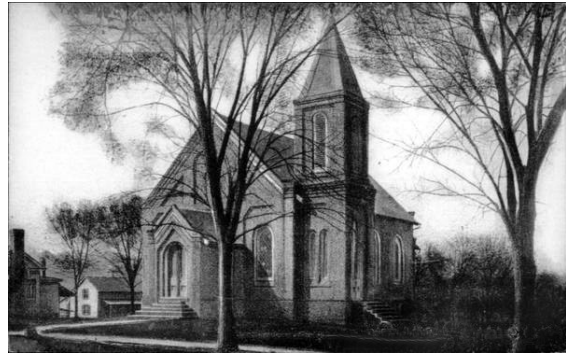


1800's – Organizing and Steadfastness

The Hillsboro* Baptist Church was organized on Saturday, November 19, 1853, in the old wooden courthouse purchased by Reverend Elias Dodson in 1845. Dodson, a native of Virginia and a graduate of William and Mary College, was the first Baptist preacher to hold services in Hillsboro. He preached in the courthouse around 1844. He was highly educated, a very zealous home missionary and a brilliant scholar.

The structure he purchased was built in 1790 at the corner of Churton and King Streets. It was sold to make room for a new courthouse. Volunteers moved it up the street to the east corner of Churton and Queen Streets. The building became the Baptist's "meeting house" in town. It was in this relocated building that the church organized with fifteen members - six men and nine women. All attended Mars Hill Baptist Church, three miles north of town on Highway 57. One of the founding members was Ms. Susannah Washington Graham, wife of William Alexander Graham, a former Governor of North Carolina (1845-1849). In April 1856, the first African American, "Sondo, slave of S. Moon," was received into membership. Other African American "servants" were soon added to the church's roll.

In December 1858, the Church appointed a building committee and trustees to receive a deed from W.J. Freeland, a founding member of the church, "for a lot on which to build a new Baptist church edifice." The two acres lot extended from Margaret Lane along Wake Street to King Street. The cornerstone was laid in 1860. Mr. W.M. Percival was the architect, and the builder was D. Kistler. The church was to cost \$4,600. On March 2, 1861, the building committee was asked to "ascertain what disposition can be made of this church building (old courthouse) and lot." The old courthouse was sold on August 18, 1862, to George Bishop of New Bern for \$750. Bishop was almost certainly an acquaintance of Mrs. Graham's mother, Elizabeth Cobb Washington. Mrs. Washington lived in New Bern until her husband's death in 1838. Shortly after, she moved to Hillsboro to live with her daughter. Four years later, Bishop sold the building to three Quakers who represented the "association of friends of Philadelphia and vicinity for the relief of Colored freedman." The purchase price was \$1,200. The Quakers established a school for African American children in the building. In 1886, they deeded the building to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The building was later bricked and today is known as Dickerson's Chapel.

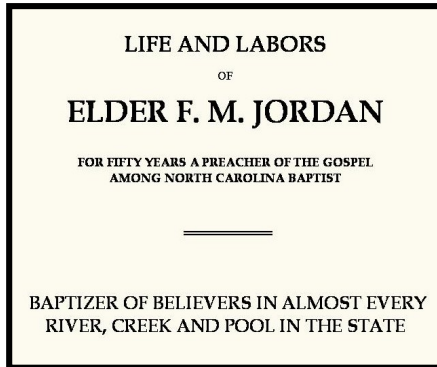


Church with Old Parsonage on Left



In July and August 1861, the church authorized the building committee "to have a lighting rod put upon the tower of the new church" and to mend the old fence on the property "to keep stock out." The church was asked to meet on Thursday, June 13, 1861 "according to the proclamation of the President of the Confederate States," as a day of humiliation and prayer. This was just two months after southern forces fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston, SC. The following year, the church voted "to give our church bell to the Orange Light Artillery of the purpose of being cast into cannon for use of the Confederate States Army." This unit was mustered in at Hillsboro, March 15, 1862, under the command of Captain

William Cameron from Petersburg, VA. Cameron had attended the Hillsboro Military Academy prior to going to West Point. He later became Governor of Virginia (1882-1886). The unit was nicknamed the “church bell battery” because four of its artillery pieces were made from Hillsboro church bells. Probably the bell was sent to the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond Virginia to be cast into an artillery piece. This is the foundry that received church bells from nearby Edenton, NC.



During the War, the congregation met and worshiped in the basement of the present building. It was not until after the War that they were able to finish the upper structure housing the sanctuary. The African American congregation also met in the basement as noted by Elder F. M. Jordan who wrote that “during the four years of the war I preached at Cool Spring at 11 o’clock, and to the colored people in the basement of the Baptist church in Hillsboro, in the afternoon.” The colored congregation continued to meet at the church until April 1868. Except for Lewis Jenkins, they voluntarily withdrew their fellowship to form a church of their own. At first, they

met in each others homes. Mrs. Graham donated land for the congregation to build its first building. Eventually the congregation became known as the Mount Bright Baptist Church named in honor of their first pastor, Rev. Alfred E. Bright.

The brick Romanesque style building was finally completed by John Berry, a well-known architect and builder from Hillsboro. The sanctuary was formally dedicated on October 27, 1868. The next day, the North Carolina State Baptist Convention met in Hillsboro. Formal services were first held in the sanctuary around 1870. Mrs. Blackwood and Mrs. Graham were appointed to solicit funds to pay off the church debt. Mrs. Graham wrote a letter that began “the Baptist of Hillsboro’ NC ask you to read the following statement, as an apology for soliciting contributions of One Dollar from yourself, and others who may be willing to aid them.” She explained the problem the church had with the original contractor over shoddy brickwork, the loss of the church’s money due to the failure of the Hillsboro Bank during the war, and the court arbitrators ruling that the church owed the contractor \$1,107 of which the church members could raise only \$300. Consequently, they were “under the necessity of seeking assistance to liquidate the balance.” The community responded and Mrs. Graham was able to make a verbal report to the church on March 31, 1872, saying that “the last dollar of the original debt had been paid.”



MRS. W. A. GRAHAM

In September 1870, the Hillsboro church met with 12 other churches at Mt. Moriah Church in Orange County to form a new Association, called the Mt. Zion Baptist Association. No vital statistics are provided for the Church in 1870, but the following year membership is reported as 61, only half the 102-membership reported in 1866 at the end of the War. According to the records of the Mt. Zion Association, the Church’s membership fluctuated between 30-40 individuals during the 1870s and 1880s. In 1889, the Church raised \$130 and appointed Dr. J. S. Spurgeon to have windows refurbish and walls strengthen by inserting bolts through the rafters. Spurgeon (1863-1950) was a dentist in Hillsboro for over 60 years.

* Hillsboro was the former spelling of the town when the church was organized in 1853. The spelling was changed to Hillsborough in the late 1960s as it first appeared on maps prior to the 19th century