

Short History of the Rockwood United Methodist Church

The roots of Rockwood United Methodist Church began with the establishment of the Methodist Church as one of the first organized religions in what would later become Roane County, Tennessee; Historic records show that a Methodist meeting house existed in the Roane County area as early as 1795; and early settlers gathered at Asbury Campgrounds near Post Oak Springs to hear the gospel from circuit riding preachers. By 1,900, Methodism constituted the largest religious body in Tennessee.

The origins of the Methodist Episcopal Church-North (more commonly known as the Methodist Episcopal Church) in Rockwood are not clear, except that we do know that Gen. Wilder was a charter member. However; in 1881, the Roane Iron Company gave the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church a lot on Trinity Street, There is no record of a building ever being erected on this site. Evidently, they continued to meet in the "slab" building near the site of the Tennessee Products machine shop until 1894, at this time the Methodist Episcopal Church constructed a lovely frame building on Kingston Avenue in "New Rockwood", its architecture was a reflection of the strong, Scottish influence of the planners. It stood where the #2 Fire Station is presently located. It was later, called the Kingston Avenue Methodist Church.

Since many families had moved to the New Rockwood area to escape the wildness of "Old Town", the ME Church, South congregation decided to erect a new building on Rockwood Avenue near, the - corner of Kingston Avenue. They continued to meet in the brick building on Hewitt and Wheeler while a grand frame building with stained glass windows and a belfry was being built.

On the first Sunday in February, 1901 the congregation marched "in a body" to the new building in New Rockwood. On October 3 1931 this building was completely destroyed by fire thought to be set by burglars. Immediately following the clean-up, a new brick building was constructed on the old foundation, Mr. John A. East supervised its construction. This building still stands today. It has been known as Rockwood Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Rockwood Avenue Methodist Church, and the First Methodist Church. The building was sold to a Baptist congregation in 1967 and is presently named Gateway Baptist Church.

On December 20, 1960, the Kingston Avenue Methodist Church was completely destroyed by fire. The only thing salvaged was the bell which M.H. Phillips had made at the old Roane Iron Company. The now First Methodist Church (Rockwood Ave.) invited the Kingston Avenue congregation to worship with them on Christmas Day.

Information for this article came from previous research prepared by Bettye Qualls and Stan Wassom; the notes of Mrs. Join, A. East; and other material from resources available at the Rockwood Public Library and the Roane County Heritage Commission.

At a church conference on January 22, 1961, with District Superintendent Blackard presiding, both congregations voted unanimously to merge and agreed that the new church would be named the Rockwood Methodist Church. The Rev. E.C. Trentham and the Rev. G.W. Atkinson would serve as co-pastors until June, 1961.

The next June, in 1962, the Rev. John Wilde was appointed as the pastor of the newly merged congregation. It was soon realized that the Rockwood Avenue building was too small for the merged and growing congregation. Thus, plans were made to build a new church. Mrs. Harry Molyneux (Belle) presented the property on N. Kingston Ave. (the old Bayless property) in memory of her late husband. The Rev. John Wikle and the building committee along with the whole congregation worked diligently to get the planning, funding and construction underway. On October 13, 1963, a Ground Breaking Service was observed with Mrs. Molyneux turning the first shovel of dirt.

On August 2, 1964 the Rockwood Methodist Church held its formal opening. The church was filled to capacity at the morning and evening services, with 1500 people attending, the afternoon's Open House. In 1968, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged, resulting in a change of name to Rockwood United Methodist Church.

Today three things remind us of our former churches' history: the Pulpit Bible, the old church bell (Church Bell: M. H. Phillips had made by Buckeye Bell Foundry & Roane Iron Company) from the Kingston Avenue Methodist Church which was, after the fire, kept under the safekeeping of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Williams until it was proudly mounted on the front lawn of the new Rockwood Methodist Church, and the Moller pipe organ brought from The First Methodist Church (Rockwood Ave.) is the sound which continues to bless this congregation.

Kingston Ave. Methodist Church



Rockwood United Methodist Church



First Methodist Church



Old M.E. Church South

