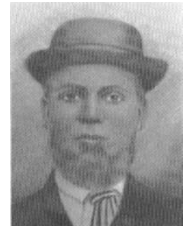


## MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH A HISTORICAL SKETCH

Edited by Karen E. Sutton, MA, Church Historian

With the Civil War over, and all their number finally free, our fore parents, the "Negro" population of Wicomico District, Northumberland County, Virginia, began to seriously contemplate how to best worship the Lord. On August 9, 1873, several men answered that call. They were: Walter Johnson, Louis Warner, Osborn Taylor, Charles Norris, and others.

Formerly members of *Old St. John Baptist Church*, Kilmarnock (the first church for "Negroes" in Lancaster County), these baptized believers received letters of release to form the *Mount Olive Baptist Church*. Joining them as the congregation in the new house of God were neighbors from the *Union Chapel Methodist Church*, Kilmarnock, the *Morattico Baptist Church*, Kilmarnock (white, the first Baptist Church on the Northern Neck), the *First Baptist Church*, Heathsville, and still others from the *Old St. John Baptist Church*, Kilmarnock. The founding leaders of *Mount Olive* were: Reverend Nelson Lee, as Pastor, with Walter Johnson, Louis Warner, Osborne Taylor and others as Deacons.



The Initial Ceremony occurred under a Brush Arbor, for freedom to worship as they pleased, and to save money. Unlike the arbor pictured here, perhaps they sat upon log benches under a leafy bough roof. After that, our founders worshiped regularly on one-half acre of land purchased from the Champion's estate, in an old mill house purchased and moved from Ingram's Farm. With a physical location in place, revivals began and baptisms were held at Magnolia, Sampson, and Mill-Creek Shores.



In 1881, Reverend Robert Haynie became the second pastor of our church. The congregation accepted him unanimously, and ardent support and cooperation were given. Reverend Haynie's stay at *Mt. Olive* was very limited.

In 1882, Reverend John R. Walker of Heathsville, Virginia was elected Pastor Number Three. Reverend Walker served for eighteen years. Under his administration, the membership and interest increased tremendously. The congregation purchased pews, a communion set, and pulpit furniture.

Ten years (1883) after that initial Brush Arbor Ceremony, by the "Grace of God," and with the loyal devoted Christian leadership of Reverend Walker, the membership increased so enormously they outgrew the old mill house. A building committee was appointed: John Grey, Joseph Smith, Lewis Johnson, Charles Taylor, Thomas Johnson, William Blackwell, Isaac Lewis, Walter Carter, Joseph Warner, Fredrick Warner, and John Sebree. They submitted plans for a building 45 x 35 with a gallery all around. The plans were accepted. Records did not show the cost of this building. Mr. Steptoe Lee was the architect and builder for this first edifice.



In 1900, the Reverend D. H. Chamberlayne was installed as the fourth pastor. A young man just completing college, he had wisdom not only for pastoring but also for community leadership. The church and community advanced and prospered under his leadership. A BYPU (Baptist Young People's Union) was organized. Mr. Steptoe Lee, a trained musician of these counties, organized the first choir. Reverend Chamberlayne oversaw the renovation of the church -- extension of the pulpit, addition of a choir loft, and the purchase of an organ. During his tenure at *Mt. Olive*, Reverend Chamberlayne also served as a public school teacher and taught at the old *Mt. Olive School*. After eight years of diligent service, Reverend Chamberlayne resigned in 1908 to become founding pastor of the *New Saint John's Baptist Church*, Kilmarnock, Virginia.

In 1908, Reverend John Amos Nickens became our fifth elected pastor. Reverend Nickens attended *Centenary Bible Institute*<sup>1</sup> (now *Morgan State University*) in Baltimore, Maryland. When he came to *Mt. Olive*, Reverend Nickens was filled with fire and zeal and years of pastoral experience, coming to us from *Union Chapel Methodist Church*, and simultaneously pastoring *Willie Chapel Baptist Church*. The church under his administration had a peaceful and harmonious reign that lasted for nineteen years. Members saw vivi d growth and development. Carbon lights were installed, and several organizations became a part of the church's program. Namely, the (male) Usher Board, the



<sup>1</sup> A Methodist Seminary for African American males, *Centenary* was founded and run by *Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church*.

Willing Worker's Circle, and the Christian Worker's Circle. Because of the time and distance involved in travel by foot, or horse and buggy, to and from the church, organized Sunday Schools began in the Brookvale, Mt. Olive and Remo communities. Prior to this, neighbors held bible discussions in yards, fields or wherever they made their home visits. The church became affiliated with the Northern Neck Association, the Sunday School Convention and the Missionary Convention. The Northern Neck Association was instrumental in building the *Northern Neck Industrial Academy*, Sharps Virginia (the first high school for the "colored" students of the Northern Neck). Reverend Nickens administration ended with his death in August 1927. Reverend Chamberlayne conducted the funeral from Reverend Nickens home.



On November 11, 1928 (the Second Sunday), at a regularly called church council, Reverend John Jay Nickens, an ordained minister (and son of Reverend John Amos Nickens) was called to become the sixth pastor of the *Mt. Olive Church*. He trained at *Virginia State College*, Petersburg, Virginia, and *Virginia Union University*, Richmond, Virginia. Reverend "J. J." Nickens, as he was known, came following World War I. He amiably led the church through the depression, World War II, and the Korean conflict. Reverend Nickens was an experienced minister and had a rich Christian background. With this experience, he began immediately reshaping the church's program.

Under Reverend J. J. Nickens leadership, several auxiliaries were organized: Junior Missionary Circle, male and female Usher Boards, The Pastor's Aid, Church Aid, Junior Choir, Young Men's Club/Chorus, and Auxiliary Clubs in Baltimore, Maryland and Brooklyn, New York. Mrs. Gertrude S. Johnson was the first president of the Baltimore Club and Mr. Fred Warner became the founding president for the Brooklyn Club. The last feature Reverend Nickens added to the church's program was the Vacation Bible School. A dynamic pastor and minister, he served *Mt. Olive* for twenty-nine years. Reverend Nickens continued the church's membership with the associations and conventions. He advanced with the times by attending workshops and conferences at *Virginia Union*, and *Hampton Institute* and by attending State and *Lott Carey* Conventions.

Very receptive to the young people of the church, he regularly included the youth in church programs, through the Junior Choir, the Junior Missionary Circle, the Sunday School and the BYPU. The Special Days in the church's program for youth participation were: Easter, Christmas and the Annual Children's Days. These programs were greatly enhanced and influenced because of the wholesome relationship that existed between the church and the public schools (Mt. Olive and Remo). The youth of our church have always brought credit to our total community.

Harvest Home Rallies were the outstanding financial programs. We began to hold services every Sunday, and an established offertory was set for church expenses.

The church was renovated once more; we removed the gallery, added two wings, repaired the interior and installed a new lighting system. As a result of the advancement of the times and the aggressive minds, the church outgrew this structure and site, and a committee was appointed to purchase land as a new site. Members of the committee were: Reverend Nickens, Deacons Emory Carter, Raleigh Jones, and Charles Fallin; Trustees, Raleigh Carter, John L. Carter, Ellis Jones, and Emerson Norris. This committee was successful in their efforts and the present church is erected on that property.

In 1952, Mt. Olive laid the foundation for the establishment of a Deacon's Union within the Northern Neck. Under the leadership of Deacon Daniel O. Jones, who served as Mt. Olive's Chair of Deacons, the Northumberland Deacons' Union was formed and soon grew into the still active Northern Neck Baptist Deacons' Union. For many years, Deacon Jones served as president of the organization.



In March 1958, Reverend B. L. Robinson, a graduate of *Virginia Union* (A.B., B.D.) and the *Richmond Professional Institute of Social Work* (M.S.W.) was installed as the seventh minister. The church again adopted new life. First, he surveyed the community and compiled their needs, that the church might offer a more effective program to the community, with its perplexing challenges: a program chairman was appointed, a unified financial plan was accepted, church bulletins were approved for morning worship, a Deaconess Board was organized to assist the minister and deacons with the Lord's Supper, and an organized worker's council served as the executive committee between quarterly business meetings (to replace monthly meetings).

In 1959, the Willing Workers and the Christian Workers combined to form the Missionary Society. The Missionary Society enabled the church to become more involved in community missions. *Mt. Olive* and the Missionary Society joined the State and *Lott Carey* Conventions and functioned in the church under the objectives of these auxiliaries. A Young Men's Chorus was reorganized which added much inspiration to the program of the church. The Service Club (consisting of Mrs. Maggie Carter, Mrs. Grace Carter and Mrs. E. B. Carter) gave new pulpit furniture.

Church officers attended leadership conferences at *Virginia Union* to serve the church more effectively. The phrase Youth Department was adopted for our young people and strong emphasis was placed on the building program.

The Baltimore Auxiliary Club was reorganized and auxiliary clubs were organized in Washington, District of Columbia (1965) and Richmond, Virginia. "*Homecoming*" replaced "*Harvest Home Rallies*." Reverend Robinson's three most outstanding contributions to the church were: (1) a more reverent understanding of the worship of God. (2) Emphasis on leadership in Community Social Service and (3) raising Building Funds on a single annual day, releasing the Church of constant fund raising efforts. Also under his leadership, the congregation completed the Educational Building and Sanctuary. We marched from the old church to the new in 1967 to begin formal worship service here.



In addition to his duties as pastor of this church, Reverend Robinson was also acting director of the Charles County (Maryland) Welfare Department. He went on to become Director of that organization, from which he is now retired. Reverend Robinson currently resides in Charles County, Maryland.

In 1969, Reverend Milton L. Foster, A. B., B. D. (*Virginia Seminary and College*, Lynchburg, Virginia), accepted the call, and was elected our eighth minister. Reverend Foster, B.A., B.D., D.D., was a sincere minister and strove earnestly to fulfill his pastoral duties. He came to us as a student in the School of Theology at *Virginia Union University*. While serving as our pastor, he completed his studies there, and served *Mt. Olive* for eleven years. Under his administration, a Board of Christian Education was appointed for the educational growth of the church. Also, a discussion hour was organized for panel discussions, debates and forums to advance the intellect of the church. Pews and carpeting were installed. In November 1973, the Church Mortgage was liquidated. The official board, Pastor, Deacons and Trustees, completed the interior of the annex, landscaped the grounds, placed asphalt on the drives, installed cement walks and an air conditioning system. *Mt. Olive* became institutional representative for Troop No. 224 Boy Scouts of America with two units: The Boy Scouts and The Cub Scouts. Reverend Foster retired from the ministry at *Mt.*



*Olive*, and since passed on to glory.

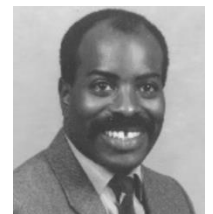
The old church was hit by lightning and burned to the ground on July 17, 1982.



A monument commemorating the old church was erected on August 3, 1983. It stands at the end of the original cement walk which led to the front door of the church. The monument is constructed with bricks from the old church, and sits on the original steps which led to the front door. Henry Thorndike was architect for the monument, assisted by Trustees. Contractor and builder for the project was Thomas Redmond & Sons, of Heathsville. The monument was built in memory of our deceased loved ones who gave so unselfishly of their time, talent and limited financial resources so that generations to follow would have a place to worship. The *Mt. Olive* Cemetery Committee raised money to pay for the monument.



In 1985, Reverend Ronald F. Turner, B.A., M. Div., a most dedicated and innovative minister, became *Mt. Olive's* ninth pastor. He came to us as a man led by God, who had the interest of the total church at heart. Also, a student in the School of Theology at *Virginia Union University* when he came to us, under his leadership we developed a Youth Ministry, a Senior Citizens Ministry, and a Systematic Bible Study/Worship Hour. For the first time in the history of *Mount Olive Baptist Church*, Reverend Turner led us in the construction of a parsonage, which was completed in October 1986. He left us in September 1989 to assume the pastorate of the *Peace Baptist Church*, Detroit, Michigan.



On December 27, 1990, Reverend F. Todd Gray, another *Virginia Union* graduate became *Mt. Olive's* tenth Pastor. Under his guidance, a thriving youth ministry and Youth Choir, an Educational Annex and renovation, a Board of Christian Education, a newsletter and a Young Adult Ministry were accomplished. On March 28, 1993, we dedicated our new Annex. In 1994, Reverend Gray ordained three deacons: Wilbur Conaway, Dorothy Johnson and Elizabeth Savoy. Deacons Dorothy Johnson and Elizabeth Savoy were the first female Deacons in the history of *Mt. Olive*. Reverend Gray went on to become pastor of *Fifth Street Baptist Church*, Richmond, Virginia.

Since Reverend Gray relinquished the Pastorate in 1995, we ordained our first female ministers in the persons of former Deacon Dorothy Johnson and former Trustee Barbara Cottrell. They were licensed to preach the gospel on October 18, 1997. Minister Cottrell has departed to serve as Youth & Adult Minister at *Shiloh Baptist Church*, Reedville, Virginia.

*Mt. Olive* has a very rich history. God has truly blessed us with capable leaders from our earliest existence to the present. Even during the times that *Mt. Olive* was absent a Pastor, we had capable leaders in the persons of Deacon C. F. Johnson, chairman of the Deacon Ministry and Trustee Adolph Burrell, Chairman of the Trustee Ministry as well as other officers and members.

We began the new millennium by welcoming our eleventh, the Reverend Dwight E Seawood, B.A., M. Div. Elected in February 2000, and installed in June 2000; he is yet another graduate of *Virginia Union University*. Under his leadership, we implemented a Thanksgiving Day Worship Service and dinner as an outreach ministry to our community. We renovated and beautified the church edifice and grounds. We completed The Cemetery Project, and also renovated the Parsonage.



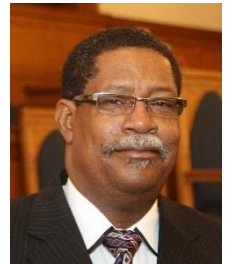
We met the needs of the youth in our congregation by implementing a Youth Jamboree that includes a full weekend of activities. Attendance at Sunday School by community youth increased by 50%, with a hot breakfast and pick-up service. We purchased new robes for our Young Disciples, and reintroduced the Mass Choir singing in Morning Worship, as well as hired Minister Jackson Blackstone, a new musician for the Youth and Mass Choirs. We facilitated two members in answering the call to the Deacon Ministry: Thomas Conaway, and Randolph Norris (Deacons in Training). The church elected three members to the Trustee Ministry: Stephanie Coleman, John Jones, and John Conaway. The church also elected to join the *American Baptist U.S.A.* & the *American Baptist Churches of the South (ABCOTS)*. Rev. Seawood's tenure ended in April 2009.

In early 2010, Mt. Olive was blessed to purchase the 36 acres of land adjacent to the church for future expansion.



On August 24, 2010, Mt. Olive elected, Rev. Quenton L. Keatts, graduate of Virginia Union University, as pastor number twelve. Rev. Keatts' tenure: August 2010 – October 2012.

On July 27, 2014, Mt. Olive installed its thirteenth pastor, Reverend Dr. Tyron D. Williams, who holds a doctorate degree from The Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. Under Pastor Williams' leadership, we have expanded our ministries: Children's Sunday School, Youth Ministry, and the Youth Choir were reestablished; Praise Dance Ministries for both youth and adults were formed; the Media Ministry was created to provide CDs and DVDs of services and special events for those who wanted to relive the experience or to share the experience with our sick and shut-in members and others within our community or beyond; the Evangelism Ministry Team was formed to assist in our efforts to reach those in our community who are either unchurched or unsaved; the Community Outreach Ministry was established to provide vital information or to provide links to available resources for those who could benefit from the information or services; and the Bereavement Ministry was established to provide comfort, support, and guidance to those in mourning. In addition, the church has been blessed to fill the position of Coordinator of Music and Worship which has added vitality to praise and worship.



Pastor Williams is an active leader in the Northern Neck community and he encourages church members to expand their involvement in the community initiatives.

We are confident that God will continue to bless the people of Mt. Olive as we do His will.