in the Bay in great quantities. The men of the village no longer went to sea but turned to the Delaware Bay to fish for oysters for their living. The end result of this was the establishing of a fabulous oyster industry, second to none. The nature of the town was changed and its destiny as well. The Churches which were to be established would feel every implication of the oyster industry, whether good or bad.

CHAPTER II

BEGINNING OF METHODISM IN PORT NORISS

Port Norris was only a small village dwarfed by rapidly expanding communities in the early 1800's. To the west lay the town of Dividing Creek. To the north lay the towns of Haleyville and Mauricetown. To the east lay the town of

Heislerville. These towns were “reeling” under rapid growth and activity. Churches sprang into existence in an effort to meet their spiritual needs. Cushing and Sheppard, in their book “The History of the Counties of Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland, New Jersey”, claim that a Methodist Episcopal Church was begun in Haleyville about 1810. However, Conference records show that a “more active” church existed in Mauricetown a little before this time. Both communities became the hub for Methodist Missionary activity in the Maurice River area. The surrounding villages were fit into a system of circuit charges where classes were organized and Sunday School sessions maintained. In Port Norris such a work was started in 1823. In the spring of 1823 Methodist Services were conducted in private homes in the village. A diary from this period speaks of a Rev. Fagan lived in Dividing Creek, though originally he came from Dennisville, N.J. His father was Captain Henry Fagan who had served under General George Washington in the Revolutionary War. His wife was Mary Anna Blizzard. The work of Rev. Fagan in Port Norris enjoyed a short existence and ended suddenly. The reason for its expiration is unknown. Just how much influence from Mauricetown and Haleyville was felt in this work is also unknown.

Nothing definite was done in Port Norris by the Methodists of Mauricetown and Haleyville until 1846. Though this work was confined to Class Meetings and Sunday School Sessions, it marks the beginning of a lasting Methodist work in Port Norris. This missionary endeavor was not a project of the New Jersey Annual Conference, rather it was a display of missionary activity on the part of two churches before mentioned. However, by the year 1854 the New Jersey Annual Conference recognized the possibilities of such a mission and made it a charge to be filled by a supply pastor. The Conference Minutes of 1854 does not give the name of the supply pastor by only reads “to be supplied”. Whether it was ever supplied by the Conference in 1854 is unknown to us moderns.

In the year 1858, Methodism made a great stride in becoming firmly established in the village of Port Norris. The brand of Methodism was not that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as represented by the churches of Mauricetown and Haleyville. The Methodism which entered in that year was under the auspice of the Methodist Protestant Church. This was a young branch of the old Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The branch had broken off from the mother church in the year 1830. The breach was a result of dissatisfaction over the authority of the Bishop and several other disciplinary matters. South Jersey was a fertile parcel of ground for missionary activity by this group. In a few years, the city of Bridgeton would give birth to one of its most powerful churches in its New Jersey Conference. But Port Norris saw the standard of Methodist Protestantism in the year 1858. Little is known of how the movement got its initial foothold since its life has long ceased in the village. It is safe to conclude that the Methodist Protestant Church started as a missionary station and ran into competition for several years with the Methodist Episcopalians from Mauricetown and Haleyville. At first it appears as if the Methodist Protestants were the most successful in their activities in Port Norris. Let it be noted that they were first to organize a society as a legal incorporation in the village. The

year 1858 saw the Methodist Protestant Church at Port Norris incorporated. The exact date of incorporation was March 10, 1858. After fulfilling the ten day notification period for an election of trustees, the people met and by plurality vote elected their trustees. These trustees were: William Lore, John Hand, and William L. Garrison. They took the title, "The Trustees of the Methodist Protestant church at Port Norris." The following day they drew up a draft for incorporation and its recorded at the county seat in Bridgeton, N.J on September 18, 1858. *Later the Methodist Protestants erected a building, which was located on East Main Street, about two blocks east of the present church building. The exact date of erection of this building is unknown.

For some reason the Methodist Protestant faith did not generate much enthusiasm among the townspeople. The Port Norris Mission was continued in spite of the competition from the newly formed Methodist Protestant Church. The Port Norris Methodist Episcopal Mission had a class of 34 members, and a Sunday School of 16 pupils in March of 1858. + The Methodist Protestants were reaching some of the villagers, but the Methodist Episcopal were still in the race. In 1860, Port Norris was put on the Cumberland Charge with Mauricetown, Haleyville, Dividing Creek, and Newport. Evidence points to the possibility that the Methodist Episcopal work in Port Norris was now largely Sunday School work. The Conference Minutes of 1860 mention only the Sunday School work and state that "The Little One's", a children's Sunday School class, had given \$2.70 for the missionary offering.

Many of the adults of the village, who sought the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church over all others, made weekly pilgrimages to the churches in Mauricetown and Haleyville for Divine Worship. The class meetings and Sunday School sessions had not been enough to quench their spiritual thirst. Not forsaking the work at Port Norris, they made the five mile journey every Lord's Day to worship in a church building, hear a sermon regularly, and receive the Sacraments. The Haleyville Church seemed to draw the most of the worshippers from Port Norris. The spiritual life of that church must have been white hot, judging by its effects upon the people from Port Norris.

Over few brief years, the imagination of Methodist Episcopal converts in Port Norris was fired with the possibility of having their own church. This conviction grew and gathered support among the residents of the village. On April 4, 1868, notices appeared around the village which stated that an organizational meeting for the Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Norris would be held in ten days, on April 14, 1868, at the place of meeting. April 14th came and the results of that meeting were several: first, "the religious society and congregation usually meeting for public worship at Port Norris, in the township of Downe, County of Cumberland, did assemble at their said place of meeting on the 14th day of April, 1868". Secondly, seven trustees were elected by plurality vote-these were: Laben L. Fagan, Dayton B. Parsons, Elmer Green, Richard W. Robbins, Levi Lore, Jesse E. Pritchard, and Richard Robbins; thirdly, the incorporation was made in the name of "The Trustees of the

Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Norris". The certificate of incorporation was drawn on April 15, 1868, and recorded seven days later at the County Seat. *

This action meant the legal birth of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Norris. From its birth to the present it has been a glorious church, surviving trials, which finally took the life of the Methodist Protestant Church. From the beginning of its life, the presence of the competitive Methodist Protestant Church did not dampen its enthusiasm. In fact, after a few years the Methodist Protestant Church died and many of its members joined the Methodist Episcopal Church.

*Miscellaneous Records Book G, page 436, Cumberland Co. Court House, Bridgeton N.J.

+ The New Jersey Annual Conference Minutes of 1858, statistical column for the Bridgeton District.

*Miscellaneous Records, Book G, page 90. Co. Court House, Bridgeton, N.J.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CHURCH BUILDING OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The formulation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1868 meant the building of a place of worship. For several years before 1868, the old school house had been used by the villagers for religious meetings. Both Baptist and Methodist services had been held there alternately from time to time. But now the newly formed Methodist congregation desired their own sanctuary. Everything pointed to the completion of their vision. On August 18, 1868, a piece of land was given to the church for the purpose of erecting a house of worship. The size of that parcel of land was one and nine-hundredths of an acre. The deed reads as follows:

*"In trust that the said premises shall be used, kept, maintained, and disposed of as a place of Divine worship, for the use of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America, subject to the Discipline, usages, and ministerial appointments of said church as from time to time authorized and declared by the General Conference of the said church and the Annual Conference in whose bounds the said premises are in state..." **

This land had been the possession of George Ogden, Theodosius Waters, and Anna Burt, Gideon Heatin, Harriet Heatin, and Thomas Hand. It was given to the "Port Norris Methodist Episcopal Church". The deed was recorded at the County Seat.

*Book 118, page 517, Court House, Bridgeton, N.J.

The next step to be taken was a building project. Everything looked promising. The Port Norris Church was on the strong Cumberland Circuit, and had helpful sister churches ever ready to give her aid. The land for her edifice had been donated. Her membership was 96 members, plus 126 probationers. + She had every promise of being strong from within and without. Her spiritual leader was a local preacher named Parent Sharp. His home was in Haleyville. He held his local preacher's license in the Mauricetown Quarterly Conference. Technically, the Rev. C.F. Garrison, pastor of the Cumberland Mission, was the presiding pastor over this work. Rev. Garrison resided at Mauricetown and made frequent visits throughout his vast mission. It was impossible for him to spend the time with the Port Norris Church, which that situation required. Therefore Parent Sharp was appointed supply pastor by the Annual Conference in March of 1868. It was under his guidance that work on the first church building began in September of 1868. It began with great enthusiasm but in a few months the mood of the society has changed. Parent Sharp gave his pastor's report to the Third Quarterly Conference on November 14, 1868. In this he said:

"The third quarterly report for the Port Norris part of the Cumberland Mission.

The pastor reports that on this part of the charge, at the present, we are doing very well spiritually. Our congregations are not so large as in the winter...our men are most of them away. Money matters are slow, but the brethren intend to make that all right in the end. Our new church enterprise has not come up to our expectation, but the intention is to persevere until the house is built. Our Sunday School has closed for the winter. I have visited some fourteen families of my charge this quarter and prayed with them and had some very precious seasons together."

The biggest problem which faced the congregation in their building project was the "money problems". This has been an intermittent visitor to the Port Norris Church ever since. Parent Sharp was optimistic indeed when he said, "money matters are slow". The year 1868 was such a poor one financially that the church could not give an offering for the Conference Missionary Fund. In spite of this, the congregation persevered and after several hard years saw the completion of they're church building. The Rev. E. J. Lippincott gave the project a "shot in the arm" in 1870, by securing a large portion of the lumber needed.

The Annual Conference of 1871, appointed Rev. E. B. Lake to be the supply pastor at Port Norris. It was under his leadership that the church building was completed. The size of the building was approximately sixty feet by forty feet, and cost close to \$8,000.00. The dedication service was held on Sunday, January 17, 1872. The Rev. Thomas Fernley, of the Philadelphia Annual Conference, and Presiding Elder A. E. Ballard conducted the dedication services.

+N.J. Minutes, 1868.

(Page 13 missing)

slow”, came back to haunt the church in 1873. The struggle to build the church had been a strain on the financial resources of the congregation from the beginning. At the time of the completion of the edifice, there was still a sizeable debt to be cleared. Some of the creditors began to seek faster payment on the debts incurred. In 1873, the trustees applied to the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension for financial aid. In 1874, the Board granted a donation of \$300 to help alleviate this situation. The Rev. C. R. Smith hit upon a daring plan to pay off the remaining debt. He asked permission of the District Conference to solicit money in the District to help pay off the debts and save the Port Norris Church from being closed. Permission was granted and he went about preaching and taking offerings throughout the District. The sum of \$300 was raised in this manner. By 1881, the situation was still urgent and the Board of Church Extension granted another donation of \$400. Between the Board of Church Extension, the churches of the Bridgeton District, and the generosity of certain men who were willing to take personal notes on the remaining debts, the indebtedness on the church property was ended. This was finally accomplished under the ministry of the Rev. C. Wesley Turrell. On Friday, February 11, 1881, the church was rededicated by the Rev. A. J. Kynett, the Secretary of Church Extension, and the church became free from debt. The two outstanding mortgages had been held by the Bridgeton Savings Fund and February 3, 1881. This marked a milestone in the early life of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Norris. The church was “debt-free”, but only after a long struggle. The summer prior to this freeing from debt had been a contributing factor in the attainment of the feat. It was during August of 1880, that a camp meeting was held by the Port Norris Church. This proved to be one of the most outstanding spiritual movements in the history of Port Norris. The location was a grove situated on the Haleyville Road, just a little north of the church. John Burt owned the property and gladly gave permission for its use as a camp meeting grove. People attended the meetings in great multitudes. They came from near and far to see the “mighty works” of God. The church became spiritually quickened and many persons were converted. This meant new life and dynamic for the church in a trying time. It gave the struggling congregation the assurance that “He that had begun the good work...would perform it”. Their giving all but doubled and the pieces of the financial jigsaw puzzle fell into place. By February 1881 the debts were cleared.

After the rededication of the church, on February 11, 1881, a series of “extra meetings” was conducted in the church. These meetings ran for a period of six weeks, and over thirty persons professed conversion. The church was on a victorious march for her Lord. She had passed the battlements of Satan and now she was a mighty conqueror. Sad to say, this state of joy and peace was short lived, as we shall see. Before her lay years of trial and testing which would be a repeat of building a new house of worship and paying for it.

About this same time, a movement began among the congregation to move the church structure to another location. The desired spot was approximately where the present church building stands. There was strong opposition to this move and tempers became aroused over the issue. It was decided at the Second Quarterly Conference, held on June 30, 1882, that the moving of the structure would be in the best interest of the congregation. Negotiations with the landowners of the property had already begun. Then it happened that on August 3, 1884, a mysterious fire consumed the building before it could be moved the next day. Whether the fire fell from Heaven, or ascended out of Hell has never been determined. The congregation was once more faced with building a new church structure. This new building would not replace the old on the former property, but it would be built on the newly acquired land brought from John and Ann Burt. This property lies on East Main Street and is the site of the present church building. The sale of the property was made for the sum of \$300 and the deed is dated December 6, 1884. (The deed registered at the Cumberland County Court House in Bridgeton, N.J., states the transaction as involving the amount of \$300 and not \$350 as stated in other church records). The deed was recorded at Bridgeton on February 6, 1885. The property was deeded to the trustees of the church. *

Work on the new building was begun almost immediately. Little is known about the actual work on the second church edifice. The building committee was composed of Pennington Corson, John Sharp, S.J. Dillahey, W. H. Behhy, and John Burt. Various plans were examined, and finally the plans of L.B. Volk, of New York, were adopted. Bids were submitted, and B.S. Baynton, of Vineland, N.J., was awarded the contract. The work began in April 1885, and was completed the same year. The dedication service was held on January 3, 1886.

*Book 176, page 222, Cumberland County Court House

CHAPTER V

THE ERA OF THE TRUSTEES

The trustees had met on December 17 1884, a short time after the fire and the purchase of the new property, to decide the fate of the old property. It was decided that the cemetery which would adjoin the old cemetery. A motion was made that the public be informed that burial lots would be available and ready for sale in short time. It was unanimously affirmed by the trustees and such a notice was posted. This begins an era in the trying work of the trustees of the Port Norris Methodist Episcopal Church. The era might be called "*The Era of Grave Undertakings*". Their administration of the cemetery was fraught with many misunderstandings and difficulties.

At the Board of Trustees meeting, held on December 8, 1886, they declared that complete payment in cash had to be made before a lot could be opened for a grave. This was only good business. All the trustees were supporters of this

“ounce of prevention”. However, the ounce of prevention was not strong enough. Somehow, one party purchased a lot but only paid a portion of the fixed price. The intention was to pay the remaining portion later. In the meantime, one of the family died and was laid to rest in the lot. After the funeral, the trustees waited patiently for the remainder of their money. Time passed and it never came. By September of 1886, the trustees were still waiting for their money. At their September meeting they decided to send a bill to the family. The only thing this action did was to arouse anger from the family and close friends in the church. By November the trustees were more determined than ever to clear up the debt. Finally they delivered an ultimatum to the family. It can be summarized as “pay for the lot or John’s body will be moved to the back party of the cemetery”. The result of such an authoritarian ultimatum was explosive, to say the least. Persons in the church, and in the village, began to take sides. Some felt that the trustees were too hasty and rash, while others chided the delinquent family for its financial failures.

By the next spring, the nature and degree of authority belonging to the trustees, in their administration of the cemetery, was being called in question. The trustees were as interested as everyone else in having the matter settled. “Had the trustees overstepped their authority at the cemetery” was the question of all interested persons. The trustees met for their monthly meeting on May 14, 1887, and decided to seek legal counsel on the matter. J.O. Burt and J.R. Morris were chosen to bear the issue before the lawyers. The decision was returned to the trustees on May 26, 1887, and it gave them legal confidence to continue the same authority over the cemetery as they had already exercised. (Even to removing bodies, in which there was no valid claim for the inhabited lot). The authority of the office of trustee was vindicated and the issue quickly forgotten. The incident mentioned above shows a glimpse into administrative life of the trustees, which lasted for close to half a century. The scope of their administration was wider than just half a century. The scope of their administration was wider than just the cemetery. They were the general administrators of the whole church life, under the direction of the pastor. For all practical purposes they were the power in the early church. The stewards were limited solely to the collection of subscriptions from the congregation. It was the office of trustee, which gave the church its lay administration for the first half century of its life. This factor must be remembered in understanding the ministry of this church.

There were other projects, which found their source in the administration of the trustees. Foremost was the problem of securing a suitable dwelling of the pastor. In 1872 the Annual Conference reported that there was no parsonage at Port Norris. Just when a parsonage was secured is unknown. It is evident, however that a new building was not erected for that purpose. The minutes of the trustees, dated April 17, 1886, show that \$700 was borrowed by the trustees to be used for rebuilding of the parsonage. This building stood, and still stands, on North Temperance Street. The fact that it needed rebuilding in 1886, suggest that it was not a new building. It was probably an old dwelling, which had been purchased between 1872 and 1886 with the idea of rebuilding. It is likely that it was purchased

while the old church was still standing, since its location was nearer that edifice than the second church building. The money for the parsonage repairs was secured by selling stock in the parsonage. The stockholders were given notes, which the church planned to pay back in two years. * The parsonage underwent its face-lifting and its new addition as planned. The work was completed in December 1886. The Port Norris Church at last had a comfortable dwelling for her pastor and family.

The trustees were also engaged in the payment of monies against the mortgage on the new church building. In August 1886, the best that could be done financially was the paying of the interest for a six-month period. The words of Parent Sharp still haunted the Port Norris Church..."money matters are slow". But under the trying circumstances, the church fire and the securing of a decent parsonage, the church was doing extremely well. "Adversity strengthens character." The faith of the church was deepened and the activities doubled in an attempt to erase all debt.

In the midst of this period, there came a ray of hope. A wealthy church member died and left a sizeable amount of money to the church. The trustees rejoiced in anticipation of paying off certain debts. It was discovered, however, that there were strings attached to this money. It must be used for only one project, the frescoing of the church sanctuary. At first, this was a disappointment to the trustees. Later, however, it was viewed as God's appointment. The trustees were called together at the Fowler and Morris Oyster House for their meeting on October 15, 1886, and the arrangements for the frescoing were made. By their November meeting the work was completed. The congregation rejoiced in the new beauty of their sanctuary. The church debts were not lessened by this gift but, psychologically, it was a tonic to encourage the congregation to persevere through their financial difficulties. Following this, subscriptions from the members poured in liberally.

The trustees began to make the policy of enlightening the membership on the financial problems of the church. At the trustee meeting held on January 3, 1887, it was decided that the chairman of the Board of Trustees, William H. Berry, should make a monthly financial statement to the congregation. This policy was to be continued in the remaining years of the administration by the trustees.

The trustees also had to deal with disciplinary problems arising in the church. This is best seen in their adoption of certain rules for behavior in the church building. Note these rules:

1. "There must be no congregating in the vestibule and about the doors of the church before or after the service."
2. Making or defacing the walls, seats, or any other part of the church property, or spitting on the floor, is positively forbidden."
3. Laughing or talking, looking in the doors, or irreverent behavior of any kind will not be allowed in or about the church during preaching or other services. (To which the present pastor says, "Amen")

4. Persons will not be allowed to pass in or out of the church during time of service except for proper cause.
5. The person attending Divine Worship in this church will be expected to at least bow the head during prayer.
6. The use of Tobacco in any form, in or about the church building is positively forbidden.
7. The sexton is authorized to see that these rules are properly enforced.”

The faith of the trustees is evident concerning behavior in God’s House. It was their contention that “This is God’s Dwelling and it is to be a House of Prayer”. If only we moderns could catch their faith and reverence for Gods House.

The trustees gave their annual report at the election for trustees held January 2, 1888. In the year 1887, the church had made great strides financially. The debt of \$3460 had been reduced by \$500. This does not seem too significant by our present economy, but according to the economy in 1887, this was a remarkable advance. They were now able to do more than just pay the interest on the notes. The church was beginning to climb out of the abyss of debt. The whole congregation was joyously involved in the ascent. They continued to climb step by step. In a few years time they had paid off their indebtedness to one of their chief creditors, John O. Burt. However, they were still not entirely free from debt. Some of the creditors were still anxious to receive full payment for that which they felt had been long overdue. The trustees met on July 12, 1892 to see what could be done to satisfy the creditors. The plan was to borrow \$1,000 on a mortgage basis, and pay off the creditors holding the first mortgage. William E. Fowler and Joseph Onens were appointed a committee to investigate this possibility. An arrangement was worked out and a new mortgage was placed on the church.

The trustees were not the only persons in the church to be concerned over the indebtedness of the church. The women of the church were also vitally concerned. “Thank God for the women! Where would the church be without them?” It was evident to the women that the church would never be free from debt by relying on personal subscriptions and financial maneuverings. What was needed was an active system of raising money for the Church of Jesus Christ. If the church was of any value, it was worth working for. To these dedicated women the church meant everything. It was their spiritual home and their source of spiritual life. They determined that their church would not be closed. They banded together and formed “The Ladies of the Bazaar Circle”. The actual date beginning of this group is not available. However, the group appeared with its plans before the trustees on February 4, 1895.* Their plan was to set up a series of bazaars and raise money for the paying off of the church debt. The plan was initiated at once. There were the critics as usual, but they were the same people who did little for the church anyway. Critics seldom do anything worthwhile for the church, and yet the church has so many of them. Thank God that only a small percentage of the church workers listen

to the critics. If everyone took them seriously there would be no Church of Jesus Christ.

*Trustee's Minutes , February 4, 1895.

Music was of great importance in the life of the early church. There had always been a stress on singing in the Methodist Class Meetings. Just what type of instrumental accompaniment aided the singing in the early years of the Port Norris Church is not known. It is a fact, however, that the trustees purchased a new organ in the spring of 1893. In May, an organ had been placed in the sanctuary for a period of trial. The trustees decided to buy it, changed their minds, and then changed their minds again. In their July meeting, they gave their organ committee the power to arrange payment with the salesman, a Mr. Albertson, for the organ. The note given on the organ was signed on July 13, 1893. On November 12, 1894, the trustees paid off the balance due on the organ. Another financial milestone for the church had been passed.

The trustees were approached by representatives of the Grand Army of the Republic about the securing of lots in the cemetery. The matter was discussed by the trustees and permission was granted. Upon the transaction of receiving cash value for the lots, the lots were given into the power of the Grand Army on May 26, 1894.

The most evangelistic pastor ever to serve the Port Norris Church was Rev. W.G. Moyer. As the year 1893 drew to a close, the Rev. Moyer felt compelled to initiate a mighty revival campaign. He sent letters to all church members and friends of the church. The tone of his letter was one of great urgency.

“Christian Friends:

The important need of our church is an immediate revival. Dearly Beloved, lift up your eyes and look on the field before you. Many in this community are lying in wickedness, having no hope and without God; to whom is reserved the blackness and darkness forever.

Awake! Awake! Put on thy strength, O Christians, for among those unsaved are your children, husband, wife, father, mother, neighbors. Our aged friends must be brought to Christ, for their journey is nearly run. Our middle aged friends must be saved, for life is too uncertain to take any risks. Our young people must be reached and brought to Christ early, or they will be ruined by the prevalent worldliness.

Then, O Toiler, to your knees. Pray down the fire. Let your first prayer be ‘create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me’. Then pray for your pastor, and the unsaved multitudes about you. God has promised showers of blessings.

Oh! For a general awakening in our church and a mighty effort along the line that shall result in a great harvesting of souls.

Yours in the work,

W.G. Moyer

The next step in the revival plans of the Rev. Moyer was the setting of dates for a series of special services. The first service was set for New Years Eve, December 31, 1893. The plan included services to be held every night for the whole month of January 1894. These got under way with great enthusiasm. The Rev. Moyer preached the first week on the subject "the last four things: Death; Judgment; Heaven; and Hell." Almost at once the fires of revival swept the congregation. The Holy Spirit was at work converting sinners and sanctifying saints. At the end of the month the Rev. Moyer gave a report of the revival. "Nearly 200 have been at the altar, over 100 have already been received (into membership) on probation." This was hardly the time to end such an endeavor. Some type of "follow-up program was needed.

The church had been deeply spiritual from its conception and birth. Theologically, it was Wesleyan and true to the prevailing Methodism of the late 19th Century. It stood for a belief in God, which represents the deepest kind of Christian Faith. "God loves all men and is not willing that any should perish. All men can be saved from their sin and from the wrath to come if they turn to God in Christ. Man can know that he is the child of God because of the witness of God's Spirit in his heart. The Christian can be made perfect in love in this life by the Grace of God". Their emphasis was evangelistic and pietistic in teaching and in practice. Not a year passed without a series of evangelistic meetings to lead "sinners" to the Lamb of God. Not a week passed without the Saturday Night Holiness Class meeting to strengthen the saints and lead them into the experience of entire sanctification.

In February 1894, the pastor, the Rev. William G. Moyer, set forth a new plan to evangelize the community and sanctify the saints. The following account of this plan's performance was reported in one of the local newspapers shortly after it had taken place.

"Midnight. Suddenly the bell of the Methodist Episcopal Church rings. It is the bell that ushers in the Day of Jubilee for Port Norris. No sooner has the bell stopped ringing, than from the church comes the voice of praise, and from almost every house in town the sound of music comes forth, at the request of Rev. W.G. Moyer.

The Pastor, a week ago, conceived the idea to have an all day meeting Thursday, February 1st. (1894). On this memorable occasion every place of business in town closed. Not a single one was opened; even the hotel and poolroom complied with the Pastor's request. At 4 A.M., the bell rang for group meetings to be held all over town.

The first meeting was held at 5 A.M., in charge of the Pastor, and the lecture room was filled. It was a very profitable meeting because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. At 6:15 A.M., a bell rang for Family Worship all over the town.

At 7 o'clock, once more the bell pealed forth calling the people to a sunrise meeting, conducted by Mrs. Dayton Campbell and Mrs. Joseph Onens. The Holy Spirit was present to bless many who were in attendance.

At 9 A.M., the bell called people to a consecration service held in the auditorium of the church, and in charge of Rev. Fergus Slater, of the Haleyville Church. This very impressive service was of one hour's duration and the power of God was manifested in a striking manner.

At 10 o'clock, a meeting in charge of the Pastor was held for the 'unconverted' only, in the lecture room of the church, and a number of the 'unsaved' were present.

At 10:30 A.M., an evangelistic service was held in charge of the Pastor, assisted by Rev. Fergus Slater, William Disbrow, Daniel Johnson, and C.F. Downs, who made brief but excellent remarks. A very interesting alter service followed.

At 12 o'clock, the bell was rung in commemoration of the great and glorious victory over sin. To Him be all the glory!

At 1 o'clock, the people gathered again to attend an evangelistic meeting, led by Rev. Daniel Johnson, of the Fairton M.E. Church. At this service, we realized that it was good to wait upon the Lord. By 2 o'clock, it was time for an altar service in charge of Rev. C.F. Downs. On this occasion even standing room could not be obtained. It was estimated that there were over 700 people in the church. It was a wonderful meeting. The altar was filled with the penitent and some were saved.

At 3 o'clock, Rev. William Disbrow gave an excellent talk on the grand and inexhaustible subject, 'salvation'.

This was not all there was to Rev. Moyer's plans to evangelize the community. His plan also involved holding a series of tent meetings during the month of July. It was his hope that more townspeople would attend these services than had attended those on the Day of Jubilee. The trustees agreed to support this endeavor. They were to take charge of these services in preserving order and taking the carried to the big tent. The services began as scheduled in July. But all did not go well: the singing was the best ever heard; the preaching seemed to come from an angel from heaven; souls were saved every night; saints were sanctified every service; yet the whole crusade was sadly marred when several of the town boys unleashed a missile attack of rotten eggs on the tent during service. Most of the blessings of the service that evening were forgotten. The trustees recognized some of the participants and a meeting was called as soon as possible to decide what course of action should be followed. It was decided that the boys should meet with the trustees in the Epworth League parlor. After much exhortation, the trustees released the boys. Official

action was not taken against the boys because someone else had already brought suit against the parents of the boys over the incident. The tent meeting continued on and ended in a blaze of glory. The tent came down and was stored away to await further use.

The New Jersey Annual Conference had long been active in fighting the liquor industry. The Temperance movement was gathering strength in the mid 1890's. Almost every Methodist Episcopal Church in the New Jersey Conference was opening its pulpit to the Temperance Union. The Port Norris Church was no exception. Permission was granted by the trustees for the Temperance Union to hold an area-wide convention in May, 1895, in the Port Norris Church. This was to be the official beginning of a strong temperance emphasis and movement in the Port Norris area. Much will be said later about the development of this movement and its relationship to the Port Norris Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1897, several complaints were made to the trustees that there were no hitching posts at the cemetery. Such a state of affairs caused great inconvenience. It must be remembered that funerals used to be outstanding social events at which the whole community would convene. It is not hard to imagine the consternation of those persons who were forced to tend the horses while everyone else was at the graveside. The trustees acted quickly and ordered ten hitching posts placed strategically about the cemetery. No other complaints were heard after this, so it is assumed everyone was more than satisfied.

An interesting note occurs in the trustees minutes dated September 25, 1897. The Rev. J.W. Clark wished to have a special speaker fill his pulpit. The only trouble involved was that the speaker was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary. Princeton was thoroughly Calvinistic in its theological approach, and the Port Norris Church was as thoroughly Arminian in its theological approach. The two positions were at complete odds. In that era the laity knew theology and were extremely dogmatic in their position. The trustees did not like the sound of having a Princeton man; saturated in a Calvinistic environment, preach in their traditionally Arminian church. The Pastor met these objections with a statement that the speaker was an Arminian. This seemed to be a paradox as far as the trustees were concerned, but they gave their consent. The minutes read, "on motion the request of the pastor was gratified in regards to the lecture in the church by the Princeton Seminary *Arminian* Student."* Theology made a difference in those days. No longer did Methodism stand in the spirit of John Wesley who said, "If thy heart be as my heart, give me thy hand!" Now the spirit cried, "If your theology be as my theology, give me thy hand!"

*Trustee's Minutes, September 25, 1897.

This spirit was true of most Methodist Churches in this general area and not just the Port Norris Church. It had come as a reaction to the critics representing the Calvinistic tradition. The shame of it was that such a spirit was devoid of a sense of Christian love and fellowship by stooping to the same separatist practices as most ultra-Calvinists had expressed. Later, in the life of the Port Norris Church, this spirit

is replaced by a more Christian spirit of fellowship with other church denominations. We shall see this development more completely later in this work.

The year 1898, saw the second day of Jubilee Services at the Port Norris Church. The first Day of Jubilee had been under the leadership of the Rev. William G. Moyer in 1894. The second Day of Jubilee came under the ministry of the Rev. J. Ward Clark. The Day of Jubilee was Thursday, June 30th. The day began at 9 A.M., with an observance of the old time Methodist Love-feast. The Rev. B.F. Buck, Pastor at Haleyville, was the leader. As they broke bread together, there was evidence the power of the Holy Spirit. At 10:30 A.M., a preaching service was conducted by the Rev. J.S. Heisler, D.D. of Camden, N.J. The sermon was delivered in great eloquence. The congregation responded spontaneously at the altar service, which followed. Under the spell of the protracted meeting, many people found a place of repentance and were converted. The afternoon service, beginning at 2 P.M., was a recital of an old Methodist Class Meeting. Prayer and Praise filled the Temple of God as the Rev. J.W. Reid, Pastor at Port Elizabeth, led the congregation. The hour of 3 P.M., was the beginning of another preaching service at which the Rev. J. Moore, D. D. of Bridgeton, preached a powerful discourse on the necessity for personal holiness in being a Christian. Another service followed at 4 P.M. The Rev. H. F. Parker, Pastor at Newport, conducted a general testimony service. Most persons present responded and witnessed to "conversion" and "sanctification" as their spiritual possessions. The youth were also included in this day of Jubilee. At 6:30 P.M., the Rev. J. Garrison, of Haleyville, took charge of the Epworth League's service. The youth were challenged with the Gospel and with Christian commitment to God's Service. Many youth responded to this invitation. The hour of 8 P.M. marked the last preaching service of the day. The Presiding Elder (equivalent to our District Superintendent) of the Bridgeton District, the Rev. J.B. Graw, D.D., delivered the sermon. Once more the congregation was stirred. Each service seemed to build upon the former. The last service was a triumphant climax indeed. It was concluded by a report from the Bazaar Circle. The Circle had had a good year financially and desired to apply their money to the church debt. The congregation rejoiced in God's blessings, both spiritual and material. Shouts of "Glory" came from every pew at the readings of the Circle's report. The church was on the march, "Glory be to God!" Triumphantly the benediction was pronounced by Pastor Clark and the people returned home to recount those services of the day which made their hearts burn within them. This did not end the Second Jubilee celebration however. There were "follow-up" services on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The Saturday evening service was unique. It was a meeting for the church in which each official board member gave his spiritual experience and declared his official relationship to the Church of Jesus Christ. The Sunday evening service closed the Jubilee celebration, but the spirit of that experience continued to permeate the church and its life. The greatest periods of spiritual experience in the church always coincided with times of financial testing's. It seems as if spiritual life had to be deepened before adversity could be overcome. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Seek first the Kingdom".

Everything in the life of the church ran smoothly for the next few years. There was still a mortgage on the church, but little by little that was being reduced. The trustees had no little to do but to look after the general up-keep of the church property. During this time, screens were made for the church windows as a defense against those first native inhabitants of Port Norris called “mosquitoes”.

In 1899, there was a revival of trouble at the cemetery. Various persons had gone to the graves of their deceased only to find that the lots were in poor condition. Much of the grass had been destroyed and some of the topsoil scratched from the lots. The culprits were spotted and identified as members of the “chicken-family”. Complaints came in thick and fast to the trustees. In the trustees meeting of November 18, 1899, they discussed the problem and notification of damage was made to the owners of the chickens. Some of the culprits were placed in better prisons while a few others were committed over for capital punishment.

In the year 1901, the Bazaar Circle desired to make some repairs on the church. They had worked hard and had raised some money, which they intended to use for frescoing and hard –oiling the church sanctuary. The task was to be a costly one, and extra money would be needed. The trustees made a loan of \$250 to the Circle and the work began in August of that year. The congregation used the Temperance Hall as a place of Worship for the two weeks during this repair period. The work was completed and the congregation returned to worship in the beauty of their redecorated sanctuary. The Bazaar Circle had made another notable contribution to the Church.

At the Fourth Quarterly Conference, held on January 31, 1903, the trustees announced with pride that the church was free from debt; except for the sum of \$100, which the Bazaar Circle still owed from the \$250 it had borrowed for redecorating the Church. The long up-hill struggle to be free from debt, caused by mortgages and the like, was over. The church rejoiced and the Circle was encouraged to make a speedy paying of \$100 to make the church 100% free from debt. Once again the church was debt free.

The parsonage had been kept in fairly good repair by the trustees. It could boast of all the necessities of any comfortable home. But in 1903, the trustees felt that the pastor’s house should have an accessory of a newly framed and screened veranda. The work was done in August and the cost of the project reached the sum of \$10. It was with pride and pleasure that the parsonage family would fill the veranda during the twilight hours of the summer months and chant to sweet songs of Zion. A Christian family singing the old fashioned Gospel hymns accompanied by the music of nocturnal insects, is a symphony never to be forgotten. Visitors to the parsonage home of so long ago would thrill to the display of Christian love and fellowship within the enclosed veranda during the evening hours of the summer months. Even now their voices reach our ears and we hear them sing,

“Round the pier my boat is coming,

Praise the Lord, she'll soon be here
With her canvas spread for glory,
Praise the Lord, she'll soon be here.
Just a few more days of sorrow,
Just a few more days of pain,
And we'll anchor safe in Glory,
Praise the Lord she'll soon be here”

Oh, for a return to a Christianity in which the family is brought together in Christian love, faith and fellowship... “where children early list His name, and parents hold Him dear.”

The organ had been purchased in 1893, and had undergone several serious repairs. By March 1904 the trustees were faced with more repairs. An organ committee had been in operation ever since the first purchase in 1893. This body was empowered by the trustees to secure a new organ and to give the old organ as part of payment on the new. Another organ was to be investigated. The organ committee was enlarged to include the full membership of the choir. Mr. Joseph N. Fowler was the chairman of the group, and under his direction a larger organ was purchased for the church. The church now enters the era of having a “hired pumper” for the organ. There were no special qualifications necessary for the job, except strong muscles and an undying love for the organist. A pumper who felt strongly against the organist could easily ruin the reputation of the finest organist. William Morris was the first hired “pumper” for the new organ. His salary was 1.75 for the first month and a half he held the position. *

The church needed painting in 1906. Bids were to be given the trustees for the work. The bid of Thomas Hollinger was accepted. The work began on August 13, and was completed by September 1, of the same year. The church property was now in the best of condition. The sudden turn of events, from adversity to prosperity, had made it all possible. The church had become prosperous. This came about mainly because of the rapidly expanding oyster industry. This factor account for the expanding economy of the town Port Norris during this era. This element, coupled with God's Grace and the Methodist love for giving, brought financial prosperity to the church in the first decade of the 20th Century. “Debt Free” and “good physical facilities” characterize the Port Norris Methodist Episcopal Church in the year 1906. But the best characterization is that it was a “true fellowship of persons of Christian Faith, striving to be found in the image of their Lord, being filled with the Spirit of God, and doing the will of their Heavenly Father.”

*Trustee's Minutes, July 1, 1905

CHAPTER VI

A NEW ERA: THAT OF THE OFFICIAL BOARD

The greatest administrative change in the history of the Port Norris Church took place in December 1906. Prior to this date, the trustees had been the administrative power within the church. The stewards had been limited to the task of collecting subscriptions to pay the pastor's salary and meet the conference apportionments. Only on rare occasions had the stewards met with the trustees to serve as an Official Board. The trustees had assumed nearly all the whether material or spiritual. This was peculiar to Episcopal Methodism in general, and not just the Port Norris Church. The Annual Conference of 1906 had suggested changing this practice. At the Third Quarterly Conference of the Port Norris Church, held on Tuesday, December 4, 1906, it was ordered that an Official Board should become the administrative body for things temporal and spiritual within the church. This would now limit the office of trustee, which is basically a legal office, to matters which are strictly related to legal responsibilities, such as care of property, deeds, mortgages, insurance, etc. The Official Board would include the trustees as well as the stewards and officers of the church duly elected at the Fourth Quarterly Conference. The work of the Official Board would be the general administration of church affairs without encroachment upon the office of trustee. But such a change demanded much planning. The Methodist Episcopal Church had outlined a basic plan to follow. It was worked into the local situation very ingeniously. The time of meetings, the definition of membership, the quorum, the elections, the officers and their duties, and the special rules were set forth in such a way as to make piece of efficient organizational machinery. This basic pattern is still in use today in our church, and is in general agreement with the Discipline of the Methodist Church (except for the matter of quorum).

The matter of finances had always plagued the church, as we have already seen. This new arrangement would mean a more efficient approach to this problem. Three committees were provided for at this point:

1. The Finance Committee was to plan the budget for the coming year and discover the method for raising the amount needed for all expenditures. The membership would consist of the pastor, the financial secretary, the assistant financial secretary, the treasurer, and three other members of the Official Board, chosen by the Board.
2. The Auditing Committee was to audit every treasurer's book in the church and maintain correct financial procedures.
3. The Poor Fund Committee was a provision for the needy in the home community. It was to have it's own treasurer and funds. Disbursements were to be made in secret and at its own discretions.

Here at last was a systematic way of meeting the church's worst problem, "fiancés". The finance committee met on January 26, 1907, and set up its policy and procedures. Their decision called for new record books, for the continuation of plate collections at every service, and for collectors to continue receiving subscriptions. A letter of explanation was drafted and sent to every member of the church. It presented the "new system" of lumping all regular expenses into one fund called current expenses. Prior to this, money for a particular apportionment would be raised by a special offering, and usually at the last minute. The new system would gather the total amount of money needed over the period of a year and then allocate, as it was necessary the full sum on each apportionment and expenditure. An "every member canvass" was set up and carried out to institute this program that same year. Who said an "every member canvass" is a "new thing"?

At concerted effort was put forth by both the Baptist Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1907, to support the Anti-Saloon League. The Baptist Church had secured one of the League's speakers for July 7, 1907. The Methodist Church was invited to attend that evening service. The spirit of John Wesley truly returned to the Port Norris Church. Theology could not keep the two churches apart or away from the noise of battle in behalf of the Anti-Saloon League. Their hearts were joined together on the stand of Temperance and they joined hands. The Official Board voted to close the Sunday Evening Service, and they urged all the members of the church to attend the service at the Baptist Church. The turnout was tremendous and everyone was challenged to fight the liquor business in New Jersey. The Baptist and the Methodist would, in a few years, do just that in Port Norris itself.

Revival services were held each year, sometimes twice a year. The Rev. J. R. Read instituted a different approach to these services in 1907, when he declared his intention to preach his own revival services. The results were amazing. The other workers involved in the services were members of the church. Revival flames were kindled and the church knew a "new experience" of being used of God in these services. Too often the church is robbed, along with its people of unique experiences when it imports "outside help" for its revival services. The church was spiritually strengthened by this unusual venture.

All of the lightening in the church was accomplished by means of oil lamps. There were two brass chandeliers, with glass prisms, hanging suspended from the ceiling of the sanctuary. The larger one provided light for the congregation, while the smaller one gave light to the pulpit. These many-branched chandeliers had a neat arrangement of oil lamps. The lamps were lit by lowering the whole unit by means of chains and pulleys. The counter-balance for this system was an old oyster dredge located in the loft. The Port Norris Church could point with pride to the fact that it was the only church in the world in which an oyster dredge could be found as necessary equipment. In 1907, the convenience of electricity was introduced to the church building. The same fixtures were used to

receptacles. Approximately thirty-five bulbs adorned the larger chandelier, and a dozen or more bulbs were placed on the smaller chandelier. The church now had that "modern look". This probably helped the attendance at the evening services. Curiosity is sometimes a useful thing after all, even in a church.

The Official Board was desirous to see the Worship Service better attended by the children. As might be expected, the Sunday-School hour had a fine congregation of children. However, the worship services could not boast of the same. The conviction of the Board seemed to be that the children needed the worship experience as much as they needed the Sunday-School hour. The Board met on April 4, 1908, to discuss the matter. A plan was devised. The children would be challenged during the Sunday School Hour to attend the worship services. The success of this endeavor is not known, but the vision of the Board in raising the future church should be commended.

The report of the District Superintendent at the Annual Conference of 1908, shows some definite signs of growth on the Port Norris Charge. The Bridgeton District Epworth League held its convention in the Port Norris church that year. It was a smashing success, and the best meeting that had ever held in the District. The District Superintendent went on in his report to commend the Port Norris Epworth League for its growth and its hospitality. At that time, Mrs. S.T. Day was the key to the work of the Epworth League in the church. The District Superintendent also reported that the Port Norris Church had secured, in the past year (1907), a new steam heating system. The membership report stood at 271 for the church, and 280 for the Church School. The value on the church had taken a sharp rise. The church building was valued at \$10,000, and the parsonage at \$1,600. The Port Norris Church was at one of its strongest positions since it's founding.

The church had long observed Holy Communion with a common cup. No other method of taking the cup had ever been entertained. Tradition cried out its authority against the face of the "new method" of individual cups for each worshipper. The Official Board saw value in the new system and asked the Rev William Adams to look into the matter. The Board, meeting on April 10, 1909, asked him to get all possible information on the subject and ask other pastors about its pragmatic worth. The May meeting of the Board heard the pastor's report and it decided to change from the single cup to individual cups at Holy Communion. The cups arrived and were used the first Sunday in June 1909. The Board also felt the Communion Service might be better attended if it were held every two months instead of every month. In the July Meeting of the Board, they set up the dates for Communion as the first Sunday in January, March, May, July, September and November. This followed for some time. Both of these aspects, changing the mode and the date for Communion, show the true nature of Methodism. Tradition has its place, but when something can be done better another way, even tradition must bow to practicality. Methodism has always

been pragmatic in character. The Port Norris Church was truly Methodist in spirit at this point.

Port Norris had been dominated for years by the Christian influence of Baptist and Methodists. The majority of townspeople belonged to either one or the other church group. The two churches were consistently friendly and often united on basic issues. Their mutual "sore-thumb" was the local hotel. This place was a den of drunkenness and vice. The predominantly Christian atmosphere of the village was shattered every Saturday night, and early Sunday morning, with the noisy reveling of the hotel customers. The expanding oyster industry had brought in many migrants to "shuck" the oysters. Saturday was their payday, and every Saturday night meant a big celebration at the hotel. The hotel was the only place in the town, which seemed to appeal to the "shuckers". The hotel would be all but "reeling" by midnight. Intoxicated migrants would overflow into the street and many would find resting places on the lawns of nearby residents. Vices of various types were also reported as being conducted within the hotel. The Methodists were especially disturbed over this turn of events since the hotel was only a little distance up the street from their church. A special Official Board meeting was called on June 9, 1912, to see what action could be taken against the hotel. A committee gave a report on the situation and showed the evidence it had gathered against the hotel. The Board voted unanimously to stand by the report of the committee and receive its recommendations. The Baptist Church also took a stand on the issue. The Anti-Saloon League was approached for legal advice. The suggestion was the legal proceedings should be pursued, the League offering itself in the fight. The hotel owners became aroused and determined to make the situation worse. Drunkards were placed by the barkeepers on the lawns of some Methodists, perhaps for spite. Mrs. Hannah Gibson recalls how her husband, Joseph Gibson, carried the discarded drunks from his yard back over to the hotel where they belonged. The Christian people of the town rallied to the cause of closing the hotel's evil and lucrative liquor business. Court action came in a few years, and by 1915, the Court ruled that the Liquor License should be revoked. The hotel all but went out of business. In general, the town was jubilant over this victory. The New Jersey Annual Conference, meeting in 1916, made a special note of "The War on Rum" at Port Norris, and suggested that the other Methodist Churches in the Conference follow the same example. The faith of the Port Norris Methodists meant an active warfare against social evil. This is seen best in this incident involving the hotel.

The church building was located on East Main Street and Haleyville Road. The parsonage was located on North Temperance Road. A group of Board members began to feel that the parsonage should be closer to the church. In 1913, there was a move to secure the lot on the south side of the church on Main Street. The report of the investigating committee was that the lot could be purchased for approximately \$460. The transaction for the entire Robbins lot was made at a cost of \$1000, with the understanding that one half of it was to be sold to another party, and one half was to be retained for the parsonage site at a

cost of \$461.50. *A Mr. David Powell purchased the other half of the lot. The deed was recorded at the Court House on May 8, 1914. The entire lot had to be purchased by the church since it was an estate to be disposed of by the commissioners of Commercial Township by order of the orphan's Court. *The next stop would be the building of a new parsonage. In November 1913, the lumber for this project was deposited on the lot, in lieu of the pending purchase. The pastor, the Rev. William H. Luther, reported that work could begin as soon as the weather was good in the spring. But several years passed before the work could be started. The Building Committee was called on June 9, 1916, to give its report on the plans of the parsonage. The contract was to be given to local bidders with the understanding that the building be completed by October 1, 1916, or a ten-dollar per day forfeit would be imposed by the church. Bids were to be opened at the June 30th meeting. There was a problem at first in that only one bid was received. This was returned to the contractor unopened, and an advertisement for outside bids was made in the Bridgeton Evening News. The time of two weeks was given for the bids to be received and a two week extension on the completion date was added.

*Official Board Minutes, September 1913, page 135.

+Book 338, page 158, Cumberland Court House.

The new bids were opened on July 14th., and the bid of William H. Owens, the same bid which had been returned previously, was accepted over one other bid. The bid called for the sum of \$2420.00, just \$27.00 under the other bid. The work began immediately, since October 15th would soon overtake them. By that date, most of the work was completed by the contractor. The wiring and heating were also being installed about this time. Never did a building project go so smoothly for the Port Norris Church as this one. At the last minute, the Board directed the contractor to make one addition not previously planned. The minutes of October 28th., 1916, state the addition, "build net frames for the porch like Harvey Hands". * There were probably two factors which inspired this addition: first, the remembrance of the screened veranda on the old parsonage, and the hours of pleasure afforded to the pastor's family by such a structure; and secondly, the exceptional craftsmanship of Harvey Hand in building screens for his own dwelling. All that remained to be done on the new parsonage was the matter of raising enough money to pay for it, and to furnish the inside. The amount of \$75.00 would be the greatest sum asked for as payment from any one person. Whatever amount a person might pledge, he would attempt to make payment on three installments. It was hope that enough church members would co-operate so as to make a long-range mortgage unnecessary. However, a mortgage was finally given on the new parsonage as directed by the Official Board at its January meeting in 1917. By May 1917, the sidewalks at the parsonage were completed. The inside of the parsonage had been neatly furnished by the Ladies Aid Society. The parsonage, inside and out, showed the love of the congregation for the ministers of Jesus Christ who would come to

“feed the flock” at the Port Norris Church. A church is known by its parsonage. The Annual Conference when it provided such an outstanding residence for its ministers. To this day the parsonage has been maintained in the highest sense of love and pride: love for the minister of the Word, and pride in the fact that the minister has the best which his calling deserves.

*Official Board Minutes, October 28, 1916, page 187.

CHAPTER VII

BAPTIST –METHODIST RELATIONS

When the village of Port Norris was in its infancy, both Baptist and Methodist formed a vital cross-section of its population. This was the situation long before either group built a place for worship, which came first to the village has long been a source of argument. Such an argument is childish and proves little indeed. To pursue such a form of argumentation is to negate a far greater heritage, that of Christian Fellowship and Co-operation between the two groups. S look at the record of Baptist –Methodist relations in Port Norris is inspiring to say that least. Certainly there have been periods of misunderstanding between the two churches. Periods in which both churches looked askance at the proceedings and programs of the other. Periods when one attempted to judge over the other, etc. But by far, these periods have been fewer n number than the periods of close fellowship and co-operation between them. The over-all picture of the past shows a basic bond of Christian love and brotherly kindness between the two churches.

The dedication of the Methodist Church in 1371 was attended by many members of the Baptist persuasion. Likewise, the dedication of the new Baptist Church building in 1881 was attended by many members of the Methodist Church. There was a feeling of liaison between the two churches. Different in so many ways, yet the two sensed their common bond and purpose in Christ. This mood is to be seen especially in the mid 1890's when the Temperance Movement brought the Baptist and Methodist together in the fight against the kingdom of evil in Port Norris. One more than one occasion the two churches relinquished their worship services to unite for services by the Temperance League. Some of these services were held in the Baptist Church, and others were held in the Methodist Church. The point of closest co-operation between the two churches came with the “Hotel-Liquor Controversy” in 1913-1915. This epoch has already been related in this work. Closely related to the alcohol problem was the profaning of the Lord's Day. Both Baptist and Methodists joined hands and faith to keep Sunday a Holy Day, rather than a Holiday. Restaurants, shops, and stores were solicited by representatives from the two churches to bring about a closed Sunday in Port Norris. By their combine's efforts, they were successful.

From 1915 on, there appeared to be an accelerated feeling of closeness between the two groups. Frequently in the minutes of the Official Board of the

Methodist Church there is found a motion to lift the Sunday evening Service and attend the Baptist Church for some particular occasion. This was not a one-way affair, however. The Baptist likewise attended many of the outstanding services in the Methodist Church. But feelings went deeper than just a desire to occasionally worship together. This is pointed out by an incident, which occurred in 1918. The Rev. C.D. Whitton had been the Pastor of the Methodist Church for three years. Annual Conference was only a month away and it feared that Rev. Whitton would be moved from Port Norris. His influence had made a great impact on the whole community, and had not been confined to Methodist people alone. The Official Board of the Methodist Church met on February 16, 1918 and declared their desire to keep Rev. Whitton for another year. Mr. Joesph N. Fowler reported that the whole town, especially the Baptist were desirous that Rev. Whitton might be able to remain another year. When the Annual Conference returned Rev. Whitton for another year the whole town rejoiced. But let it be noted that Methodist loved and respected the Baptist Clergy as well. For several years, prior to 1920, the Baptist Church had been pastured by a Rev. Sigmund. Through his Christian Spirit and co-operation the two churches were able to attain a true ecumenical relationship. By March of 1920, Rev. Whitton had left Port Norris. June of 1920 saw the exit of Rev. Sigmund. His farewell sermon was delivered to a capacity congregation in the Baptist Church on June 20, 1920. The Methodist Church was dark again that Sunday evening for the whole Methodist Congregation went in a body to say "God's speed" to such a fine Christian friend.

At one time the Baptists and Methodist attained a zenith of Christian Fellowship. In this brief chapter we have caught but a glimpse of this heritage. There should be no other relationship than this between the two churches today. If possible, it behooves every Christian to love one another and say as John Wesley.

"If thy heart be as my heart,
Give me thy hand."

The Christian Fellowship, seen the past, should be admired, but it should also be surpassed by a greater Christian Fellowship in the present and in the future.

CHAPTER VIII

TIME TO REBUILD

The year 1921 saw the beginning of a new project at the church. The church structure had been erected in 1885 and renovations had been few prior to 1921. A number of church officials felt a complete remodeling of the church was in order. Already members had inquired about having the church basement enlarged to house a kitchen and dining room. *Other ideas were freely given on

how the basic structure could be changed to meet the growing needs of the congregation. It all began as a small pebble rolling down a mountain side. The pastor The Rev. H.H. Neale, had called the building committee to a special meeting in December of 1920. As tentative goals they planned to do something about the church basement; new pews, interior painting; a new lighting system; repairing of windows, steps, and vestibule; and a new arrangement for the pulpit furniture. The committee had seen some of the needs of the church, but took no official action toward the realization of these goals. The pebble was rolling all by itself, but soon it would get other pebbles to roll with it. The Official Board, in turn, desired the total church membership to consider the possibilities under such a project. After the meeting an inspection of the property was made. It was soon agreed upon that the building was far from being safe, and that a renovation would not be wise. A spirit of despair rested upon the group when confronted with these facts. Hope was not lost for at the next Official Board meeting, February 26, 1921, some person of faith made a motion that the church building be completely rebuilt. The rolling pebble had now started what became an avalanche in a few years.

*Official Board Minutes, page 194.

It was decided to table this motion until all the church members could be present to consider the proposition. However, it was a whole year before the matter was brought before the congregation for a vote. The members of the church cast a favorable vote for a new building on May 13, 1922. After debating the question of building a new church or rebuilding the old, Stetson Campbell made a motion that a new church should be erected. Harry Lee seconded the motion and the motion passed by more than two-thirds majority. One week later, May 20, the Official Board met again and Roscoe Sharp presented his drawings of the new church. The Board became very enthused over these plans. However, no official action was taken at that particular meeting. The Board met the following week and voted on Roscoe Sharp's plan. They authorized the Building Committee to start the necessary proceedings. The congregation was called together on June 10, 1922 to authorize the trustees to mortgage the new building, and arrange a fund raising campaign. But here the project hit a snag. Everyone was in agreement for a new building, but the problem was when it should be erected.

Some persons felt that work should begin immediately. Others were in favor of waiting awhile before beginning. The Pastor, the Rev. H. S. Garrison, expressed his support of the latter position, claiming that conditions were not the best for such a project right at this time. A postponement of one year was given so that all related problems to building might be worked out to the fullest extent. The largest obstacle to beginning the work on the new structure in the summer of 1922, was the lack of sufficient funds. It was probably this factor, which figured most in postponing the work for a year. The first Sunday in November was set aside as "Finance Day". The purpose of this special day was to raise money for

this venture of faith. The outcome was not as great as had been expected. Once again the words of Parent Sharp came back to haunt the church..."money matters are slow". Truly money matters were slow, slow enough to postpone the beginning of the new project for a few more years.

Services were conducted in the old church, as usual, until July 1, 1924. Then the old building came down to make way for the new. The First Quarterly Conference, held in April 1924, decided that the time had come when the new building should be started. Finances had improved considerably, so much so that payment for the new structure would not too difficult a task. The Official Board met the week prior to the last service in the old church. The Building Committee was given the task of selling equipment, which could not be used in the new building. The organ and blower were to be sold for \$300, that is if any one would buy them for that much money. Other materials in the old building were kept to have a place in the new building. Soon the old building came down. The congregation met for its services in the schoolhouse during the period of building.

The Building Committee consisted of six members: the Rev. Linwood Miller; Morton Bateman; Joseph Fowler; J. Hammit Lake; Stetson Campbell; and John Sharp. The contract for erecting the building was awarded to Samuel Godfrey. The cornerstone was laid on October 26, 1924 at 3 p.m. by the Rev. H.J. Belting and the Rev. Linwood Miller. From that time on the work progressed steadily until its completion in April of 1925.

Many persons desired to see beauty and practicality blended together in the new building. The placing of the memorial windows shows how they accomplished this goal. The placing of the memorial windows was accomplished by persons who desired each window to illustrate some aspect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Placed voluntarily, each window points vividly to the faith of the church. One window, in the sanctuary, was given by the Klu Klux Klan. It must be remember that he Klan was active and somewhat popular in Port Norris during the mid 20's. The price paid for the window was \$275. The same window could hardly be replaced today for \$1500. Almost every pastor, since 1925, has preached a series of sermons on the windows. They are indeed beautiful, and contribute much inspiration to ever service.

The church was dedicated on April 26, 1925, by the Rev. J.B. Kulp and the Rev. Linwood Miller. It was a day of great rejoicing. The afternoon service featured a sermon by the Rev. D. C. Evans, and at the evening service the Rev. Alfred Wagg, of Ocean Grove, delivered the sermon.

Now that work was finished the congregation could begin to enjoy their new church home. However, the Official Board felt that there should be certain rules for the congregation in the new building. First, no tacks were ever to be used in the new building for any decorations. Secondly, the church chairs were never to be used to stand upon in placing decorations. Thirdly, chairs and tables placed in

the basement were not to be removed unless by permission of the Official Board. Perhaps someone had borrowed chairs and tables, at some time and had not returned them. Or, if this is not the case, the Board foresaw that such a thing might happen unless it could be checked. There were other “do’s and dont’s” to be sure, but to mention them here would serve no real purpose.

The New Jersey Annual Conference met every March for its sessions. In 1925 the District Superintendent of the Bridgeton District, the Rev. H.J. Belting, reported the work on the new building at Port Norris to the Annual Conference. The estimated cost of the project was given as \$50,000. At the following Annual Conference, March 1926, the Rev. Joseph B. Kulp gave this report:

“There seems to be a revival of interest in the making of Gods House a fit temple of worship. The church at Port Norris became unsafe and it was evident that a new one had to be reared. The problem was: how much can we afford to build a suitable edifice? In answering this question they counted the cost of the automobiles owned by the members of the church and concluded that they could afford as much for a temple of worship as for motorcars. The result is one of the most complete buildings in the New Jersey Conference. The Official Board has devised the following plan to care for the indebtedness: oyster beds have been loaned, oyster seeds will be given, and the men of the church will plant and harvest the oyster free of charge. After two years this plan is expected to earn approximately \$6,000 per year. This, with the annual contributions of members and friends of the church, will speedily cancel the entire indebtedness.*

The church was now riding high. It had a new building which was the most modern in the Conference. It had a dynamic religious life which was second to none. It had a glorious past, mixed with great adversities and great victories. It was to have a greater future, still to be an admixture of adversity and victory. But for its life in 1925, it was a triumphant church. Strong in praise and thanksgiving to God, it looked forward, in great optimism, to the years lying before it. Fortunately, it could not see clearly what lay ahead. The return of financial troubles (later to be seen in mortgages, impatient creditors, economic depressions, bank failures, and disasters in the oyster industry) would nearly take its life in the 1930’s and early 1940’s. If it had foreseen these trials, perhaps its existence would have come to an end. But it did not know what was ahead...thereby it preserved trial after trial in the years which followed 1925 and 1926.

“As thy days, so shall they strength be:” Deuteronomy 33:25.

*New Jersey Annual Conference Minutes of 1926, page 212.

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...from the past that God had faithful and capable servants, and that their line will not perish from the Church of Jesus Christ. This remembrance of the past gives faith and courage for the future.

In the past, there had been a true fellowship of believers among the laity. This had come to birth in the mid 19th century and had never died. It was this nucleus of lay personnel which made the church courageous and strong. Every trial was faced with perseverance and a willingness to work. They represented the greatest paradox: have enough faith to believe that God is able to do all things, then work as hard as you can, as if God expects you to do it all. These Christians laymen were fired with a deep faith in God, but they saw that only faith with works could establish and maintain the Church of Jesus Christ. They reckoned themselves to be “stewards” of Jesus Christ, calling to be “holy and faithful” in all points of life. But they were human, and they were ever swift to acknowledge that fact. In this confession, they were not willing to write off their short comings as necessary sins. They measured themselves by the mind of Christ and submitted themselves in a deeper consecration to God so that “the mind of Christ” might be in them. Theirs was a faith and a life which built a church and maintained it as a source of spiritual refreshment In a needy community. With the close of this era there would still be lay people deeply committed to Christ within the church. The Christian community did not end with the death of those original founders. Christ is alive forever and manifest Himself in the fellowship of the church. The same spirit of faith, the same attitude of sacrificial work, and the same striving after the mind of Christ must continue amount the laity. This alone will insure that the church is still a fellowship of believers through which Christ directs His redemptive Gospel. Do not forget the laymen of the past, remember them. From their example of faith and devotion, the church is to be challenged to “press on”, knowing that Godly laymen will pick up the banner of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the future.

In the past, God was at work. It was God’s church which was established and maintained under the title “The Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Norris”. The “cloud of witnesses”, surrounding the life of the Port Norris Church, ever points to the Divine-Human encounter which is basic to the Christian Faith. Here men knelt and met God. Here men found the ability to live nobler lives of service. Here men learned to love each other. Here men challenged to bring Christianity into the social issues of their day. Here men were inspired to make the pronouncement of the early church, “Jesus is Lord”. This is all God’s activity, but it is always in relation to human instrumentality and responsibility. God is dynamic in His dealings with men. By His Spirit, He has animated the sons of men and caused the dynamic of His being to be reflected on His Church. The years of the past reveal this fact in relation to the Port Norris Church. The years to follow will continue to show dynamic God at work through human instruments. God has not forsaken His Church. The very “gates of Hell shall not prevail against it”. It will forever march against evil and not retreat. It is His creation: its life is that of its Lord’s; it is Divinely instituted and sustained.

Therefore, “remember the things which are behind”. Rejoice in this God who lovingly redeems mankind. Trace His course by the church of the past. Then “press on” into the days of uncertainty which lie before. God is at work, He has a church: it is comprised of deeply consecrated laymen who are shepherded by disciples of faith and ability.

With this challenge, the Port Norris Church enters into a new era. God is still with her.

“Being confident of this very thing, that he hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6.

The Port Norris Methodist Episcopal Church was an active one in relation to its classes. The charge had three of its own classes in 1870.

Richard W. Robbins William L. Garrison and Charles McDaniels

These three classes consisted of the entire membership of the church. They met each Sunday for their session in addition to the regular Sunday services. The Port Norris church was also responsible, in 1870, for four other classes which conducted in neighboring communities. These classes were held in Buckshutem, Baileytown, and Centergrove. The class leader at Buckshutem was William Buzby. Edward Bailey held the class at Baileytown. The Centergrove charge had two classes with Elmer Earl and the Rev. John W. Stewart as leaders.

The spiritual life of the church was maintained primarily by the presence of the class meetings. From the classes came spiritual power almighty enough to change lives – “convert sinners and sanctify saints”. The classes were marked by much singing, prayer, testimonials and exhortations from the leaders. The class was primarily a layman’s project. Only on unusual occasions did the clergy conduct a class. Love Feasts were frequent forms of procedure with the classes. “Breaking Bread” ...confessing sins and faults...being reconciled together...praying...singing...shouting...testifying---these were all elements of the Love Feast of the class meetings of so long ago.

The class meeting was started at the beginning of the church’s life and continued until recent years. Perhaps a return to it might do much for our church and Methodism in general.

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL FACTS

The Bivalve Mission was founded by Mrs. James R. Morris, in 1896.

The Rev. Herbert H. Neale, 1920-21, was the first minister to own an automobile. The first couple to be married in the present church building was Warren Miller

and Mabel Hollinger on November 24, 1926. (It took Mr. Miller several days to recall the date when asked by the author).

The silver chalice once used as the common cup in Holy Communion is still in the church's possession. It was placed upon the Lord's Table for the Communion Service on Maundy Thursday, 1959.

The marble baptismal font was given by the children of the church when the present church building was dedicated in 1925.

A Home-Camp meeting was held in 1911. Camp meetings were being held in most of the surrounding areas of Port Norris. The Rev. George Abel pondered whether to try on at Port Norris. The largest obstacle to having a camp meeting was the mosquitoes. The only way to outwit them was to have camp meetings indoors. A number of sizeable trees were cut and used for atmosphere, being fastened to the end of each pew, and across the front of the church auditorium. The meetings lasted for two weeks, and the custom was followed for several years. When the electricity failed, during one of those meetings, old fashioned barn-lanterns were tied to the trees. This gave a realistic effect, to say the least.

Miss Louella Fowler first became choir director at the age of eighteen. She was later married to Morton Bateman, and continued her work in the music department of the church for 48 years. Under her direction the Senior Choir produced "The Story of the Pink Rose" on September 26, 1915. Miss Elizabeth Buzby was the organist, and Mrs. Joseph N. Fowler was the reader. The Sanctuary was decorated with 500 pink roses for the occasion.