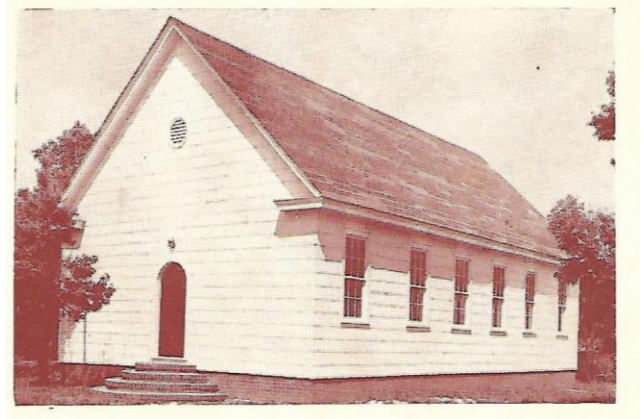


# “The First 10 Years”

## Avondale History 1944-1954

This year is Avondale’s 75th year. I’m going to share a few stories about the first 10 years of Avondale.

In 1944 the neighborhoods that surround us were just being developed. There were some houses across Park Road - or Avondale Avenue as the street in front of the church was called until around 1955 or so when it was absorbed into Park Road. It ran from Poindexter to Latta Park.

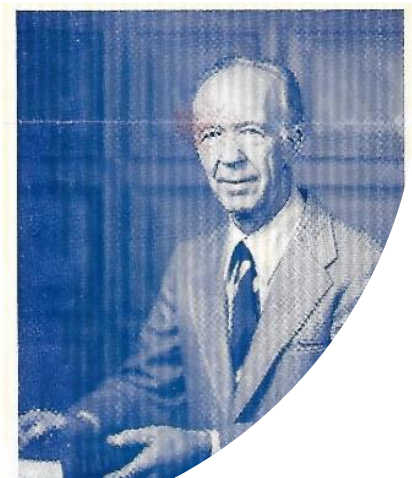


There were some houses on Idlewood Circle, Somerset, and Poindexter. Salem Dr would not be developed until 1948, Lilac in 1946, and Freedom Park was developed in 1953. The price of a house in this area in 1944 was around \$2,500.

We were not in the city limits of Charlotte. There was talk about the lot on the corner of Lilac and Avondale Ave. becoming a gas station. The neighborhood was not happy. The neighbors reached out to the Charlotte Presbytery...they wanted a Presbyterian church.

A committee was formed and on the committee was W.H. Belk, owner of the Belk Department stores. He was a good friend of Avondale. He not only bought the lot but had an abandoned schoolhouse in Waxhaw dismantled and brought to the lot to build our first building we called the Chapel. It was to be temporary but because of the war, building supplies were very hard to get. It was our start.

We were assigned an interim Pastor, Dr. John Rosebro, a retired minister. The first service was on July 23, 1944 and 35 people came. There would be no Sunday School classes that summer because of the polio epidemic. When the church began having Sunday School classes there were 60 people crowding in the small chapel.



Dr. Rosebro would stay with us until we called our first Pastor, Rev. Thomas MacLean. Rev. MacLean was a much-loved Pastor and preached his first sermon on Easter Sunday 1946. He stayed until the early 1970’s.

We quickly outgrew the little chapel, so in 1945 we had it moved to face Lilac Rd just behind the present site of the sanctuary and began to build a sanctuary.

The sanctuary was designed in the New England Meeting house style by Jim Stenhouse, a deacon and member. It took two years to build because building supplies and labor were still hard to get. The cost was \$20,000 and we had only 49 pledging units at the time. The first service was in July 1947.



By 1950 we had 300 members. We began to plan an "Education Building" that would face along Lilac Rd.

The old Chapel was hauled away and construction began. It cost \$60,000 to build the building that

included 6 classrooms and a lounge. We also had an opportunity to buy for \$150 (plus \$100 to move it) an old Army surplus Quonset hut from Morse Field. They had to saw it into 4 parts to move it. The men of the church put in hard wood floors, built a porch, and build a fireplace. This place was a large space for Boy Scouts, congregational meals and youth group to meet. We finally had a kitchen. Everyone called it "the Hut". You can see the hut on the left side of the property where the courtyard would be now.



While gathering facts for this presentation I began to wonder who has been a member the longest in our present-day congregation. I'll give you hint. The top three are in this picture.



This is one of the 1954's children's choirs. The member who has been here the longest is Hannah Stockwell joining on March 30, 1952. Next is Tommy Gribble who joined on March 29, 1953. And the third longest member is Stewart Farris who joined on March 11, 1956. All their parents were charter members of the church or came very shortly after.

We had many wonderful families that made up Avondale. I can't name them all, but the Meachams, the Jermans, the Aitkens, the Johnsons, the Throwers, the Hamers, the Smiths, the Alexanders and the McGees were there from the first meeting on someone's side porch. I read a quote from one of them that said "We were a Sunday School class that build a church".

Later in the year you will hear about other decades of Avondale.

###

Shared by Betty Chambers, May 2019

