

CHRIST'S SANCTIFIED HOLY CHURCH

[1892]

Chincoteague

Not only is this the oldest Holiness congregation on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, it is also the mother church of an entire sect of more than 1000 members, spread from Delaware to Louisiana.

The Sanctified church on Chincoteague Island grew out of Goodwill M.E. on the north end of the island. In 1887, three years after that church was annexed by the Methodists, Joseph B. Lynch, a class leader there, obtained sanctification. With Sarah Collins he became the leader of a growing sanctified faction at Goodwill. In 1892 the group petitioned the bishop for a "holy man of God to preach the gospel to them," and they were subsequently removed from office by the Methodist congregation. Nineteen persons constituted Christ's Sanctified Holy Church as a separate congregation on February 14, 1892.

The first Sanctified church building was erected just north of Goodwill on Main Street during the summer of 1892, and was at that time the largest church building on the island. By the next year the new faith had adherents in Franklin City, and as far away as Maryland and Delaware. By the fall of 1893 the congregation had begun those religious practices that so incensed the rest of the island: the repudiation of marriages previously made with unsanctified persons, and the establishment of the practice of "two-plus-two" for the study and proclamation of the scriptures. Acrimony between the congregation and the rest of the island intensified sharply after that time. After A. T. Bowden was accidentally killed by a band of young men on their way to punish members of the congregation in September 1894, Lynch and Collins and two others were hauled into court, convicted of several misdemeanors, and found guilty.

It was at this point that the congregation, perhaps as many as 120 members strong, began to migrate from the island, following Lynch and a party of believers who were gone by December 1894. Over the next three years the congregation sold homes and businesses at great loss and left the island, leaving behind a small remnant that were not permitted by the community to hold services. Some of the group returned in 1897 only to leave a second time during the final phase of departure in the summer of that year. Off the island, the sect found its first home in eastern North Carolina and continued its gradual journey across the South. The church building was auctioned off and purchased by the Goodwill congregation in 1898, who remodeled it for their own use, thinking that the Sanctified congregation was at last gone from the island.

In 1903 the island remnant, long since purged of those whose actions the community found objectionable, resumed services, erected a new building, and

became a permanent church. The ill will of the previous decade was now past, and the little congregation grew rapidly. By the 1940's it had outgrown the small church building, and in 1943 it purchased the abandoned Bethel M.P. Church on Church Street. Services were held here for a number of years until the congregation again dwindled in size. In 1964 the Church Street building was sold to St. Andrew's Roman Catholic Church. The original Sanctified building, abandoned by the Methodists, burned in 1933.

The doctrines for which the island congregation suffered so much harassment in the 1890's are still in force among the members of the sect, whose members are now held in respect throughout the community. Festivals and fund-raising events are still forbidden. Women members use no jewelry or makeup. Music is without accompanying instruments, and hymns are still "lined out" in old Wesleyan style. The sect has its own hymnbook, many selections of which were written by members from Chincoteague. Marriage with unsanctified persons is still forbidden and is not practiced, with the result that the sect, even at its national level, resembles and is often referred to as "one big, happy family."

The congregation at the mother church on Chincoteague Island is now reduced to only seven members, all women. Worship in the Chincoteague church is now only occasional, but the members maintain an active relationship with the rest of the sect, and travel regularly to Omur, Delaware, to meet with that larger congregation. Island members also regularly attend the annual camp meeting in Georgia, and it is still the usual practice for members of the Chincoteague congregation to be buried in the Sanctified burial grounds there.

On a national scale, Christ's Sanctified Holy Church and Christ's Sanctified Holy Church Colored (headquarters in Jennings, Louisiana) claim together a total of about 1700 members. Though a small sect nationally, it is the only national denomination of Eastern Shore of Virginia origins, and a direct link for the Eastern Shore to the theological issues of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

[Sources: 32, 109, 110, 117, 123, 176]

Location: see CHINCOTEAGUE

Good Will Independent Church are very much divided...and they are not likely soon to be of one mind."

It is possible that the division at Goodwill was due to growing Methodist strength in the congregation, for the independent church did not stay independent for long. By August 1884, J. M. Reese, the Methodist Episcopal pastor on the island, had organized the congregation into the Goodwill Class, and annexed them to Methodism. Two years later the downtown M.E. congregation abandoned its church building, gave it to "the people of Goodwill," and it was moved up the island and outfitted for worship there. From that time on the church was known as Goodwill Methodist Episcopal Church, and it was served by the M.E. pastor on the island.

The "upper" church prospered in its new Methodist affiliation. A woods meeting was held in an adjacent grove in 1888. The building, a small structure erected in 1869, was improved in 1889. The report to the conference in 1894 calls the church not Goodwill but "Salem."

Joseph B. Lynch, one of the original trustees of the congregation, was a class leader at Goodwill when in 1887 he obtained sanctification. Over the course of the next several years a sizable group of members followed Lynch in the pursuit of sanctification. A serious schism hit the church soon after the "sanctificationists" petitioned the bishop for "a holy man of God to preach the gospel to them," and on February 16, 1892, fifty-eight members withdrew to form Christ's Sanctified Holy Church. The schism was attended with much bad feeling and strife, and by the end of 1892 the rival Sanctified church building, largest church on the island at that time, stood just north of Goodwill.

By 1898 most of the Sanctified congregation had left the island for other fields, and Goodwill purchased their larger building in that year for \$1000. Goodwill, however, seems to have been seriously weakened by the sanctificationist schism, and by the early years of the twentieth century was in decline. It is possible that services ceased to be held regularly there by as early as 1913, but the church was not officially closed until 1922. In that year the new stone M.E. church building was erected on Church Street downtown, and Goodwill's congregation officially merged with the downtown church.

In 1928 A. J. Hill purchased the old Goodwill building for \$400 and used it for the storage of fishnets until it burned in 1933. By then not only the old church but also the old Goodwill School, once located at the "turntable" at the northern end of the island, had been discontinued, and the name Goodwill was preserved only in the Goodwill Men's Bible Class at Christ Church downtown.

[Sources: 32, 105, 109, 110, 117, 123, 154, 176]

Location: see CHINCOTEAGUE

*GOODWILL METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

("Salem," "Upper")

[Independent 1876, ME 1884-1922]

Chincoteague

Although completely vanished from the scene and all but forgotten today, Goodwill is an important church in the history of Methodism on the Shore, for it was here that the Holiness movement first made its appearance in the two counties.

Goodwill began not as a Methodist church, but as an interdenominational church for people on the northern end of Chincoteague Island. The church was already in existence in 1876, when the trustees bought additional land on all sides of the building. Apparently it was the practice at Goodwill for each of the white preachers of the island, Baptist, Methodist Protestant, and Methodist Episcopal, to preach there in turn. One of the first records of the church is from 1884, when a notice in the county paper cites the three community pastors by name, states that they have preached recently at Goodwill, and comments: "The congregation of