

A BRIEF HISTORY ABOUT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, AYDEN, NC

Baptist work in Ayden had its unofficial beginning in the year 1890 in a school North-west of Ayden known as Spring Branch school house. A *Sunday School (SS)* was organized with Eddie Mumford (later one of 20 charter members) as the Superintendent, and preaching was held once a month by the Pastor of Antioch Baptist Church (later Winterville Baptist Church). In 1892 A. G. and Susan Cox gave the present site upon which the church is located and subsequent meetings were held there until this day. On July 2, 1898 the Ayden Baptist Church officially came into being and continued to be known by this name unto the adoption of a constitution and by-laws in July, 1960. It then officially changed its name to the First Baptist Church, Ayden, NC.

Twenty charter members composed the original church and all are deceased. Until the year 1924, the First Baptist Church was a mission church under the auspices of the N.C. Baptist State Convention, but then became self-supporting. The Rev. W. L. Bilbro was called as first pastor of the church and he has been followed by a succession of eighteen other pastors at the time of this writing. On September 21, 1986, Rev. Gilbert Mister (1968-1985) was elected in church conference as "Pastor Emeritus". Pastor Rev. Lynwood Walters began his ministry June 1, 1986.

In 1931 the church felt the necessity of owning its own parsonage and for this purpose the house situated by the side of the Ayden Free Will Baptist Church was purchased. This was the house of all succeeding pastors until 1960 when a new parsonage was built at 400 Terrace Drive and the old house sold.

In 1940 after many years of holding *SS* and worship services in the same building, the original church sanctuary was remodeled. The rear portion to the Sanctuary was added to furnish separate and private *SS* rooms in 1943. In the ensuing years homes were purchased to the south' (Frank Hart home) and to the east (Basden home) for the ever expanding *SS*.

A fire occurred on May 30, 1959 doing much damage (\$24,000.00) to the interior of the church and destroying some of the early records of the church. The congregation met in the Myers Theatre while the sanctuary was being rebuilt. Portions receiving damage were rebuilt and in March 1969, the church voted to demolish the old houses on its property and erect a new educational plant including kitchen, fellowship hall, S. S. space, and an unfinished area to be used according to its best purposes.

For a number of years it had been recognized that the Nursery housed in the Hart home and the intermediates and juniors housed in the Basden home were not an ideal situation. Planning for a new education wing commenced during the tenure of Charles Sinclair and was completed under the leadership of Rev. Gilbert Mister. Haskins and Rice, Architects of Raleigh created the design. Cost of the new construction was estimated at \$102,000.00, of which \$80,000.00 was borrowed from Southern National Bank. Ayden Building and Supply Company was to construct the new building. The plans called for the demolition of the Hart and Basden homes, and the construction of a new education plant to include the pastor's study, secretary's office, fellowship hall and kitchen, eleven *SS* rooms, and an unfinished area to be used as a multi-purpose room. Ground breaking took place March 1, 1969, bringing to reality a dream of years of need.

At this time, the church had a membership of approximately 200 members and growing *SS* enrollment necessitating the remodeling of the sanctuary area and some educational space. Due to settling of the rear portion of the Sanctuary, extensive repairs were necessary. Upon the completion of this in 1990, plans were made to renovate the chancel area of the church and place new carpet and cushions in the pews.

Under the leadership of Rick Lawrence we were looking forward to a continuation of our heritage a Christian fellowship of Bible Study, worship, evangelism, missions, and a world-wide witness for Jesus Christ.

(The information contained herein was gleamed from prior written histories of Ayden First Baptist, records in the church's possession, and from the Baptist Historical Collection of the Z. Reynolds Library of North Carolina.)