

Wingate Baptist Church's History

The Wingate Baptist Church was established in 1810 as the Meadow Branch Baptist Church on the Old Camden Road about a mile north of the present church campus. The founders brought a Baptist heritage from one of two sources. Some were reared in the Welch Neck community in South Carolina and nurtured in the English Regular Baptist tradition then prominent in the Charleston Baptist Association. Others had breathed the fiery revivalism of New England-Great Awakening Baptists still thriving in the Sandy Creek Baptist Church in the North Carolina Piedmont. At Meadow Branch the two traditions melded into a dynamic community from the very outset, sometimes peaceful but contentious over issues of education and cooperative missionary activity.

Meadow Branch split over these issues in the 1830's with the group supporting education and missions retaining the church house. Sunday school was incorporated in the 1840s, and in 1856 the congregation moved to a new building just over a mile southward on the east side of Camden road and near the east-west road which connected Wadesboro, the Anson County seat with Monroe, the new Union County seat. Amid the chaos of the Civil War, conditions were so difficult for the congregation in every way imaginable. Preaching was sporadic and attendance weak, yet the congregation subscribed \$34.25 to buy Bibles and Testaments for the soldiers. But an August revival in 1866 added thirty new members and momentum increased in the early 1870s. The Carolina Central Railway arrived in 1874, giving both Monroe and Wadesboro an economic impetus and providing important transportation options for local lumber, produce, and travelers. A third church house was erected in 1884 as the congregation expanded, and the old building became a school for the children.

In 1896, Union Baptist Association churchmen, encouraged by Meadow Branch pastor J. B. Richardson, joined with other Baptists to establish The Wingate School to provide much needed education for the area. John W. Bivens was elected first Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Ten acres of land close to Meadow Branch Church containing a strong spring for pure water was donated by G. M. Stewart and lumber was promised for construction. The institution was named for a late Wake Forest College president and leading North Carolina Baptist preacher, Dr. Washington Manley Wingate. The school prospered, enrolling 231 students in 1900. The Town of Wingate incorporated in 1905, adopting the school's name to replace its earlier railroad-siding designation of Ames Turnout.

Meadow Branch Church celebrated its first centennial in 1910 and learned its history from Dr. W. E. Sikes of Wake Forest, a historian with deep Meadow Branch associations. In 1922, the fourth and current church building was dedicated with a roll call of the 450 members, most of whom answered to their name. The sanctuary, a beautiful brick and domed structure, sat adjacent to the northern border of the Wingate School which a year later became Wingate College by adding advanced level studies while maintaining its high school division. During construction of the new church, the Meadow Branch Sunday School met in school facilities. A few years later when the administration building burned, college courses met in the church classrooms. With some melancholy but very little opposition, the Meadow Branch Baptist Church voted unanimously to change its name to the Wingate Baptist Church in 1931.

The 20th century Wingate Church has been blessed with excellent pastoral leadership. Rev C.J. Black was noteworthy for his work during World War I. Coy Muckle was for a time both pastor of the church and

president of the college. William Link and David Shelton gave strong leadership during the war and recovery years of the 1940s. Dewey Hobbs was and remains one of Wingate's most remembered and beloved pastors, serving from 1954 to 1964, then moving to First Baptist, Marion and later to the School of Pastoral Care at the North Carolina Baptist Hospital. Modern members recall the gentle but persuasive leadership of Dr. Mitchell Simpson and the dynamic charisma of Dr. Jim Somerville. Both left their image imprinted on the congregation before leaving to serve elsewhere, Simpson to University Baptist in Chapel Hill and Somerville to First Baptist in Washington, DC and later First Baptist in Richmond. Currently the congregation is ably served since 2001 by Dr. Derrill Smith. As Wingate Baptist approached its 200th birthday and with Dr. Smith's encouragement, the congregation undertook an eighteen-month study and re-articulation of its purpose and goals as a Christian community in the 21st century and the facilities needed to minister in the town of Wingate and Wingate University.

The Church celebrated its bicentennial in 2010, recalling highlights of earlier years in drama, proclamation, and remembrance. This sketch is drawn from *The History of Wingate Baptist Church*, authored by Carolyn Caldwell Gaddy (1984) and Jerry L. Surratt (2009), where further detail of the faith-trek of this congregation is elaborated. We invite you to explore.

Today the Wingate Church enters its third century as a Church of Jesus Christ in this community.. Through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the congregation maintains its historic commitment to Christian discipleship and missionary outreach stretching from the local town and its needs to a loving refuge for homeless children in Kiev, Ukraine. It affirms that the human mind is the gift of God, to be cultivated by education and inspired by God in Christ Jesus. It preserves its foundational Baptist ideas of the authority of the scriptures and autonomy of the congregation, proclaiming God's written Word in the Bible and incarnate Word in the Christ. It breathes modern convictions that God created male and female and planted in the heart of each both the discipline of following and the potential of leading. It empowers servant leaders to minister to the needs of God's children, all by God's grace called to be saints and sinners forgiven. It embraces fellow Christians of differing persuasions who affirm that above all other ideas, Jesus Christ is Lord, His cross is God's love, and His resurrection is the hope of eternity.