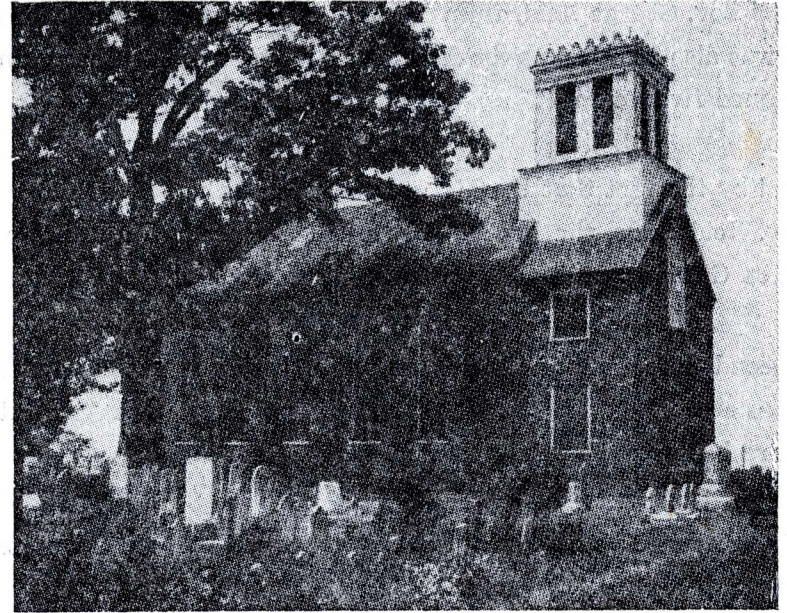


SION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



ORIGINAL BUILDING, 1809

Abridged History of Sion Presbyterian Church

BY DR. CHARLES SPENCER McCANTS

The genesis of Sion Presbyterian Church was the emigration of the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from Pennsylvania and Virginia, the English, French Huguenots, and other Scotch-Irish from Charleston and the low country.

The above admixture soon prepared for the establishment of Presbyterian worship. The Mt. Zion Congregation was incorporated by the Legislature in 1787, the 27th of March. It is reasonable to conjecture that the Presbyterian Congregation worshipped in connection with the College fostered by the Mt. Zion Society. There is also evidence that worship was also conducted in the County Court House.

Rev. Robert E. Smith was called by us from Cedartown, Georgia, in 1954. His stimulating influence on the Church is within the present knowledge of most of us. He is unusually well liked in his church, by the ministers of the other denominations, and is an outstanding citizen of our town. The church, the Sunday School, and Fellowship Hall have been modernized, all departments are well organized, the enrollment has reached over 400, the budget is over \$33,000, and a new manse has been built. The church has practically no debts. It is the wish of the congregation that Rev. Smith will be our Pastor for many more years.

During the past generation, the Church has developed some very dedicated workers. Emanating from Sion Church have been Rev. C. K. Douglas, Rev. Charles Turner, Rev. Talmadge Haynes, Rev. Francis B. Mayes, Rev. Archie Reed, and two medical missionaries, Rion Dixon and Miss Charlotte Dunlap, the latter having spent 37 years in China and Formosa. Sion Church is also proud of the mission work performed by Eugene Broome and H. E. Caldwell of Wateree, and D. V. Walker, Jr. at Simpson.

The social, racial, financial and other problems will periodically appear in our church affairs; however, we trust the fundamental teachings of the Bible and our Presbyterian doctrines will be sufficient always to sustain us.

Mt. Zion College and Sion Presbyterian Congregation collaborated for the services of Rev. George Reid, from Yorkville. He was President of the College and was also installed as the first regular pastor of the Church in 1805 and remained five years.

Spurred by the fact that the Methodists erected their church two years after Rev. Reid came, the Presbyterians belatedly began in 1809 to build a church on Garden Street which was completed in 1811.

The second defection of the congregation began four years after the church was erected. A large influential group was lost to the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church over the question of Psalmody.

The first church had as its first regular pastor Rev. B. R. Montgomery, who came in 1811. He was succeeded by Rev. Anthony Ross.

The original church building was a brick structure 50 x 30 feet with a 21-foot ceiling, and galleries on three sides for the occupancy of the slaves. There was a high pulpit against the south wall. After 1865, the side galleries were torn away and the front entrance was made from the east. Some of this work was done with brick from the burned Mt. Zion College. This church was abandoned in 1923, after being constantly used for 112 years. The entire property is now preserved as a cemetery.

Space forbids recording all the financial difficulties, the controversies, and the up and downs of the old church congregation. Many of the ministers were outstanding in their profession and in the community and, upon leaving Winnsboro, went on to larger and more prestigious duties. In 1850 there were only 68 white and 28 black communicants.

After the War between the States, and for about 40 years, the Church was in dire straits. The net gain of only one member per year did not denote progress.

Affairs of the Church began to brighten in 1903 under the pastorate of Rev. S. C. Byrd. A year later, Rev. McLees and Rev. Wardlaw, Evangelists of the Synod, conducted a series of meetings which were very fruitful and 25 members were added to the roll.

Rev. J. M. Holladay followed Rev. Byrd in 1907. Through Rev. Holladay's leadership, there was a significant improvement in the financial status of the church. The present site of the church was acquired in 1910. Membership now reached one hundred and ninety-eight.

Rev. George G. Mayes came to us in 1915 and remained for a pastorate of 23 years, the longest in the history of Sion Church. In 1920, the walls of the old church were condemned as unsafe, and the cry for a new building began to be heard. The women with a \$5,000 fund persistently and successfully challenged the men to begin construction. The colonial designed Church on Washington Street is the result initiated by the women of the Church. The congregation moved in April 24, 1923, sans pews. The only connecting link of the old church with the new is the pulpit, two pulpit chairs, and the oval marble top table.

Rev. Arthur Martin of Savannah, Georgia, appeared on the scene in 1938 and remained fifteen years. The church continued its steady progress. The fellowship Hall was constructed in 1952. Rev. Martin was very popular in the Church and was an asset to our community.