

HISTORY OF THE PENTECOSTAL FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCH

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Historically, Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Churches have traced their roots to Benjamin Randall and the Free Will Baptist movement, which was started in the New Hampshire area. However, more complete research has led to the conclusion that not any of the Free Will Baptist Churches in North and South Carolina owe their roots to the Randall movement. Free Will Baptists in North and South Carolina trace their roots to Paul Palmer. The Palmer movement is older than the Free Baptist or General Baptist movement in any other state, having begun officially in 1727.

The first official mention of a Free Will Baptist in the Randall movement appeared on the ministerial credentials in 1779. The North Carolina Free Will Baptist Denomination began no later than 1727, which was fifty-two years before the Randall movement. The North Carolina Free Will Baptist Movement has continued uninterrupted since that time. Free Will Baptist Churches in North Carolina were never a part of the Randall movement in the real sense; however, in 1831 a fellowship was attempted between the two groups. The North Carolina group was represented at one of the Randall meetings. Because of that, Randall listed the North Carolina members in his 1835 minutes. In 1837, the fellowship was interrupted over the question of slavery; thus merger was never accomplished.

North Carolina Free Will Baptists date their beginning earlier than the Randall group of Free Will Baptists in the north. Furthermore, the Randall movement merged with the Northern Regular Baptist in 1911. This resulted in Randalls group of Free Will Baptists losing their identity to the Northern Regular Baptists.

Palmer was a native of Maryland. His history can be traced in the colonial records of North Carolina. On April 3, 1720, he became involved in a court case concerning the ownership of a slave named ASambo. We know that Palmer was living in North Carolina at that time because in 1722, in Perquimans County North Carolina, he asked for a certificate of dismissal from the Quaker congregation in that county. There is record of his going North to be baptized by Owen Thomas at Welsh Tract, Pennsylvania. He was later ordained in Connecticut. On this trip, he preached throughout New England but returned to North Carolina for most of his ministerial work.

Palmer married Johanna Baker Peterson prior to 1720. She was the widow of Thomas Peterson in the Perquimian precinct in the northeastern part of North Carolina. Thomas Peterson had left her a plantation of about 500 acres surrounding the town of Edenton, North Carolina. After their marriage, Palmer became a wealthy landowner by the addition of his wifes property. Prior to his ministry, he was an important political figure in that area.

In 1726, Palmer began to attract attention as an evangelist in Chowan County. There is no record that Palmer ever pastored any church. Much of his ministry was as an evangelist preaching in homes that were open to him. He was a man of great ability and revival seemed to follow his ministry. Two people associated with Palmer who later had an impact on the Free Will Baptist movement were Joseph Parker and William Parker. Three churches can be traced directly to Palmers work. They were known at the time as General Baptist churches.

The name General Baptist distinguished them theologically from those who were Particular Baptists. The difference between the two had to do with the gospel call for sinners to be saved. General Baptists believed that God desired for all men everywhere to be saved and that the call was issued generally for Awhosoever will. This is in contrast to those who believed that some people are predestined to be saved, and some are predestined to be lost, and that they have nothing to do with it. We believe God calls all men to repentance, but whether or not they are saved has to do with the exercise of their free will. So as a matter of decision, people began to call them Free Baptist or Free Will Baptist.

The first church established by Palmer was in Chowan County near the community of Cisco. It was established with thirty-two members in 1727; Joseph Parker was the first pastor. The second church was in the Pasquotank precinct. This group of dissenters was lead by Palmer to file a request with the court of this precinct for a license to worship in the home of William Burgess. The date of the beginning of this church

was September 5, 1729. Morgan Edwards history tells of Palmers gathering another Church at New River, near the South Carolina border.

There is some question about what ultimately happened to those three original Free Will Baptist Churches. Palmers influence and ministry gave beginning to the Free Will Baptist movement in North Carolina. He is regarded today as the Father of the General or Free Baptist Churches in North Carolina. It is not certain when or how Palmer died, but it appears to have been sometime around 1747.

Although Palmer established the first Free Baptist Churches in North Carolina, Parker became the more important figure in the continuing story. His extended ministry and missionary travels with his brother William had tremendous impact. J. D. Huffman in his history concluded that from 1700 to 1757, Athis energetic evangelist band of Baptist provided most of North Carolinas spiritual enlightenment. There were twenty Free Will Baptist Churches in fourteen counties in North Carolina by 1755. These churches were on North Carolinas east coast, but the influence had gone as far north as Hertford County, west as far as Granville County, and south as far as Onslow County.

The events that transpired from that humble beginning are far too numerous to attempt to cover in this abbreviated history. The country was in a developing stage, and from secular history, it is clear that there was much struggle in the development. New churches continued to be added and small fellowship conferences were springing up all over North Carolina. As the years passed, Rev. Reading Moore became a key figure in our history.

Rev. Moore, born in 1781, and reared in Greene County, was ordained in 1816. He ministered over a wide area and organized three churches in the Marion, South Carolina, vicinity. In 1831, the Free Will Baptists in North Carolina released Moore and his churches to form a conference of their own in South Carolina. The Free Will Baptist Churches of North Carolina were in the northeastern part of the state, and travel for Moores group was difficult. Rev. Moore organized the South Carolina conference, and churches and ministers were added to the fellowship. It became a very successful endeavor.

The Stoney Run Church, located approximately five miles east of Dunn, N.C., and the Hodges Chapel Church,, located three miles west of Benson, N.C., in Harnett County are the two oldest churches of the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church. For years, the Stoney Run Church in Sampson County was regarded as the oldest Church of this denomination.

Stoney Run Church considers the year of 1850 as the date of its beginning. It is the site where the Cape Fear Conference was organized. The Stoney Run Church membership grew to well over three hundred before 1860 when it disbanded because of the dangers of the Civil War. Several battles were fought in the immediate area, such as the Battle of Aversboro and Bentonville. The church was re-gathered and re-established immediately following the war and has continued until this day.

The Hodges Chapel Church was formed out of a land grant made by a Mr. John Hodges. Mr. Hodges donated five acres of land on August 22, 1840, to be used Afor the purpose of building a house thereon for religious worship..... That building was used as a meeting place for the Quakers, Primitive Baptist and Free Will Baptists. Each of these was a distinct church occupying the same building. Since none of them had a full-time minister, they designated the Sunday for each group to have charge of the service.

We cannot identify the exact time the Hodges Chapel Church was organized. We do know that it was a part of the group that formed the Cape Fear Conference in 1855. The Hodges Chapel Church could have had its beginnings in 1840, but was started no later than 1855. There are records in a history written by Mrs. E. Pernice Barefoot and published by Hodges Chapel Church in 1985 that indicate that the church was in existence in the early 1840's. If this is true, it would make the Hodges Chapel Church the oldest church of this denomination.

There were seven other Free Will Baptist Churches organized during this general time frame that were in association with Rev. Reading Moores conference in South Carolina. James Turnage and William Harris went to South Carolina in 1855, to petition the South Carolina brethren for permission to start a conference with the seven churches in the Cape Fear river basin. Permission was granted and the churches met at Stoney Run on November 1, 1855, and organized the Cape Fear Conference. Elder John Williams served as the first moderator with William Harris as his assistant. The conference was named after the Cape Fear River that flows through that part of the state.

The following churches were present and became charter members of the Cape Fear Conference: Stoney Run of Cumberland County (now Sampson County), Long Branch of Cumberland County (now Harnett County), Fayetteville of Cumberland County, Shady Grove of Sampson County, Bethsaida (now known as Hodges Chapel) of Harnett County, Prospect of Harnett County, and Elbethel of Robertson County.

The Pentecostal experience came to the Cape Fear Conference early in 1907. As a result of the great holiness revival that broke out following the Civil war among Methodists there were formed holiness conventions. Blackmon Crumpler was the leader of one called the North Carolina Holiness Convention. That Wesleyan Holiness emphasis influenced the Cape Fear Conference of Free Will Baptist to adopt Sanctification as a second definite work of grace in the heart of a fully justified believer, subsequent to and separate from regeneration. This prepared the hearts of the ministers and members for reception of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit when the Pentecostal revival came to North Carolina.

Following account shows how the Pentecostal message came to the Free Will Baptist Church: A Methodist minister named G.W. Cashwell, who was associated with Crumpler in the North Carolina Holiness Convention, traveled to Los Angeles, California in 1906 to attend William Seymores Azusa Street mission revival. He received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.

Cashwell returned to North Carolina and very quickly scheduled a revival in an old tobacco warehouse in Dunn, North Carolina. The meeting started on New Years Eve in 1906 and continued through February of 1907. The meeting was a phenomenon that attracted many people of various religious faiths in the area. Leaders of the Cape Fear Conference of Free Will Baptists attended the meeting, and a number of them testified to receiving the Holy Spirits fullness and anointing. Among them were H.H. Goff, Willis B. Strickland, J.A. Blalock, C.A. Jackson, Hannibal Jernigan, James (Jim) B. Barefoot and others. The new doctrine and experience so influenced these leaders that they led the Cape Fear Conference to adopt the new faith as a part of the statement of faith for the Conference in the November 1-4, 1907, meeting held at the Long Branch church, one of the original member bodies.

The influence of the Cape Fear Conference grew. Ministers and churches were added so that the conference expanded over a wide geographic territory. Travel and the size of the group caused the leaders to begin to think about dividing the conference to accommodate the people. In the 1908 meeting of the Cape Fear Conference, Rev. O. B. Garriss of Watha, North Carolina, and Rev. C. J. Carr of Clinton, North Carolina, offered a petition that the conference be divided to accommodate travel. They requested that another conference be established under the Cape Fear Conference discipline to be known as the Wilmington Conference of the Free Will Baptist Church. Permission was granted and the first Wilmington Conference of the Free Will Baptist Church was held at the Lebanon Church (now disbanded) near Clinton, North Carolina, on Thursday before the fifth Sunday in November, 1908. The moderator, Elder E. L. Parker preached the first sermon in the Wilmington Conference. Seventeen churches and twenty-three ministers were represented in that first meeting.

Approximately three years later, in 1911, a group of representatives from some of the churches along with some of the ministers, formed another group known as the New River Conference of the Free Will Baptist Holiness Church, Inc. This group was located for the most part in the extreme southeastern section of North Carolina. Details of how this conference was formed are not fully known. We have interviewed some of the men who were alive at that time and participated in the beginning of the New River group. It seems that something similar to what happen with the Cape Fear Conference occurred. The Pentecostal Revival spread

from the Dunn area to that community some seventy miles Southeast. Instead of those who embraced the Pentecostal experience changing the doctrine of the Eastern Conference of Free Will Baptist Church, as the Cape Fear Conference did, they rather split with the parent group and organized their own conference and named it after the New River that flows in that part of the state.

In about 1910, a Bible College was attempted in the Lebanon Church area just south of Clinton, N.C., in the Beulah Community. Little can be found in our history about it. We do know, however, that a school was established and operated for about three years and was closed due to lack of support.

The 1911 Cape Fear Conference met at the Long Branch Church near Dunn, N.C. At this meeting, it was discovered that some of the churches and ministers neither believed the doctrine of sanctification as historically taught by the Free Will Baptist, nor accepted the doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Ghost according to the official teachings of the Cape Fear Conference since 1907. A resolution was adopted forbidding these churches and ministers from being seated as delegates because of their doctrinal irregularities.

The group that could not be seated left the conference, and a few weeks later, on January 12, 1912, held a meeting at the Shady Grove Free Will Baptist Church near Dunn, N.C. At that meeting, they decided to send a letter to all Free Will Baptist Churches of the Cape Fear Conference. The letter was an invitation and request for all churches to send delegates to a special meeting being called by the splinter group. E. R. Wilson, R. M. Parker, and W. A. Jackson signed the letter. As a result, twelve churches pulled out of the Cape Fear Conference to form a new group. Why these men were departing the Cape Fear Conference is clearly stated in the document they drafted at the 1912 meeting at Shady Grove Church eleven miles south east of Dunn, N.C. They expressly declared that they did not believe the doctrine of Aentire sanctification nor did they accept the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues as agreed on in the 1907 meeting of the Cape Fear Conference held at Long Branch Church.

The 1889 discipline that the splinter group objected to have read on sanctification:

A Mans side: A. A complete consecration of himself and all his to God and his service.

A Gods side: B. Is an instantaneous work of Gods grace in a believers heart whereby the heart is cleansed from all sin and made pure by the blood of Christ; it is obtained by faith and is subsequent to regeneration. The Christian can and should abide in this state unto the end of life, constantly growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The 1907 discipline records the newly formed position of the Cape Fear Conference on the doctrine of Pentecost that the splinter group dissented from. It was a declaration of belief in the baptism in the Holy Spirit of a fully sanctified believer; an endowment of power that comes with the attendant experience of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance.

The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Churchs teaching on sanctification and the baptism in the Holy Spirit today is consistent with the original teachings of the Cape Fear Conference as outlined above. Therefore, the Cape Fear Conference that joined with the Wilmington and New River Conference to form the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church in 1959, was the original Cape Fear Conference of the Free Will Baptist Church which was organized at Stoney Run Church in 1855. It teaches the same position on sanctification as the 1889 discipline. It contends for the same position that was adopted by the Cape Fear Conference on the doctrine of Pentecost in the 1907 meeting, four years before the split over these two issues in 1911. The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church has more than seventy per cent of the churches with it today that were with the Cape Fear Conference prior to the 1911 split, including the church in which the Cape Fear Conference was formed.

The splinter group could fellowship with Free Will Baptist Conferences in other parts of the North Carolina and in other states because others were also denying the doctrine of sanctification as historically taught as well the newly adopted Pentecostal doctrine.

There is no doubt that the main thing that precipitated the division was the doctrine of Sanctification and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial evidence of speaking with other tongues. Ministers throughout the Cape Fear Conference were teaching that one could receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost today even as it was received and practiced by the 120 on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The group that met at Shady Grove near Dunn in 1912 denied the doctrine of sanctification that Free Will Baptists had held, and they never accepted the teaching of Pentecost.

Because of the doctrinal disputes, the break with other Free Will Baptists of non-Pentecostal persuasion came. Our churches did not enjoy a close fellowship with other denominational bodies for many years. Today our identification is more with the Holiness and Pentecostal bodies than with the non-Pentecostal Free Will Baptist groups. This is evidenced by our membership in the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America and its successor organization.

In 1935, our churches began to publish Sunday school curriculum. Miss Nettie Johnson, the daughter of Rev. Jesse Johnson of Wilmington, N.C., was selected as the first editor-in-chief of the Free Will Baptist Sunday School Literature. She served in this role until 1947. Various writers were selected to prepare the age-level material.

Upon her retirement, Dr. Harvey English was selected as the editor-in-chief. He continued in that role until the amalgamation in 1959. At that time it was decided to enter into a contractual agreement with larger Pentecostal publishers to use the Sunday School Literature they provide. We have continued in that relationship until the present.

In 1940, there was an attempt to establish a Bible College by the Wilmington Conference. Mr. Carlton French chaired the effort. Mr. Will Butler from the Dublin church in Dublin, N. C., donated the land. It was to be known as Emmanuel Bible College. After several months of trying to raise funds, some building materials were gathered. The people just did not seem to have the vision for a school, so the project was abandoned.

On April 7, 1943, a very significant meeting was called at the Free Will Baptist Church in Lumberton, North Carolina. All of the ministers and churches of four Free Will Baptist conferences that embraced the Pentecostal experience, the Cape Fear, Wilmington, New River, and South Carolina Conferences of the Free Will Baptist Church were asked to attend. The meeting was to discuss uniting the above mentioned conferences into one general conference. Each of these conferences had been the same in faith and practice but had not been organizationally united since the agreement of 1908 in the Cape Fear conference meeting at the church in Benson, N.C., to allow some of the churches to form a Wilmington Conference. No previous effort has been made to reach out to our sister body of Free Will Baptists in the New River conference that believed and experienced Pentecost, nor the South Carolina conference that was formed as a result of leadership, revivalism and influence from ministers of the Wilmington conference.

The meeting was a success and a new general conference was formed with three of the four joining. Only the New River did not accept membership in the group. However they did faithfully attend the meetings. The General Conference continued to meet each three years until the 1959 amalgamation, at which time individual charters of the Wilmington, Cape Fear and New River conferences were dissolved. Though the New River conference did not ever join the General Conference, they did participate in the 1959 amalgamation. Unfortunately, the South Carolina conference of the Free Will Baptists did not agree to be a part of the consolidation of 1959. They did rename their conference to AFree Will Baptist of the Pentecostal faith. Even though each of the individual conferences that made up the one General Conference remained in tact as their own highest tribunal from April of 1943 until April of 1959, fellowship was

fostered between the groups. This was a key factor in bringing a closer working relationship that paved the way for the consolidation.

In 1951, the Wilmington Conference appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of starting a Bible College. Dr. Barney English chaired this effort. They developed a curriculum and selected the name, Temple Bible College. Unfortunately, one of the members on the committee decided to start an independent College in the spring of 1952, in the general proximity of this denominations churches. Therefore, not wanting to compete, the conferences efforts in this regard were dropped.

Much of the success of the 1959 amalgamation can be traced to the General Conference formed in 1943. Each conference continued to have its own officers and operate under its separate charter. A close fellowship was fostered, and they began to work on mutually beneficial projects. There was a free exchange of pastors from one conference to the other without regard for conference lines.

One of the major projects jointly attempted was to sponsor an orphanage. They were able to obtain a facility built by the county, which was formerly used as the Long Branch public school near Dunn, N. C. With the purchase, came approximately three acres of land and a house suitable to be used as a superintendents home. The orphanage was opened in 1945, and the first superintendent was Rev. Vance Davis. He was succeeded in 1948, by Rev. J. Edward Johnson who continued as superintendent until the orphanage was closed in 1961. That facility is still in use today as the main classroom and administrative building of Heritage Bible College.

There were early attempts to involve the church in a foreign missions outreach program. In 1918, George Kelly was sent to China as the first missionary from this church. He married a girl from the First Magnolia Church in Magnolia, NC. She died while they were serving in China. When the government changed so that it was no longer safe for missionaries to be there, he came home and pastored a church in Cerro Gordo, N.C.

In the late thirties, Mrs. Pearl Balleu approached the Wilmington Conference leaders about her burden to work in India. The conference raised the money and sent her. One person remembered a Rev. Marvin Parrish being sent to a foreign field for a brief period in this general time frame. However, after serving on the field, Rev. Parrish returned to pastor a church in Roanoke, Virginia. Rev. Carlton French petitioned the church to send him as a foreign missionary. The church responded and he went, unfortunately; little is known about the result of that effort.

In 1947, Mrs. Myrtle Blanton Holder approached Rev. J. T. Blanton, Wilmington Conference moderator and the treasurer, Mr. J. Richard Parker, about her burden to begin a denomination youth ministry. The idea was brought to the conference and accepted.

The Wilmington Conference owned a facility for campmeetings near Watha, N. C. In June, 1948, at the campgrounds, twenty-one boys and girls gathered for the first denomination youth camp. The first youth convention was held on Saturday afternoon of that week. The youth ministries were very useful in helping to bring about the fellowship that led to the 1959 amalgamation. The New River Conference began its youth program in 1953. Mrs. Jacqueline Hopewell was their first president, and Rev. B. A. Daughtry was the chairman of the monthly rallies. The New River and Cape Fear Conferences did not have a youth camp. They were encouraged to send their youth to the camp at Watha.

The Conference moderators continued to lead the conference in a closer working relationship. Numerous things happened that made merger more and more encouraging. The membership was seeing in a new light what could be accomplished by working together. Many began to envision these four conferences consolidated under one charter and one administration with one denomination name. Leaders began to meet and discuss the possibility. Ultimately, each moderator placed the amalgamation issue before his individual conference.

In 1959, at the time of the merger, Rev. J. T. Blanton was the moderator of the General Conference. The following persons were moderators of the individual conferences at the time the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church came into being in its present form: Rev. J. E. Andrews - Cape Fear Conference, Rev. A. C. Wheeler - Wilmington Conference; Rev. Ransom Kennedy - New River Conference; Rev. Ray Rumsey - South Carolina Conference. Each of the conferences voted for an immediate amalgamation except for South Carolina. They voted to drop out.

A joint Committee was formed from the Executive Committees of the three groups that voted to continue; their task was to do those things necessary to bring to reality a proposed merger. First, the committee had to agree on the plan of merger. They drew up the articles of Consolidation and outlined the necessary legal steps to be taken. After several meetings, it was agreed to add the word Pentecostal to the name to designate it from the Free Will Baptists Church that was not Pentecostal in faith. The plan was submitted for the approval of each conference. After most of the concepts had been resolved, an attorney was secured to prepare the charter and new by-laws for the merged groups.

In the merger plan, the former joint committee became the Board of Directors of the proposed new group. It was their duty to lay the foundation and organize the newly amalgamated denomination. Once the charter had been secured and approved by the Board of Directors, a historic organizational meeting of the churches and ministers was called. The meeting was held April 28, 1959, at the Owens Grove Church near Clinton, North Carolina. The moderator for the meeting was the Rev. Herbert Carter. They first adopted a set of by-laws to govern the body.

In accordance with these by-laws, the conference ratified the boards selection of officers. The necessary committees were established to get the infant organization moving.

The first officers to serve the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, Inc. were as follows: General Superintendent - Rev. Herbert Carter; Assistant General Superintendent - Rev. J. E. Andrews; General Secretary - Rev. A. B. Dawsey, Jr.; General Treasurer - Miss Charlotte Wells. These people, along with the General Board of Directors, were charged with the responsibility of establishing an office and putting together a program. With great faith and enthusiasm, they went about their work.

On August 26-27, 1959, the first General Conference of the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church was held. The meeting was held at the First Methodist Church of Clinton, North Carolina. In this meeting, the organization work was approved, the directors properly elected, and their terms designated. A program of work was set for the year ahead. The total merged group was 129 churches, 180 ministers, with a total membership of approximately 6,300. There were ministers and churches that almost immediately decided to withdraw. When things had settled, the total number of churches that remained was reduced to 93 with less than 6,000 members.

The first headquarters offices were established in the city of Clinton, North Carolina, in rented facilities. During the first year, problems developed with the orphanage at Dunn that resulted in its being closed in 1961. It was closed primarily because of lack of financial support and declining student body. There was a sizable farm and a number of buildings available that the orphanage had occupied. It was decided to move the headquarters to those facilities and to sell the farm because it was located elsewhere in the area. The money from the sale was to be used to purchase additional acreage joining the existing buildings. When this was accomplished, the total land owned by the denomination was approximately thirty-eight acres. It had a building to be used as its headquarters office and a home for its superintendent.

A part of the program for the first year was to divide the geographic area in which churches are located into districts. This was to encourage fellowship and make it convenient for communication and reporting. District officers were elected to help the general officers in the building of the new denomination. A similar organizational structure continues to be used. It was also during the first year that the work was divided into departments, and various boards and committees were established for the promotion of each phase of the work.

The second General Conference was also held in Clinton, N.C., at the Kerr School Auditorium. A large crowd attended the conference. Several churches and ministers were added to the fellowship, including the first person to represent the merged church on foreign soil, Rev. P. John Thomas. Rev. Thomas of Kerala, South India, had a mission work there and called upon this church to assist him in the building of a Bible School. The people adopted the project. Money was raised and the school was built. The first foreign mission project of the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church was completed in 1961.

During this time, Rev. and Mrs. Winfield Kelly petitioned the church to send them as missionaries to Hawaii. Though it is a part of the United States, it was a distant area in which the new denomination had no churches. The church agreed, and for the first time in its history, sent out missionaries in January, 1960. Since the days of those early beginnings, the church has established works in these foreign countries: Mexico, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nigeria, the Philippine Islands and El Salvador. God has blessed our efforts to reach those beyond our borders.

After the amalgamation, the Watha Campground served as the official campground facility for the merged church until 1962. Then the camp was moved to Dunn where the denomination headquarters was located and shared the thirty-eight acres of land owned by the denomination. The camp has grown and today it serves several hundred young people every summer. Additional acreage has been acquired so that today the total acreage at the site is approximately eighty. It has a beautiful western town setting with modern facilities used throughout the year as a retreat center.

This denomination began to merchandise Sunday school literature, from its headquarters along with other Christian books, Bibles and materials in January, 1963, under the operational name of Blessings Bookstore. Rev. R. M. Stewart was the first manager of the store. Rev. Don Sauls followed him in 1971. Rev. Curtiss Tatum became the manager in 1975 and continues as manager today. The store continued to operate from the headquarters after the new headquarters was built in 1973. In September 1981, it was moved into the Wayne Avenue Shopping Center in the town of Dunn where it is today.

The building originally used for the headquarters has in it a small auditorium. As the attendance for various meetings increased, it very quickly became too small to hold the crowds attending the General Conferences and Campmeetings. A large metal building was built on the headquarters property that would be adequate for this need. This building, with a seating capacity of approximately 1,200, was finished in time for the 1964 conference and campmeeting. Dr. C. M. Ward was the invited guest speaker for the first meeting in the new tabernacle. He was the nationally syndicated radio speaker for the Assemblies of God ARevivaltime Program.

The tabernacle at first was an open-air shelter. A couple of years later; metal walls were added but left unfinished on the inside. In 1985, large entrance foyer and restroom facilities were added. On the following year, the interior was completed. It serves today as both a general assembly facility and a recreational facility for the college and camp.

In 1971, the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church established a college in Dunn, N.C. under the operational name of Heritage Bible College. The founder and first president of Heritage was Rev. O. T. Spence. In 1974, Rev. Ned Sauls became president and served until 1984. The current president, Rev. William Ellis, followed him. Heritage is a four-year Bible College owned and operated by the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, Inc. Heritage occupies the building that was formerly used as the orphanage and later the headquarters near Dunn.

It has since added a modern dormitory and remodeled some of the other buildings creating a comfortable study place. A student life center was completed in 1995, and currently a beautiful library building serves as administrative offices, a computerized learning resource center, and library.

Upon the opening of Heritage, it became necessary to build a headquarters building. Six acres of land were purchased approximately one mile north of the college campus for that purpose. The land faces the

Interstate 95, thus providing excellent visibility for the organization. The office building is modern and well- equipped. It serves as the International Headquarters of the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, Inc.

Departments have been developed and new ones added as the work has grown. The General Superintendents Department is responsible for the Regional Directors. The Christian Education Department includes Crusaders for Christ, Sunday School, Ladies Auxiliary, Girls Axuiliary and Royal Rangers. The World Witness Department includes foreign missions, home missions, and evangelism. The General Services Department includes office management, accounting, information management, purchasing and maintenance, publications, and Blessings Bookstore.

The church continues to publish The Messenger, a sixteen-page monthly magazine that has been in continuous existence since the late 1800's. The Cape Fear Conference began to publish The Free Will Baptist Herald. The name was later changed to The Free Will Baptist Messenger with the sub-title AAn Advocate of Bible Holiness. After the 1959 merger, the word Pentecostal was added to the name, causing it to be consistent with the name of the new denomination. It is today widely received as The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Messenger.

The church has, for many years, been concerned with reaching out to Hispanics. That concern began to receive focus and direction during 1995. In October of that year the World Witness Board held a meeting in which a AField Coordinator for U.S. Hispanic Ministries was employed for the first time. The Board also approved a budget for one year and authorized the Field Coordinator to begin on January 1, 1996. The person hired as the first Field Coordinator was the Reverend Juan Velazquez who has been a Pentecostal Free Will Baptist ordained minister since 1979.

In the last months of Rev. Don Sauls leadership as General Superintendent, he led the board of directors in self-study with professional consultant assistance. In the first meeting the consultant raised the question: AShould we continue to exist as a separate organization. If not, why not, and if we should, then what course of action should we take to make the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church a better organization? The discussion of that question lead to the conclusion that we have a distinctive role to play in the Kingdom of God, and we should apply our best intelligence to the task of finding a way to perform the mission we are called to.

Five task groups were selected to lead in a study of five areas of concern. They were (1) organizational structure, (2) Service to Ministers, (3) Service to Churches, (4) Size and Growth of the churches, (5) and Partnering with other denominations. In order to get input from the grass roots, all ministers were given an opportunity to choose a task force they would like to meet with to assist in a plan of action. The results of the study done by each task group were thoroughly debated by the General Board of Directors. A resolution committee put the final results in resolution form. Then all ministers and delegates designated to serve each local church in the soon-to-be held General Conference were invited to a public meeting by district for a complete briefing followed by questions and answers.

The Board of Directors decided to present to the General Conference only the work of the task group on organization structure. The program task group conclusions were left to be instituted by the administration that would be in place following the General Conference of 1996. The organizational structure changes were as follows: (1) separation of offices, (2) procurement of staff, (3) defined leadership, (4) defined corporate offices, (5) establishing of the general superintendents advisory council, and (6) make-up of the General Board of Directors. The separation of offices resulted in removing all elected corporate officials from voting privileges on the General Board, a policy making group. Another result of organizational change was to allow the General Superintendent to hire the departmental leaders instead of using the election process. The advisory council was created to take the function of the former General Executive Committee. The Superintendent was granted the privilege to select regional directors.

General Superintendent Sauls felt that the process would not be considered an objective one if he remained in office. Feeling that the general membership might see it as self-serving, he graciously resigned his office

at the beginning of the process, but continued to chair the board through the next General Conference. The board of directors nominated Rev. Preston Heath, a minister of thirty years in the fellowship, to be their candidate to place before the delegates. He was elected and officially took office at the benediction of the 1996 General Conference. Superintendent Heath immediately restructured the church in accordance with the approved plan adopted by the Conference. He selected his co-workers for the various departments and regions and proceeded to guide the church toward a bright future. He has served for three and a half years to date. He is well accepted, and there is great optimism for the church and its mission to the world in the years ahead.

The mission statements that we adopted for the denomination and for the local churches are as follows:

PENTECOSTAL FREE WILL BAPTIST STATEMENT OF MISSION

The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church is a Christian fellowship committed to building biblically functioning communities through worship, instruction, fellowship and expression. Adopted by General Conference August 14, 1996

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE PENTECOSTAL FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCH

The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist headquarters exist to serve the fellowship in fulfilling its mission in a spirit of cooperation. This mission is to be accomplished through the following specific objectives:

To provide an organization by which churches and ministers may be duly affiliated and certified, and to provide ministry and services to those ministers, churches, and other entities of the Fellowship.

To promote world evangelization through involvement in both home and foreign missions.

To provide for the educational needs of our fellowship in a manner that strongly emphasizes our Pentecostal Free Will Baptist fundamental truths.

To provide Pentecostal curricular materials, literature, periodicals and publications that may be a service to our Fellowship and the Kingdom of God, using all available mediums.

To provide for cooperation and fellowship with other organizations outside our Fellowship who are furthering the Kingdom of God.

To provide a model of servant leadership that exceeds the expectations of our Fellowship and fellow team members. Adopted by General Conference August 14, 1996

Our ministers are respected in the areas in which they serve because they live honorably before God and men. Never has there been a time when the ministers and churches of this denomination had more with which to work than today. God has been faithful to us. We believe the brightest days for this church are ahead.

This is His church! We now have a mutually agreed on statement of mission. We know why we exist, why we are on earth and not in heaven. We have presented that mission in two parts. First the mission of the Denomination and second, the mission of the local member bodies. It exists to point men to the King of Kings who is the Savior of the world. This church exists to make disciples of men so that they can go and make disciples of others. Our purpose is that all men may be redeemed and come to praise Him. That is our challenge!

We call upon every member of this denomination to unite as never before and to live, labor, and worship daily in a way that will praise Him. Our opportunity is now, God is moving in a wonderful way in this generation. Let us not miss the opportunity. We have a wonderful history; we can have an even more wonderful future.

God created man for His pleasure. He chose to create us as beings of worship and praise to His glory. Worship is the privilege of Gods children. Praise brings God near, and it forms an atmosphere for personal interaction with God.

Let us join together as His people to praise Him for who He is. Let us join together to praise Him for what He has done through our rich and wonderful history. Let us join together to praise Him for what He is going to do as we walk with Him and trust Him for daily guidance. Let us praise Him for His sovereignty. Lets praise Him for His faithfulness. Let us praise Him for His benefits. ALet the people praise thee, O God: let all the people praise thee Ps. 67:3.

The leadership of this church acknowledges a great debt to those that have lived and served before us. Many have served God and this church with distinction and today are with the Lord. The progress of this church has to a large extent been because of the sacrifice of these people, some living and some dead. To all that God has used, we acknowledge a great debt of gratitude. Life for us is more pleasant and our work much easier because of those pioneers. We have a heritage of which we can be justly proud.

We especially acknowledge with grateful appreciation the contribution of Rev. Herbert Carter. Rev. Carter was a key person in bringing the amalgamation to pass in 1959. He provided effective leadership to the merged church as General Superintendent for its first twenty-five years. In 1984, when his term expired, he chose to dedicate himself to the world mission phase of the denominations work.

IMPORTANT PENTECOSTAL FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCH DATES

1720 Ministry of Paul Palmer and Benjamin Randall.

1779 First Free Will Baptist Church.

1855 Cape Fear Conference established.

1907 Wilmington Conference established. This Conference became Pentecostal.

1911 Cape Fear Conference split with other Free Will Baptist. New River Conference formed.

1948 Joint youth camp at Watha formed between conferences.

1959 Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church formed by amalgamation of the three conferences. Herbert Carter was elected as the first General Superintendent.

1960 Mr. & Mrs. Winfield Kelly, first PFWB foreign Missionaries commissioned.

1961 Orphanage formerly operated by three conferences was closed and church headquarters moved from rented facilities in Clinton to Dunn to use the old orphanage property.

1963 Blessings Bookstore opened.

1964 Youth Camp moved to Dunn.

1970 Mutual Benevolent Fund established.

1971 Opening of Heritage Bible College.

1984 Don Sauls was elected as the second General Superintendent.

1992 Cape Fear Christian Academy was purchased.

1996 Preston Heath was elected as the third General Superintendent.
The General Conference adopted an extensive reorganization plan.
The Benevolent Fund ceased operations.