

THE HISTORY OF MOUNT PLEASANT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH THROUGH THE YEARS 1867-1985

One wintry morning in 1978, I read Mount Pleasant Church's history from a special church bulletin concerning its One Hundredth Anniversary (1867-1967), written by Mrs. Karlene D. Childs, a faithful member of the church. After reading the history, it seemed good to me to be a co-writer with Mrs. Childs. I regard this as a precious privilege. My purpose is to expand the history and keep it up-to-date.

The Early Years

The inception of Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church occurred in a period of American history that rivals all other periods. It was a time of social unrest throughout the nation when the followers of the Christian faith were sorely tested. So it was on July 16, 1867, Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized when the Reverend Isaac Davis and nine Trustees of Mount Pleasant Church made a deed with Charles W. Brush, a Methodist, for the purchase of a lot described in the will for the sum of one hundred sixty dollars (\$160.00). The names of the Trustees were: Lojarn Davis, Alexander Hamilton, Ethan Daniels, Henry Roberts, William Anderson, Adam Dancy, Shadrach Abednego, Robert McDuffie, and Dr. McDowell. The deed was formally recorded in 1883.

Reverend Isaac Davis, the Church's first pastor, served from 1867-1871. It was a probability that the first church, a wooden building, was erected during Davis' term and was located in approximately the same spot as the present dining hall, facing Northwest Seventh Avenue.

Methodism's annual conferences were not organized among Black churches until 1864, when the General Conference authorized the organization of mission conferences for Black churches. These conferences were held annually at Black churches throughout the nation. Until the organization of the Florida Annual Conference in 1873, Mount Pleasant was a member of the South Carolina Annual Conference. The first Florida Annual Conference was held at Mount Pleasant Church in January 1874, during the pastorate of Reverend Alexander Debose. Nine other annual conferences have been held at the church since then.

During the early years of the young church, many capable pastors helped the faithful membership reach some of their spiritual goals, despite the obstacles encountered along the way. The following names were the pioneers:

Rev. C. Fletcher

1871-1873

Attention: Ed Sheaw

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Rev. Alexander Debose	1873-1876
Rev. Peter Swearangen	1874-1876
Rev. C. C. Manigalt	1876-1878
Rev. T. Holsendorf	1878-1880
Rev. W. J. Salmond	1880-1883
Rev. E. H. Ferguson	1883-1885

A Cherished Dream is Realized

The Reverend Peter McCray began his ministry at Mount Pleasant in 1885 and helped members realize a cherished dream, the construction of a brick church. On July 17, 1886, the Board of Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church made a mortgage before the Trustees of Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church and the Florida Annual Conference (White) to build the brick church. The names of the Trustees were: Lawrence E. Chestnut, James E. Frazier, Richard McRae, Roscoe Brisbane, Edward Martin, Joseph Roberts, and John Hill. On May 10, 1887, the cornerstone of the new brick structure was laid. That occasion was one happy time for both the pastor and members. They had realized their cherished dream.

On July 17, 1886, the Board of Trustees bought Mount Pleasant's cemetery for the sum of one hundred twenty-five dollars (\$125.00). The deed was filed September 6, 1892.

During Reverend McCray's administration, a parsonage was built. This was a prosperous period for Mount Pleasant.

The following ministers began to pay off the mortgage on the new brick building during each pastor's term of service:

Rev. O. F. Niblack	1888-1891
Rev. Peter Swearangen	1891-1894
Rev. James F. Elliot	1894-1899

Reverend Elliot was especially interested in young children and young adults in the church school and spent much of his time working with them. The young church grew tremendously during his administration.

The Turn of the Century - Joy and Sorrow

Reverend James M. Deas, described in a church historical document as a man of evangelistic fervor who provided inspirational leadership, was the pastor from 1899 to 1906. Evangelism was a high priority during his ministry. Evangelistic meetings were held annually and many persons were added to the church during his ministry. This was a fruitful period for Mount Pleasant Church.

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In the midst of joy there is sorrow. On November 18, 1903, disaster struck. Fire reduced the stately brick structure and parsonage to rubble. The pastor and members were shocked! Did you not know the pastor and members did not remain in the "valley of despond" long? With renewed faith in God and an invincible will to go forward, they started another brick building after the fire and the cornerstone was laid on the first anniversary of the fire. During the building year, services were held in the "Rising Sun Hall." A large parsonage was built during Reverend Deas' ministry.

In 1904, a significant event occurred. The Church received its charter and was incorporated as a non-profit organization. The Trustees during that time were: Robert Ayer, Jake Debose, Ellerson Thompson, H. D. Jackson, J. F. Murrell, and Hattie Adams.

By 1906, the brick building's exterior was completed although the interior was completed over a period of years by various pastors. Each of the following ministers served Mount Pleasant as pastor for a one-year period—Reverend J. S. Todd (1906–1907) and Reverend S. A. Huger (1907–1908).

Mount Pleasant Grows

The first additions to the building's interior began in 1908 with Reverend T. H. B. Walker as pastor of the church. Among the additions were installation of stained glass windows and completion of the building's ceiling and floor. A hall was built for church activities in the rear of the church building.

Reverend J. S. Todd returned in 1913 and assumed the pastorate of Mount Pleasant for one year. During that year, the choir stall was moved from the gallery to its present position, and the problem of a basement water seepage was solved.

The years 1914–1919 are described as a "fertile period" for Mount Pleasant. Reverend Scott Bartley, a spirited evangelist, led the church. He held evangelistic meetings and the church grew tremendously.

This "fertile period" included the ministries of Reverend J. B. F. Williams (1919–1924) and Reverend James P. Patterson (1924–1925).

Reverend Sandy B. Wilson, a man of insight and a builder, began his ministry at Mount Pleasant in 1925–1929. During his administration, two restrooms (a men's restroom and a ladies restroom) were added to the southwest corner of the building.

Began

The "Great Depression"

Reverend Thomas W. Williams, a dynamic leader and a good preacher, guided the church in 1929, beginning of the "Great Depression," a period of financial struggle for the church members. Various pastors added to the building's exterior. Reverend Will-

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Williams realized the need to add natural beauty to the grounds of the church, especially in front of the building, along the northwest side of the building and the parsonage. A beautification club was organized and the members began the work immediately. When the work was finished, the sight was beautiful to see. Sidewalks were laid in front of the church where the old parsonage formerly stood, electrical fixtures were modernized, and the big stained glass window behind the choir stall, destroyed by a violent storm, was replaced.

Reverend Williams was also interested in young children and young adults. He organized a junior church and a Young Women's Missionary Society. These organizations were very active in the church during his administration.

The church was struggling with a long debt that was never paid. The members worked untiringly to liquidate the debt. Finally, the debt was paid. That was a happy day for both pastor and members. It was the crowning accomplishment of Reverend Williams' administration. The long, hard struggle had ended. These words from the Black National Anthem depict the hard strain on the members to liquidate the church's debt—"God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, Thou who has brought us thus far on our way, Thou who has by Thy might, led us into the light, keep us forever in the path we pray."

The "Great Depression" period did not deter Mount Pleasant's members from reaching their spiritual goal, "for the people had a mind to work" and God richly blessed them.

These ministers served Mount Pleasant as pastors the following six years:

Rev. D. W. Demps	1938-1940
Rev. Thomas Huger	1940-1943
Rev. Fermon Welch	1943-1944

During Reverend Welch's ministry, the street pavement was paid. Reverend Welch died before the end of his term.

Reverend Daniel H. McClain, a good gospel preacher and an innovator, began his ministry at Mount Pleasant in 1944. He led the way to make many improvements in the building. A dining room was built, the interior and exterior of the church building was thoroughly renovated, the first water fountain in the vestibule of the church and the first electronic organ in the sanctuary were installed, a self-serving table-like form was built around the chancel for the Administration of the Holy Communion, a bus was purchased to provide transportation for the elderly members and others who lived a long distance from the church, full time church worker was employed, a fence was built around the play area, Choir Number Two was organized, and new robes were purchased.

Reverend McClain initiated a "Radio Outreach Ministry" that made a positive impact on Gainesville and the neighboring communities in Alachua County.

The Church and the Community

Reverend Weeks, a capable leader and orator, served as pastor of Mount Pleasant from 1953–1955. He and his family were warmly received by the parishioners.

Reverend Weeks saw the need for a church office to transact the church's business, so he suggested an unusual idea to the church that was warmly received. The south wing of the church was converted into a second unit, separated from the main auditorium by folding doors. A wall was built that separated the second unit into space for a church office which is presently in use as the office. Several additions were made to the second unit during Reverend Weeks' term: installation of a water fountain, and gas heater and the purchase of a new piano.

Reverend Weeks was interested in the total life of the community. He felt that the community was a part of his responsibility. He held the theological view established on the Biblical truth—"God is no respecter of person." This view was demonstrated when an important event occurred. The Alachua County School Board sponsored a Dental Health Program to provide free dental services for White school children, however, Black school children were not included. Reverend Weeks was very disturbed, so he approached the School Board concerning this matter in behalf of Black School children in Alachua County, and urged the School Board to include them in the program. This, the Board did. Reverend Weeks was in the right place at the right time. He was truly a man for justice. His ministry ended in 1955.

End

A Prosperous Period

Reverend George Frank Ponder succeeded Reverend Weeks as pastor of the church in 1955, but because of ill health, was relieved of duty after one year. Reverend William Ferguson, a dynamic leader and preacher began his ministry at Mount Pleasant in 1956.

This was a very prosperous period for the church. Reverend Ferguson's pleasant manner drew the church membership together. The youth and young adults were drawn to Mount Pleasant through his inspirational preaching of the Bible.

Many improvements were made on the building during Reverend Ferguson's administration. Among the improvements were: building's foundation was rehabilitated, tile was placed on the vestibule's floor, new doors were installed, the interior and exterior of the building were painted, pews were modernized with paint and colorful cushions, new carpet was laid, a three-piece communion suite was provided for the administration of Holy Communion (along with a five piece altar ware service), a six-piece pulpit suite added beauty to the pulpit, and new chairs were purchased and added comfort to the choir members and the worshippers in the second unit of the church. Two choirs (children



and youth) were organized, robes were purchased for each choir, an attractive bulletin board was placed on the outside of the building, the old parsonage was renovated, furnished, and used as an educational building for the church school.

The spiritual life of the church was good and every part of the church developed with unprecedented success. Some of the members were inspired to make special contributions to the church. Among them were: Mrs. Claronell Brown of Durham, North Carolina, who gave a one hundred dollar (\$100.00) Baptism Fount in memory of her father, Reverend H. M. Trapp. A memorial gift of five hundred dollars (\$500.00) was given by Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Carter in memory of their son who died in the "Vietnam War." This gift provided fifty hymnals, a public address system, and a set of flags for the church, Mrs. Mayme Smith and daughter, Mrs. Claronelle Griffin gave a gift of four hundred dollars (\$400.00) in memory of their husband and father respectively, Mrs. Fannie Glover's timely gift of two thousand eight hundred fifty nine dollars (\$2,859.00) that provided a much needed air conditioner and a central heating unit, Mr. Richard Parker gave two hundred dollars (\$200.00) toward interior decoration, Mrs. Martha Adams furnished cushions for the altar in memory of her husband.

The significant achievement of Reverend Ferguson's ministry was the erection of a modern nine-room parsonage at a cost of sixteen thousand dollars (\$16,000). The parsonage was dedicated by Bishop Marquis Harris and Reverend J. B. F. Williams, District Superintendent of the Gainesville District.

From 1967 to the Present

Reverend Joshua Reddick succeeded Reverend Ferguson in 1967. The members greeted Reverend Reddick and wife kindly. During Reverend Reddick's leadership, improvements of the church continued. Ducts were installed under the church and heat was connected to the second unit of the church. The sanctuary received a new organ and piano. A committee was appointed to spearhead the payment of the organ and the piano and Mrs. Marie Adams was selected chairperson; other members were Mrs. Jessie West, Mrs. Blanche Jackson, Mr. Frederick Daniels, Sr., Mr. Edell Turner, choirs (number one and two) and the ever faithful members. The six thousand dollars (\$6,000) debt was paid off within a very short period of time.

Once again Mrs. Fannie Glover gave a much needed gift, a pair of decorative wrought iron hand-rails to be placed on each side of the front steps of the main entrance to the sanctuary.

A significant event occurred during Reverend Reddick's administration. The church's name was changed in 1939 when the Methodist Episcopal Church South, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church united into the "Methodist Church". The church's name was changed again in 1968 when the Methodist Church

and the Evangelical United Brethren Church united and became "The United Methodist Church;" consequently the local church's name was changed to "Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church." Reverend Reddick's term ended in 1972.

Reverend Ferguson returned as pastor to Mount Pleasant for a second term in 1972 and remained until 1977. During the first part of his second term, the debt on the parsonage he had built was liquidated. What a remarkable experience for Reverend Ferguson! It only comes once in a life time!

The pastor and members started out to fulfill another long, cherished dream; the construction of an educational building. They raised the first seed faith money of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) for the building, but it was not to be. Reverend Ferguson was moved from Mount Pleasant and appointed to a higher position in the church. The members were very disappointed, but they knew they had to keep their faith in God who never fails.

Reverend Robert Dell was assigned as pastor of Mount Pleasant in 1977. He came to Mount Pleasant when the members were sad. There was much to be done despite the mood of the church. The church building needed to be strengthened. Reverend Dell began the work. Among the improvements: three large stained glass windows were reinforced with bars placed across them, the building's interior was painted, steps were rebuilt on the left side of the pulpit stand, two restrooms were renovated, the communion table top was refurbished with a plush-like material, pockets were placed on the backs of the church pews, the ceiling in the second unit was replastered, two vents were placed around the building's foundation by Brothers Trapp and Richardson, wrought iron handrails were strengthened and painted white, Brother Willie Adams furnished materials and built a ramp for handicapped persons at the south end of the church building, the dining room was repainted, and the prayer band donated twenty (20) hymnals to the church for worship. Reverend Dell's ministry ended in 1981.

Reverend John H. Adams, Jr., a scholarly man and a good preacher, assumed leadership of the church in 1981 and remained until 1984. The church pews were upholstered and a lot was purchased, located at Northwest Seventh Avenue and Northwest Second Street. This lot is used as a parking space for cars. New carpet was installed in the building.

The present pastor is Reverend James E. Brown.

Reverend James E. Brown, a pleasant man, and a good gospel preacher began his pastorate at Mount Pleasant Church in June 1985. Pastor Brown and his family were cordially welcomed by Mount Pleasant Members.

It did not take the church members long to realize that Pastor Brown is a man of action without delay. He realized the stately old brick structure needed to be thoroughly renovated, and a large amount of money would be needed to do the job well. Pastor Brown

and brother George Perry, chairperson of the Administrative Board sought information from several persons on the city staff relative to the question—How could we, (Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church Members) receive a state grant from Tallahassee, Florida to help us renovate our old historic church building?

Mrs. Wendy Sattin, Gainesville's city grant co-ordinator, did a research study on the question and wrote a letter to the Florida Historic Preservation Council in Tallahassee, Florida, relative to the question and requested an answer. She received an answer in the form of an application blank from the Florida Historical Preservation Council. Mrs. Sattin gave the blank to brother Perry to give to Pastor Brown. The following procedure was used to receive the state grant: Pastor Brown gave the application blank to brother Player, chairperson of the Trustee Board who filled the blank out, Members of the Trustee Board reviewed it, and mailed the application blank to the Florida Historical Preservation Council in Tallahassee, Florida Dec. 14, 1984 to be approved. The Florida Historical Preservation Council approved a state grant of \$15,000 to help the church members renovate the building and the church members matched the funds allocated in the grant. Bids for the project were sent to Tallahassee for final approval. The final bids were approved by the Florida's Historical Preservation Council and the work on the project was begun. At the present time, the work on the project is nearly completed. Pastor Brown and the church members are very happy.

The church members have purchased two lots near the church building. This land will be developed into parking space to accomodate the growing membership.

Mrs. Louise P. Haile, a faithful church member, encouraged her friend, Mrs. Janie Hansford, owner of a lot with a building on it near the church's building to give the property to the church members. Mrs. Hansford considered the idea and gave the property to the church members. Pastor Brown and the members thank God for His wonderful blessings to Mount Pleasant Church. Good things are happening to Mount Pleasant.

Looking to the Future

Just as Mount Pleasant has grown and strengthened through the years, so shall it continue to do so. Future plans for the church include erection of an educational building, demolition of the old dining hall, elimination of the second unit in the church building, and development of more parking areas for cars.
