

A Brief History of BSUMC

In 1832, Vardry McBee, a large landowner and prominent citizen of Greenville, deeded to the Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church a lot of land located at the Southwest corner of East Coffee Street with a frontage on Coffee Street of 100 feet "for the promotion of religious worship and in order that a suitable church may be erected for the Methodist denomination in the village of Greenville." The vision and gift of a non-Methodist spurred the Greenville Methodists to action and two years later, in 1834, five women and one man gathered at the home of Miss Mariah Turpin for the organizational meeting of Greenville's first Methodist congregation. Vardry McBee also made generous donations to Christ Episcopal Church, First Baptist Church and First Presbyterian Church.

A frame building for the "Greenville Methodist Episcopal Church" was completed in 1836, where worship services were conducted by Circuit Preachers until 1841 when the Greenville Church was made a station and William P. Mouzon was appointed its first pastor by action of the South Carolina Conference held in Camden, South Carolina. A separate and distinct Sunday School was organized in 1836 under the patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Separate classes existed for males and females.

Worship services were held in the frame building located on Coffee Street until 1870, when the property at the intersection of Buncombe Street and Richardson Street was purchased from T. Henry Stokes and Abigail Stokes for \$3,200.00. A new church building was erected on the Buncombe Street property at a cost of \$12,000.00 and was dedicated by Bishop D. S. Doggett of Virginia on February 3, 1873. The Methodists were not immune to the issues which had divided the nation into two armed camps, so it should be no surprise that the name of the church was changed to "Buncombe Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South." The original property deeded to the Church by Vardry McBee was sold to Sarah H. Lester for \$1,200.00 after obtaining a court ruling that the property could be sold if the proceeds from the sale were used exclusively for religious purposes in compliance with Vardry McBee's covenant.

In 1928 additions were added to the rear and side of the building to accommodate the rapidly growing Sunday School. In 1939, in compliance with the provisions of the Unification Agreement, the name was changed to "Buncombe Street Methodist Church." The church membership continued to grow and in 1951 the original building was extended to the South, and the size of the sanctuary nearly doubled, giving a seating capacity of 850. A social hall and kitchen were constructed under the sanctuary, and were used extensively until that area was changed into children's classrooms during the enlargement and renovation undertaken in 1996. In 1968 the Methodist Church merged with the United Brethren and the name became "Buncombe Street United Methodist Church."

During 1960, construction of the Children's Building and renovation of existing facilities was begun and occupied on November 23, 1960. In 1972 Memorial Chapel was constructed on the Richardson Street side of the Church and in 1976 the Family Activities Building, later named Drake Hall, was completed on the Academy Street side of the Church. All of these additions have added greatly to the ministries available for the community and the congregation. Realizing that both the membership and the programs of "Buncombe Street United Methodist Church" were growing rapidly, in 1996 the Board of Stewards undertook a major renovation and enlargement of the Church facilities, some parts of which were more than one hundred years old. The cost of the work was estimated at six million dollars, but as the job progressed it became evident that this estimate was too low, and that funds pledged would be inadequate to complete the project without bank financing. During the Charge Conference held in November 2007, the congregation's buildings and furnishings were reported by the Trustees to have an estimated value in excess of \$7,000,000 with an indebtedness of \$1,175,000.

Today the "little flock" which met to organize this church in 1834 has grown to a congregation of 2,303 members with three worship services every Sunday morning attended by an average of 920 persons; a Sunday School with an average attendance of 724 and more than 550 children; and one of the best-attended Family Night programs in the South Carolina Conference

In 2009 "Buncombe Street United Methodist Church" will celebrate the 175th anniversary of its founding. During those 175 years the Buncombe Street congregation has provided from its membership the nucleus of several suburban congregations, leadership for United Ministries, the Rescue Mission, the Free Medical Clinic and the Mercy Center at Triune Methodist Church. Four Bishops of the Methodist Church have come from this congregation, as well as at least three Mayors of the City of Greenville, and a Governor of the State of South Carolina.

To God Be the Glory. Hallelujah!