

EVERGREEN BAPTIST CHURCH 1920

For some time, the Colored Community in West Palmyra had felt moved to form a church. In April, 1920, they decided the time had come to do more than think and talk — the time was at hand to take action of a definitive nature. A meeting was held in the home of Mrs. M. Hammond. Those in attendance were Mrs. Lucy LaRue, Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Brister and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Brown.

Six in number, but mighty in faith, this handful of dedicated Christians worked hard and prayed hard, and from their labor the Evergreen Baptist Church was born. With the help of God, and the steadfastness of their own spirits, the beginning of what was to be a long and fruitful witness was underway!

The first building fund was begun in 1920. In that same year, the building on Third Street, directly west of Market Street, was acquired. This was during the pastorate of the Rev. William Borem who served as minister from the first organizational days until December of 1921.

The congregation increased in numbers and as they increased it became apparent that a larger building was going to be required. A second building fund was instituted and a larger building, valued at \$3,000, was put on the same site as the first. It was completed in 1923.

In 1923 parishioners were frequently buried at the graveyard in Wrightsville. In later years burials have taken place at Lakeview Memorial Park.

Over the years Evergreen has been visited with at least its share of adversities. The bank closings in 1933 dealt a particularly devastating blow. The church lost all of its \$1,300 assets and was in an extremely precarious financial position for many lean and hard years. The membership was taxed mightily to cope, but they pressed forward, making the best of the bad times.

In the early days of World War II still another sad experience was visited on Evergreen. Frankford Arsenal used some of the lots adjacent to the church property to test ammunition and the vibrations made by these explosions caused the walls of the church to crack.

Problems or no problems, the people of the church were determined to complete building their main sanctuary. Complete it they did, even overcoming the additional hardship of being temporarily without a pastor.

The sanctuary was completed in 1945 and on that day of rejoicing, when the membership came together to worship for the first time in the finished sanctuary, the Rev. Dan Morgan, Pastor of Central Baptist Church, came to render the service of praise and thankfulness.

Evergreen has an interesting history as a church. But its true history can best be told in the stories of the people who have made up the membership over the years and who even now are working and planning for the future.

Remembered are Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Brister, two of the Charter Members. Now both gone to their rest, Mr. and Mrs. Brister gave much to the church in time, talent and love. Indeed, Mr. Brister served as the first superintendent of the Sunday School Department.

Still another name from the past, but also very much of the "Now," is that of Deacon Samuel Austin. He joined Evergreen in 1921, one of the original eight members, became a Deacon in 1924, and served as Chairman of the Board for forty years, a position he still holds. Brother Austin also was the second Superintendent of the Sunday School and served as such for forty-two years. He gave up this position in 1972 though he is still an active teacher in the school.

Deacon Austin has been active in the State Baptist organizations, having served as the Assistant Superintendent for the New Light Missionary Union for nineteen years, County Superintendent for four years, financial secretary for fifteen years, and corresponding secretary for five years. He has attended Bible Training Classes for over forty years and is called with affection and reverence "The Deac" by young and old alike.

Gone on to God for eternity are Miss Lucy Austin, her mother, Mrs. Viola Austin, and her brother, William. They were all active members of the church and took their Christian concerns for their fellowman into the community as well. Miss Lucy Austin was the first President of the Palmyra Civic League and the entire family gave generously of themselves in many community projects.

Evergreen has continually shown itself willing and interested in helping out with projects for the betterment of the community at large. The young adults of the church are active in Little League sports, high school sports, Challengers, and a variety of other programs. The church has also been the meeting place for both Boy and Girl Scout troops.

It is hard to pick and choose names from the wonderfully faithful Christians who make Evergreen their spiritual home. One name that comes to mind is that of Mrs. Mamie Austin. She goes a long way back in her memories of the early days at Evergreen — she did, after all, join the congregation in 1924. Over the years that have followed, she has been a Sunday School teacher, the leader of a Girl Scout Troop and is currently the president of the Missionary Society.

Not only has Mrs. Austin worked in the Vineyard of the Lord, she has given much of herself to the betterment of her community. She was an active member of the West Palmyra Civic League, a member of the Tri-Boro Community Board, a life-time member of the P.T.A. and for many years worked on the Halloween Parade Committee. At this time she is also serving on the Bicentennial Committee for the Tri-Boro area.

In 1924, Mrs. Gladys Cook King joined Evergreen. For the past fifty-four years she has been a witness for the Lord and one of His servants on earth. At this time she is the president of the Senior Usher Board at Evergreen, president of the Burlington County Ushers Union and a member of the New Light Missionary Baptist Union Usher Board. She is also a gifted musician and has served as organist for Evergreen Baptist Church as well as at other churches throughout the State. She is the daughter of the Rev. Albert Cook, who was an Assistant Pastor at Evergreen.

Certainly there are dozens upon dozens of names and stories that could be told about Evergreen Baptist Church. These people are the only ones still living who came to the church when it was an infant and are still active members today.

Evergreen Baptist Church has grown in numbers. In the church now there are listed the names of three hundred and twenty believers. The Sunday School Department, under the superintendency of Miss Laura Alston, who has held this post since January 1973, has a current enrollment of 27 boys and 39 girls. For many years this church has been an active member of the World Alliance of Baptist Churches. The congregation has reached out into the community time and time again showing its desire to bear witness of commitment to Jesus Christ and to the furtherance of God's Kingdom here on Earth, not only in words but in actions.

The Rev. Guy Campbell, Jr., has been pastor of the church since April 8, 1969. He is the ninth minister to hold this post.

As we look back over the years from 1920 until this Bicentennial year of 1976, we can see how far this church has walked along the sometimes rocky and sometimes smooth path of the Lord.

No one can foretell what the future will bring. But if the present gives a hint to the times still to come, and if history does indeed repeat itself, then the years that still dwell in the Tomorrow will find Evergreen Baptist Church faithful, willing, ready and full of vigor for the tests and the tasks that lie ahead.

