



**ALABAMA – WEST FLORIDA CONFERENCE
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2015



**The Historical Society's 2015 Annual Meeting
Ivy Creek UMC and Autaugaville UMC, September 24, 2015**

**"Pleasant Path to the Past"
Jim Young, AWFC-HS President**

September 24, 2015 was a beautiful day in the area of southern Autauga County, Alabama, known as the Mulberry/Statesville community -- a perfect day for the Annual Meeting of the AFWC-HS.

Ivy Creek, a church here since 1854, was our host for the opening session; and, as Jeannie Johnson, Church Historian, told us when she welcomed us, "We've been sweeping the floor and fluffing the pillows in preparation for company coming." And a warm, gracious, and delightful welcome it was!

After a brief period of meeting and fellowship with the large number of Ivy Creek members and friends who had turned out to welcome us, we moved from the Fellowship Hall into the historic sanctuary.

We sang familiar hymns from the Cokesbury Hymnal and were inspired by a warm welcome and devotional from Ivy Creek pastor Rev. Richard Lucas.



Singing at the Opening Session at Ivy Creek

Jeannie Johnson then told us of the history of this area and how Ivy Creek church came to be. She described the successful efforts by members of the congregation over more than 150 years to serve God and the community and preserve their heritage. She invited us to enjoy the wonderful display of historical artifacts in the Fellowship Hall, to climb the stairs to the gallery, and to visit the adjoining cemetery.

To complete the presentation, Mrs. Johnson introduced Catherine Wood, Marcus Houston, and Linda Walker who told us about some of the earliest settlers in the community.



Display of Historical Material at Ivy Creek UMC

The morning session at Ivy Creek was adjourned and everyone was invited to continue the meeting with the afternoon session to be hosted by the Autaugaville UMC

Lunch was served in the Fellowship Hall of the Autaugaville UMC. Pastor Dr. Jabe Fincher and other members of the Autaugaville congregation gave us another warm and gracious welcome.



Gathering for the Afternoon Session at Autaugaville

After lunch we gathered in the sanctuary for a short time of singing and to hear Dr. Fincher tell us of the history of the church and some of the unique features of the historic building.

His presentation was followed by a representative from the Autaugaville County Historical Society who gave an outstanding program concerning the past and future of Autauga County, Alabama, and invited us to visit the county Museum in Prattville.

**The Business Session
Sharon Tucker, AWFC-HS Recording Secretary**

The business session of the 2015 Annual Meeting was called to order and opened by prayer by AWFC-HS President, James Young.

The meeting was held in the sanctuary of the Autaugaville United Methodist Church beginning at approximately 1:45 on September 24, 2015.

This session was held immediately following the 2015 Annual Meeting where the attendance was thirty-nine members/guests.

The first matter of business for the AWFC-HS business session was an introduction of the Executive Board by Jim Young. Sharon Tucker read the minutes of the Executive Board Meeting held on February 20, 2015.

Rev. Ed Shirley reported on the creation and maintenance of the AWFC-HS website which can be found at www.awfhistory.com.

President Jim Young discussed the publishing of the society's newsletters which he prints quarterly.

Mary Ann Pickard gave a Membership and Financial Status Report. The AWFC-HS had a financial balance of \$4,748.88.

Sharon Tucker and Ed Shirley presented the joint efforts of the Commission On Archives And History and the Alabama West Florida Conference Historical Society at the 2015 Alabama West Florida Annual Conference held in June 2015.

There being no old business, President Jim Young asked for New Business. After much discussion a motion was presented by Myrtice Carr to support the publishing of a coffee table book to be produced from the pictures and history of some of the oldest churches in the conference. These photos were taken by the late Mr. R.H. Couch and Mr. J.B. Harrington. A donation pledge of \$1,000.00 was seconded and the motion carried.

A call was made for volunteers/nominations for the 2016/2017 Executive Board Members. There being no new volunteers/nominations made, the current members were then re-elected.

The next annual meeting will be held after the 2016 AWF Annual Conference. Several suggestions were discussed for that meeting. They were: Troy First UMC and Troy University Wesley Foundation; Montgomery First UMC; AWF Conference Headquarters/History of the AWF Conference; Pensacola First UMC; and Noah's Ark, the first fifty years. The Executive Committee will take these suggestions into consideration and decide on the next meeting place and time before 2016 Annual Conference. At conference, brochures will be presented to encourage attendance at the 2016 Annual Meeting and membership in the AWFC-HS.

There being no more business the meeting was adjourned by Jim Young and a closing prayer was offered by Rev. Ed Shirley.

Histories of Ivy Creek UMC and Autaugaville UMC and photos of these historic churches are on pages 3-5.

Megachurches

Among various developments within United Methodism, the rise of the so-called "megachurch" has had a significant impact on United Methodist self-understanding. Although Methodism throughout its history has placed a strong emphasis on the nurture of persons in small groups, the mega church has posed new challenges to this historic understanding.



Frazer United Methodist Church, Montgomery, AL

In fact, one of Alabama's United Methodist Churches was instrumental in pioneering the development of the megachurch phenomenon. In 1990, Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church, located in Montgomery, had the largest worship and Sunday School attendance of any other United Methodist congregation in North America. Frazer Memorial routinely trained pastors from across the country in their methods of worship, outreach, and spiritual development.

As the denomination continues to see the rise of large, urban churches, the small church model is increasingly under pressure to find its place in this denominational shift, just as the megachurch is challenged to find new ways to remain faithful to the historic small-group model of Methodism founder John Wesley.

Even as the megachurch concept has seen rapid growth in the denomination, United Methodism also faces the tremendous challenge of overall decline, as does almost every other mainline, Christian denomination in the country. Membership in the United Methodist Church in 1968 was roughly 10 million persons and has since fallen to roughly 8 million, and the trend seems to be increasing.

The decline in Methodist membership in the Alabama-West Florida Conference (AWFC), has been nowhere as severe as in other parts of the country. However, leaders of AWFC United Methodist Churches understand that they are not immune to the problem and are grappling with the challenges and opportunities this difficulty brings with it. In an effort to address decline, Methodists are increasingly involved in outreach programs that center less on bringing persons to traditional church buildings in favor of programs that take church members into society at large and serve the needs of those outside the church.

Currently, there are approximately 600 congregations and 148,000 individuals in the Alabama-West Florida Conference. The larger congregations are located in the metropolitan areas of Alabama as well as the panhandle of Florida.

Extracted from *United Methodism in Alabama (Encyclopedia of Alabama)*, C. Jason Borders, Huntingdon College

History of the Ivy Creek United Methodist Church

Jeannie R. Johnson, Ivy Creek UMC Church Historian

The following history is an abridged version of the presentation given by Jeannie R. Johnson, Church Historian, at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society on September 24, 2015. The opening session of the Annual Meeting was hosted by Ivy Creek UMC.

We've been sweeping the floor and fluffing the pillows in preparation for company coming. Some people don't care about history, but since you are here, I assume you do. So, welcome. We are delighted to have you at Ivy Creek, and when you leave we hope you have learned just a little of the history and service of our historic church and community. There is so much information and so many facts I would like to share with you, but with time limits I can touch on only a few.

Who are we and how did we come to be? To comprehend one must forget the paved highways, dirt roads, and communities we are familiar with today and try to visualize nothing but a vast undeveloped land. Most areas had no names except the Indian names. The same territory that was considered one in the beginning later developed several identities. The area pertaining to us was called the Mulberry District, and it covered a large section in the central-southwestern part of Autauga County. Within this huge Mulberry District various communities emerged: Statesville, Mulberry, Hamilton, Peace, Huckabee, Milton, and even portions of what we know today as Autaugaville were born within this district.

...

Families began settling in Mulberry and Statesville in 1817 and 1818. We still have families from those early outer-edge-of-civilization settlers living in this community.

An early reference to Statesville appeared in the Selma Courier on 13 December 1827 when George Goff advertised his Statesville property in glowing terms as a fine site four miles from an excellent landing on the Alabama River. In 1867 John Hardy wrote that by the year 1829 Statesville was "a prosperous thriving community," and Statesville was still prominent enough on 28 January 1846 to have received two votes as a new capital site for Alabama.

Proper religious training and good churches were a vital matter for most of our early settlers. The first church in the community lasted only a few years. It was a small Methodist Church that was built around 1828 on the J. B. Smith plantation. A small Methodist Episcopal Church, Mallard's Chapel, was organized between 1831-1834 and survived until shortly before the Civil War. The Baptist Church was more successful when members built a log building adjacent to where the Ivy Creek Church now stands. Its membership grew to over 200, and they had to build bigger. The church remained active until the members migrated west around 1840.

Quoting from Mr. Maury Howard's writing, a descendant of Mark Howard who settled here in 1817, Mr. Maury said, (Quote) "After the dissolution of the Baptist Church at Ivy Creek prior to 1840, there was but little preaching

in the community for several years. The neighborhood lapsed into a state of indifference as regard to all moral and religious enterprises, and McGraw's Store became the center of the sporting population which engaged in many of the popular amusements of the time. Not only was card playing common, but horseracing, shooting matches and cockfighting were not uncommon, while drinking, Sabbath breaking and profanity were the rules rather than the exception. McGraw's Store, commonly known as "The Lick" at that time, became the center of a sporting circle which extended to surrounding neighborhoods, and as there was no influence to checkmate this tendency toward general dissipation-it grew until "The Lick" became the synonym of all that was demoralizing to society. This reputation was bad enough without exaggeration, but it was made darker by visitors who came to engage in its sports, they themselves being of the baser sort." (Unquote)

After the loss of available churches and the serious moral decline in the community, \$800.00 was collected from various families toward the building of a new church, and in 1854 the Ivy Creek Church was built on the west side of Ivy Creek (creek of water nearby), and quoting Mr. Maury Howard again, he said (Quote) "The Honorable John Steele took this matter in hand and supervised the erection of the present Ivy Creek Methodist Church at the cost of \$2,800.00. He used his own slave labor and materials from his plantation nearby." (Unquote). A Mr. Felke, an expert craftsman living on the Steele Place, and the man who also supervised the building of Mr. Steele's home, directed the building of Ivy Creek Church using slave labor and local folks. In 1855 Mallard's Chapel, a Methodist Episcopal Church South, was erected on the east side of the creek. In 1867 the Ivy Creek Methodist Protestant members united with this church. The combined membership chose the Ivy Creek sanctuary as home. The Mallard's Chapel building was sold in 1885 to the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Our church's cemetery predates our church. Although no markers exist for a few of the earlier graves, there are graves dating back to 1829 in the Ivy Creek Church Cemetery. Our cemetery today has 225 identifiable burials. The oldest grave is for Susan Gordon, age 23, 3 September 1829, and the second dated 13 September 1829 is for Francis Calloway Gordon, Susan's son, age 2 years, 7 months, 23 days. We have 5 Confederate States Army soldiers buried here.

On your way here today you came down Highway 14, but it is not the site of the original road that ran through our community. The first was a dirt road that came very close and directly in front of the church, and it was called the Cahaba Road.

You are sitting on 161 years of history. Nestled in serene woods and a lovely landmark of Autauga County, Ivy Creek Church got its name from the mountain laurel, known locally as ivy, that grew along the banks of the nearby creek with the same name. Years ago when [television station] WSFA Channel 12 TV signed off the air at midnight, Ivy Creek Church was one of the scenes showed while they signed off the air.

The Ivy Creek Church is a Greek Revival style building featuring two ionic columns at the front, and two small rooms on either side of the entrance. The left one was used as a Sunday School room for years and supplies access to the bell cupola on the roof. The one on the right holds the stairs to the gallery. An Egyptian style influence is seen in the windows that are wider at the bottom than at the top. If you look closely you can still see the indentions on the sides of the windows where oil lanterns



once hung and also see the waves in the old window panes. You will also note that there is only one door into the building. Because of fire codes etc. this would not be allowed with new buildings today.

A divider that originally was used to separate the men and women runs down the center of the pews. Somewhere through the years a portion of this divider was removed to add a vented wood-burning stove to heat the building. If you look at one of the old photographs in the Fellowship Hall you can see a pipe that was used to carry out the smoke protruding out the side of the church. The hand-hewn pews, heart pine floors, and wainscoting are also original and prominent aspects of the building. Electricity was installed around 1941. When the women of the church had cushions made in 1978, it was found the pew sizes all varied slightly because they were made by hand, not manufactured on an assembly line. Each cushion had to be made to fit a specific pew. The pulpit area and Gothic Revival style altar were added in the 1870s.

Repair was done to the foundation of the building in 1960 including replacement of the wooden steps that were badly damaged from termites and age. We salvaged a chunk of wood that was to be thrown away. It shows hand hewn nails of wood were used to build the church. An altar shelf was added on the wall behind the pulpit in the 1960s. In 1995 a wheelchair ramp was constructed. To maintain the historic integrity of the building, the ramp runs along the west side and is attached only at an added door to the small belfry room.

In 1955 at the 100th birthday celebration of its Sunday School, Bishop Clare Purcell said of Ivy Creek, (Quote) "So many modern architects have lost the art of symmetry. A building like this is frozen music, note the relation of lines and angles, the pleasing relation of dimension. There is a spiritual quality in the lines of an old building like this that

we don't get anywhere else. Architects of one hundred years ago had knowledge that this type of building would never tire anyone, never get old, would withstand change." (Unquote)

Sunday School classes were held in various corners inside the church, in the small belfry room, and even outside on the grounds when weather permitted until an educational building was dedicated in 1958. Funds were obtained for the new building from a "Lord's Acre Project." The Statesville-Mulberry Community is an agricultural area. Profits from the sale of an acre of cotton, corn, pecans, or vegetables or the sale of a cow or hog were collected on Harvest Sunday that was the Sunday before Thanksgiving.

During 1987 we had been discussing some interior work on the church, and I had been talking with and getting advice from Robert (Bob) S. Gamble, Architectural Historian with the State of Alabama Historical Commission. The following is from his letter to me of 27 January 1988. (Quote) "Thanks to the concern and care of its congregation across the years, Ivy Creek is one of the best preserved antebellum churches of any denomination left in Alabama. This is especially true of the interior that still retains its original pews, altar rail, slave gallery, clear glass windows and other elements. The historical and architectural significance of the church was recognized as early as 1934 when the (National) Department of the Interior's Historic Buildings Survey photographed Ivy Creek as part of its reconnaissance of early American architecture. These photos are today preserved in the Division of Prints and Photographs of the Library of Congress." (Unquote) I contacted the Library of Congress and purchased a copy of those old photographs, and they are hanging in our Fellowship Hall.

A copy of Mr. Gamble's letter, a marvelous display of historical artifacts including the chunk of wood with the wood nail, one of the old chandeliers, writings, books, certificates, and pictures are on display [today] in the educational building for all to see. Books of local authors are included.

My book, *A Look Back*, which is a pictorial history of Autauga County from 1818- 1959 is also there. Please feel free to browse, look, or read to your heart's content after we adjourn. There will also be docents at the cemetery gate to assist you if you so desire to venture there.

We, today, live in the deep south and have developed a true southern culture of love, service to others, and friendship. But, we have to remember all our ancestors migrated here from somewhere else, mostly from the north and east of Alabama.

At this time we will hear [Catherine Wood, Marcus Houston, and Linda Walker speaking] about some of our earliest community settlers.

After the closing solo, "Til The Storm Passes By", by Les Mack, please feel free to view the artifacts in the education building, climb the stairs to the gallery, or visit the cemetery.

Mrs. Johnson has donated the complete text of her presentation as well as historic and current photographs of the Ivy Creek UMC sanctuary to the Methodist Archives Center in Montgomery.

Autaugaville United Methodist Church

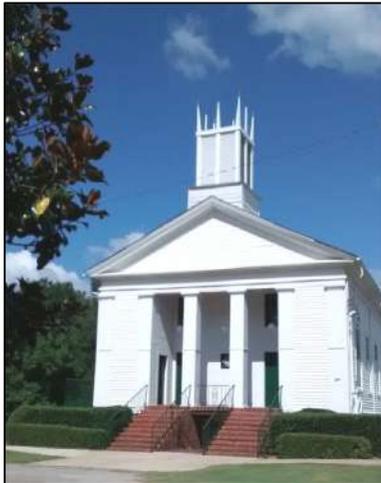
A history based on information compiled by the Church Historian in 2011

In December 1818, the South Carolina Methodist Conference appointed the Rev. Alexander Talley, of the Alabama Conference, as a missionary to organize a preaching circuit along the Alabama River. Rev. Talley made Autauga County the center of his ministry. However, by 1819 he gave up circuit riding to practice medicine but he continued to preach in Autaugaville.

In 1822, Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church was organized on Davis (now Whetstone) Hill a mile west of Autaugaville. The pastor was Rev. Rennan and the congregation met in a log cabin. A Sunday School was organized there in 1825 and was confirmed as the oldest "Evergreen" Sunday School in America. The term "Evergreen" is used in the sense that meetings were held year round and not suspended during winter months, as was an early custom in our country.

Agitation against the power of the bishops and a desire for lay representation caused a split in the Methodist movement, resulting in the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1829 the Asbury Methodist Church divided and about half of the members left and started a Methodist Protestant Church in Dutch Bend. The old Asbury Church (Methodist Episcopal) membership grew but the log cabin began to decay. They moved to Autaugaville and built a new building on a lot near Swift Creek. The lumber was donated by William R. Pickett. This lot was located just off Pickett Street behind our present church building, on the site where William R. Boyd's home stands. The Asbury Church became one of the strongest churches in central Alabama.

As the town of Autaugaville grew more prosperous, the Dutch Bend Methodist Protestant congregation moved to town and built a new building in Smedley Grove (named after Rev. D. I. Smedley). This grove was later known as Factory Town. Rev. Smedley is buried in the cemetery between Pickett Street and Swift Creek.



The building was in the Greek Revival style and was probably constructed in the 1850s. Its west front follows the temple form so popular in antebellum America. Two Tuscan box columns are inset in a recessed alcove formed by extended antae, which are defined by Tuscan pilasters. The lower tower on the roof

above the entrance portico has retained its Crown of Thorns spire formed by eight pinnacles. The interior retains a fine Rococo Revival oil chandelier hanging from a ceiling medallion. The old oil lamp chandelier was converted to electric bulbs during a renovation and two

Eastlake style rostrum chairs are currently present in the sanctuary. The slave gallery was part of the original church and is considered today as part of our heritage. This gallery is supported by two Tuscan box columns.

In 1866 or 1867, by a special act the General Conference, the two Methodist Churches in town were re-united to form the Methodist Church of Autaugaville. In 1868 the Protestant Methodists returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had by then recognized lay representation. The Asbury structure was sold to Theodore Nunn who converted it into a cloth factory, and the Smedley Grove Church was moved to our present location on Autauga Street, using land donated by Col. Pickett.

By 1923 the membership was 224; and on September 20, 1925, the Autaugaville Methodist Episcopal Church celebrated its Centennial. There were between 800 to 1000 people present.

In the early 1920s, a cyclone passed down the east side of Dutch Bend Street, turned and avoided the Methodist Church and its parsonage. Slight damage was done to the church roof and back wall and the parsonage. The choir loft was added when repairs were done to the roof.

Full church services began during 1958. By 1960 the membership was 224, the pastor's salary was \$2,267 plus a \$400 expense account. An education building was built onto the church in 1961-1962.

Improvements to the buildings continued through the years and work was done to preserve the historical integrity of the sanctuary. In 1991 the original and rare steeple, the "Crown of Thorns", was reworked.



On April 9, 2000, a homecoming was held to celebrate the 178th anniversary of the church and 180 were in attendance. That September, Mary and Earl Jones gave the church a deed to the property across the street from the church, known as the Ware house.

Autaugaville UMC continues to serve God and the community and to honor the heritage which has formed it.

Bruce United Methodist Church

A Native American Church

Within the Alabama-West Florida Conference

Bruce, Florida, is a community located at the intersection of Florida Routes 20 and 81 in south Walton County. The Bruce United Methodist Church was founded in 1913, with a membership of 83 people. The charter members of the church were Creek Indians, spouses, and friends. The congregation was led by an elder, 83-year-old William Josiah "Diamond Joe" Ward, the youngest son of James B. and Elizabeth English Ward. The Wards were Creek Indians. (James B. Ward was half Creek and his wife, Elizabeth was full-blooded.)

Diamond Joe is remembered for his gift of sharing the Bible by "inspiration"; he could quote Scripture from memory. He tirelessly worked to preserve our Native American heritage but he believed in the strength of the family through the Church.



Bruce Methodist was built following a revival led by J.W. Matheson that was held in the old Bruce School House. The school is still located across the road from the church. Today it is the Council House for the Muscogee Nation of Florida. It also contains a gift shop and a Creek Indian Museum.

Diamond Joe's son, J.J. Ward, donated much of the materials needed to build the original Bruce Methodist Church. The first church building was blown off its foundation by a tornado in the 1930s. It was repaired and used until 1966 when the current block structure was built by church members and volunteers.

In 1991, Bruce United Methodist was officially recognized by the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church as a Native American Church. It is one of the two recognized Native American churches within the Alabama-West Florida Conference.

The tribe and the church act in unison to meet the needs of this community. The fellowship hall was added in 1993 by church members and volunteers, facilitated by a

Native American grant from the Alabama-West Florida Conference. The church steeple was donated by the Muscogee Nation of Florida in 2006.

In the AWFC statistics for 2013, there was a total membership of 55 with approximately 60% of the congregation being Native American (Muscogee) including almost all of the governing tribal council of the Muscogee Nation of Florida who continue to claim their Creek Indian heritage.

This original church history was recorded by a charter member, Mazie Ward Rossell (1903-2001). It is used here by permission of Rev. Elaine Barrow, Pastor of Bruce UMC in 2011.

The Muscogee Nation of Florida

The Muscogee Nation of Florida, also known as the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, is a Tribe of Creek Indian people whose home is centered in Bruce, in Walton County, Florida. The Creek predecessors of the Muscogee Nation of Florida signed 11 treaties with the United States between 1790 and 1833. By these agreements, the removal of the ancestors of the present day Muscogee Nation of Florida began from their traditional homelands in the states of Georgia, Alabama and Florida. To escape the federal government's removal policies, those who formed the Muscogee Nation of Florida followed the Choctawhatchee River south into the State of Florida from Dale County, Alabama as early as 1837.



In 1852, the General Assembly of the State of Florida enacted a law stating that "It shall be unlawful for any Indian or Indians to remain within the limits of this State, and any Indian or Indians that may remain, or may be found within the limits of this State, shall be captured and sent west of the Mississippi; provided that Indians and half-breeds residing among the whites shall not be included in this section." This law removed any possibility of Creek people openly living traditional lifestyles, much less identifying themselves – or being identified – as members of a Tribe of Indians. The law, however, did not prevent the Creek people that formed Muscogee Nation of Florida from creating settlements that were separate and distinct from white or black communities. But, the Florida laws required the public suppression of identifiable Creek self-governance, traditional ceremonies, racial identification, practices and lifestyles under the direct threat of removal or death.

The Jim Crow laws of the South became the determinant for racial identity. In the State of Florida, everyone living in Northwest Florida after 1852 was classified as either

white, negro, or mulatto. There were no allowances made for Indian people who were not Seminoles.

“My Mama used to bleach my knees when I was in elementary school away from Bruce because they were so dark she was afraid I’d get sent out of the white school.”

Becky Ziegler, Tribal Member

Few people visited the remote community of Bruce, which was best located by following the Choctawhatchee River or poor logging roads. Outsiders were not welcome to stay in the area. From then, the Tribe was forced to acknowledge the policies of the State of Florida and try to survive them. The Muscogee Nation of Florida continued to function, though, maintaining its traditional form of leadership, subsistence type of living, and shared economics. Second cousin exchange marriage became a way to protect Indian bloodlines in the remote areas of the community.

Two of the Muscogee institutions, the school and its church, provide evidence that the Creeks in and around Bruce survived throughout the twentieth century. Pine Level School was established in 1890 and served primarily Indian students who were taught almost exclusively by Indian teachers. The school was renamed Bruce School during the hardest years of the Jim Crow laws.

For the past 150 years, the Muscogee Nation of Florida has continued to maintain ceremonial and traditional practices. Although the old ceremonies continued, the establishing of an acceptable church was used as a method to ensure the protection and survival of the Indian community. Handwritten church records document the names of community members who formed the church, the births and deaths of members, and the continued participation of Creeks in this institution from 1912 to present day.



**Muscogee Nation of Florida Council House
Bruce, Florida**

The Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church recognizes the Bruce Methodist Church, established in 1912, as a Native American Church. The original Church rolls listed from 1912 to 1917 are the baseline document for membership in the Muscogee Nation of Florida.

www.mnof.org/history

Sacred Harp Singing

Sacred Harp singing (sometimes called *Fasola*) uses four shapes to identify the notes to be sung and is performed without the assistance of musical instruments. Traditionally the singers solmize or “sing” the notes, using the syllables “fa”, “sol”, “la”, and “mi” prior to singing the words. The singers gather at “singings” and “conventions” to perform the music. These gatherings were and still are great social events and once were often the center of rural community activity, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Alabama and the Florida panhandle.



When B.F. White and E.J. King compiled the songbook, *The Sacred Harp*, in 1844, they were continuing a singing tradition which ultimately became identified with the book. Thousands of southerners would learn or be exposed to music through the singing schools taught from *The Sacred Harp*.

DETROIT, C.M. 39
E. Minor Philip Doddridge, 1755. Bradshaw, 1826.
1. Do not I love Thee, O my Lord? He hold my heart and see, And turn each one of i - did out, That does to e - vil Thee. Then:
2. Do not I love Thee from my soul? Then let me nothing love, Dead be my heart to ev - ry joy When It - an can not move.
3. Thou know'st I love Thee, dear - est Lord, But O I long to see Thee from the sphere of our - fal joys, And learn to love Thee more, more.

A hymn from *The Sacred Harp*. The leader would call out this hymn by saying “top of 39, Detroit”.

The singers arrange themselves in a hollow square, with rows of chairs or pews on each side assigned to each of the four parts: treble, alto, tenor, and bass. The treble and tenor sections are usually mixed, with men and women singing the notes an octave apart.

The melody is usually sung by the tenor part. There is no single leader or conductor; rather, the participants take turns in leading. The leader for a particular round selects a song from the book, and “calls” it by its page number. Leading is done in an open-palm style, standing in the middle of the square facing the tenors.

The pitch at which the music is sung is relative; there is no instrument to give the singers a starting point. The leader, or else some particular singer assigned to the task, finds a good pitch with which to begin and intones it to the group. The singers reply with the opening notes of their own parts, and then the song begins immediately.

The title shown in the hymn book is the name of the tune, thus in the above image the song *Do Not I Love Thee, O My Lord?* is shown as *Detroit*.

Wikipedia and Georgia Historic Monuments

The Alabama-West Florida Conference

Alabama which previously had been the eastern part of the Mississippi Territory, joined the Union on December 14, 1819. But even before it was a state, Methodist circuit riders were working in it. In 1808 Rev. Matthew Sturdivant was appointed from the South Carolina Conference to the Tombigbee Circuit. In 1812 pastoral appointments to Alabama were made from the Tennessee Conference. From 1813 through 1831 appointments were made from the Mississippi Conference. In 1832 the Alabama Conference was organized. The conference was directed by four "Elders" one for each of the districts.

On March 3, 1845, Florida became the 27th state. Methodist circuit riders from the South Carolina Conference were already active in northwest Florida by this time. White settlers continued to encroach on Seminole lands, and the United States intervened to move the remaining Seminoles to the West. The Third Seminole War (1855–58) resulted in the forced removal of most of the remaining Seminoles, although hundreds of Seminole Indians remained in the Everglades and other places.

From 1809 to 1829 all Methodist churches were in The Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1829 there was a split in the church, and the Alabama Conference of The Methodist Protestant Church was organized. In 1845 there was another split over the issue of slavery and the Alabama Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was organized. The Mobile and Montgomery Conferences replaced the Alabama Conference from 1864-1869. The churches might be in The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Protestant Church, or The Methodist Episcopal Church, South within the two conferences. In 1870 the Alabama Conference and the North Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South were organized.

In 1939 The Methodist Church was organized on a national level from the merger of the Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Protestant, and the Methodist Episcopal, South churches. Also the Jurisdictional system was organized. Five jurisdictions were organized according to geographical regions of the country. The Central Jurisdiction was organized to include all of the black churches regardless of geographical location. Therefore, in Alabama there were three conferences – the Alabama Conference, the North Alabama Conference, and the Central Alabama Conference. With the merger of the three branches in 1939, all churches (Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Protestant, Methodist Episcopal, South) in Alabama were in The Methodist Church.

In 1956 the Alabama Conference changed its name to the Alabama-West Florida Conference. However, only one Bishop was elected from the Southeastern Jurisdiction for both the North Alabama Conference and the Alabama-West Florida Conference. With the union of The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968, all churches were now in The United Methodist Church. This same year the Central Alabama Conference was abolished and the North Alabama and Alabama-West Florida Conferences were reorganized to include the black churches within the geographical boundaries of the respective conference. The two conferences continued to share one Bishop until 1988 when Bishop Charles Hancock was appointed to the Alabama-West Florida Conference.



Over the years the districts of the Alabama-West Florida Conference have changed from four to nine and, in 2004, to eight. As population shifts and church membership changes, the Conference continues to monitor the number of districts needed and the boundaries for them. <http://www.awfumc.org/conferencehistory>

William Thad Chesser May 4, 1941 - Sept 17, 2015



The Reverend William Thad Chesser, retired Elder of the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, died September 17, 2017 at Westminster Village in Spanish Fort, Alabama.

He was born in Chipley, Florida, received his Masters of Divinity from Duke University and was ordained an Elder in 1969. For 48 years he pastored churches in Alabama and West Florida. He served Fulton Heights UMC for 14 years before retiring in 2011.

Rev. Thad Chesser was keenly interested in history. He served on the Southeast Jurisdiction Historical Society for many years and was President of the Commission on Archives and History of the Alabama-West Florida Conference from 1977-1979 and again in 2004-2007. He also served as the Alabama-West Florida Conference Historian from 2007-2014.

Reverend Chesser is survived by his two children: John Chesser (Mary) of Woodstock, Georgia; Andrea Ottolino (John) of Mobile; two grandchildren: Joshua Chesser ; Emma Grace Ottolino ; former spouse Verna Chesser of Mobile; three sisters: Jimmie Fay Sanders, Allee Chesser Sharp, Patty Herndon; brother, Stephen Chesser; and nieces and cousins.

A service of Christian Burial was held in the chapel of Dauphin Way UMC on Monday the 21st of September and interment followed at Pine Crest Cemetery.

Approaching 200 years in service to God and God's people in Northwest Florida

Moss Hill Methodist Church

Moss Hill Methodist church is located a few miles southeast of Vernon, Florida.

American settlers had arrived in the Holmes Valley area in Washington County in northwest Florida around 1819, the year that Spain ceded Florida to the United States. By 1821, Methodist missionaries were active in the area and by 1826 they were connected to the South Carolina Methodist Conference.



The Moss Hill congregation first held services in a log blockhouse northwest of the current church site which was used by American settlers during the Second Seminole War. It is thought that the blockhouse remained in use until it was so deteriorated that it was replaced with the current structure in 1857 which was built on public land. The congregation's effort to gain ownership of the land succeeded when President Lincoln signed the land transfer papers in December 1861, some eleven months after Florida seceded from the Union.

This unpainted building was built by both white settlers and slaves, all members of

the congregation. The material used was pine wood, much of it heart pine which is highly rot resistant. The lumber was sawed by a water-powered mill on Hard Labor Creek. Square nails and wooden pegs were used in the construction.

The planks used in the ceiling have footprints and handprints resulting from being walked on and handled while they were stacked on the ground during the building years.



Moss Hill is believed to be the second building in Washington County to have glass windows.

Before and during the Civil War, the congregation included both white and black members. It was during Reconstruction that the congregation separated.

There is still no electricity in the building and the lighting comes from the tall windows and lanterns. The outside fellowship and picnic area, though, has both electricity and running water.

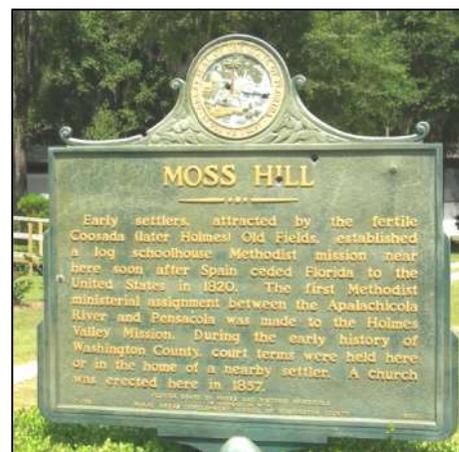
Moss Hill has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

According to the sign in front of the church, services are still being held at Moss Hill.



Markers in the adjacent Moss Hill cemetery honor some of the local men and boys who were captured when the Vernon Home Guard unit tangled with Union troops returning from the Battle of

Marianna. The September 28, 1864 skirmish is locally remembered as the Battle of Vernon and a number of the men taken prisoner died in northern prison camps and never returned home.



<http://www.usgulfoaststatesgeotourism.com/content/moss-hill-church-cemetery/gul01D4F2955A3C065FD>

Photos made July 14th, 2015 by Jim Young

Information and Events of Historical Society Interest

2015-2016 Executive Committee and Officers of the AWFC-HS

Jim Young, President
Rev. Ed Shirley, Vice President
Sharon Tucker, Recording Secretary
Mary Ann Pickard, Financial Secretary
Carolyn Coker, Member at Large
Craig Reynolds, Member at Large
Joyce Stimak, Member at Large
Myrtice Carr, Previous Past President

The Historical Society Website

<http://www.awfhistory.com/>

Please visit the website for the AWF Conference's Historical Society. This website was created so that we may be more accessible to everyone with information and offer an avenue of interaction concerning our shared interest in Methodist history. Please browse through the pages to learn more about early Methodism in America, Alabama, and West Florida. We will be adding more to our internet files through the efforts of volunteers (we invite you to be one), members of the Historical Society (you can become one), and our conference archivists (we have some good ones). We regularly plan events where we enrich our knowledge of history, enjoy fellowship, and actually visit a historic location.

We're Also on Facebook!

Follow us on Facebook. Enter "AWF Historical Society" in the search box at the top of your Facebook page. "Like" us – Follow us! Participate with comments and photos. Invite your friends.

The AWFC Historical Society Newsletter

The newsletter is published quarterly and all comments and suggestions are welcome.

If you would like to submit an article or a notice or an announcement for publication in the AWFC Historical Society Newsletter, please contact the editor, Jim Young, at youngjimmy@cox.net or by phone at 850 862-8642.

**History is not a burden on
the memory but an
illumination of the soul.**
Lord Acton

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The Historical Society Fiscal Year

The AWFC Historical Society Executive Committee, at their February 2015 meeting, amended the by-laws of the Society to establish the AWFC-HS Fiscal Year as being from AWF Annual Conference to the next AWF Annual Conference.

The Executive Committee members for 2015-2016 were re-elected at the September 24th, 2015 Annual Meeting to continue to serve during the 2016-2017 Fiscal Year.

Next Meeting of the AWFC-HS Executive Committee

The AWFC Historical Society Executive Committee will meet in January to discuss the location and program for the 2016 Annual Meeting. The time and location for the Executive Committee Meeting will be provided by the end of December.

Your Help Needed!

Our Society has a relatively small number of members. We need your help to make everyone in the AWF Conference aware of our group and what we do. We need to educate District Superintendents, Pastors, and Church Councils about the need for an active effort in each church to collect and preserve our history.

We need to recruit new members and to involve more folks in our activities.

We need your suggestions for locations for future AWFC-HS Annual Meetings. Consider your own church or historic churches in your area and let us know.

Articles or suggestions for articles for this newsletter are appreciated. People, places, and events of historical AWFC interest are worthy of being featured here.

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