



## HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ORA ASSOCIATE REFORMED PREBYTERIAN CHURCH

### Homecoming Committee Note:

*The following Historical Sketch was written for the 175th anniversary by Miss Bessie Byrd in 1965. The original sketch includes Rev. Guy Smith, Jr.'s remarks on The Compiler; Miss Bessie Byrd.*

*Minor corrections have been made to this original sketch. Photos have been added for the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary.*

It is a matter of regret that the earliest records of the Ora Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church seem to have been lost. The facts given in this sketch have been gleaned from the History of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South (and of the A. R. P. Churches) by the Rev. Robert Lathan, D. D. Facts have also been gathered from the 1803-1903 Centennial History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the later records of the Church, and from some of the older members of the Church. The oldest records now in possession of the elders of the Church date back to 1847. The minutes of the General Synod, the highest Church body, go farther back.

The name by which the early church was known was "Madole's Old Field", because the site on which the church was built belonged to a Mr. Madole. He later gave several acres of land surrounding the church for a community cemetery, which is still in use. The first building was constructed of logs and was not heated.

By 1809 the name was changed to Warrior Creek, the name of a stream about two miles northwest of the church. In 1836 the name was again changed to Bethel, the name it has kept until the present day. Only by custom is it now called Ora, the name of the little town in which it is located. The old records use the name Bethel. Ora was the name given to the community. The naming occurred in 1885 when the surveyor for the railroad asked that he be allowed to suggest a name for the depot to be located in the community and since he had fallen in love with one of the pretty young ladies of the community, he chose to call it "Ora", her name. He was later married to her and descendants of the family still live in the community today. The church at this time was ninety-five years old.

The Ora Church is among the oldest in the Synod. When the Associate Reformed Presbytery of the Carolinas and Georgia was organized at Long Cane (near Greenwood), S. C., on February 24, 1790, what is now the Ora Church was reported as a vacancy. (See 1 in Sources at end of Sketch). The Presbytery was organized with four ministers and forty-four churches, one of which was Ora (then called Warrior Creek); though there was no settled pastor at the time. Ten years later when the Presbytery was divided into First and Second, Ora became a member of the Second and has remained within its bounds until the present.

In 1812, Rev. John Renwick, Jr., who was pastor of a church in Newberry County, was called to become pastor of the Ora Church. He accepted the work, and thus became the first pastor on record, though he continued to live in Newberry County, going back and forth to the two churches for many years. In 1825 Rev. Renwick resigned the Ora pastorate. From 1825 to 1836 the church had no regular pastor but was supplied by Rev.

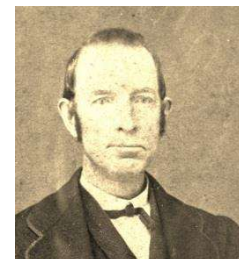


J. L. YOUNG

John Renwick, Dr. John T. Pressly, Rev. Henry Bryson, Drs. E. E. and J. P. Pressly. According to the minutes of Synod, the meeting of Synod was held at Ora in 1832. In 1836 Rev. J. L. Young became the pastor of the Bethel Church, together with the Laurens Court House Church, Providence and Head Springs. These were probably the only organized churches in Laurens County at the time. He served the church until 1851, when at his own request, the pastoral relationship was dissolved and he moved to Mississippi, taking with him most of the members of the Providence Church.

It is about this time that there began to be an element in the church wishing to make some changes in ordinances of the church, as it is recorded in the sessional book, which eventually led to the withdrawal of some of the members and organization of the Presbyterian (Southern) Church. The church building was later sold. This was the third church building and was jointly owned by the two groups. There is in the record an action affecting both groups. The A. R. P.'s were to use the building three Sabbaths a month and the Presbyterians one Sabbath a month, the second one, and this arrangement was followed until the A. R. P.'s erected their own building, the present one. This division weakened the original church as to membership and yet the congregation was rather large, being made up of both whites and blacks. The list of slaves and their owners is in the old record book.

Rev. J. L. Young was pastor at this time and was servicing three other churches, so it was thought wise to have an assistant pastor. Rev. D. F. Haddon was chosen to fill this place. He was born, reared and trained in Due West, S. C. In 1854 Rev. Haddon was installed as pastor of four Churches—Bethel, Providence, Head Springs and Laurens. The Laurens Church was organized in 1830 and built by Dr. Samuel Todd. After the Civil War the Laurens Church was sold and the work discontinued. The bell in the Ora Church tower is the bell once used in the Laurens Church. Rev. Haddon was the preacher at Ora for fifty years and her pastor for forty-two years; though during the last years of his life he was unable to preach regularly. He died in 1896 but his influence still



D. L. Haddon

lives on. He is buried in the Ora Cemetery. Though few figures are given, in 1871 the record shows 130 members, 80 whites and 50 blacks. Many of these blacks remained in the church until they died; others left as soon as they were freed. The slave cemetery joins the community cemetery but is badly neglected now.

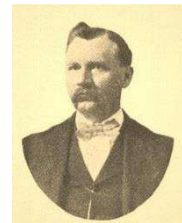
About 1870 three members from Providence—Mrs. Sarah Bryson, Mr. E. B. Anderson, and Mr. Newton Anderson---moved to Woodruff. From Bethel seven members, Brysons, Pearsons and Wrights, also moved to Woodruff. Rev. E. P. McClintock from Ora preached for them some. In 1879, Presbytery sent two elders from Bethel, Mr. A. Y. Thompson and Mr. W. A. McClintock, to help organize a church at Woodruff. The Church has never been strong but is still in the Presbytery.



H. Rabb      Rev. Horace Rabb followed Rev. Haddon, becoming pastor of Bethel, Head Springs and Providence in 1896. He remained pastor for less than two years, but during that time the present church building was constructed. The church was built by Mr. J. J. Dodd of Anderson, the stepfather of Dr. C. H. Nabors of Greenville. Mr. T. P. Byrd and his brother, Bill, got the timber off the church property, sawed and prepared it for the building. The land from which it came was later sold to T. P. Byrd in 1896. This was the fourth building used by the congregation. The first two were simple log buildings, with no heating systems and rough planks with no backs for support, and stood near the present location. The session house stood near the church and for many years was the community schoolhouse. The third building was jointly owned and used by the A. R. P.'s and Presbyterians.

The Bethel Church now felt it was strong enough to have a full time pastor so in 1896 Bethel sold her interest in the joint building and constructed the present structure.

Rev. Rabb left in 1897 and the church was supplied by Rev. W. A. M. Plaxico until 1901. Rev. B. H. Grier then became pastor of Bethel and served until 1910. For one year he was both preacher and teacher, having charge of the community school. The membership at this time was about 100, some being lost to nearby churches. The records show that during Rev. Grier's pastorate there was a splendid Sabbath School and Young People's Christian Union with a membership of 25. There was also a weekly Bible class and a mid-week service.



W. A. M.  
Plaxico

Dating back to 1874, the Woman's work was organized under Rev. Haddon and "Cousin Nancy" Lindsay, wife of E. E. Lindsay and sister of Margaret Taylor, the first wife of Rev. Haddon. This organization had about 30 charter members. It was called for many the Bethel Benevolent Female Society. It has been a vital part of the Ora Church since that time. The original minute book with the charter members listed is still in a good state of preservation. This society, like the church, is one of the oldest in the Synod.

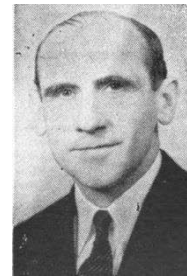
Rev. I. N. Kennedy became pastor of the Ora Church in 1912 and remained until 1924. During the first period of his pastorate the church was very active and growing. During



I. N. Kennedy

the latter part of his ministry here, heavy losses were sustained in the death of three of the most influential elders. Both from a financial and a spiritual standpoint the church was weakened. It was also weakened by the removal of several families to other churches, especially to Laurens. It was thought wise to open a mission in Laurens, so largely by contributions from the Ora Church, and the removal of several Ora families to Laurens, a nice church home was built in Laurens. For a short time the outlook was bright, but within the next few years, the mission suffered heavily from removals and deaths so was abandoned. The church building was sold for use as a home by a Presbytery committee.

From 1925 to 1929, Rev. P. L. Grier was pastor of the Ora Church. Being the only resident minister in the community, he was called upon to serve the entire community, which he did most acceptably. His ministry was short in years but fruitful in service. He was admired and loved by all. For several years after Rev. Grier left, the church was served by different ministers, most of them seminary students—W. L. Pressly, J. G. Brawely; two ministers—Rev. G. L. Kerr and Rev. R. Dale White.



P.L. Grier



J. . C.

In 1933 Rev. J. C. Smith became pastor. While he was here the outlook was very bright. There was a fine spirit of co-operation between the A. R. P. and Presbyterian churches. The Presbyterians worshipped with the A. R. P.'s three Sabbaths a month and the A. R. P.'s with the Presbyterians once a month. The young people of the two churches worked together in one organization. Rev. Smith was the community pastor and was loved by all. His musical talent was a great help to the church. While here he married a local girl, Hattie Mae Blakely, who has been a fine pastor's wife. The membership was now 88. There was an active Sabbath School, a mid-week service, a large young people's organization and a very active Woman's Society.

Rev. W. C. Alexander became the pastor of the Ora Church in 1937. The church made progress under his ministry. He was interested in all community efforts and attended the Rural Minister's Conference at Clemson College each summer. The church made improvements in the physical side of the work. The manse was remodeled both inside and outside; a gas heating system was put in the church; the inside of the church was redecorated; and four new



W. C.



rooms were added for educational purposes. In the latter part of Mr. Alexander's pastorate new carpet, new pulpit furniture, new organ, new blinds, underpinning and painting and improvements to the grounds were done. The cemetery



was enlarged and the women successfully sponsored a drive for the cemetery and \$700.00 was raised. Plans were also made to surface the cemetery drive and do other landscaping.

The membership of the Ora Church on March 31, 1952 was 76 communicants and a number of children. During 1952, the Presbyterian Church standing only a few yards



Old Fields

from the A. R. P. Church decided to disband since there were so few members and the church had not had a pastor for several years. On April 19, 1953, the entire membership, 19 communicants and 2 baptized children, were received by transfer from their presbytery, the entire group with the church property, becoming a part of the Ora Church to 96. We feel that this resulted in making a fine church for there has always been a good spirit of co-operation between the two churches. Another accomplishment of this same year was the organization of a young woman's society which began with 5 charter members.

The Ora Community has always been a lover of education so has put most emphasis on her schools until the last few years, when a radical change of educational policy in South Carolina made it necessary to discontinue the three teacher school in Ora. This was a matter of great regret to all the people. The school building has been purchased by the community and is now being used by the Community Club.



Due to the emphasis on Christian Education the community has been fortunate in that most of the citizens have been trained in denominational colleges. This has been a great asset to the church. The Ora Church can justly and proudly claim a number of ministers, some of whom spent their early life here and went to school here. The ministers native to Ora are: E. P. McClintock, J. M. Todd, E. E. Todd, H B. Blakely, Sr., W. A. Blakely, C. H. Nabors, R. D. Byrd, W. F. Blakely. Those here during the early years of life were: M. R. Plaxco, R. C. Kennedy, J. L. Grier, M. C. Grier, Neil Tingle. At least five women have married ministers: Margaret Taylor (first baby baptized by Rev. Haddon) later became his first wife, after her death Rev. Haddon married Eliza Thompson; Miss Emma McDill became the wife of Rev. J. S. A. Hunter, and A. R. P. missionary to Mexico; Emma Blakely married Rev. R. A. Young; Hattie Mae Blakely married Rev. J. C. Smith. One woman from the Ora Church, Miss Bessie Byrd, taught in Erskine College, the A. R. P. College at Due West, S. C. for about thirty years (1913-1944). Her teaching of Bible was perhaps her greatest contribution. After leaving Erskine she taught Bible in the Ora Church and others in the surrounding area until recently.



R. J.

In 1959 Rev. Alexander left to become pastor of the Ebenezer Church in Virginia. In 1960 a new pastor was chosen by the Ora Church, Rev. R. J. Robinson, who completed his seminary work that year. He and Mrs. Robinson, with their two children, did a fine work at Ora. A new manse was built costing about \$13,000 and is now paid for. A membership of 84 was reported. Landscaping was done on the

cemetery and some redecorating was done on the church. Rev. Robinson served at Ora for about three years. He felt the call to a larger field, New Sterling in North Carolina, so he gave up the Ora charge. For about a year after this Dr. P. L. Grier, retired and living in Laurens, supplied the church two Sabbaths and seminary students fill the pulpit on the other Sabbaths. In June the church unanimously called Mr. Guy H. Smith, Jr. of York, S. C. who had completed his seminary work in May 1964. He accepted the call and with his wife, Betsy, they began their work at Ora. Mr. Smith was installed by a commission of Second Presbytery on June 28, 1964. The commission was composed of Dr. P. L. Grier, Rev. G. L. Leitze, and Hon. Joseph R. Moss of Catawba Presbytery and the York Church. Though here for only one year they have done a fine work. Both are loved and respected by all members of the church. He is a fine pastor and his sermons are deeply spiritual. Every department of the church is well-organized and functions co-operatively. The mid-week prayer service is well attended and the time is given to Bible Study. His work with the young people is outstanding. His pastoral visitation is regular. The membership is now reported as 91.



G. H.

The church has put in new pews and plans are being made to add four new rooms for the educational needs of the church. Some work has been done in the cemetery, surveying and laying off plots and more is to be done. The Women's Missionary Society, organized in 1874, is still functioning actively. Plans are being made for celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the organization of the church at Ora. The name given the church, Bethel, has not been changed but is generally thought of as the Ora Church.

Not boastful of what the Ora Church has done in the 175 years of its existence, for it is all too little, but grateful for the many blessings God has showered upon it and the community, and the new life that seems to be permeating our membership, as we try to take our part in the plans synod sets before us, it is our prayer that in the years ahead, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, "Paul's prayer for the Philippian Christians may be fully realized in the Bethel Church: "and this I pray, that your love may abound yet and more in the knowledge and in all judgement; that ye may approve things that are excellent; That ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:9-11)

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### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. History of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South. (and of the A.R.P. Churches) Rev. Robert Lathan, p.286.
2. Minutes of the A.R.P. Church, from its organization.
3. Centennial History of A.R.P. Church, 1803-1903, p. 420.
4. Sesquicentennial History of A.R.P. Church, 1903-1951, p. 350, 506. Do not know why two records under different names and disagreement of two.
5. Sessional records of Bethel (Ora) Church from about 1841 to the present.
6. Several members of the Church still living at this time.

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## THE COMPILER

*The compiler of this history, Miss Bessie Byrd, is still an active and beloved member of this church of which she has been a lifelong member. "Miss Bessie", as she is known by all, was born in 1884. In her early life she taught public school and from 1913 to 1944, she faithfully served her Lord and Church as a professor of Bible at Erskine College. After retiring from teaching, she taught Bible Classes in the surrounding churches until just a few years ago. She is still living in Ora with her brother and remains an active and dedicated member of the church. It was said of her by Dr. R.C. Grier, President –emeritus of Erskine College, "....she was an invariable constant; at all times dutiful, industrious and exemplary. By living example as well as in class room instruction she represented a faithful and loyal servant to her college and the cause of the Great Teacher." Miss Bessie is in every sense a sincere and dedicated Christian.*

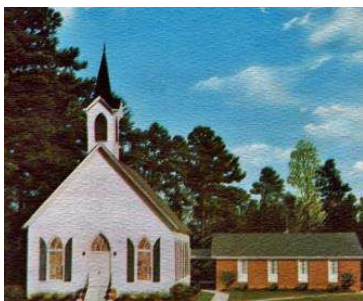
*The Homecoming Committee wishes to express its thanks to her for her untiring work in preparing this history.*

-Rev. Guy H. Smith, Jr.

### **Homecoming Committee Note:**

*The Historical Sketch was updated from 1965 through 2000 by members of our Church. Some additions have been made for the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary history.*

With Rev. Guy Smith as pastor, the Ora Church continues to grow and serve. On July 18, 1965 the Ora Church celebrated its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Homecoming Day. Dr. W.R. Echols, pastor of Neely's Creek A.R.P. Church, Rock Hill, S.C., brought the message at the 11:15 A.M. service. Former pastors participated along with the pastor, the Rev. Guy H. Smith. After the service a picnic dinner was served at the Community Center.



On May 1, 1966 the session asked Presbytery to make the name of the church "Ora A.R.P." as its official name since it was called that by common practice.

Also in May of 1966 a new educational building had been completed and was dedicated.

In December of 1967 the issue of using Bible Songs along with the Hymns in worship was voted on by the congregation and passed.

In 1974 a new steeple was added to the church to replace the one damaged by lightning.



In March 1975 the study was built onto the manse.

After twelve years of faithful and dedicated service to the church and community, Rev. Guy Smith resigned on May 23, 1976, to accept a call to the Unity A.R.P. Church in Lancaster, S.C.

The Session and congregation accepted this resignation regretfully. The Ora Church grew in many ways during the time Rev. Guy Smith and his family was here.

From June 1976 until May 1977, Dr. J. Calvin Smith served the Ora Church as the supply pastor. Dr. Smith has returned to Ora to live after his retirement. Ora was very fortunate to have him supply during this time.

In 1977 the Women of the Church planned a bazaar to be held in October of that year. The bazaar was a time of work teamed with fun and fellowship for the ladies. It was very successful with the funds raised going to the new educational building fund.



Rev. Allen Larson was called by the Ora Church, in May 1977, after completing Erskine Seminary. He accepted the call and moved with his wife, Margaret and son, Pat, to Ora. After faithfully serving the church for two years, he resigned on April 11, 1979, to accept a call to Bethel A.R.P. Church in Vidette, Ga.

A.

During July of 1978 the church held dedication services for the new education building. The new building would house three classrooms and a nice new assembly room. There is also a basement with ample room for get-togethers with a kitchen in one end.

In November of 1978 the Women of the Church held a bazaar with the funds going into an account for purchasing of flooring for the basement of the new education building. In preparing for this bazaar during the year, the ladies enjoyed the fellowship as well as the challenge of working toward a unified goal. The bazaar was very successful with growth in togetherness for everyone.

On May 27, 1979 the Ora A.R.P. Church extended a call to Mr. Gary Fravel. He had just completed his training at Erskine Theological Seminary. Mr. Fravel accepted and began his work here in June of 1979. We felt blessed to have Rev. Fravel and his wife, Debbie, son, Cory, and daughter, Mayme at Ora. Rev. Fravel left after faithfully serving as minister and pastor for 27 months.



G Fravel





In 1982, Richard C. Lewis, Jr. was called to be our pastor. Following his graduation from Erskine Theological Seminary, his ordination and marriage to Belinda Sellers, they moved into the manse. During his tenure, our first adult choir was organized and choir chairs were purchased.

During 1985, the first women deacons began serving at Ora.

R. C.

In 1980 and 1985 two groups of young people went to visit the missionary fields in Mexico

In 1989, Rev. Lewis accepted a call to a mission church, Scots Kirk in Summerville, South Carolina. Rev. Lewis had given Ora seven faithful years as minister and pastor. The church then called Rev. James A. Loughner to be its new pastor. Following his graduation from Erskine Theological Seminary and his ordination in Virginia, he and his wife, Vicki, and children, Christina and Benjamin, moved into the manse. There were 88 active members at this time. In 1996, Rev. Loughner accepted a call to help establish a mission church in Mauldin, South Carolina after faithfully serving seven years as pastor of the Ora Church.



J. A.



In 1997, the church hired Mr. Robert D. Turner, an Erskine Seminary student, to be the stated supply. He and his wife, Rachel, moved into the manse. After his graduation from Erskine Seminary in January 1998, the church called Rob as their pastor. He was ordained and installed at the Ora Church on March 22, 1998. On November 29, 1999, a son, Daniel, was born to the Turners. Rob, Rachel and Daniel are loved by all and Rev. Turner faithfully preaches the Word of God.

R. D.

The church has an active Sunday School with classes from nursery through adult, with a total of 58 members. We have Prayer Meeting, two active youth groups, ages pre-school through teenage with a total of 22 members. The church also has two circles of the Women of the Church for a total membership of 21. The Ora Church also has a Men's Club, which has a prayer breakfast each quarter.

The Ora Church is active in Home Missions and in Foreign Missions, helping support Ali & Tara Mitchell, Jim & Gala Coad and Jane Blakely Jennings (who was raised in Ora).

The total membership of the church is 110, at this time. We look forward to God working out His plans in the life of the Ora Church as we celebrate our 211<sup>th</sup> anniversary and begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today you will find the photographs of former pastors of the church from 1836 to present and 7 pictures of former pastors of the Old Fields Presbyterian Church from 1895 to 1953 in the assembly room. This was begun in 1972 and is updated as necessary. As you look over this group you come to realize that Ora has been greatly blessed with leaders that are dedicated men of God.

**Homecoming Committee Note:**

*The Historical Sketch was updated from 2000 through 2015 by Jean Blakely.*

Robert D. Turner was the pastor at the Ora A. R. P. Church from August 1997 until March 2003. During the years the Turner's were here they had two sons: Daniel Patrick and Michael Douglas. Upon leaving the pastorate at the Ora Church, Rob and Rachel and their two sons went to Turkey in October of 2003 to take up mission work in that country.

During the years when our church was without a pastor the church was supplied by students from Erskine Theological Seminary as well as other ministers. On November 6, 2005 Samuel F. Roper, a senior student at Erskine Seminary began serving as our student supply. Sam, his wife Pam and sons, Joey and Michael moved into the church manse in December 2005. Upon completing his seminary training Sam was ordained and installed as the pastor of the Ora A. R. P. Church on January 6, 2006.



S. F.

For many years our youth have participated in the denominational Bible School which takes place in July in the Appalachia area of Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky. Leaders of this group have been faithful in taking these young people to the Appalachia area for the week of Bible Schools in various churches. Youth leaders who have accompanied the young people over the years to Appalachia and to Bonclarken for youth retreats are: Leslie and Amy Blakely, Lucy Gibson, Abby Hope, Zelda McClintock, Sam and Pam Roper.

Our music director Sharon McAuley has planned and presented special music with the adult choir as well as the youth choir. The music has been a special addition to the worship.



During 2009 the church was refurbished. The two rooms at the entrance of the church were brought back to their appearance when the church was built in the late 1800s. In November 2009 the carpet in the sanctuary was removed and the original pine floors were sanded and varnished. Carpet runners, pew cushions and pulpit furniture cushions were put in the sanctuary. Since then improvements have also been done in the Bethel Building. New carpet has been put in the Assembly Room and Sunday School rooms upstairs. The Fellowship Hall and kitchen in the basement have been repainted. In October 2014 new wider steps and railings were installed at the front of the church leading into the sanctuary to replace the older steps that had become unsafe.



In the fall of 2014 work began to restore the slave cemetery which is located down the hill from the Ora Cemetery. A trail was cleared into the slave cemetery area and fieldstones marking the graves were noted. The Cemetery Committee recommended to the session to put up metal posts joined by a chain around the slave cemetery. A marker identifying the slave cemetery was directed at the start of the trail leading down the hill to the cemetery. The slave cemetery will be dedicated in July 2015.

