

Old Mt. Ebal Once Center Of Religion

BY CHARLES LEE SUTHER
DENTON, June 18—On Sunday afternoon, June 18, a religious service unique in the history of southern Davidson County was held at old Mt. Ebal, three miles east of Denton, when a large granite historical marker bearing the names of many members of the old church was dedicated.

The marker was presented, in behalf of the Mt. Ebal Memorial Association, by John A. Tucker, city permit clerk of Greensboro. The rite of dedication was read by Rev. D. L. Stubbs, pastor of the Central Methodist Church of Denton.

Center Of Old-Time Religion
The service was unique because it commemorated a church founded nearly 100 years ago, which flourished for decade after decade as a center of old-fashioned, camp-meeting Methodism, and which played a vitally important part in the founding and growth of the Central Methodist Church, which is now building what is planned to be the largest and finest church plant in Denton.

The first written records of the church are dated in 1861. At that time it was holding services in a log schoolhouse, sometimes called "Sexton's School House," sometimes "Sexton's Meeting House." Another log meeting house was built in 1871, in which year the name of the church was changed to Mt. Ebal.

Structure Built In 1883
The present old structure dates from 1883. It was built of forest pine lumber donated by people of the community. Contractors were John T. Sexton, later a prominent businessman of Denton, and Alfred Thompson, father of Rev. W. B. Thompson, retired Methodist minister of near Lexington and grandfather of Rev. Walter Rowe Thompson of Greensboro, associate editor of the North Carolina Christian Advocate. Ceiling, flooring and weatherboarding were all planned entirely by these men, entirely by hand tools. Sexton and Thompson were paid \$60, in full compensation.

Only One Road Now
Camp meetings at Mt. Ebal during the last quarter of the 19th century were something rather special, even in a day when camp meetings were no extraordinary phenomena. At one time no less than five country roads converged at the churchyard (where only one narrow road leads today), and no less than 25 "camp houses," as they were called, stood on the church's four-acre lot. Such structures were almost always occupied by their owners at camp meeting time. Others came and slept in home-made tents, and still others in covered wagons.

Families moved to the camp grounds on Saturday, before the opening Sunday, and spent the night, usually assembling for a religious service before bedtime. The fourth Sunday of September was the big opening day. At this time of the year the crops had been laid by, and a week could be spared from the farm without much inconvenience. The camp meetings were looked forward to, and planned for, especially by the women folk, for weeks in advance. For many families camp meeting

Mr. Wm. Donald Sexton
1815 Boulevard Street
Greensboro, NC 27407

THIS MARKER DEDICATED IN 1954
BY THE MT. EBAL MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION
TO HONOR THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO
FOUNDED SEXTON'S SCHOOL HOUSE IN
1861 RE-ORGANIZED IN 1871 AS MT. EBAL
CHURCH

IT IS ERECTED WITH THE HOPE THAT
FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL KEEP THE
LIGHT OF FAITH SHINING THAT WAS SO
HUMBLY LIGHTED HERE AND HAS REFLECTED
THROUGHOUT TIME TO HELP GUIDE OUR
LIVES TODAY.

A GROUP OF MEMBERS OF THE EARLY DAYS

WILLIAM SEXTON	AND WIFE MARY MORRIS
WILLIAM MORRIS	SALLIE HICKS
RICHARD CRANFORD	EMILY MORRIS
A HARRIS JOHNSON	ELIZABETH HARRIS
DANIEL SEXTON	BASILEE ELLIOTT
WILLIAM GIBSON	MARTHA THOMPSON
LEONARD CRANFORD	BETHENA MOORE
JAMES SEXTON	MARTHA HOPKINS
WASH HARRIS	ELIZA HARRIS
JOHN C. MORRIS	SARAH THOMPSON
THOMAS MORRIS	REBECCA ELLIOTT
JONATHAN TUCKER	RINDA HATTON
ALLEN MORRIS	JANE RISHER
JOHN THOMPSON	MARY SPENCE
LEWIS MOORE	

MARKS HISTORIC SPOT

This marker, recently dedicated, commemorates the founding of historic Mt. Ebal Methodist Church in southern Davidson County and bears the names of some of the early-day members. It was the home church of the Rev. J. W. Frank, lower picture, veteran foreign missionary, now, at the age of 84, living in retirement at Mount Airy.

week was a sort of red letter week-of-the-year. For the young people it provided a sort of vacation and social season, with religious drama and thrills to boot. The elders, too, enjoyed something in the nature of a vacation.

A Throng Of People
So for many years, on the fourth Sunday of September, a throng of people poured into the camp grounds at Mt. Ebal, making the day a sort of festive occasion, tempered by a tone of religious solemnity.

It was no doubt "a fiery gospel" that was preached at Mt. Ebal at camp meeting time. For a modernistic view of the Book of Revelation, and of certain other portions of Scripture, such as is now taught in the Divinity School at Duke University, was then unknown among the Methodist clergy below the Potomac. Nor had the study of philosophy, which is apt to arouse skepticism as to the justice of burning an ordinary sinner forever, been pursued by many of the clergy of North Carolina. So while much was said about divine love in the arbor of Mt. Ebal, the visiting evangelist (there was always one to assist the pastor) pulled no punches in warning sinners of the flames of hell.

Rev. John Wesley Frank
Of the hundreds whose lives were touched or transformed by the camp meetings at Mt. Ebal, no doubt the most successful Christian worker has been Rev. John Wesley Frank, now 84, a retired foreign missionary living at Mt. Airy. Although Mt. Ebal was not the church of his parents, Rev. Mr. Frank, as a boy, was attracted by the camp meetings there, and in September, 1885, joined his church (then, he says, a "strong and harmonious" body), and formed the habit of daily prayer.

Sometime afterward he felt a call to preach, and set himself serious to the task of getting an education. He taught one public school at old Flint Hill, in the district which embraced Mt. Ebal and most of the land on which Denton now stands. Graduating from Oak Ridge Institute in 1894 and from Western Maryland College three years later, he at once became pastor of what is now the First Methodist Church in Winston-Salem. In 1899 he was married, and in the same year he and Mrs. Frank sailed for Japan, where he entered upon a long career as foreign missionary.

For more than 34 years he was connected with the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Protestant Church (now merged into the Methodist Church). Part of this time was given to missions



during one of which he and Mrs. Frank traveled around the world. He has crossed the Pacific Ocean nine times; the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean once; and has visited Palestine, Egypt, Italy, Switzerland, the home of his ancestors in Germany, Oxford University (where his son Grady studied for four years), and many other places of historic interest.

Old Church Withers Away
But while Rev. Mr. Frank was advancing the cause of Christianity in Japan, his old home church, as the record shows, was in the melancholy process of withering away. Camp meetings were abandoned at Mt. Ebal before the turn of the century because of the decline in attendance. In 1903 a small group of members withdrew to assist in organizing what is now the Central Methodist Church in Denton. Others withdrew to join at Denton as the years went on. Meanwhile, of course, the old church was losing a number of its older members by death.

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