1947 - Const. Sept. 7 Admit. to GASTON under watchcare.
1948 - Full member.
Sunset Forest - 1947

1925 -  
1926 -  
1927 -  
1928 -  
1929 -  
1930 -  
1931 -  
1932 -  
1933 -  
1934 -  
1935 -  
1936 -  
1937 -  
1938 -  
1939 -  
1940 -  
1941 -  
1942 -  
1943 -  
1944 -  
1945 -  
1946 -  
1947 - Admit to Boston under watch care (25)  
1948 - Fall member (29)  
1949 -  

Yaston Co.
Authorities offering $21,000 reward for information on church fires

By Kevin Ellis, Gazette Staff Reporter

CHARLOTTE — Police are looking for a connection between fires at five churches last week in Gaston and Mecklenburg counties, while at the same time alerting communities of the need to protect their houses of worship.

On Monday, federal, state and local law enforcement held a press conference in Charlotte to urge communities to protect their churches against arsonists.

"They look like they're connected, but you never know for sure until you complete all the investigations," said Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Deputy Chief Jack Boger. "We're looking at all of them independently but continuing to look for linkages."

Police say they have found no graffiti or evidence of cult activity at any of the churches.

Jack Boger, deputy chief of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, holds a resource guide that could help churches protect their buildings from arsonists.

On Monday, federal, state and local law enforcement held a press conference in Charlotte to put communities on notice that they need to take steps to secure their churches.

"They look like they're connected, but you never know for sure until you complete all the investigations. Arrest somebody and find out why they did it," said Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Deputy Chief Jack Boger. "We're looking at all of them independently but continuing to look for linkages."

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Church in Stanley and ending with two fires Saturday in Mecklenburg County — police say someone intentionally set fires at five churches, the first two in Gaston. Authorities are offering a $21,000 reward for information leading to an arrest.

The rash of fires prompted law enforcement in both counties to contact the National Church Arson Task Force, which President Clinton began two years ago when a string of fires at predominantly black churches created a national outcry.

Unlike those fires, the recent church fires have been at churches with predominantly white membership.

In a span of six days — starting with a Feb. 8 fire at the First Baptist Church in Stanley and ending with two fires Saturday in Mecklenburg County — police say someone intentionally set fires at five churches, the first two in Gaston. Authorities are offering a $21,000 reward for information leading to an arrest.

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Shelby Pastor To Preach In Revival Here

The Rev. Wilson Padgett, pastor of Eastside Baptist Church, Shelby will be the visiting evangelist for revival services at Sunset Forest Baptist Church. Services will be held each evening at 7:30 p.m. Monday through Sunday, May 1-7.
Fires

any of the fires. Police also do not know if a single person or persons is responsible for burning the churches.

"We don't have a particular suspect," said Deputy Chief Larry Snider, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police. "We've done a lot of canvassing of neighborhoods and communities and are looking at people whose names have been given to us."

In Gaston County, patrol officers have been told to check the churches in their assigned districts on a regular basis, said Capt. W.J. Farley.

Besides all five fires being at churches, other similarities indicate possible links, police say.

All the fires were set near doors or entranceways, an accelerant was used in each fire and three of the fires were started around the same time, between 7 and 8 p.m.

On Sunday, 85 members of Sunset Forest Baptist Church, 903 Hickory Grove Road, Gastonia, met in their gymnasium after a fire last Tuesday caused approximately $500,000 damage to the sanctuary. The Rev. Michael Horne and other members built an altar in the gym and sectioned off areas to divide Sunday school classes on Saturday.

"That's just a building, the church is the people," Rev. Horne said.

Rev. Horne preached a lesson of forgiveness on Sunday, reminding the congregation that four other churches also were hurting.

"We've already forgiven whoever did this, you've got to. But we do expect justice," said Rev. Horne.

It will be 10 months before the 140 members of Sunset Forest get back into the sanctuary, Horne said. On Sunday, the church family already showed signs of coming together during adversity, with eight people making new professions of faith, he said.

"He can take something bad and make good come from it," Rev. Horne said.

The fire at First Baptist Church in Stanley was discovered around 9:30 a.m. on Feb. 8, said Stanley Police Detective Heath Jenkins. Members found a stick with cloth wrapped around the end near the rear entrance. About two square feet of floor was scored before the fire burned itself out, Jenkins said.

The first of the Mecklenburg County fires occurred Thursday at Garden Memorial Presbyterian Church. Someone poured a flammable liquid around one side of the Garden Memorial sanctuary and lit it around 7:30 p.m. Thursday. The fire caused less than $2,000 in damage.

At 7:25 p.m. Saturday, someone set fire to the kitchen door at Moore's Chapel United Methodist Church, located about a half-mile away from Garden Memorial. Damage was estimated at $2,000.

Three-and-a-half hours later, fire destroyed the front doors of New Apostolic Church, a few miles from Moore's Chapel Road. Damage was estimated at $3,000.

New Apostolic Church members didn't hold services on Sunday but hoped to be back in the church this week, the church's pastor said.
To Observe Anniversary

The 30th anniversary of Sunset Forest Baptist Church, Springwood section, will be observed Sunday, Sept. 25.

Morning worship service will begin at 10:30 a.m. with the pastor, the Rev. Fred King, bringing the anniversary message. Special singing will be a part of the service. Picnic style lunch will be served in the fellowship building at approximately 12 noon.

All former members and friends of the church are invited to participate in the anniversary service and lunch.
Authorities suspect arson in church fire

By Michael Sadoff
Gazette Staff Reporter

MCADENVILLE — The pastor of Sunset Forest Baptist Church said he has no idea who would want to burn his church down.

But fire officials confirmed Wednesday that arson was indeed the suspected cause of a fire Tuesday night at the church on Hickory Grove Road, which sits one mile outside of McAdenville in the Springwood area.

“We’ll, it’s sad. We wished it wouldn’t have happened, but we’re not going to let it stop us from serving the Lord,” said the Rev. Michael Horne.

Chairs were already set up in the basement of the harborage for Wednesday night services, he said, and on Sunday they will begin congregating in the church’s gymnasium.

Firefighters had to cut off power to the gymnasium while they were working Tuesday night, and it had not been restored on Wednesday.

Eight fire departments responded to the call, which came in around 7:30 p.m. Tuesday after a neighbor spotted smoke from a car on Hickory Grove Road.

Chief Jerry Swift of the Community Volunteer Fire Department said four departments remained at the scene until around 2 a.m. Wednesday.

“The basement was destroyed. The rest of the facility sustained moderate to heavy smoke and heat damage,” he said.

Gaston County Fire Marshall Jim Pharr estimated damage to the church at $150,000. He would not discuss details about the arson investigation.

“We pretty much suspected arson last night because of the origin of the fire,” said Swift on Wednesday. “It was at the rear door of the building.”
S.O.C.K.S. group booted from its Belmont home

Church’s decision based on United Way rule against witnessing

By Wanda R. Garrett
Gazette Staff Reporter

NORTH BELMONT — Sunset Forest Baptist Church members wanted to tell people assisted by S.O.C.K.S about God and his salvation. But because they couldn’t, the charitable organization is being evicted.

The Rev. Wilburn Edmondson said that was one of the reasons church members voted to ask the United Way-sponsored agency to find a new home after working out of the fellowship hall for a decade.

The organization has until Dec. 3 to leave.

“This was not an anti-United Way vote and I have nothing against United Way,” said Rev. Edmondson. “But if someone came to S.O.C.K.S. through the United Way for help, the membership of the church was not allowed to witness to those people about the Lord and salvation.”

United Way officials on Thursday expressed disappointment at the decision.

“We feel S.O.C.K.S is one of our premiere agencies,” said Barbara Voorhees, United Way executive director. “It's all volunteers, very dedicated people who help those who really need it. This is a very critical time of the year for families and children.”

S.O.C.K.S., which stands for Serving Our Community with Kindness in Springwood, helps residents in that area who need clothing, food, medicine, help with utility payments and rental assistance in emergencies. In 1995, the organization assisted 1,644 families and 3,429 people.

Mrs. Voorhees said it is inappropriate for church members to
SOCKS

FROM 1B

witness to S.O.C.K.S. clients because the organization was set up to provide emergency relief to people in need, not spiritual guidance.

The United Way does give money to organizations that stress Christian principles — the Salvation Army and the YMCA. But in those cases, it is the agency's mission. In the case of S.O.C.K.S, the church is landlord but does not play a role in the running of the organization.

Church members also wanted to oust S.O.C.K.S, Edmondson said, because they had to check with S.O.C.K.S before scheduling church meetings.

"It's not right for us to go to them to schedule church meetings," he said. "They should be coming to us."

Church members were also upset, Edmondson said, because S.O.C.K.S volunteers often helped people while the congregation was holding worship services.

"While worship services are going on, there shouldn't be any other activities going on in the church," he said.

"If someone comes on Sunday and needs help, we don't wait until Monday," said Lee Allen, S.O.C.K.S. director.

Doris Chapman, a member at Sunset Forest for 30 years, said she voted against having S.O.C.K.S. move.

"Some people, especially the treasurer, think we can't fund them any longer," said Mrs. Chapman. "We do pay for their power. But I know if they stayed, the Lord would give us the means to continue to do that."

In addition to the United Way, S.O.C.K.S. also receives support from the Glenn Foundation, the Western North Carolina Presbytery missions program and individual contributions.


The search for a new location in the Springwood area has been going on since September, said Allen.

"We're looking for a miracle in the clouds," Allen said.

It would be a big help, added Allen, if the church would allow S.O.C.K.S. to use the fellowship hall until after Christmas.

Rev. Edmondson said church membership may discuss the possibility in the coming week.

In the meantime, Allen said, the search will intensify for a location preferably in the Springwood area.

"People are helping us try to locate a lot on Hickory Grove Road where we can at least put up a building of some sort," he said. "And we all believe in the power of prayer."
Rev. T. Alfred Woolbright has assumed the pastorate of Sunset Forest Baptist Church, Springwood Community, as of Jan. 1.

He and Mrs. Woolbright are at home in the church pastorium on McAdenville Road. He brought the first message at the Sunday evening service Jan. 4.

A special day was observed, "Rally Day '87," as they kicked off their ministry together as pastor and people. Special emphasis was given to Sunday school attendance, morning worship, Sunday school enrollment and offerings for the day.

For the past five years, Pastor Woolbright has served as associate pastor in education/outreach for the Durham Memorial Baptist Church, Charlotte.

He is a graduate of Furman University, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and has studied at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.

Rev. Woolbright has taught at Union Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans and has toured several mission points in several foreign countries in Europe, the Mid-East and spent a week in Israel.

He was on a preaching mission in the West Indies in 1969. Most of his ministry has been as a pastor, associate in education, outreach, youth and music in South Carolina.

Rev. Woolbright has served in many positions with churches, associations, affiliated with the South Carolina State Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Pastor Woolbright grew up in Abbeville, S.C. During World War II he served aboard the USS Massachusetts in the captain's office in both oceans. He and Mrs. Woolbright have two sons, Wallace A. Woolbright of the North Carolina Patrol in Morganton, and Michael E. Woolbright, director of music/education with Myers United Methodist Church, Gastonia. He lives with his wife, the former Cindy Walls, on Circle Drive, Mount Holly.

A special service of recognition was given for Rev. and Mrs. Woolbright by the Durham Memorial Baptist Church Sunday, Jan. 4, in recognition of his earlier announced retirement.

A special invitation is extended to those who do not currently have a church home and who would like to become a member.
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Religion

Last Service March 31

Rev. Woolbright To Retire At Sunset Forest Baptist

Pastor T. Alfred Woolbright will preach his last service as pastor of Sunset Forest Baptist Church in the Springwood community on Easter Sunday, March 26. He is retiring as pastor of the church on March 31.

The last Sunday in May will mark 41 years in the pastoral ministry for Rev. Woolbright who also served as Music Minister for two years while a student at Furman University.

Rev. Woolbright earned the Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and also studied at Princeton Theological Seminary. He taught at Union Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans which was sponsored by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

During the 27 months that he has served Sunset Forest Baptist Church, the church has added 66 new members with 35 joining on profession of faith. Over 200 new people have been enrolled in Sunday school, increasing the enrollment from 70 to a high of 196.

During this time, Sunday school has averaged 20 more per week than in the 1986 church year and a high attendance of 121 has been reached. One class has gone from an average of five to an average of 15-25 in attendance having had 42 on two occasions.

Attendance High

A church attendance high of 170 was present for Homecoming in September 1987 and 135 in 1988.

REVEREND WOOLBRIGHT

While Rev. Woolbright has been pastor, income received has amounted to $115,000. The church building and the pastorium have been painted, new furnishings provided for the pastor’s study, a new refrigerator for the kitchen and other improvements.

The debt on the church renovation has been reduced from $36,000 to $30,000. Recently a lift has been installed for senior and handicapped members to assist them in getting into the church auditorium, at a cost of approximately $7,000. Over $21,500 has been given to missions beyond the church community.

A church survey of the membership and facilities has been made by the Rev. Richard Spencer of the Gaston Baptist Association with the membership giving input into things they would like to see the church accomplish. The Church Elected Committee of Eight is to review this report and make recommendations to the membership.

During the first weeks of Pastor Woolbright’s ministry, Max Erwin of the United Way requested him to assist Erwin in getting ministers in the community together to consider establishing a crisis support service for the Springwood community. After several meetings of ministers, others from the churches and community, an organization was formed with the name “Serving Others With Concern and Kindness in Springwood,” S.O.C.K.S.

Many Help

A large number of persons have given of their time, service, money, clothing, furnishings and food over the past two years to help others in special times of need. For over a year, Leroy Ramsey has given leadership to S.O.C.K.S. and has served as treasurer. The Sunset Forest Baptist Church has allowed S.O.C.K.S. to use space in the fellowship building for its projects.

Mrs. Woolbright has served as an organizer for the church during this time and has taught a Sunday School Class. She has also participated in a community Morning Bible Study Group consisting of a number of women from several churches and has shared in leading Bible studies.

Rev. Woolbright has done an extensive updating of the church membership roll and has enlisted a number of members to participate in the church ministry again. The church was carrying a membership of 465 which has been adjusted to approximately 250 members accounted for.

Pastor and Mrs. Woolbright will continue to live in the area. Their youngest son, Michael, his wife, Cindy, the former Cindy Wall, and little daughter, Farren, live in Mount Holly. Michael is music director and assistant at Unity Baptist Church, Belmont, and Cindy is owner and director of Fantasy World Day Care of Mount Holly.

Having had a varied ministry as pastor, associate pastor in Education, Outreach, Music, Youth Ministries, Sunday School Campaigns, Evangelism and Bible Conferences, he will continue in his retirement in the knowledge that he has the opportunity to do so.
S.O.C.K.S. volunteers, from left, Wayne Eller, Jennifer Morgan, Betty Eller, Jimmy Morgan, Thelma Jones

Searching for a home

Springwood group will have to relocate if church closes hall

By Wanda R. Garrett
Gazette Staff Reporter

NORTH BELMONT — S.O.C.K.S. is looking for a new home. Serving Our Community With Kindness in Springwood — S.O.C.K.S. for short — has operated out of the fellowship building at Sunset Forest Baptist Church for the last decade.

The future of S.O.C.K.S. was discussed briefly during a September meeting at the church, said Craig Farmer, a 40-year member and former deacon. The issue will come up again this month.

Lee Allen, director of the community assistance group, said he could not attend the meeting, but was told by one of the church deacons that the church was going to close down the fellowship building and
Juvenile deaths hit all-time low in state

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Study: Health of North Carolina children

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Foreign study

Kristine Keathley, Belmont, a student at UNC-Greensboro, is studying abroad in the United Kingdom during the 1996-97 academic year. She is one of about 150 UNCG students selected to take part in exchange programs this year.

UNC-Greensboro news

Rick Smyre, Gastonia, president of the Center for Communities of the Future and Strategic Concepts, will serve as keynote speaker for the 20th annual McIver conference, sponsored by the Alumni Association.

Nomination forms are available by calling Wake Forest University at 910-759-4696.

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