

# HISTORIAN'S VIEW

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2      SEPTEMBER, 2012



## PRATTVILLE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Daniel Pratt was raised on his family's New Hampshire farm. In 1815, at age sixteen, Pratt apprenticed with an architect. Released from his apprenticeship at age twenty in 1819 Pratt sailed to Savannah, Georgia to begin his career. After two years in Savannah he moved west to Milledgeville, Georgia and practiced his profession building many fine plantation homes for Georgia planters near Macon and the Georgia State Capitol of Milledgeville. In Georgia, Daniel Pratt was introduced to Methodism and professed a commitment to Christ in the early eighteen thirties. While in Georgia Pratt met Samuel Griswold, another New Englander, who manufactured cotton gins. Impressed with the skills of Pratt, Griswold employed him to manage his factory. A year later Pratt became a partner. Soon Pratt wanted to expand the business westward to serve new cotton growing states such as Alabama to take advantage of the excellent river system that could transport gins downriver to markets everywhere. When his partner Griswold declined to go along with Pratt's plan, Daniel Pratt set out on his own moving to Alabama about 1833. He brought his young wife, two slaves and enough material to build

fifty gins. After spending a year in at Elmore's Mill in current Elmore County, he leased land along Autauga creek and founded his Daniel Pratt Gin Company at McNeill's Mill. In 1835 he purchased approximately two thousand acres further up Autauga creek where he built his factory and founded the community of Prattville. In the eighteen fifties Pratt began to market his gins world-wide. By 1860 he was manufacturing 1,500 gins each year selling them to Russia, Great Britain, France, Cuba, Mexico and countries in Central and South America. Pratt encouraged diversification of industry in Prattville and purchased mineral assets in north Alabama. His early north Alabama investments led to the creation of the coal and iron industry in what is now Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham's Pratt City is named for Pratt. Daniel Pratt is thought to have created the first free school in Alabama. He also built other schools, churches, shops and homes for his employees. He promoted growth of his community as well. In addition to his contributions in establishing the Prattville Methodist Church, Pratt also donated land and money to help build the Prattville Baptist and Presbyterian churches. He made sure the children of his employees had clothing suitable for church.

When Prattville became a regular appointment on the Washington Circuit, the Methodist encouraged Pratt to build a building for a church. Pratt agreed and constructed a frame building on the south side of Autauga Creek in 1843. In 1844 a Quarterly Conference of the Methodist Church was held in this church that Pratt had built. In 1847 the church brick building in Alabama. Unique in design this church had a sanctuary and Sunday school rooms on the second floor and the first floor was designated for local businesses. Profits from the businesses financially supported the church. Pratt founded the Union Sunday School Class which he led until shortly before his death. Members from other community denominations often attended Pratt's Union Sunday School class then went to their own church for Sunday worship services. According to Ann Boutwell, a thirty year member of Prattville First United Methodist, the Union Class continued until at least the nineteen sixties and even the nineteen seventies. The old 1843 church was donated to the African Americans in Prattville for a church and school. Daniel Pratt died in 1873 but the church he built continued to grow and develop and his influence is still evident today. Throughout the late eighteenth hundreds evidence abounds of the activities and contributions of Prattville's Methodist Church. The Women's Auxiliary became the Ladies Missionary Society in 1881 and in 1899 Prattville Methodist hosted the Ladies Missionary Society of the Alabama-Mississippi Methodist Conference. Also in the eighteen nineties, Wednesday night prayer meeting began at In 1911 the Methodist church that Daniel Pratt built was sixty-eight-years-old and the growing congregation had outgrown the space available. The 596 members of the Prattville Methodist Church voted to construct a new church building on the corner of Chestnut and Fourth Street. The church sold the old church building to the gin company for \$12,500. Most of the old sanctuary accoutrements were donated to the Methodist Church in Booth, AL. These church sanctuary furnishings are still in use today. The groundbreaking for the new sanctuary was held in May of 1912. Church services were held in the Prattville Courthouse until the new church building was completed. The cornerstone was lowered in place in July of 1912 and the first worship service was held on April 13, 1913. Cost of the new sanctuary was \$40,000 and an organ was purchased for \$2,500.

Since 1960, some four million dollars have been expended for building additions, real estate and renovations of the 150 year old Prattville United Methodist Church. The Education Building, Wesley Hall, was constructed in 1958 at a cost of \$150, 433. The Family Life Center was constructed as Pratt Hall in 1989 for a total of \$894,900. In 2002, Epworth Hall was added at a cost of 2.1 Million dollars. There have been approximately seventy Methodist clergy serving the church during this time.

In 2012 the Prattville First United Methodist church, led by current ministers Dr. Robert Gibbs Couch and Reverend Olivia Poole, is having a year-long celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the current 1912 Church sanctuary. On Sunday May 6, 2012 Prattville United Methodist Church members gathered on Bridge Street next to the old Pratt Gin company at the site of the second Methodist Church building in Prattville. They then proceeded through town on foot to the current sanctuary at the corner of Fourth and Chestnut Streets. Plans were made to open the marble cornerstone. Records reported that items in the cornerstone were placed in a copper box. But experts advised that removal of the cornerstone might damage the structural support the cornerstone provided the surrounding wall. So, the cornerstone opening was abandoned until a future time.

Today's 169 year-old First United Methodist Church of Prattville boasts a membership of 1,800 and an annual budget exceeding 1.2 million dollars. Daniel Pratt is buried in the Pratt Cemetery on Gin Shop Hill. Some of his final words were, "Work for the church, Work for the church." The inscription on his tombstone is taken from Revelation 14:13, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them." Daniel Pratt's permanent resting place atop Gin Shop Hill provides a view of Pratt's old gin factory, the churches he help found and the community that carries his name. By Bob Couch, Auburn UMC

## References

Couch, Doctor Robert Gibbs, personal communication, May 6, 2012      Boutwell, Ann, personal communication July 25, 2011      Prattville First United Methodist Church (2012): *A Historical Timeline of First United Methodist Church, Prattville, AL* Encyclopedia of Alabama: (2007) <http://www.encllopediaofalabama.org> (Pratt, Daniel)  
Special thanks to Ann Boutwell and Dr.. Robert Gibbs Couch of Prattville First UMC for their kind assistance in provided material for and in editing this article.

*Author's note:* AWF Historical Society president, Myrtice Carr invited me to write this quarterly feature for the historical Society's new newsletter. If you would like for your historical Methodist church to be featured in a feature newsletter, please: (1. Join the Historical Society, and (2. send me information about your church history. Please include church founding, locations, stories and information on special features. Your church can be featured in one of our quarterly columns. Contact Bob Couch at: 334-887-7348, [rcouchau@burn@charte.net](mailto:rcouchau@burn@charte.net) or 1007 Felton Lane, Auburn, AL 36830.



**Elba United Methodist Church**



Nell Gilmer receives the 2011 Local Church Heritage Award from Bishop Leeland on behalf of Elba United Methodist Church during An-

**Stanley Carter, Minister of Elba United Methodist Church, 9th Year**

#### **Elba UMC Received the Conference Local Church Heritage Award for 2011**

Due to several major floods having destroyed both buildings and records, Church Historian, Nell Gilmer, wrote of the struggles to put together an updated membership roll and the history of this church. Here is her story:

An extensive search was made to verify the present building of the Elba UMC in Elba, Alabama. I looked to the old Elba Clipper (local newspaper) for information about the building of the church. We ran into some problems due to the town sustaining 3 major floods since the sanctuary was completed in February of 1911. The flood of 1990 was several feet deep in the sanctuary and the education building attached to the back. All church records were in the flood and the church membership book was salvaged, then dried enough to get some of the names of the members (ink was faded on most names). A new membership book had to be prepared listing members at the time of the 1990 flood. We have no record of members before 1970. Now the membership has been stored on the computer and directories were printed from this list for the Homecoming celebration.

Older members contributed much information about members and the history of the church. A history of the church had been prepared for Heritage Sunday in 1984, which was most helpful. Photographs were gathered from membership to put together a scrapbook for the 2011 Homecoming. Unfortunately, no pictures of the original church building could be located. It, too, fell to one of the floods. During the planning for the 100th Anniversary and Homecoming, I asked former members to write something about their memories of growing up in the EUMC. These thoughts were included in the scrapbook.

The 100th Anniversary of the completion of the building was celebrated on February 12, 2011 with the Homecoming and Dinner. Many former ministers of the church were in attendance as were former members and those with ties to the EUMC. The attendance was larger than expected.

#### **OPELIKA FIRST CELEBRATES 175 YEARS**

All year this UMC is celebrating its 175 year history. It was originally a log cabin building south of town built by Mr. Bullard in 1837, before Opelika was settled. Mr. Bullard attempted to build the church the year before, but was run off by the Creek Indians. He built the church at cost of \$220 for 22 initial members and it was called Lebanon. Twenty years later the congregation voted to move into the newly founded town of Opelika, built around the newly constructed cross road of railroads. The first location was on the corner of what is now 7th Street, North, and 2nd Avenue where it remained for 20 years before being moved to its current location at the corner of Avenue A and 7th Street, South. Claud Brown, current Historian, along with the committee have developed several programs they are presenting to various small groups and Sunday School classes in the Church. They included an area on the three locations, one on Methodist Music rendered, included narratives on the musicians. By Claud Brown, Historian.

#### **CEMETERY-PRESERVATION QUESTIONS**

Recently the Historical Society received a question regarding old cemetery clean up and preservations that were near old, abandoned, or dissolved Methodist Churches. This one bore the graves of three Methodist ministers. The question was forwarded to Sharon Tucker, Archivist, who provided information about an organization called the Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance. Try their website: [HTTP://WWW.ALABAMA-CEMETERY-PRESERVATION.COM](http://www.alabama-cemetery-preservation.com). Their email address is: [<FIXINGGRAVES@ALABAMA-CEMETERY-PRESERVATION.COM>](mailto:FIXINGGRAVES@ALABAMA-CEMETERY-PRESERVATION.COM).

ALABAMA WEST FLORIDA UMC  
ARCHIVES CENTER  
SHARON TUCKER, ARCHIVIST, (334) 833-4413 OR [<stucker@huntingdon.edu>](mailto:stucker@huntingdon.edu)

**HOW DO I JOIN?**

**MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES**

Individual	\$ 12 per year
Student	\$ 8 per year
Institution	\$ 15 per year
Benefactor	\$ 50 per year (Gift tax credit of \$38 per gift)
Life	\$100

Make checks payable to the Historical Society and send to:

Mary Ann Pickard  
Methodist Archives Center  
Huntingdon College  
1500 East Fairview Avenue  
Montgomery, AL 36106

Consider a gift membership for a family member, friend, colleague, or local church, library or historian. Recipients will receive a special letter acknowledging the gift.

**WELCOME NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS**

Your conference Historical Society has already welcomed many new and renewed members this year. For those joining for the first time or renewing memberships, a special coffee mug awaits you with the logo created by past president, Claud Brown on it and a picture of an old log church. These will be given out, free, at the Annual Meeting on October 13, 2012, at Huntingdon College.

**ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD OCTOBER 13TH AT HUNTINGDON**

This year the Alabama West Florida Historical Society will hold its Annual Meeting in the Legon Chapel of the Flowers Administration Building on Huntingdon Campus in Montgomery on Saturday, October 13th. The meeting starts at 10:00 with a Welcome by Anthony Leigh, Vice President of Huntingdon and some entertainment by college students. Sharon Tucker, Archivist, will tell something of the history of Huntingdon College. Lunch will be in the Stallworth Dining Room in the Cafeteria followed by instructions on how to conserve the local church histories along with ways to research and document church history by Nell Gilmer. We will then adjourn to the Archives of History section of the college library for a tour and help in deciding what to share with this center and preserve your history. Once you have joined the organization, you will be empowered with the right to vote on one change and a slate of officers for the coming year. There will be a quick business meeting during lunch, so everyone will be kept up with the conclusions and concerns. One will be a possible theme and meeting place for the fall of 2013 meeting. Your suggestions are welcomed. Myrtice Carr, President

**REGISTRATION**

**FOR THE  
2012 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE AWF CONFERENCE  
AT HUNTINGDON COLLEGE**

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (H) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

(O) \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee \$20.00 per person, includes lunch \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Program starts at 10:00 and ends with a tour of the Archives of History starting at 3:00. Register now.

**Make checks payable to: Historical Society of UMC**

**Send checks with registration fee to:**

**Mary Ann Pickard  
Methodist Archives Center  
Huntingdon College  
1500 East Fairview Avenue  
Montgomery, AL 36106**

**CLIP NOW AND MAIL YOUR REGISTRATION**

**PARKING OPTION AT HUNTINGDON COLLEGE**

Attendees at the October Annual Meeting should use the parking lot beside the Library and baseball field to access Flowers Administration Building where Legon Chapel is located. Entrance is on the same street as the main college entrance on East Fairview Avenue. Flowers Administration Building faces Fairview.

Bring along any high school student who might wish to consider attending Huntingdon as Mr. Leigh will arrange campus tours by students and review available scholarships, privately. This is a wonderful opportunity for your church to expose high school students to the value and opportunities for a church oriented higher education. The teacher to student ratio is much smaller than in the larger universities, thus allowing for an easier and smoother transition from high school to college that will provide more self-confidence and ability to succeed in life. The youth of today become the church tomorrow. Help assure a strong church for the future.

NOW IS THE TIME TO START THE REGISTRATION PROCESS WITH THE EASLY CLIP OUT FORM. HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE,. PLEASE LET US KNOW YOUR INTENT BY OCTOBER 1ST .



Executive Board  
President—Myrtice Carr  
myrticecarr@att.net  
Vice President—Lynda Biddle  
334-491-3591  
Secretary—Bettie Letlow  
blelow@bellsouth.net  
Treasurer—Charlotte Hobson

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***ANNUAL MEETING***  
***OCTOBER 13, 2012***

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PUBLISHED BY  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF  
THE ALABAMA-WEST FLORIDA  
UNITED METHODIST CONFERENCE

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### **ANNUAL CHURCH HISTORY RECORDS**

Each year the church Historian and the local minister should complete the form entitled, "Annual Church History Record". This form is included in the Pastor's Annual Report and necessitates team work with the Pastor. But, why keep these records? The Bible is a depository of our Holy Archives and it is through these records that God's plan of salvation is available for every generation. Throughout history, each generation's task has been to continue to transmit God's plan of salvation through archival records preserved in safe depositories. Review the Bible to discover what kind of records to preserve for in it one finds narratives, letters, laws, covenants, family history and genealogy, sermons, and more. This is a broad guideline, but each church should decide what they wish to include in their church records.

Saving church records for years can present a quantity of material that calls for a management plan. The questions arise as to what to be kept and for how long, and how do we organize our records to make them easily available. This help is provided for each church historian through the Conference Archives Center located at Huntingdon College Library in Montgomery. Church records preserve history, so we can remember the past and prepare for the future. **IF IN DOUBTY, DON'T THROW IT OUT! ASK THE ARCHIVIST! COME TO THE ANNUAL MEETING TO HELP YOU DECIDE AND GET IDEAS.**