

Topsail Presbyterian Church

The History of Our Church
Celebrating 150 years



Topsail Presbyterian Church History

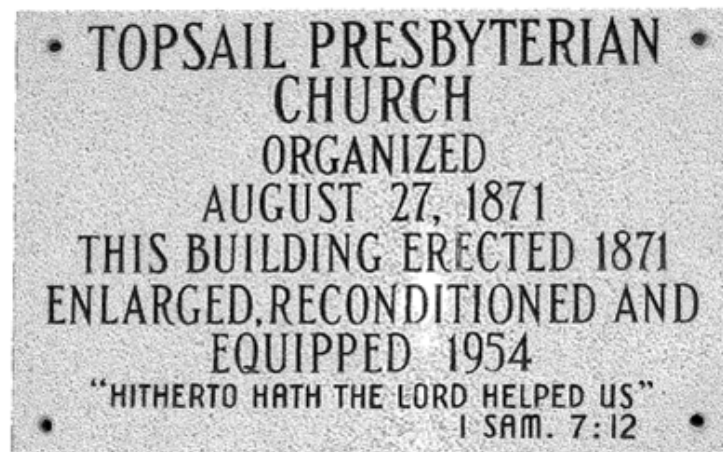
In both the written and oral history of TPC, it is obvious that God has "bountifully blessed" this house of worship and this congregation. Topsail Presbyterian Church is located in the town of Hampstead, North Carolina.

Hampstead is located about 17 miles north of Wilmington and 30 miles south of Jacksonville. The community is mainly situated on Highway 17 which is a main north-south thoroughfare along the coast of North Carolina.

Years before there was a building known as TPC, people met to worship on the same oak covered site upon which the Church and Cemetery now stand. The site was known as the "Chapel Pond Church" or the "Cyprus Lake Chapel", named after the nearby Cyprus pond, just down the ridge to the south of the present church. Old steam locomotives would stop to refill with water from the pond.

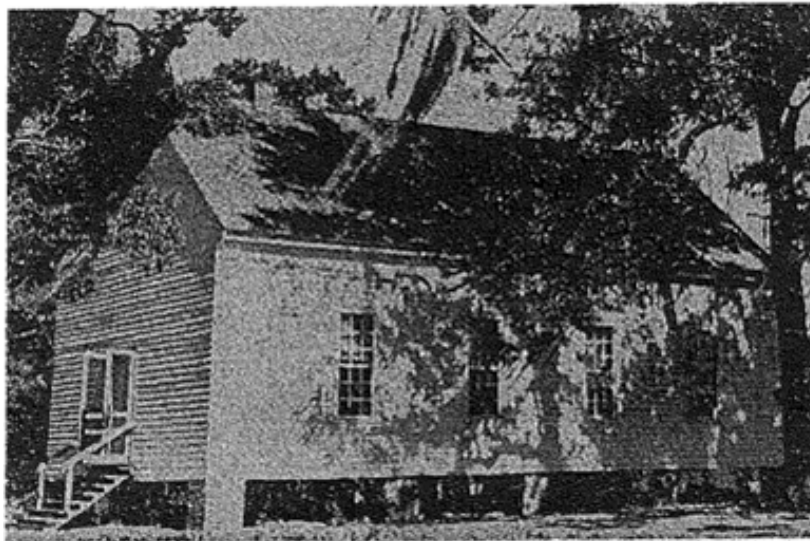
Following the Civil War, Mr. Dougald MacMillan from Sloop Point, a plantation located on the sound several miles north of Hampstead, took the leadership in establishing a Sunday school for the people in the area, which was later directed by his daughter, Miss Hattie D. MacMillan.





In his capacity as the first evangelist of the newly formed Wilmington Presbytery, Reverend Samuel Caldwell Alexander, DD, was to organize the TPC on the 27th of August 1871. The First Book of Session shows that also on this date Mr. Dougald MacMillan was received into membership and unanimously elected and ordained to the office of Elder.

The most natural place to build a church was the place frequented for many years by worshipers. The oak covered site, upon which the Church was to be built, belonged to the family of Miss Caroline Alexander, who married Mr. John W. Howard. He later deeded the several acres to the Church.



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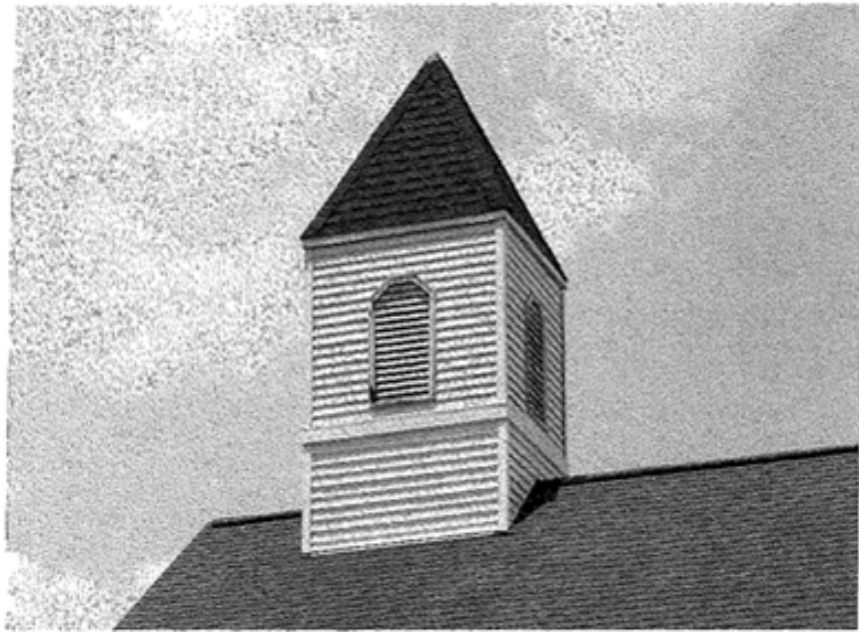
Mr. R M King, the second elected Elder, had the primary responsibility for the construction of the first building. It was said to look more like a barn than a church. It was built plain, rectangular in shape, with wooden steps. There was no steeple, no porch, no vestibule, or windows on the front.

The lumber for the original Church sanctuary was shipped from Wilmington on a 2 masted ship by Mr. R M King and others. The Church was "Dedicated to the Service of God on the 18th day of January 1873" by the Rev S C Alexander with the Rev A H Dickson. At about this time, there was only 1 grocery store in Hampstead. In 1 corner of this small 1- room building was the first Post Office. Mr. George W Mallard, a long-time resident of the area, was the owner, operator and the first Postmaster. Even though the building was small, it was large enough to supply the needs of the small number of residents at that time. The residents mostly made their living by farming, fishing, clam-digging, gathering oysters and working in the sawmills.

Originally TPC faced the dirt highway, located on the west side of the church. This dirt road was the main road between Wilmington and Jacksonville. Eventually the dirt road was shifted to the east side of the church, paved and named Highway 17, leaving the Church up the hill, among the big oaks and hidden from those who passed by. A passenger train ran daily between Wilmington and New Bern, and the digging of the Inland waterway made the area more accessible for growth.

In the late 1930's, the sanctuary, which was sitting several feet off the ground, was lowered and underpinned and a porch and new steps were added. Four Sunday School rooms were added onto the back of the sanctuary in 1952. The original hand-made sanctuary furnishings, the pulpit, pews, and communion table were replaced.





Mr. Ravenswood Sidbury provided the long-awaited steeple in 1955. The church bell, which continues to call us to worship each Sunday morning, was a gift from the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. Mr. Sidbury, who had been employed there for more than forty years, made the presentation. Mr. Sidbury also generously added a vestibule in 1968. The church's first manse was built and occupied in 1959. Mr. Roy Thomas donated the land, also located on Highway 17. Members of the congregation, including the youth of the church, were very involved in building this structure. It was occupied until 1984, at which time the property on Hughes Road in Washington Acres was purchased for use as the manse.

The Homecoming celebration of 1969 included breaking ground for a separate building for outreach and fellowship, and the long-awaited indoor plumbing. The "slanted roof dwelling" down by the branch had served very dependably for ninety-nine years. Mr. W J Batson oversaw construction. Trees were cut from the site and hauled to the farm and sawmill of Mr. Roy Thomas. The logs were cut into lumber to be used in the construction of the new building. The church offices, the gathering room, and the connecting hallway behind the Sanctuary are part of that building.

In 1980, the congregation was faced with the difficult decision of whether to build a new Sanctuary or try to make the much-needed repairs on the structure that was now over 100 years old. The decision was made to rebuild. Mrs. Cora Mae Ward, the organist for many years, broke ground for the new Sanctuary on June 8, 1980. Mr. Greg Mosher, Sr was selected as the contractor. On May 3, 1981, the new sanctuary was dedicated.



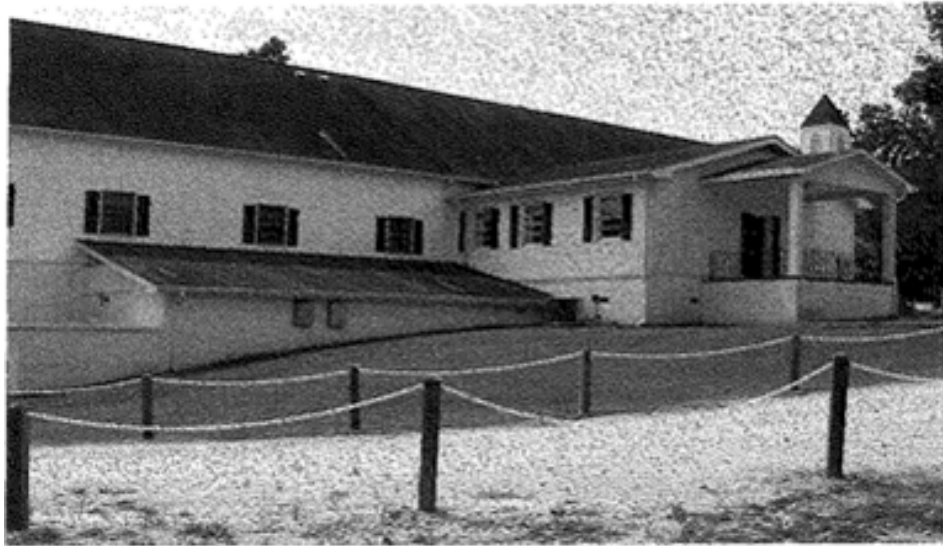
"How lovely is your dwelling place, o Lord of hosts!"

Psalm 84:1

In 1983, the old sanctuary was torn down in just a few days, was hauled away, and the land was cleared and cleaned before the next Sunday Worship Service. That area is now part of the Church Cemetery. The lumber from the previous building was donated to another pastor to build a sanctuary for his congregation. The pastor gifted a window (top and bottom) from the old sanctuary to Diana Howard (now Askins) who cross stitched and inserted in each glass a lighthouse from North Carolina or Virginia, utilizing the lighthouse as a symbol for the church. The window is located in the church office above the Administrative Assistant's desk.



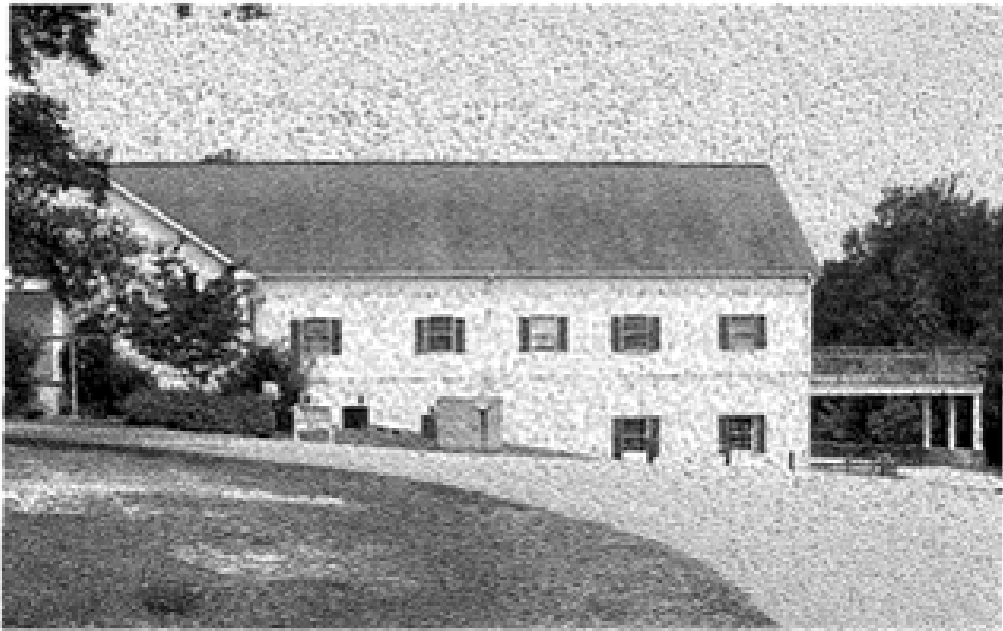
Hampstead and the surrounding areas have experienced a large surge in population since then. People have moved into the area from all areas around the country; the area is attractive to people for its easy lifestyle and enjoyable climate. As the population of the area grew, so did the membership of the church and the need for more space. On May 19, 1991, the newly constructed educational wing and the Fellowship Hall were dedicated.



Northwest entrance to offices, classrooms, and the Fellowship Hall

At the Homecoming celebration of 1996, the Fellowship Hall was dedicated to the memory of Mr. Johnie Thomas, Sr, and the educational building was dedicated to the memory of Miss Nellie Mae Howard and Mr. Harold D. "Buddy" Howard.





East entry to Gathering Room, classrooms, and Fellowship Hall.



The property from the Cemetery, down to Highway US 17, was purchased in 1992, and the road was built and paved in 1998. While still sitting among the big oaks, the church was once again visible to those who pass by.



Topsail Presbyterian Preschool was started in the fall of 1998. The preschool is operated, maintained and governed by the TPC as a service to the church and community.

TPC Cemetery

For many years the Church Cemetery was available to anyone in the community. On December 15, 1959, the Session voted that no one outside the Church could be buried in the Cemetery unless approved by the Session. On November 7, 1994, the Session approved the formation of the "TPC Perpetual Care Cemetery Organization".



The earliest dated headstone in the TPC Cemetery is that of Mr. David Bernard (1789). Oral history says that his earthly remains are buried somewhere in this area of Pender County. The exact location is unknown. Since he was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, the Daughters of the American Revolution were granted permission to place a memorial marker in our Cemetery.



The earliest known gravesite, 1864, is that of Sara Caroline Alexander Howard. Her family was the original owners of the Church property.

Footnote: Many thanks to our contributors who in years past researched and assembled this treasure of information about our church. Several minor updates have been made but it remains basically the same as printed years ago. If you know anyone who should be credited within this body of work, please let the church office know.

Ministers Who Have Served TPC - 1871- Present

S.C. Alexander 1871 – 1873	W. M. Currie 1924 – 1926
D. B. Black 1873 – 1874	C. C. Myers 1926 – 1951
B. F. Marable 1874 – 1875	T. B. Ruff 1952 – 1956
R. A. Miller 1875 – 1877	Robert Rock 1957 – 1958
G.W. McMillan 1878 – 1884	George Sowerby 1959 – 1960
Colin Shaw October 1878	Dr. J. M. Waggett April 1961
A. L. Phillips 1884 – 1886	C. G. Johnstone 1962
Peyton H. Hodge	Fred P. Albright, Jr. 1963 – 1965
W. McC. Miller April 1890	J. Wendell Ligon 1965 – 1966
Letcher Smith 1890 – 1891	C. H. McLean July - August 1966
John S. Wood 1893 – 1895	Walker H. Allen 1966 – 1969
J. Stanley Thomas 1898 – 1899	Edward L. Moore (seminary student) 1969 - 1970
S. H. Isler 1899 – 1906	Edward L. Moore 1971 - 1975
Lucien E. Wells April 1907	William D. Hasty 1976 - 1982
J. S. Wood October 1911	Robert Haywood, Interim 1982
Wm. Mc. Baker September 1916	Ralph Evans 1982 – 1987
J. S. Crowley 1916 – 1923	Dale E. Miller 1988 – 1996
	Joseph C. Washburn 1997 – 2005
	C. Owen Carriker 2005 – May 2015
	Jake Young (Interim) October 2016 - April 2018
	Cameron (Cam) Thomas May 2018 – Present

Members who have served in the wider Presbyterian Church (USA)

Certified Director of Christian Education:
Diana Howard Askins

Commissioned Lay Pastor:
Julie Carriker
Nick Ferrante
Denise Thomas Jones

Qualified Lay Pastor:
Brent Edwards

Union Presbyterian Seminary Alumni:
Rev. Luke Woodcock

