

## History of Salem Presbyterian Church

In the late 1700s many emigrants from Ireland came to America seeking religious freedom and a better life. Many of these newcomers to the colonies were “Covenanters” of Scotch-Irish descent and were of the Presbyterian or Reformed faith. Such were conditions prior to 1812.

Salem was originally known as Little River Presbyterian Church named for the Little River Creek in western Fairfield County. In the early days of its existence, like almost all churches of that time, the pulpit was filled by a circuit-riding preacher. It was officially instituted as a church by Congaree Presbytery during its meetings of Nov. 12-16, 1812.

The site for the church and cemetery was a gift from the Means family. The charter for this particular religious organization by the name of “The Salem Presbyterian Church in Fairfield District” was granted by the South Carolina Senate on Dec. 18, 1813.

The church united with the Sion Presbyterian Church of Winnsboro in 1817 and the Lebanon Presbyterian Church in 1847. In 1896 five acres of land was given for a church by Thomas Means and a church and a manse were built.

The highest recorded membership was in 1918 with 205 members.

It was for many years a member of the Presbyterian Church, United States (PCUS) but since 1973 has been a charter member of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination. In its more than 190 years of existence it has been a member of the Harmony, Bethel, and Congaree Presbyteries (PCUS) and the Calvary and Palmetto Presbyteries (PCA). It is located in Western Fairfield County on SC Highway 215, one-fifth mile north of Salem Crossroads (SC Hwys. 34 & 215).

The original meeting house in 1812 was a wooden cabin approximately 40 by 60 feet that ran parallel with the public road. This first of what was to become three church buildings was “a plain wooden structure having a large auditorium and gallery and a separate session house”. This was typical construction for a rural Presbyterian church in the early 1800s.

Former church member and historian, the late Lugenia Gladney Roberts, wrote in 1946, “Through growth, worthy ambition, religious zeal, and untiring effort, by common consent and purpose on the part of the people, this building was removed and in its place a new house of worship was erected...in 1893.” This was under the ministry of Rev. G. T. Bourne.

The second building was completed in 1894. It too was a wooden edifice but with a spacious auditorium, gallery and meeting rooms under one roof. The frame construction included arched windows and lights, and “a large, lone spire of the structure gave added beauty and dignity to the entire setting,” according to Roberts. Dedicated in 1894 the

building served the church as a meeting place for worship and Sunday School until Aug. 30, 1927 when it was struck by lightning and completely destroyed.

Of Huguenot and Scotch ancestry

In 1817 the women of Salem joined with the women of Sion (Winnsboro)

In 1893, under the ministry of Rev. G. T. Bourne, a manse and a new church were built.

In the 1920s the Women made quilts for the Thornwell Orphanage in Clinton.

On Aug. 30, 1927, the church building was struck by lightning and burned. Worship services were held under the oak trees by the side of the ruins.

A fellowship building was added in 1975.

Ministers over the years include the Revs. J. S. Lyons, Charles Harris, Bert Wilkinson, Wilbur Parvin, Marshall Smith, Robert Wallace, James Russell, John Holmes, Ken Barnes, Dan Smyth and Richard Hodges, pastor since Feb. 1984.

Current membership is 100 with attendance of about 50-60 each Sunday.