

THE CHURCHES OF DELAWARE

by

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Author of "Along the Brandywine"



*A history, in brief, of the nearly 900 churches
and former churches in Delaware as
located by the Author.*

1947

The church was dedicated on Sun., June 20, 1897, under the direction of the Rev. J. C. Pierce, the pastor. Among those taking part were the Revs. C. E. Hastings, J. B. Turner, Alfred Smith and S. S. Woodward. The match was applied to the mortgage by George Barker and Mrs. Eliza Walker, charter members. The prayer of dedication was offered by the Rev. F. G. Merrill and the benediction was pronounced by the Rev. T. C. Young.

More land facing Division St. was purchased on Sept. 14, 1901, from Nannie B. Van Dyke. The parsonage, on State St., was purchased on Jan. 30, 1914.

An addition, to be used as a Sunday School and social-center, was dedicated on Dec. 14, 1924, by the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Walker.

Wesley Methodist Church (M.E.), of Dover, was organized on Sept. 13, 1778. Freeborn Garrettson, the missionary, had preached from the steps of the old Academy on the day before. He was subjected to indignities as were so many of the early Methodist preachers. Preaching was also held at Mr. Hilliard's home above Dover, at Gum Swamp and at Little Creek. The first church was built at North and Queen Streets, Richard Bassett, afterwards Governor of Delaware, contributing one-half of the cost of the building. Vincent Lookerman had donated the land for that purpose to a board of trustees, on June 1, 1782. Incorporated in 1799, the church was given the name "Wesley."

Francis Asbury preached in the new chapel on Oct. 2, 1784. On May 25, 1801, he preached in the Court House while Bishop Whatcoat preached in the chapel.

Bishop Whatcoat died on July 5, 1806, at the home of Richard Bassett in Dover. He was buried beneath the altar of the church. When the old church was removed a stone monument was erected over Bishop Whatcoat's grave, the entire plot being used as a cemetery. The oldest tombstone that the writer could find is over the grave of Elizabeth Chandler who died on Dec. 1, 1807. Among the prominent men buried here are former Governors Cornelius P. Comegys and Gove Saulsbury.

In 1850, a new church was built on State Street, salvaged bricks from the old church being used in the new building. The corner-stone was laid on Sept. 23, 1850. The church was dedicated on Feb. 9, 1851, by the Rev. Charles I. Thompson. The brick dwelling adjoining the church was purchased for a parsonage on Jan. 6, 1851, from James L. Smith.

A reopening service was held on July 17, 1859, after extensive improvements not the least of which was the installation of gas lighting. Two new harmoniums, one in the church and the other in the Sunday School room were used for the first time on June 3, 1866. On Oct. 22, 1869, Wesley Church purchased five acres of land beside the lake upon which to establish a cemetery.

The corner-stone of an addition was laid on Fri., July 22, 1870, by Pres. Elder T. J. Thompson, assisted by the Revs. James H. Lightbourne and Henry Sutton. The church was rededicated on Jan. 8, 1871. The Rev. Dr. D. W. Bartine preached in the morning, the Rev. Wm. Corbett in the afternoon and the Rev. J. S. Willis in the evening. The new organ was first used at a musical entertainment on Fri., May 12, 1871. The church was enlarged in 1884. An addition was erected in 1892.

In 1897, the entire church was rebuilt, only the side walls being used. The organ, which was retained, was equipped with a water motor. Six new memorial windows were installed. The rededication service was held on Feb. 20, 1898. Among those assisting were the Revs. S. F. Beiler, T. E. Terry, W. L. S. Murray and Alfred Smith, the pastor. The church was dedicated by

Pres. Elder R. H. Adams. In 1903, the church was beautified after which it was reopened on Wed., Sept. 9, 1903, by the Rev. L. E. Barrett, the pastor.

In 1907, Andrew Carnegie contributed \$1500.00 toward a second organ which was installed. An addition was built in 1924 and in 1938 a new parsonage was completed.

The Sunday School was started in 1830 by Mrs. Ann Clark Sipple. On Sept. 27, 1800, Berroni Harris, a trustee, was ordered to free a girl slave whom he owned and, in 1803, the Quarterly Conference ordered another member to free several slaves. It was 1866 before music was approved and an organ installed. It was 1912 before church suppers were approved.

The Holt Chapel in Wesley Junior College. The organ was dedicated on Mon., Aug. 17, 1942. Those taking part included the Revs. Dr. Walter A. Hearn, M. W. Marine, Earl J. Cummings, Ralph C. Jones and L. E. Windsor. An organ recital was given by Lester S. Bucher. The chapel furnishings and the organ were gifts of Mr. and Mrs. T. S. Holt of Federalsburg, Md., for whom the chapel was named.

The People's Christian Congregational Church of Dover. The Rev. Dr. A. W. Lightbourne was pastor of Wesley Methodist Church, in Dover, when the validity of his credentials was questioned by the Conference, meeting in Asbury Church at Wilmington, in 1908. After a trial Dr. Lightbourne was acquitted. In 1909, at the Conference in Milford charges were again brought against Dr. Lightbourne relative to his credentials. Dr. Lightbourne refused to stand trial a second time. As a result, Dr. Lightbourne with about 250 members who sympathized with him withdrew from Wesley Church. On Apr. 4, 1909, they started to hold Sunday meetings in the Opera House.

The church was duly organized and the name "People's" selected at a meeting held at the pastor's home on Fri., May 28, 1909. A court action to decide just who owned the Wesley Church property was decided in favor of the minority who had remained at Wesley. The project of building a church was immediately undertaken and, in July, a lot was purchased on s. Bradford St., near Reed St.

On Aug. 29, a one-day rally was held at the Camden camp-grounds with hacks to transport those attending, to the grounds. It was an eminent success. In the meantime People's Church became identified with the Southern Christian Conference.

The corner-stone of the new church was laid on Oct. 31, 1909, at 3 o'clock. The congregation met at the Opera House and marched in a body to the new site. The ceremonies were conducted by Dr. Lightbourne. Thomas J. Stevenson read a sketch of the history of the church which was enclosed in the stone.

The church was dedicated on Sun., June 5, 1910, by the Rev. W. W. Staley, assisted by Dr. Lightbourne. Gifts of ornaments and furnishings were presented by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Morris, Mrs. John B. Hutton, the W. T. Smithers' class, the Usher's Union, the Lend-a-Hand Society, Miss Lizzie Clark and Miss Mary Godwin.

The dedication service took place in the evening and as they were completed at 11 o'clock, Miss Clara Heverin and Harry Raymond, with their attendants, proceeded to the altar and were married. This was something unique in dedication day ceremonies.

A window in memory of Catherine Benson was unveiled on Mar. 5, 1916. The property adjoining the church on the corner was purchased and plans were prepared for rebuilding the church and adding a parish-house.

Saturday, May 17, 1941

Just Imagine! Church Suppers Once Banned by Trustee Board

Men Officials Finally Gave In; Judge Powell Sketches Unpublished Wesley Methodist Data

By ASHWORTH BURSLEM

Imagine a church without church dinners!

It's rather difficult—considering how active women's groups are in church kitchens, how many church suppers there are in the course of one week in any large community.

And the women, as they are praised for their cooking, perhaps would smile, if they knew it was not too long ago that church boards frowned upon suppers on the church property.

One church in particular was Wesley Methodist of Dover.

Judge Walter A. Powell of Dover, historian and author of a history of Delaware, in sketching heretofore unpublished data on the Wesley Church directs attention to the days when women had little or no voice in the official life of that particular church—one of the earliest Methodist churches in the state.

Men in Control

Until 1870, the trustees of the church were elected only by the men members. For many years, the women of the Mite Society wished to hold supper and other suitable entertainments but the boards refused all such requests.

In 1905, for example, the board declared: "It is the sense of the board that no suppers or entertainments other than religious service shall be held in the church."

And it was not until 1912 that women were given permission to hold suppers in the building.

In his sketch of the history of Wesley Church, Judge Powell states:

"The history of Wesley Church is intertwined with the history of Methodism in the state. It came to Delaware in the midst of the storm of war. The planting of Methodism in Delaware is a tragic story."

About Early Methodists

John Wesley and the English preachers he sent to this country were Tories—loyal to the crown during the Revolutionary War. The Tories and the Methodist preachers openly gave aid and assistance to the British. One group of about 15 Tories, banded together by General Mow, a Methodist holding a commission in the British army, were routed out of their fort near Kent and dispersed.

The Colonials, according to Judge Powell, regarded the Methodists as politically a dangerous people, and bitterly persecuted the preachers.

Disregarding this persecution, the Methodist preachers traveled from cabin to cabin in the forests and marshes "where there were hundreds who had never heard a sermon," and through preaching and singing won their way into the hearts and lives of the pioneer settlers.

Freeborn Garretson was one of the most outstanding of these traveling preachers. Judge Powell relates that on Sept. 12, 1778 he went to Dover on invitation of an Alderman Smithers, who had heard him preach in the forest west of Dover.

On that day, Judge Powell states that was the first Methodist sermon preached in Dover, but not without struggle. Garretson must have fully believed his last sermon had been delivered just before his arrival in Dover, for on alighting from his horse in the colonial town he was greeted by a mob threatening to hang him.

But with the brave and determined alderman standing beside him, Garretson preached and sang with such fervor that "many wept and 20 were awakened." The influence of the sermon was such that on the following day Garretson organized a Methodist society in



Photo by Ash.

Wesley Methodist Church of Dover is one of the oldest in the state.

DOVER.

In Private Homes

For several years the society worshipped in private homes, until their first Wesley Chapel was erected in 1780. Judge Powell believes the edifice may "well claim the honor of having been the first Methodist church built in Delaware. At least, it will share that honor with Barratt's Chapel."

A new church was built in 1850 by the Methodists of Dover, which is now in use. In his description of the church Judge Powell speaks of the "gilded organ pipes in the rear of the pulpit."

It was not until 1866, however, that any kind of instrumental music was allowed by the Wesley Church board. At that time an organ was bought and placed in the gallery of the church.

Their opposition to instrumental music was a strange policy for a church which believed so firmly in the power of song.

Judge Powell writes that "Methodism was born in song." The early preachers made the chapels and camp meetings vocal with Methodist hymns.

In his history covering the period of the Civil War, when the "Great Secession" split the Methodist church into two factions, Judge Powell relates several instances where a member and a trustee of Wesley Church were tried and found guilty of owning slaves.

On Sept. 27, 1800, Berroni Harris—a member and a trustee—was ordered to free a black girl he had bought, and issue papers of emancipation, after a church trial. In 1803, the quarterly conference of the Dover Circuit brought before them another member of Wesley Church, and ordered him to free a number of slaves in his possession.

director of the Department of Public Safety, and Mrs. Robert W. Tomlinson, vice-chairman of the Republican First District Committee.

The Ninth Ward Republican Club, 109 Race Street, held a house-warming in its renovated quarters last night. A program of addresses and entertainment was presented. More than 100 persons attended.

Dover's first Methodist group dates back to the Revolution

By EILEEN C. SPRAKER
Religion Editor

Methodists had a hard time in Delaware during the American Revolution. Nevertheless, it was during those years that the Methodist Society which was to become Wesley United Methodist Church was organized in Dover.

John Wesley, the English founder of Methodism and from whom the Dover church takes its name, was unsympathetic toward the American cause of independence. He even went so far as to publish in 1775 "A Calm Address to Our Own American Colonies" suggesting that Americans should be thankful for British rule.

Many of the Methodist lay preachers, in fact, returned to England during the Revolution — but not Francis Asbury, who was later to become the first bishop and pioneer circuit riding missionary in the colonies.

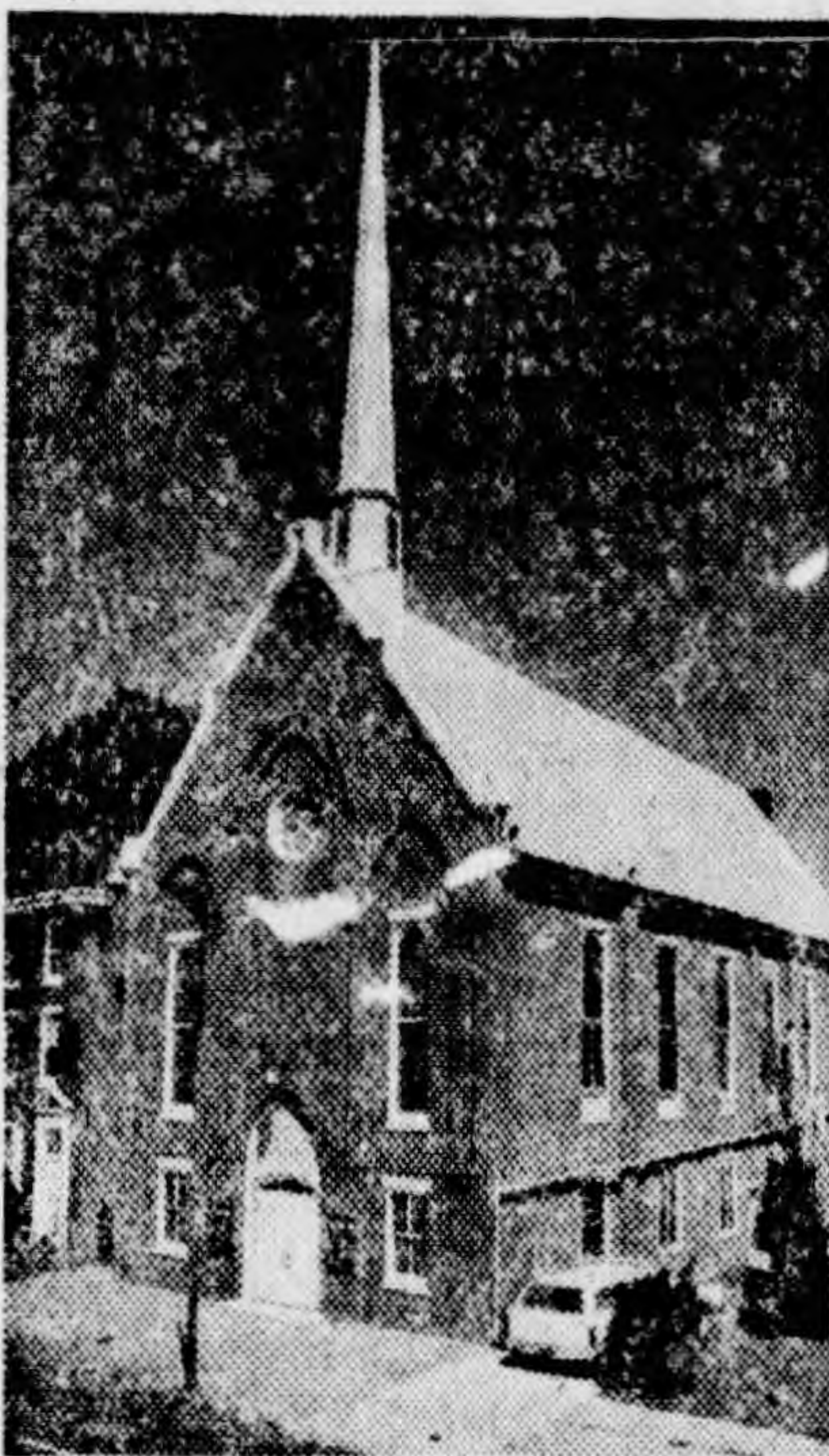
It was in that kind of atmosphere that the first society of Methodists was organized in Dover on Sept. 13, 1778 after the preaching of Freeborn Garrettson on the steps of the old Academy on S. State St.

Garrettson, a Maryland resident, had been converted to Methodism in 1775. He immediately freed all his slaves and began traveling through the colonies to spread the faith.

It wasn't long after the Methodist group organized in Dover that a church was built. By 1782 there was a \$2,000 building on a site at North and Queen Sts. where a cemetery still stands. But by 1850, the Wesley congregation had moved on to the site of the present church at S. State St. and the Plaza.

The building has been remodeled several times. Through the years it has been used for many community activities as well as for worship and church affairs.

Methodists were rather straight-laced in the early days. Wesley's present pastors note that musical instruments played no part in worship services until 1866. And of all things, church suppers were taboo until 1912!



Wesley United Methodist Church.

The music issue was so divisive among some Methodists that one congregation in Brandywine Hundred split over singing of hymns. Chester-Bethel in Delaware on Foulk Rd. and Siloam on Foulk rd. but in Pennsylvania, were the result.

But music has become a vital part of Wesley's worship. Choirs for tiny tots on up to adults are routine. The church was one of the first in the state to have a handbell choir. It still is an active group with Ron Shomo as director. George Wiltshire is church organist.

Senior pastor for the past 5 years has been the Rev. Dr. Robert Whitlock. The Rev. Robert Starrett is associate. The Rev. Dr. Hartwell F. Chandler, former district superintendent and Grace Methodist associate, Wilmington, now retired, is church visitor.

The Wesley congregation led efforts in Dover last year to help needy families strapped by a shaky economy. Earlier the church had been involved with others in the Kent Ecumenical Ministries under the wing of the Delmarva Ecumenical Agency.

But Whitlock thought the churches could do more if they got together and consolidated the various private services offered by church and civic groups.

An emergency food and fuel fund was set up, and the Wesley congregation donated \$850. The state division of social services and Catholic Social Services have helped screen applicants and administer the money.

The church operates on the premise that its building should be used. It is the home of United Cerebral Palsy's Dover branch, a branch regional office of the Girl Scouts, the Delaware Association for Retarded Children, and Alcoholic Services.

Few churches have a special program for physically and mentally handicapped children and adults, but Wesley does. In addition to three classes on Sunday mornings, Thursday evenings feature recreation programs suited to needs and skills of those who attend.

About 75 people are involved, including the 25-to-40 handicapped who attend and volunteers from the Wesley congregation and from nearby Wesley and Delaware State colleges.

The church has about 1,700 members, which in Methodism means those 12 and older. Services are at 8:45, 9:45 and 11 each Sunday and the ministers say they're well attended. About 350 are in the Sunday School.

When the congregation settled in at its S. State St. location more than 100 years ago, the members bought about 5 acres near Silver Lake for a cemetery which is still administered by the church. Burial is not limited to Methodists.

Wesley Church is one of the nearly 500 Methodist churches in the Peninsula Annual Conference, which comes under jurisdiction of Washington Area Bishop James K. Mathews.

The first Methodist, John Wesley, set a precedent which its namesake church seems to follow: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

a year, of which the society paid one hundred dollars, the Second Baptist Church of Wilmington one hundred dollars and George Parris one hundred dollars. Jonathan Stites and George Parris purchased a lot on the south side of the public square, and in 1850 started a subscription to build a church, each contributing five hundred dollars. The corner-stone of the church was laid September 8, 1850, by the Rev. A. D. Gillette, then of Philadelphia. The basement was completed in the winter of 1851-52 and dedicated January 25, 1852. A call had been extended to other churches to organize a church at that time. The roads were bad and the day stormy, and the delegates from Wilmington were the only ones present. The church was constituted with eight members—Jonathan and Mary Stites, George and Jane Parris, George P. and Ruth H. Barker, Mrs. Eliza Walker and Mrs. Beulah McGonigal. The Rev. J. P. Walter extended the right hand of fellowship. Meetings were held in March and April following, and as the result, eleven persons were baptized and became members of the church viz.: John Q. A. Adams, Mary McBride, Elizabeth Jones, Sarah Hall, Grace Nowell, Samuel, Eliza Ann and Jane Nowell, Francis A. Connelly, Raymond and Elizabeth Wheatley. The upper part of the house was dedicated in January 1853. The pastors of the church, from the organization to the present, are here given: John P. Walter, resigned July 1, 1852; D. A. Nichols, 1852 to latter part of 1853; E. R. Hen, 1854; C. J. Hopkins, three months, in 1859; H. C. Putnam, from 1861 to September 20, 1863. In 1866 the Rev. D. B. Purinton was sent to Dover and vicinity by the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, and resigned in 1868. He was succeeded by the Rev. O. F. Flippo, who served two years, and resigned September 15, 1870, to become a missionary for the State of Delaware, and to give attention to Wyoming Institute, which he was then endeavoring to purchase for the Baptists. The church was without a pastor for some time, and has been served since by the Rev. Charles A. Harris, February 27, 1873, to September 27, 1873; Rev. J. J. Reeden, April 15, 1875, to October 1, 1876; Rev. B. G. Parker, October 29, 1876, to 1881; Rev. Henry Tratt, one year; Rev. James Trickett; Rev. J. C. Miller, November, 1885, to July, 1887. Rev. Mr. Williams accepted the pastorate in September, 1887. The church has a membership of about one hundred.

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS.¹—The foundation-stone of the present church was laid by Rt. Rev. Thos. Becker, first bishop of the diocese of Wilmington, in November, 1870.—Rev. Edward Taylor, pastor. The building, of Gothic architecture, was completed the following year at a cost of nearly twenty thousand dollars, and is at present completely out of debt.

Rev. Ed. Taylor was succeeded by the Rev. John Lyons, in August, 1879; Rev. George Bradford, in 1880; Rev. Wm. Birmingham, in 1884; and Rev.

Joseph Graf in 1887, under the Rt. Rev. Bishop A. A. Curtis, D.D., second bishop of Wilmington.

To the parish of the Holy Cross are attached the congregations at Smyrna and Magnolia, and the mission-stations of Salisbury, Westover, Princess Anne, Berlin, Ocean City and Cape Charles City, which places are visited monthly by the rector of the Dover Parish. The whole congregation numbers about three hundred members.

METHODISM IN DOVER.²—The Methodist Episcopal Church in Dover was organized on September 13, 1778. The first sermon preached in the town by a Methodist minister was delivered by Rev. Freeborn Garrettsen, from the steps of the old academy that stood in the southern part of the town, near where the Farmers' Bank is now situated, on September 12, 1778. Concerning the labors of Garrettsen here, Stevens, in his "History of American Methodism," says: "He began his labors in Dover amid a storm of opposition in the latter part of 1778. He had been invited thither by a gentleman who had been profited by his ministry elsewhere.³ Hardly had he dismounted from his horse when the mob gathered, crying out, 'He is a Tory; hang him, hang him!'" While others shouted in his defense. Hundreds of clamorous voices resounded around him. "I was in a fair way," says he, "to be torn in pieces."

He was rescued, however, by some friendly gentlemen, one of whom (Mr. Smithers), taking him by the hand, and leading him to the steps of the academy, bade him preach, and declared he would stand by him. The evangelist cried aloud to the multitude. He was heard through most of the town. The crowd wept. One person sitting in a window a quarter of a mile distant, was alarmed by the truth and afterward converted. More than twenty of his hearers were awakened. The ringleader of the mob repented and betook himself to the reading of the Bible, and "never again persecuted the children of God." Garrettsen preached repeatedly in the town, formed a society (September 13, 1778), and "the Lord was with them, spreading the word and converting many souls." The preaching was at this time established at Mr. Hilliard's, above Dover.

The first church edifice owned by this society was built by Richard Bassett, Esq., afterwards Governor of the State of Delaware, and who was himself a member of the society. The house cost about two thousand dollars, one-half of which Mr. Bassett generously donated to the society. It was located at the north-west corner of North and Queen Streets. The entire lot is now used as a cemetery. The original trustees of the property—i.e., the building—were Richard Bassett, Benoni Harris, Jno. Willbank, Jno. Lowber and Joseph Harper. The lot of ground on which the church stood was donated for that purpose by Vincent Lockerman to the following trustees, viz.: Jno.

² Contributed by Rev. Thomas E. Terry.

³ Nathaniel Smithers, Esq., father of Hon. N. B. Smithers, of Delaware.

¹ Prepared by the Rev. Joseph Graf.

Pryer, Jr., Richard Lockwood, William Kirkley, Major Taylor and James Hull. The deed for the ground is dated June 1, 1782. The society was incorporated in 1799, and in honor of the founder of Methodism it was called Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church. In this first church edifice many of the fathers of Methodism labored, among them Dr. Thomas Coke, Freeborn Garrettson, "Father Connelly" and others, and of the bishops, the following visited Dover and preached there, viz.: Bishops Asbury, Whatcoat, McKendree, George and Emory. Bishop Whatcoat died here in 1806, and his remains were buried under the altar of the old church, and when the building was afterwards torn down, a suitable monument was erected over his grave to mark the spot.

The old church building was torn down and the new one erected on the present site on State Street in 1850, most of the bricks from the old edifice being used in building the new. The lecture-room of the present building was dedicated on Sunday, February 9, 1851. The sermon on that occasion was preached by Rev. Charles L. Thompson, from Gen. 28: 16, 17. Since it was first built the house has been enlarged twice, once in 1870 and again in 1884. The seating capacity of the present audience-room is about six hundred. Present membership (1887), 559.

During the year 1887 the society undertook the work of erecting a chapel in the western part of the town for the convenience of the people living there, and Edwin M. Stevenson, Esq., a member of the church, having donated for that purpose a lot of ground situated at the corner of Governor's Avenue and Mary Street, the society built a neat chapel with a seating capacity of about two hundred, and it was dedicated on Sunday, October 2, 1887.

In addition to the property already referred to, the society owns a handsome parsonage property, conveniently located alongside of the church, and it is furnished with all the modern appliances necessary for the comfort of the ministers' family. Also the church has recently bought and laid out a handsome cemetery on the north side of the town, containing about five acres. The aggregate worth of real estate held by the church is about thirty-one thousand dollars.

The Sunday-school connected with the church is one of the strongest and most prosperous in the State. At first there was organized a union school and it met in what was at that time the town academy, at the southern terminus of State Street. This school was organized by Hon. Willard Hall (afterward Judge Hall), Dr. Martin W. Bates and a gentleman named A. Strong, about A. D. 1826. The school was non-denominational, and after an existence of about four years was abandoned, Messrs. Hall and Strong having removed from Dover and Dr. Bates having given up the enterprise. During the year 1830, however, Mrs. Ann Clark Sipple collected the children together and organized the school in the Methodist Church, and

Mrs. Sipple herself was elected the first superintendent, and from that time on to the present the school has continued to increase until it now numbers sixty officers and teachers, with about six hundred scholars. In 1856 Mrs. Elizabeth Davis Burton, who was assistant superintendent of the school, suggested the organization of an infant department in the school, and the organization was effected with Mrs. Sallie Ann Ridgeley as superintendent, an office which she retained until her death, in the spring of 1887.

During the history of the church the following ministers have been stationed here as pastors in charge, viz.:

William Glendinning.....	1783	William Ryder.....	1820
Nelson Reed.....	1784	Atward White.....	1821
Samuel Dudley.....	1785	William Torbert.....	1822
Ira Ellis.....	1786	John Smith.....	1823
Jacob Brush.....	1787	Solomon Higgins.....	1824-25
George Moore.....	1788	James Balsaman.....	1826-27
William Thomas.....	1789	Daniel Lambdin.....	1828
Christopher Spry.....	1790	William Bishop.....	1829-30
Thomas Foster.....	1791	Solomon Sharp.....	1831-32
Walter Fountain.....	1792	William Barnes.....	1833-34
John Wilbur.....	1793	J. Buckley.....	1835
John Wilburn.....	1794	J. H. McFarland.....	1836
William Hunter.....	1795	Eliphabet Reed.....	1837-38
John Smith.....	1796	Levi Storks.....	1839
Joseph Whittly.....	1797	Joshua Eumpbries.....	1840-41
Thomas Jackson.....	1798	Ignatius T. Cooper..	1842-43
Daniel Cronch.....	1799	Enos R. Williams.....	1844-45
Archibald Foster.....	1800	Henry Sutton.....	1846-47
William Bishop.....	1801	James Allen.....	1848
T. Smith.....	1802	Goldsmith D. Carrow.....	1849-50
William Hunter.....	1803	John D. Hazzard.....	1851-52
Ephraim Chambers.....	1804	Henry E. Gilroy.....	1853-54
Richard Lyon.....	1805	Charles Karsner.....	1855-56
Henry Boehm.....	1806	William C. Robinson.....	1857-58
Joseph Aydelott.....	1807	Charles Cook.....	1859-60
Henry White.....	1808	John D. Curtis.....	1861-62
Thomas Walker.....	1809	Thomas J. Thompson.....	1863-64
John Sharpley.....	1810	Henry Colchazer.....	1865-67
Dora Melvin.....	1811	James H. Lightbourn.....	1868-70
Asa Smith.....	1812	James D. Merritt.....	1871-72
William Bishop.....	1813	George D. Watson.....	1873-74
James Ridgway.....	1814	John H. Caldwell.....	1875-77
James Ridgway.....	1815	William P. Davis.....	1878-80
James Moore.....	1816	John H. Caldwell.....	1881-83
Charles Reed.....	1817-18	Thomas E. Martindale.....	1884-86
Thomas Miller.....	1819	Thomas E. Terry.....	1887

WHATCOAT METHODIST CHURCH (col.).—The first meeting-house erected by the colored people in Dover was built in 1852, on the southwest corner of the old church-yard and burying-ground of the Methodists. The house was used until 1872, when a new church building (and the present one) was erected west of it on the same lot, and the old church was removed to the south side of North Street, and fitted up for a parsonage, and is still used for that purpose. The church building was neatly frescoed and painted in the summer of 1887. Before 1852 there was no separate organization of the colored people, but in that year the society was organized, taking the name of Bishop Whatcoat, who is buried in the yard on which their church is erected.¹

¹ Rev. Richard Whatcoat, one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was born in the parish of Quinton, England, February 23, 1736. He was ordained in September, 1784, by John Wesley and, accompanied by Dr. Colte, landed in America the 3d day of November following.

DOVER

The First Two Hundred and Fifty Years

1717-1967



A Brief History of Dover, Delaware

May 6 through May 13, 1967

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D68



brick chapel north of the church, which was dedicated in memory of his daughter, Anna Kimber Massey. Soon the Sabbath School superintendent reported "the greatest improvement in our condition is owing to our removal from the gallery of the church to the beautiful chapel . . . the most liberal donation ever made in or to our community."

After the move to the new church on State Street, an annual worship service was held in the Old Church. Also special events took place in the ancient sanctuary, dear to the hearts of the members. The last wedding there was the wedding of Bess Muir and J. Caleb Boggs, now U. S. Senator and former Governor of Delaware, on December 26, 1931. The church, decorated with ivy and Christmas greens was lighted by candle light. The bride wore eggshell white velvet and carried white lilies. The service was performed by the Reverend Francis Shunk Downes.

Having celebrated in 1964 the 250th anniversary of the birth of the church, the Presbyterians are grateful for sturdy forbears who lived up to the challenge of their times and they stand ready to take their place in this century to serve God in service to their fellowmen.

Wesley Methodist Church

Methodism, beginning in England as a movement within the Anglican Church, was first spread to the colonies informally by laymen who migrated to the new world. Then, between 1769 and 1774, John Wesley sent several lay preachers from England to establish Methodism in the colonies. Among these, Francis Asbury, who later became the first great Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, was the most famous. These early Methodists only lightly touched the life of Kent County with no lasting results.

But on September 12, 1778, Freeborn Garrettson came to Dover and preached on the steps of the Academy, which is now the home of Mrs. Marguerite Fox, on South State Street. He was subjected to the indignities which most of the Methodist preachers met, not only because of their new doctrines, but also because they were often considered to be Tory sympathizers, but his stirring sermon won several converts. The next day, September 13, he met with these people and helped them organize the Wesley Society of Dover. For the next four years this Society met in the homes of its members and like many such societies throughout the colonies, it was considered a preaching place to be regularly visited by the itinerant Methodist preachers.

By 1782 a decision was reached to build a Methodist Church in Dover. Vincent Lookerman donated a piece of land for the nominal fee of five shillings. Richard Bassett, the most prominent of the early converts who afterwards became Governor of Delaware and United States Senator, built the church at a cost of \$2,000 and then donated half of the cost himself. By the time the church was incorporated on March 23, 1799 and officially took the name "Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church", there were more than 20 families belonging to its

membership. This first building was located at the corner of North and Queen Streets where the old cemetery which surrounded the church still remains.

One of the most influential clergymen associated with Methodism in Delaware was the Rev. Richard Whatcoat. The General Conference of 1784, which had organized this movement as The Methodist Episcopal Church in America, had designated Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke as Bishops, but Coke had soon thereafter returned to England leaving Asbury with entire weight of leadership. As the number of churches grew rapidly the need was felt for another Bishop, and Richard Whatcoat was elected to this post in 1800. He labored diligently at his task, having no time for marriage or family. In April, 1806 he became very ill while preaching in Milford. The last thirteen weeks of his life were spent in the home of his dear friend, Richard Bassett, on the Green in Dover where he died. At his request, his body was buried under the altar of Wesley Church. Today a large monument stands on this spot on the North Street side of the cemetery near where the altar of the church used to be. The original marble slab which marked his grave now hangs in the hallway of Wesley Church.

From the very beginning, Methodists in Dover seemed to have a sensitive conscience on social issues. Although the colored people were required to sit in the balcony, the Trustee's records show that on September 27, 1800 Berroni Harris, a Trustee, was ordered to free a slave girl, and again in 1803 another member was directed by the Quarterly Conference to free his slaves. It was not until after 1850, when Wesley Church had relocated, that a separate Negro congregation was organized and selected the name "Whatcoat" for their church.

In the early years, certain things were prohibited in Wesley Church such as the chewing of tobacco or snuff during the service and the indiscriminate sitting together of men and women. The latter restriction was relaxed in 1866, but the others remained in force. This was also the year when the ban against musical instruments was lifted and two new harmoniums were used for the first time.

Although 19th century Methodists were often criticized for their shouting and emotional revival meetings, Wesley Church grew rapidly and soon became one of the largest congregations in Dover. Among the prominent citizens attracted to the church were two members of the Ridgely family, Elizabeth and Nicholas. The Ridgely Family Letters reveal that, in spite of accusations made by other members of the family that the Methodist preachers were "biggots" and often "appealed to unreasoning fear", Elizabeth was determined to be loyal to her new faith. And Nicholas Ridgely requested ordination and became a "circuit-riding" preacher who burned himself out in the work, dying in 1849 at the age of 29.

The present site of Wesley Church on South State Street was chosen in 1850 after much discussion. The cornerstone was laid on September 23 and the building dedicated on



250 YEARS

February 9, 1851. Additions were made in 1870, 1884, and 1892. In 1897 the interior was completely torn out and the entire structure except the walls rebuilt. The six memorial windows which now adorn the sanctuary were added during this project.

Since the old cemetery was limited in capacity, the church purchased five acres of land along the lake in 1869, which has become the Silver Lake Cemetery and is operated by the trustees of the church.

During the late 19th century, Methodism tried to expand by starting new congregations in certain sections of the city not reached by Wesley Church. One such church was organized in the old Armory as a result of a great revival held there. Later this society merged with another group and became known as St. Paul's Methodist Church which continued in a building on Division Street until 1960 when it merged with Wesley Church. The Grace Methodist Protestant Church, which was built in 1892 on a site on South Governor's Ave. now occupied by a supermarket, voted to merge with Wesley in 1948. Its name is perpetuated in the Grace Fellowship Hall which was added to the Wesley building in 1950 under the leadership of Dr. John A. Trader, Pastor Emeritus, who held the longest pastorate in the history of the congregation.

The passing years have not always been easy for these "singing Methodists". One of the darkest periods came in 1909 when the pastor, the Rev. A. W. Lightbourne, was questioned by the Annual Conference about the validity of his credentials. In the heated controversy which developed between the minister and the Methodist Conference, about 250 members of Wesley Church who sympathized with their pastor withdrew from Methodism and organized the People's Church of Dover. A court action to determine who owned the Wesley Church property resulted in a ruling in favor of the minority who remained with the denomination and who were determined to struggle onward in the face of this great difficulty.

The 1967 report to the Peninsula Annual Conference shows that the congregation of Wesley Church now numbers more than 1400 members. Like their spiritual forefathers, modern Methodists are responding to the challenge of a growing community which needs up-to-date facilities for religious education. In 1965 the congregation voted to remain in its down-town location and to add an educational building to improve its service to the community. Funds are now being gathered for this project which will cost some \$250,000, and it is hoped work will begin sometime in 1968.

The First Baptist Church

The First Baptist Church of Dover came into corporate existence in 1850. Nearly 20 years before that time, in 1832, George Parris and his wife Jane had come to Dover from New Jersey. Here they found two other Baptists, Jonathan Stites and his wife Mary, also from New Jersey. The four were intelligent Christians who "adorned by their walk and

talk the Christian life." They were eager to establish a Baptist fellowship in Dover.

An appeal to the American Baptist Home Mission Society resulted in the coming to the vicinity of the Rev. John P. Thompson. He and others sent by the Home Mission Society labored in and around Dover, for a number of years.

In 1847, the Rev. John P. Walter was persuaded to come to Dover at a yearly salary of \$300, of which \$100 was provided by the Home Mission Society, \$100 by the Second Baptist Church of Wilmington, and the last \$100 being assumed by Mr. Parris to be collected in the field. In 1850, a subscription was started for a house of worship. Messrs. Stites and Parris gave \$500 each toward the project. Ground facing on "The Green" was bought for a church building and parsonage.



The First Baptist Church on the Green, now home of the Century Club.

The cornerstone of the edifice was laid Sept. 9, 1850. The basement was ready for dedication on January 8, 1852, when the church was constituted with the following eight members: Jonathan and Mary Stites, George and Jane Parris, George P. and Ruth Barker, Mrs. Elizabeth Walker and

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Jim Skeans, Bill Fitzhugh, & Ann Horsey ✓
FROM: Bob Moyer
SUBJECT: Historic Marker
DATE: August 18, 2000

In 1782,

Vincent Loockerman sold one-half acre of this 2½-acre site for five shillings in 1782 "for the purpose of building a preaching house or chapel thereon" on North Street a little west of Queen Street to a Methodist Society organized in Dover in 1778 by Freeborn Garrettson, an itinerant minister and circuit rider. Richard Bassett, lawyer and later Governor of Delaware, furnished 750 pounds to build the brick 40-foot square Wesley Chapel where Bishop Francis Asbury preached the first sermon October 2, 1784.

The cemetery

(NOTE: If room permits, it would be nice to add the following: Two additions to the cemetery were made in 1823 and 1852. The present Wesley Church at its current site on State Street a little south of Loockerman Street replaced Wesley Chapel in 1850.)

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Ann Horsey
FROM: Bob Moyer
DATE: 8/23/00

SUBJECT: Additional info re Historic Marker

In addition to Bishop Richard Whatcoat, other ministers interred in the old cemetery included the following: Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, who died in 1862; Rev. William Fletcher Talbott, who died in 1903; and Rev. John Wiltbank.*

Other prominent members of Wesley Church buried in the old graveyard include: Cornelius P. Comegys, Governor of Delaware from 1837 to 1841, who died in 1851; Gove Saulsbury, Governor of Delaware from 1863 to 1871, who died in 1881; and Nathaniel B. Smithers, elected to the United States Congress in 1863, who died in 1896.

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*Extracted from Page 24 in the 1982 history of Wesley Church. The listing of pastors who have served Wesley Church beginning on Page 71 lists an E. Cooper, 1844-1845, but no record of the other two, Talbott and Wiltbank.

*belong to
the line with*

incorporation and deeds: Sussex Co. Recorder's office, Leads Record; vol. 181, p. 208; vol. 182, p. 328; Kent Co. Recorder's office, Leads Record; vol. 73, p. 182; vol. 88, p. 19; vol. 99, p. 378; vol. 98, p. 85; vol. 112, p. 191; vol. 112, p. 116; vol. 113, p. 98.

203. WESLEY METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 1778--, State and Delaware Sts., Dover.

Organized 1778. Freeborn Garrettsen came to Dover, September 12, 1778 and preached from the steps of the Academy, situated on High St. (now Governor's Ave.). The following day a Methodist Society of twenty members was formed and met in the home of Mr. Williard. Services were continued until 1784 when a church was created on the NW corner of North and Queen Sts. Present building dedicated 1881. Enlarged 1870, 1884, and remodeled 1897. A two story brick structure. Inscription cut in stone over entrance. First settled clergyman, Rev. David Abbott, 1782-83.

Minutes (Board of trustees), 1787-1915, 1918--, 2 vols., (Official Board), 1892-1907, 1908-17, 1920-24, 3 vols.; Register, 1816-57, 1 vol.; 1860--, 3 vols.; Sunday School, 1874--, 2 vols.; in possession of pastor, Rev. Earl V. Shockley. Records of incorporation and deeds: Kent Co. Recorder's office, Leads Record; vol. 12, p. 166; vol. 12, p. 198; vol. 14, p. 87; vol. 14, p. 18; vol. 16, p. 43; vol. 16, p. 50; vol. 16, p. 17; vol. 50, p. 85.

minutes 1777 or 1778

204. FOREST CHAPEL, 1778--, (about 6 miles W. of Dover) P. O., Maryland, Md.

Organized not later than 1778. Built by Rev. Dr. Samuel McJannet, rector of Christ Church, Dover (entry 628) and called Forest Chapel. Feeling that the Methodists under Francis Ashbury's leadership could use the chapel to better advantage than the established church, he presented it to Ashbury. This was the first meeting house owned by the Methodists in Delaware. It was later named Thomas' Chapel in honor of William Thomas, one of the early local Methodist preachers. The first building of logs was replaced by a frame structure in 1798. Dedication sermon of the latter building was preached by Freeborn Garrettsen. In 1828 a brick building was erected and in 1877 was rebuilt. First settled clergyman is unknown but the chapel has probably always been part of a circuit. It now belongs to the Maryland Circuit in charge of Rev. C. Flynn Egan, pastor of Maryland Methodist Episcopal Church, Maryland, Md. (see forthcoming Inventory of the Church Archives of Maryland).

Current records are included with those of Maryland Methodist Episcopal Church in possession of Rev. G. Elwyn Egan, Maryland, Md. Superintendent of the Dover District of the Wilmington Conference reports no prior records known to exist.

205. ST. ANTHONY'S METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 1779--, R.F.D., Greenwood.

Organized 1779. Incorporated March 5, 1820. Meetings held in home of William Howe until 1780 when a frame structure was erected. Krafft building was dedicated 1786. It is a one story frame structure with cupola and bell. First settled clergyman, unknown. *simple in line*

Minutes, 1851--, 2 vols.; Financial, 1886--, 2 vols.; in possession of Wilson C. Hatfield. Register, 1881--, 4 vols.; in possession of pastor, Rev. James F. How Jr. Sunday School, 1834--, 1 vol.; kept in church. Records of incorporation and deeds: Sussex Co. Recorder's office, Leads Record;

my records 1779-1880 missing.

63161 191939

Walter Powell's history says what Wesley had not furnished the

W. Powell's history says what Wesley had not furnished the

no!



FIRST SITE: An historical marker was erected on Friday and dedicated on Sunday, April 29 at the site of Dover's First Methodist Church located in Wesley Methodist Church Cemetery, South Queen and West North streets, Dover. Pictured are Renny Johnson (left) of Kent Sign Company and Russ McCabe of the Delaware Public Archives. Photo by Betsy Gustafson.