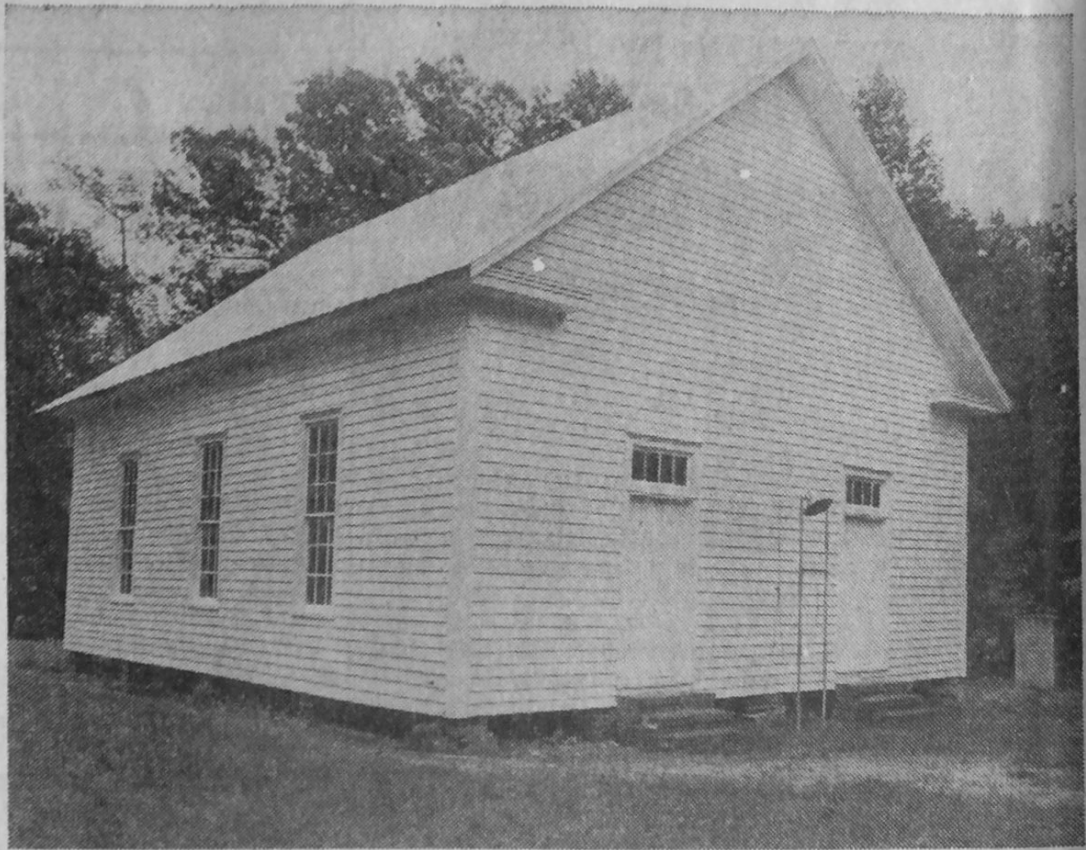


Photo at right shows Mount Ebal Methodist (Protestant) Church which was constructed in 1883. The church bell can be seen along with a monument (to the right of the church) erected by the Mount Ebal Memorial Association in 1954. In the bottom photo, the spreading oak tree where the first worship services probably were held over 100 years ago and the small church cemetery are visible.



(Staff photos by Lewis Day)



THE TIMES Area news

Mount Ebal worshipers 'keep the light of faith shining'

By BOB BERTINI
TIMES Staff Writer

DENTON — A memorial marker at Mount Ebal Church reads, "It (the marker) is erected with the hope that future generations will keep the light of faith shining that was so humbly lighted here and has relected throughout time to help guide our lives today."

Located about three miles southeast of Denton near a tributary of Tom's Creek, Mount Ebal (Protestant) Methodist Church has not opened its doors for regular worship services since before World War II.

There are few, if any, original members of the church still living. Yet, annually on the first Sunday in June, "friends" of Mount Ebal gather at the rural frame church for worship and for fellowship on the church lawn under a spreading oak tree. Much as persons have done for over a hundred years.

It is not known when the church organized, but according to 1861 records of a quarterly conference of the Davidson charge of the Methodist Protestant Church, William Sexton was a delegate to the conference. These same records indicate that the conference was invited to "Sexton's Meeting House" for the next session.

The reference "Sexton's Meeting House," sometimes "Sexton's School House" or just "Sexton's," often appeared in the records of the conference. The name Mount Ebal appeared in the conference records for the first time on Aug. 5, 1871.

On Sexton's farm, it is reasonably certain that around 1871 a log structure was built. The Rev. A.J. Laughlin was the pastor. The log structure was replaced in 1883 by the present structure, according to a historical sketch written in 1940.

Members of the congregation during the early history of the church include (husbands listed with their wives) Sexton and his wife, the former Mary Morris; William Morris and Sallie Hicks; Richard Cranford and Emily Morris; A. Harris Johnson and Elizabeth Kearns; Daniel Sexton and Bashebe Elliott; William Gibson and Martha Thompson; Leonard Cranford and Bethena Moore; James Sexton and Martha Hopkins; Wash Harris and Eliza Kearns; John C. Morris and Sarah Thompson; Thomas Morris and Rebecca Elliott; Johnathan Tucker and Rinda Haltom; Allen Morris and Jane Bisher; John Thompson and Mary Spencer; and Lewis Moore.

The 1883 frame building measures 36 by 48 feet and is constructed of native pine. John T. Sexton and Alfred Thompson were the contractors. They agreed to construct the building

for \$60, said Mrs. Coy L. Kearns of Denton, a daughter of Sexton.

The floor and ceiling were planed and matched by hand tools. The seats also were sawed out of two-inch maple boards by hand. The pews and original pulpit can be seen in the church today.

Thompson was the father of the Rev. W.B. Thompson, a widely known Methodist minister during his day. Sexton moved to Denton in the early 1900s and established a livery stable near the spot where Carroll Oil Co. is located today, Mrs. Kearns said.

Soon after the frame building was completed, a new arbor was constructed near the church to serve as a location for camp meetings.

"The annual camp meetings usually were held in the late summer when crops were laid by and work on the farm was not so pressing. When the season for the annual revival approached, preparations were made in advance in order that all work on the farm, save the most urgent and necessary, might cease for a week or 10 days during which the revival was in progress," John Oakly Garner, a Denton newspaper editor, wrote in 1939.

"Those whose circumstances would permit, moved to the church grounds and camped in log cabins or tents grouped around the church arbor. Others who could not afford to maintain a tent camped in the open and slept in covered wagons," he said.

In the late 1800s, 25 or more camp houses of both frame and log construction were grouped around the Mount Ebal Church and its arbor. Light was furnished to the campers by pine knot fires on top of stone "fire stands," three to four feet tall. The camp houses (some of which could accommodate an entire family) and the arbor have long disappeared, but the unusual stone "fire stands" remain today. (Stands were placed in each of the four corners of the arbor.)

By 1940, the Rev. George Curry was responsible for the supervision and care of Mount Ebal Church, but there were no longer regular services and the membership had been reduced "to just a few of the good people who love the old church and are true and loyal."

At one time, five horse and buggy roads converged at the church, but by 1940 only one small road led to the church over which an automobile could travel. This single gravel road remains today.

In addition to this isolation, many members of the congregation had moved over the years to Denton and had joined churches such as Central Methodist Church. As Garner wrote, "The pulpit is without a preacher and the benches are empty on Sunday morning, as on all other days, but the old church at Mount Ebal is not dead."

Once a year on the first Sunday in June, former members and friends of the church began holding a homecoming day. At one of these early events, the Mount Ebal Memorial Association was formed. The association, now ably led by John Sexton of Fair Grove, keeps the aging church building in repair and maintains the church grounds, including a small cemetery on a four-acre site near the church.

The association erected a stone memorial marker in 1954 on the spot between two "fire stands" where the arbor pulpit once stood. The names of the early members of the church are inscribed on the monument.

Mount Ebal closed its doors long ago, but for many, affectionate memories linger.

Association members were informed this year prior to the homecoming that between \$600 and \$700 was needed to paint the church. One of those contributing to the cause was Mrs. George Curry, whose husband died 23 years ago.

"I do not remember very much now," the elderly woman said, "but George always called the church dear old Mount Ebal."

"I felt like he would have wanted me to contribute."

2 killed in separate county auto mishaps

LEXINGTON — Two young Davidson County men have died from injuries received Wednesday night in separate automobile accidents on county roads north of Lexington.

Randy Gwynn Carter, 21, of Route 8 was dead on arrival at Forsyth Memorial Hospital in Winston-Salem after his car ran off Old Mill Road and overturned several times. Carter was thrown from his car into the field.

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h celebration ls plan traditional Fourth

Meanwhile, thousands will probably take advantage of the sunny and hot weather for private outings.

The National Weather Service predicts a few scattered showers and some morning fog in the mountains. Otherwise, the weather picture looks good for outdoor activities.

On the grim note, the N.C. Motor Club predicts 18 traffic deaths across the state from 6 p.m. Friday to midnight Sunday.

In Pittsboro, a black history pageant, "Black Bicentennial — Crispus Attucks to Barbara Jordan," will be presented at the Graham County Fair-

grounds.

The day's festivities will also feature a fashion parade of dresses from other nations starting at 11 a.m.

In Raleigh, the daylong celebration will include a fireworks display at the State Fairgrounds at 9:20 p.m. Bluegrass music and speeches by Mayor Clarence Lightner and state Agriculture Commissioner Jim Graham round out the program.

Old Salem will hold its annual reenactment of the July 4, 1783 celebration by the Moravian Community. The 1783 celebration is believed to have been one of the first in the United States.