

History of the First Baptist Church of St. Stephen

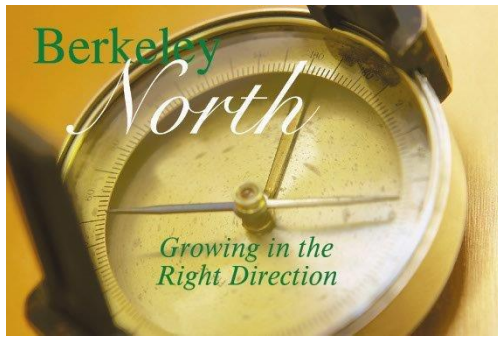
The St. Stephen Baptist Church was constituted in August 1849, with fifteen members. They met in a small frame building at the intersection of the Harristown and Bonneau highways about two miles from the present location. The old Baptist Cemetery marks the spot.

The Church was admitted into the Charleston Association the next year. In the minutes of the Association for that year is this record. “A letter from the St. Stephen Baptist Church, applying for admission, was read: Whereupon it was resolved that the St. Stephen Baptist Church be received as a constituent member of the Association. The Moderator, Reverend J.R. Kendrick, gave the right hand of fellowship to Brother D. Owen, delegate from the said church. This church was organized in August 1849, with fifteen members, supplied by Reverend D.M. Baker. Received by baptism, fifteen, and by letter, six. Peter Huxford is clerk.”

From 1851 to 1854 all letters to the Association complained of coldness and inactivity. In 1851, it was written, “Last year our prospects were truly cheering, but also for us the hour of bright hopes have fled and now nothing remains but darkness and discord.” In 1853, the church failed to make a report.

In 1858, the Church reported that it was a “refreshing year, with ten additions by letter and four by restoration.” It is pledged one hundred dollars toward the support of the pastor, Rev. D.M. Breder. The next year’s report was equally encouraging.

From 1860 to 1868, it may be presumed that all work was closed because of the war, as no reports were made for these years. However, in 1868, reporting to the Association was resumed. “Suffered the loss of many members by the war, and those who remain are in reduced circumstances.



Reverend J.L. Rallings baptized thirty-six colored people and the congregation increased greatly. As the house of worship could not hold the congregation that attended it, it was deemed best to constitute

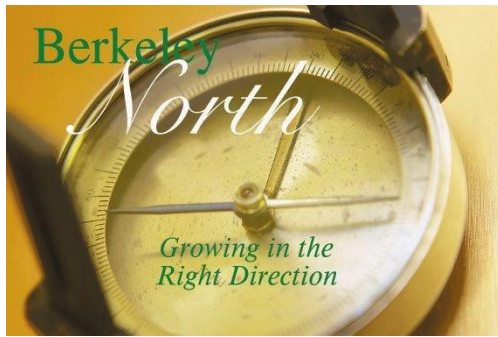
the colored members into a separate church, which has been done and they are now known as the Pineville Colored Baptist Church. They have adopted the covenant and declaration of principles set forth by the Welsh Neck Baptist Association. Since then, Brother Peter Huxford has baptized forty-seven colored people who have joined Pineville church. They desire to secure the services of an intelligent and pious colored minister.” A Sunday School was organized in 1868 with T.P. Smith as Superintendent.

From 1870 to 1873, the church reported splendid progress. It was at this time that friction occurred between the Russellville and St. Stephen churches. A committee was appointed to investigate, and Brother T.P. Smith reported they had given the churches advice. However, despite such progress, the years 1874-76 showed a lethargy in the church, while 1877 reports tell of “a gracious visitation from heaven during the meeting in which the pastor was assisted by Rev. P.M. Breaker, six conversions.” There was nothing of interest recorded from 1878 through 1880.

But in 1881, there were large and attentive congregations with increased membership. Aid was requested for the erection of a new building, and the new church was completed in 1882 on the same location. D.N. Gore was Pastor.

The years 1883-89 were active ones. There was much preaching and revival and “well attended prayer meeting.” In 1884, the Charleston Church was invited to meet with the St. Stephen Church the next year. The Sunday School continued to grow, sixteen members were baptized from 1885-88, and in 1889, the Women’s Missionary Society was organized.

The year 1891 was marked by spiritual prosperity, though it was regretted that Pastor Gordon had been called to another field. The next six years (1892-98) were spiritually lethargic ones for the church. Often, there was no pastor and seldom more than one service a month.



There are no more notes of interest until 1912, when the church was destroyed by fire. Work began immediately to build a new one, and the new church, of solid brick, is the one now in use. However, until 1919, membership and gifts declined sixty-three members, and preaching services became irregular.

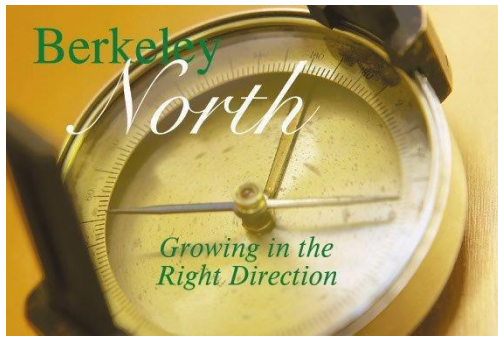
But in 1920, with the coming of Reverend D.O. Rivers, regular services were again begun, and membership increased. In 1924, the Baptist Young People's Union was organized with Miss. Etta Wilder as the first leader, and 1928, when a parsonage was built.

Om 1933, Reverend W. Edgar West became pastor. The church prospered under the leadership of Reverend West and his wife, until he resigned in 1939, due to injuries sustained in an accident. Nevertheless, he was conferred the honor of being Pastor Emeritus, and they enjoyed his council and help until his death. On March 28, 1937, the church was incorporated under the laws of the State of South Carolina.

From 1939-40, under the direction of Rev. Shelton Jones, the Sunday School Annex rooms were built and the Cradle Roll Department was added. Little history was recorded the years 1941-48, although in 1948 the Women's Missionary, under the leadership of Mrs. John Wooten, led the church to install a Hammond organ. Reverend J. Bright Powers served as pastor from November 1942 to 1948.

On August 28, 1949, the church celebrated its Centennial with day-long services. An historical pageant was presented giving a history of the church from its beginning to the date of the pageant. Rev. George Sage was pastor at this time.

From 1950-56, the church was served by Rev. James Browder. During his ministry, the present educational building was erected, and the church membership grew from 197 to 257. The church building itself was remodeled during the service of Reverend Michael Brandy (1957-64) and new furniture was installed. In 1963, St. Stephen Baptist Church started a Sunday School Mission in the home of D.E. McDonald. A few months later,



a building was erected to house this mission. It is now located only a few hundred yards from the original site of St. Stephen Baptist Church.

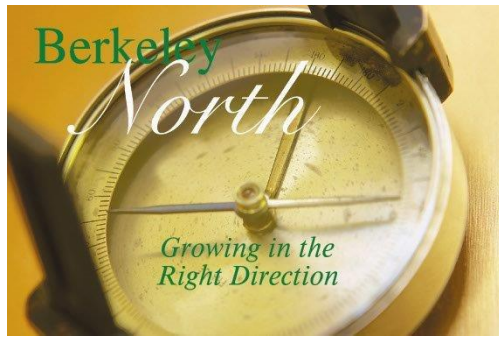
Reverend James Holcombe was pastor for the years 1964-65, and then Reverend Broadus Heatherly was called to serve the church in 1966. The name of the church as changed in 1968 to First Baptist Church of St. Stephen. In 1969, the church voted to purchase a lot on Gourdin Street for the purpose of relocation the parsonage. Today, the house and two lots are valued at \$75,000. Reverend Broadus Heatherly served the church until January of 1972. Reverend Robert Dukes served as pastor from December 1972 until January 1980.

Reverend Timothy Morris of Texas was called to serve as pastor September 28, 1980, until July 1984, when he resigned. He and his wife, Loretta, were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board, on July 6, to serve as Missionaries in South Korea. Under Reverend Morris' leadership, the St. Stephen Baptist Mission was constituted into a church on September 26, 1982 and was named the Harristown Road Baptist Church. The present church Social Hall was completed in July of 1984 at a cost of approximately \$170,000. Rev. Morris concluded his last service July 29, with a candlelight Communion Service and dedication of the new Social Hall.

Our church then called Rev. Jake J. Thornhill, Jr., of Sumter, S.C., the latter part of May 1985, preaching his first sermon on June 2, 1985. During the time Rev. Thornhill was here, the membership grew from 330 to 371, in July 1986. At this time the church experienced much spiritual growth. Reverend Thornhill left our church on July 30, 1987. From November 1, 1987 until August 6, 1989, the Reverend Dennis Glover was pastor.

In February of 1990, Reverend Ed Edgerton and his wife Betty, came to us from Ruffin Stacy, Reidsville. Since they have been here, the church has experienced a close Christian fellowship, an Active Senior Citizens group and Betty organizes our Vacation Bible School each year (putting her whole heart into it), which is a great Christian experience for all involved.

Then, on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1998, "Mr. Ed" passed away at the morning sunrise service. This was such a great loss for the church, as "Mr.



Ed” was very much loved and respected by the young and old, the church and the entire town of St. Stephen, as well as surrounding communities.

“Mr. Ed” was also the founder of the “Timberland Crusade,” which is held each year at Timberland High School for all community churches, black and white. The first Crusade was held in 1996.

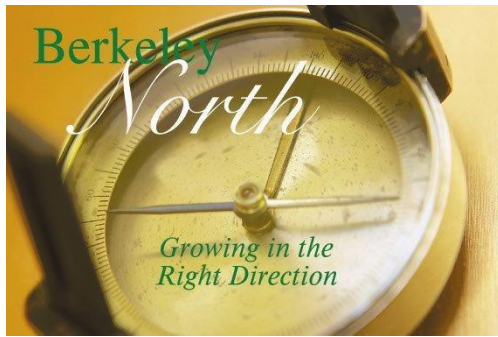
From September 6, 1998 until October 31, 1999, Rev. Harold Williams and his wife, Freta, filled the role of Interim for First Baptist.

Then on August 22, 1999, Rev. T.W. McGuffin preached a trial sermon followed by a covered dish dinner. He was hired as pastor and began his duties on November 1, 1999. He and his wife, Shelvie, moved into the parsonage. Then, on July 2, 2000, McGuffin resigned as pastor of the church. The church then took a vote and requested that he not leave as pastor of the church, but he decided to resign anyway. He preached his last sermon on July 16, 2000.

On November 28, 1999, First Baptist celebrated their sesquicentennial (150 years). Former pastors and friends from far and near were invited to the morning service, commemoration its many years of service.

On November 1, 2000, the church was very fortunate to have Rev. Paul Pridgeon (and wife Millie) come and serve as Interim Pastor until September 30, 2001. Rev. Pridgeon was indeed sent by God at this particular time to help First Baptist Church heal from the many hardships it had endured since losing “Mr. Ed.” With his help and the Lord’s guidance, the church family was again united and was now ready to move forward as God’s people. (Rev. Pridgeon retired in 1991 from First Baptist Church, North Charleston, having served there since 1960.)

When Rev. Pridgeon left, the Pastor Search Committee presented and the church called Rev. Wilton O. Gleaton to come serve as pastor. Rev. Gleaton came from Deer Park Baptist, where he had been pastor for some sixteen years. As of April 2004, Rev. Gleaton and his wife Barbara are still with First Baptist and the church is now growing and looking forward to a bright future serving the Lord.

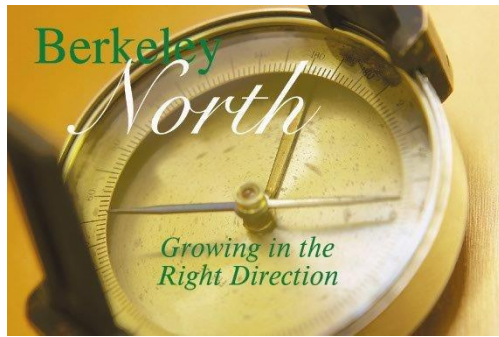


Membership at the present time is 213 residents and 146 non-residents, for a total of 359 members.

The material used in this history was compiled by Mrs. John Wooten and updated in 1986 by Mrs. Louise H. Rich. It was updated February 1995 by Ms. Elma Harvey Atkins. It was updated again in April 2004 by Ms. Elma H. Atkins.

Pastors serving First Baptist Church of St. Stephen, organized August 1849:

- Rev. D.M. Baker – 1849
- Rev. D.M. Breder – 1858
- Rev. J.L. Rallings – 1868
- Erection of a new building, same location – 1882
- Rev. D.N. Gore – 1882
- Women's Missionary Society organized – 1889
- Rev. Gordon – 1891
- Church building destroyed by fire – 1912
- New solid brick church building built – 1912
- Rev. D.O. Rivers – 1920
- Baptist Young People's Union organized – 1924
- Parsonage built – 1928
- Rev. W. Edgar West – 1933-1939
- Church incorporated under laws of State of South Carolina - 1937
- Rev. Shelton Jones – 1939-40; Sunday School Annex built & Cradle Roll Department added
- The Women's Missionary Society (under Mrs. John Wooten's leadership) installed a Hammond organ in the church.
- Rev. J. Bright Powers – 1942-48



- Church Centennial Celebration – August 28, 1949, with Rev. George Sage, Pastor
- Rev. James Browder – 1950-56; Educational Building erected
- Rev. Michael Brandy – 1957-64; Church building remodeled & new furniture installed
- St. Stephen Sunday School Mission begun in the home of D.E. McDonald in 1963. A few months later a new building was erected (only a few hundred yards from the original church site)
- Rev. James Holcombe – 1964-65
- Rev. Broadus Heatherly – 1966-Jan 1972; church name changed to First Baptist Church of St. Stephen
- Church purchased lot on Gourdin Street for relocating the parsonage – 1969
- Rev. Robert Dukes – December 1972-Jan 1980
- Rev. Timothy Morris – September 1980-July 1984; the St. Stephen Baptist Mission was constituted into a church on 26 September 1982 and named Harristown Road Baptist Church
- Rev. Jake J. Thornhill, Jr. – 1985-87
- Rev. Dennis Glover – 1987-89
- Rev. Ed Edgerton – 1990-April 12, 1998
- Mr. Ed founded the Timberland Crusade of Churches – 1996
- Rev. Harold Williams – Sept. 6, 1998-Oct. 31, 1999
- Rev. T.W. McGuffin – Nov. 1, 1999-Jul. 16, 2000
- First Baptist Church of St. Stephen celebrated its sesquicentennial (150 years) – November 28, 1999
- Rev. Paul Pridgeon – Nov. 1, 2000-Sept. 30, 2001
- Rev. Wilton O. Gleaton – 2001-present (April 2004)
- Rev. Emmett Browder, Interim
- Rev. Don Sadler – July 2010-Nov. 2010
- Rev. David Brien – April 2012-2014
- Rev. Jim Melton – April 2015-

*Edited 3 January 2022 by Keith Gourdin, Chairman
Berkeley North Historical & Cultural Association, 153 Walnut Way, Pineville, SC 29468*