

Historical Sketch of Nazareth

The first permanent settlement in what is now Spartanburg County was formed by a group of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian families who came from Pennsylvania in the late 1750's, and later were joined by Scotch-Irish families direct from Ireland. These families settled in small settlements along the branches of the Tyger River. Since these early settlers came to America in search of religious freedom, the establishment of a place for worship was a top priority.

The "Tyger River Congregation" met for worship in homes until 1765, when the first log meetinghouse was built about 200 yards from the existing sanctuary. In selecting a place to build, a man from the lower part of the settlement and one from the upper section began walking towards each other at the same time, and where they met was the place selected to build. A nearby spring was called the "meetinghouse spring" and is still in existence today.

In 1772, Nazareth Presbyterian Church was formally organized by the Rev. Joseph Alexander as part of the Philadelphia Presbytery, and in 1785-1790, the first church was replaced by a larger house of worship. In 1832, the present sanctuary was completed, thus making it one of the oldest surviving church buildings in upper South Carolina.

Many of the important events in the history of Spartanburg County took place at this church and in the bounds of its congregation. Every able-bodied man of Nazareth fought for the independence of this country. The church was especially active in the area of education. In 1794, the Nazareth Philanthropic Society was organized to promote interest in learning in the country and the state by providing teachers for neighborhood schools. The Reidville Female College and Male Academy was founded at Nazareth in 1857, during the forty year pastorate of Rev. R.H. Reid. He also served as the first county school commissioner, and in that capacity laid out the first districts and established the first public schools. The first county Teacher's Convention in South Carolina was organized at Nazareth.

Nazareth cemetery is one of the oldest in upper South Carolina dating back to the Revolutionary War. People come from all over the United States to visit the resting place of their forefathers.

Throughout the years, the sanctuary has seen changes as our lives have done the same. When the present sanctuary was built, the men entered by one door and were seated on one side of the church and the women entered and sat on the other side. In time, the pulpit was moved to its present wall and the side door became the front door, which we all enter together now. As time passed, the need for Sunday School rooms became apparent and the balcony was enclosed. Windows were added for lighting. In time, the windows were removed and a circular adornment was added. Near the roof peak, a cut out design was also added. Soon, electric lights replaced gas lamps and the congregation grew.

In 1957, an educational wing was built, which added Sunday School rooms, a kitchen and a dining hall. In 1983, the Family Life Center was completed, which answered the need of a growing church and community. In 1996, the renovation and addition to Nazareth was completed, which added more Sunday School rooms, a social hall, church offices, as well as the sanctuary restoration of the balcony.

Through all of her changes, the center post stands in the center of the sanctuary and remains the support for the church. For many, this post symbolizes the arm of God that has held Nazareth's congregation for all these many years with the uplifting power of God. Each generation makes a contribution to the continuing history, and as the present day congregation walks toward the twenty-first century, it is with the assurance that the God of their fathers walks with them still from memory to hope. Nazareth is recognized by the South Carolina Historical Society and the Presbyterian Historical Society.

Nazareth is called "the mother of churches." The following churches were formed from the membership of this congregation: North Pacolet, 1780 (the name later changed to Campobello); Fairview, 1786 (near Fountain Inn in Greenville County); Mount Tabor, 1841 (now First Presbyterian of Greer); First Presbyterian of Spartanburg, 1843; Antioch, 1843 (with most of its members moved to Reidville Female College and later changed the name to Reidville Presbyterian Church); Mount Calvary, 1846 (at Walnut Grove); Wellford, 1883 (later Florence Moore Memorial); Center Point, 1883 (at Moore). Antioch was reorganized in 1904, at the original church and was called Old Antioch. Mr. Reid also helped organize two black churches, one at Wellford and one at Reidville (Bowers Chapel, 1873).

Adapted from historical sketches by Florence Quinn, Ann Pitts, and Hellen Carslile.

Stephanie Heath

Circle One