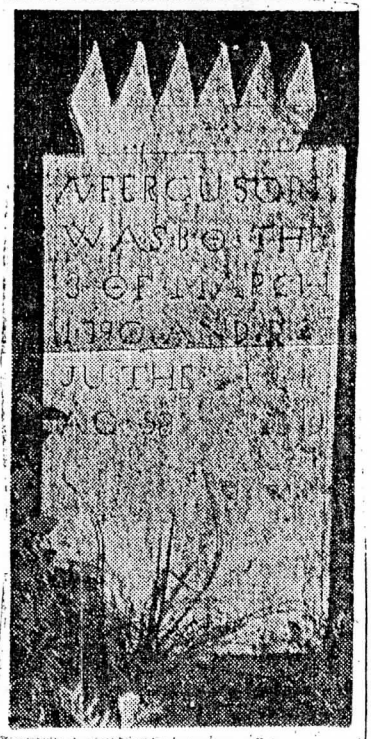
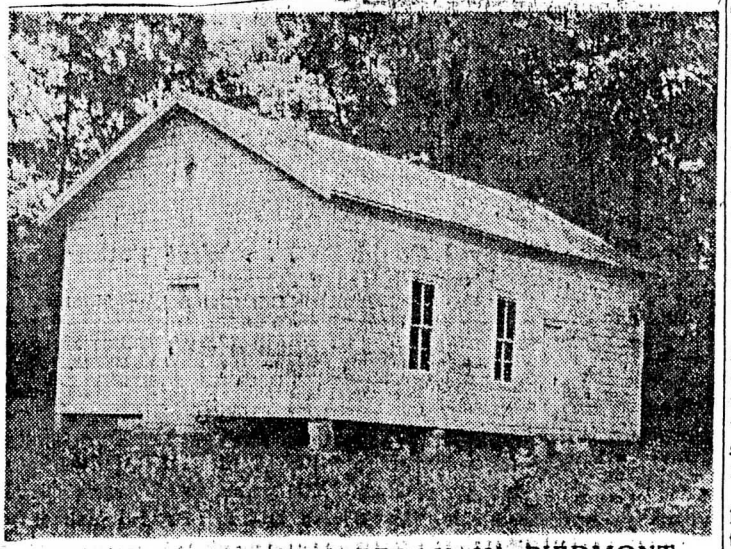
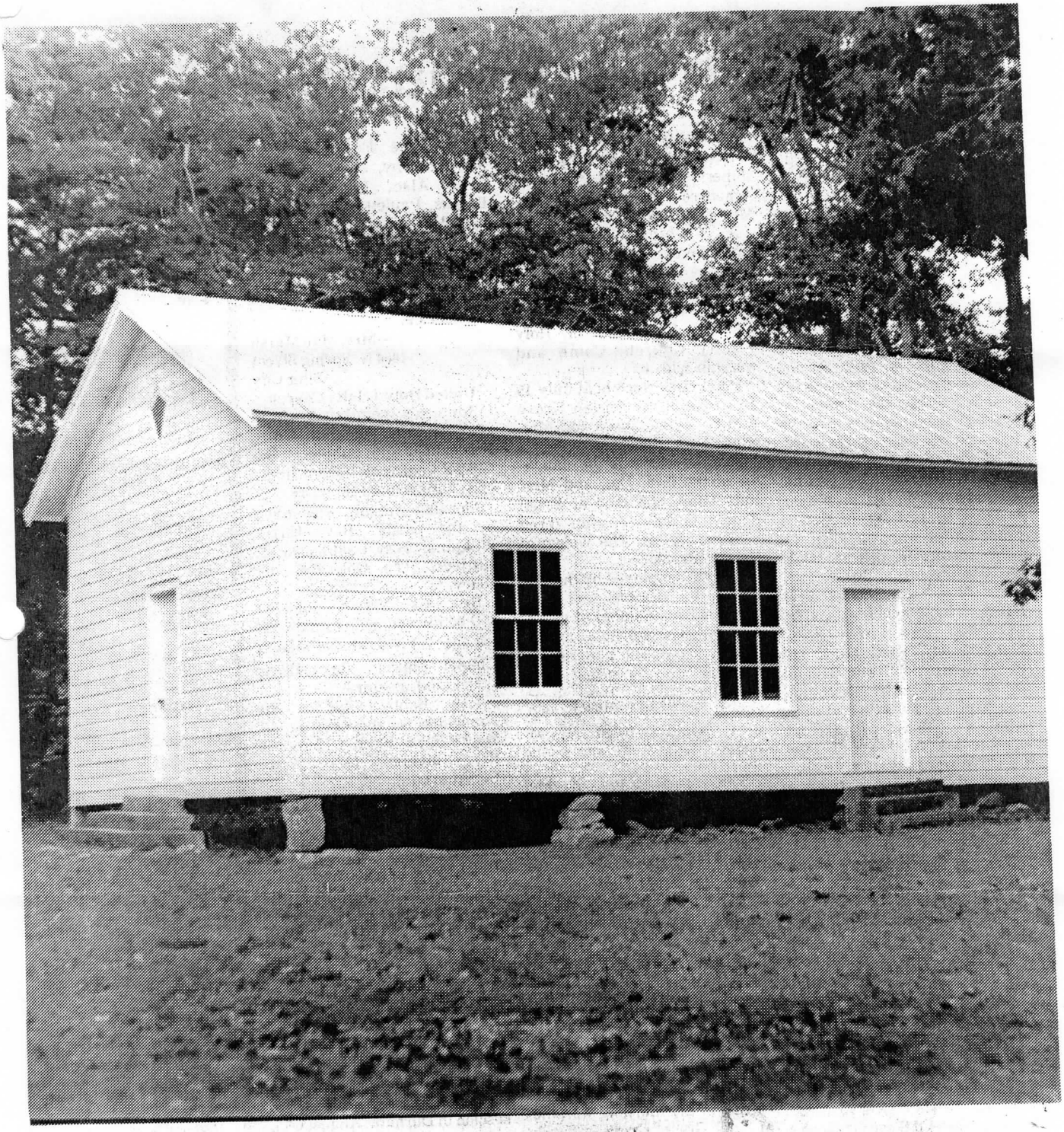




WHERE METHODISM BEGAN IN PIEDMONT

The little white chapel in lower picture stands on the site of old Rocky River Methodist Church, the first Methodist church established west of New Bern by Bishop Francis Asbury. There are many old tombstones in the churchyard, like the one above at the grave of Isaac Ferguson. The dates testify to the age of the church.

A46.1



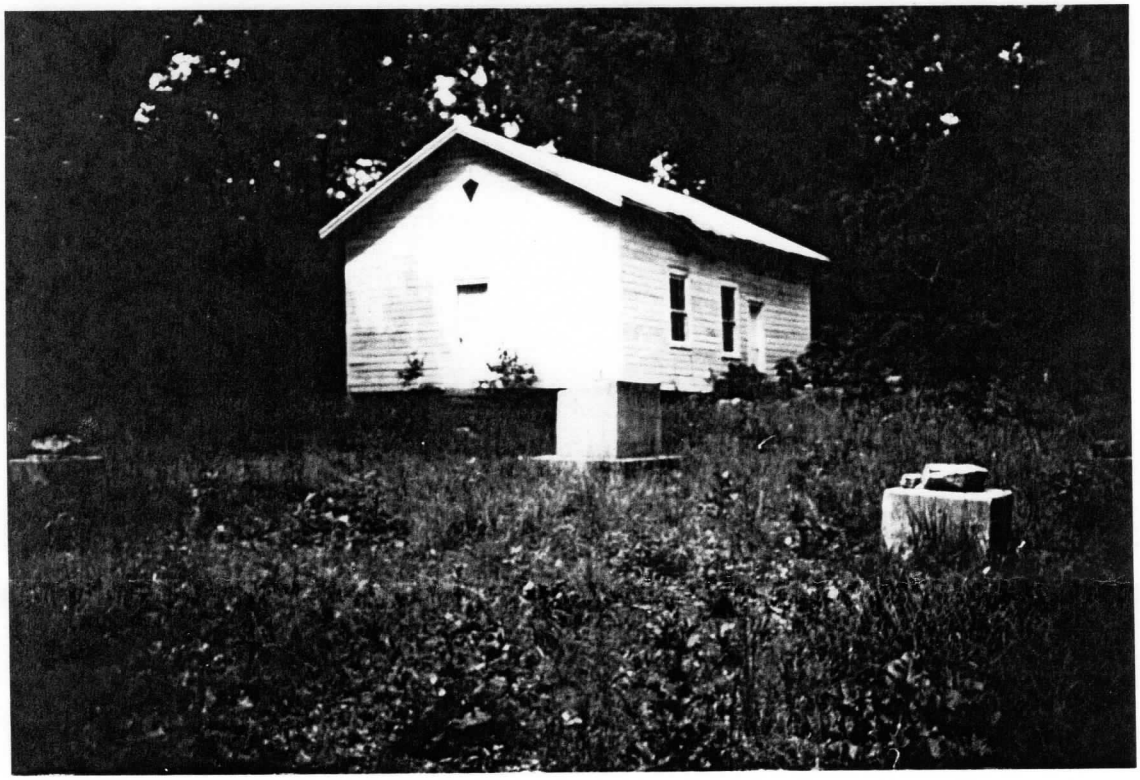
Memorial services set

1780 wh42

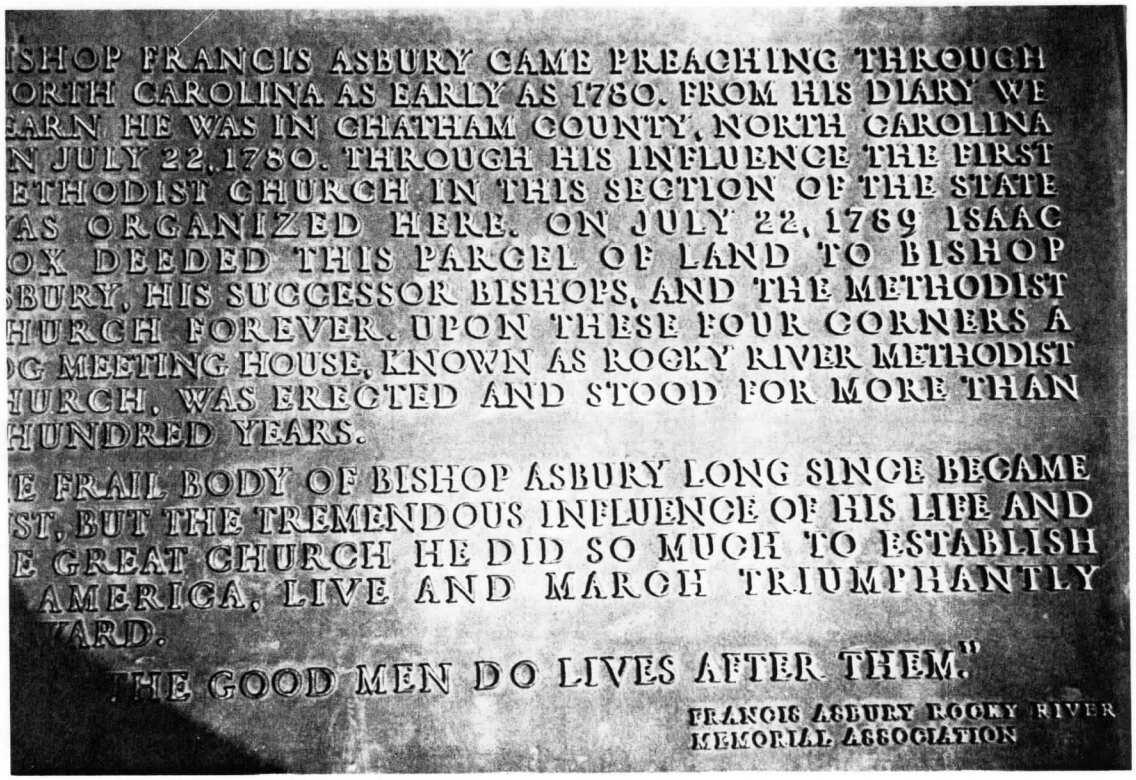
Hickory Grove United Methodist Church will hold a Memorial Service Sunday, July 30, at 11:00 a.m. on the site of the old Rocky River Methodist Church. The church standing now has been recently renovated by members of the church and according to Rev. Gordon Hanford, the memorial services will become an annual affair. The church was first established in 1757 by Francis Asbury, and Hickory Grove Church now holds the deed to the property. Rev. Hanford said that "dinner will be served on the grounds and we particularly urge all Methodists to attend these services and anyone interested in the past glory of this church". Further information pertaining to the memorial service can be otained from Ann Crutchfield or any member of Hickory Grove Church. **(Lee Harris Photos)**

A 96.1

A 46.1



ROCKY RIVER METHODIST CHURCH IN CHATHAM COUNTY



a History

A 46.1

Rocky River Methodist Church

James O'Kelly, Beverly Allen and Francis Poythress had preached in the New Hope Circuit a year or two before July of 1780 when Francis Asbury first entered the area which was roughly the upper middle part of the state of North Carolina. On the twenty-second, forcing their way through thickets and brush, climbing rocks and hills, and fording numerous creeks, Asbury and his young traveling companion "with great difficulty came in about two o'clock" to an unnamed place where "the people (were) looking almost as wild as the deers in the woods." The place was the northwest corner of Chatham County, two miles north of the present community of Staley, and through Asbury's influence the first Methodist church in this section of the state was organized.

On July 22, 1789 Isaac Cox deeded a parcel of land "to Bishop Asbury, his successor bishops and the Methodist Church forever." There a log meetinghouse was built. When Asbury preached there again on January 22, 1790 he called the place William McMaster's Chapel. Some of the McMasters still live ~~within sight of~~ near this beautiful hillside site where the present Rocky River Methodist Church now stands. The deed for the land was held in the Wrenn family for many years and is now on deposit at Duke University. The cemetery in the church yard contains the graves of ancestors of both of these families.

An original sketch of the Rocky River Methodist Church was drawn about 1902 by Edna McPherson, vestal, an art teacher in the Siler City School. This picture was in possession of Mrs. H. L. Jordan, a member of the Wrenn family, who presented it to the North Carolina Conference Commission on Archives and History in 1971 to hang in the Methodist Building in Raleigh. The log meetinghouse pictured there was built about 1825 and was apparently the second structure on this historic site.

On April 30, 1950 a Francis Asbury - Rocky River Memorial Association was organized under the leadership of the Reverend Ralph Reed, a former pastor of

the Siler City Circuit where title to the property now lies. Interest was shown through this association in preserving the historic spot where Francis Asbury had preached. The following year, the cornerstones of the log meeting-house were preserved in concrete and a bronze tablet was erected within the four corners commemorating the historic events that took place. In 1926 a third church was erected nearby through the efforts of the Reverend W. L. Maness after the old structure had stood about a hundred years and was in a dilapidated condition. Finally the memorial association dwindled to only a few members largely represented by Mrs. H. L. Jordan, the mother of the Reverend ~~Henry~~ R. H. Jordan, through whom the presentation of the picture was made possible. The church has now long been abandoned as a preaching appointment in spite of a resolution in 1951 by the association that services be held there each fifth Sunday.

Recommendations: The North Carolina Department of Archives and History should be notified of the sequence of historic events which took place at this location beginning in 1780 when Francis Asbury's first preaching in this section of the county resulted in "the first organized church" and a highway historic marker should be produced to be erected at the intersection of highway US 421 and state road ~~2466~~ 2464, about one mile north of Staley and two miles west of the church. Furthermore, the church and site should continue to be preserved and a bicentennial should be held at the location in 1980 to commemorate Francis Asbury's first appearance in Chatham County.

See Question 16-g., page 200, 1978 Conference Journal, Volume II.

1978 NC Conference Journal

A 46.1

Rockingham: Robert E. Hutchinson
Rocky Mount: Robert Frazier
Sanford: Clyde Strother
Wilmington: Jerry Paschal

16. What local churches have been:
    a) Organized? None
    b) Merged? None
    c) Discontinued or abandoned?
    Raleigh District: Prospect Church on the Warren Charge was discontinued in 1976. Membership was transferred to the Macon Church. Property was placed in the hands of the Division of Missions.

    Discontinue Youngsville Church on the Wake Forest-Youngsville Charge. Property to be placed in the hands of the Wake Forest Church. Membership to be transferred to the Wake Forest Church.
    d) Relocated and to what address? None
    e) Changed name of Church? None
    f) Transferred this year into this conference from other United Methodist conference(s) and with what membership? None
    g) What other changes have taken place in the list of churches?
    Rocky River Church in Chatham County, previously under the supervision of the Siler City Circuit which has been dissolved, is placed under the supervision of Hickory Grove United Methodist Church, to maintain Rocky River Church as an historic site.

17. What changes have been made in district and charge lines?
    a) District
    Fuquay-Varina and Holly Springs were transferred from the Sanford District to the Raleigh District, effective January 1, 1978.
    b) Charge
    Durham District
    Take Salem Church from the Oxford Circuit and make it a station charge, called Salem.
    Oxford Circuit will be composed of two churches—Stovall and Hermon.
    Combine Durham; Maybrook-Massey and Durham: Wellons-Bethesda Charges to form a four point charge known as Durham: Wellons-Bethesda-Maybrook-Massey.
    Goldsboro District:
    Take Zion Church from the Seven Springs Charge and make it a station. Leave Seven Springs and Indian Springs together, to be known as the Seven Springs Charge.
    New Bern District:
    Divide the Asbury-Dover Charge as follows:
    Place Asbury and Tuscarora together making a two point

charge,
Dover w
Rocking
Take St
Hamlet
Take B
and adc
St. Paul
Make T
Take F
Springs
Cool Sp
Take M
Walls C
Zion-W
Take M
it to th
Springs
Take J
Charge
Charge
Take F
Charge
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Part II: Pertai and Local Pas

18. Are all th
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Yes with c

19. Who con
2521.1)
N.L. Jone
Principal
N.L. Jone
Reserves:
White, R

A 46.1

Asbury's Journal
References to William McMaster

January 25, 1790 "Proceeded twelve miles (from Gerald Burr's where there was a preaching place of oak) to Rocky River and preached at William McMaster's Chapel, afterward we had a night meeting and upon the whole I believe we were speaking about four hours, besides nearly two spent in prayer."

November 14, 1798 "We forded Haw River and came through a curious path for a carriage, to the new meeting house on Hickory Mountain. We dined with Mr. Reeves, an ancient friend of mine, and thence proceeded on to brother McMaster's, a local preacher."

December 4, 1804 "We breakfasted fourteen miles ahead, with brother Reeves, at the Hickory Mountain. I ordained William McMasters a deacon. I dined and lodged with him: God has blest him - his twin sons, converted all the same time, are both called to preach the gospel."

(According to Phyllis McMaster, William McMaster preached at the chapel from 1788 until 1828 when he was forced to leave and unite with the Methodist Protestants.)

from Chatham Co. Deeds office

A 46.1

76

ROCKY RIVER METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Book Page

F 263 Isaac Cox of Chatham Co. deed to the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in North America, July 22, 1789, for five pounds a tract of 1½ acres lying upon the waters of Rocky River, beginning 11 poles southwest of the Chapel and running east 16 poles, thence north 15 poles, thence west 16 poles, thence south 15 poles, with trees as markers, for the use and benefit of the Methodist Church forever.

No date of registration. The preceding and following deeds were both registered at February Session 1793.

Chatham Record 28 Feb 1991

A 461

Old church grounds victim of vandalism

By David Rouse

The old Rocky River Methodist Church sits on a plot of land in northwest Chatham County which has been the Methodist church's land for 202 years.

In the plot are graves dating back before the Revolution, a church built in the early 1930's with some timbers from the original church built in 1789, and a marker commemorating the site as the oldest Methodist church west of New Bern.

The church, although still containing all of its pews and pulpit, is empty, all except for a bird's nest lying in a cubby hole in the back of the pulpit and a few words written in the dust collected on the pews.

Bishop Francis Asbury, who traveled through this part of the country in the late 1700's founded the church through a deed given by one Isaac Cox.

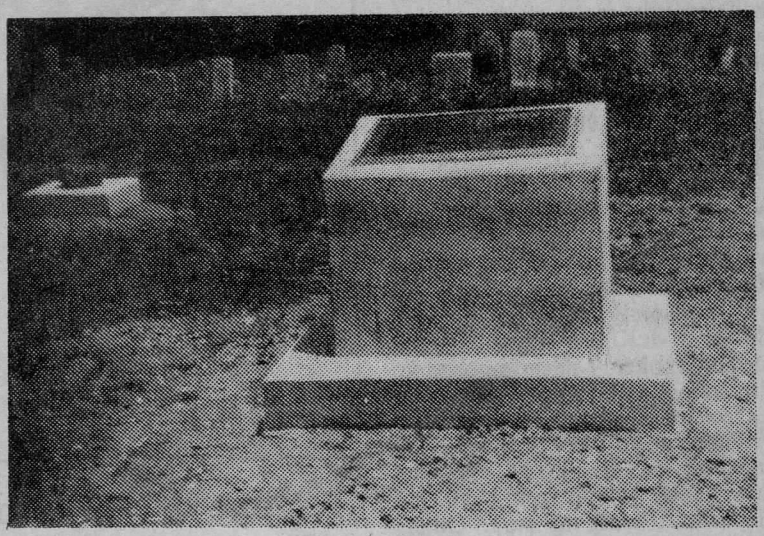
In 1949 a Francis Asbury Memorial Association was founded with the goal of getting this historic church official recognition. A memorial marker with a bronze plaque was placed on the church grounds in 1951.

Original members of this Association included; H.L. Jordan, Lucy Lane, G. C. Graham (pastor at Coleridge), J. H. Parrish (Pastor of the Siler City Circuit), R. L. Reed (Pastor of Bessemer Church at Greensboro), L. L. Wren, and Troy Smith.

Two weeks ago it was discovered that someone had stolen the bronze plaque from the marker.

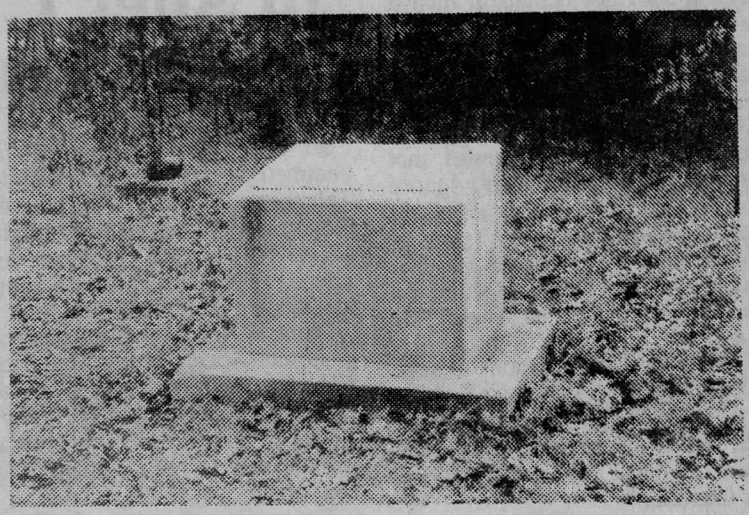
The church is near the Randolph County line out past Ben Smith Road. As it is no longer used for services police believe that the theft may have taken place some time ago.

Anyone with any information about the theft is asked to call the Chatham County Sheriff's Department.



Then . . .

The Rocky River Methodist Church monument as in appeared in the 1950's. (Photo courtesy Francis Asbury Memorial Association)



Now . . .

The monument as it appears today, minus the bronze plaque. (Photo by David Rouse)

F-263

Chatham Record
28 Feb 1991

A46.1

The old Rocky River Methodist Church . . .

This church, which last saw regular use about 30 years ago, is on the site of the oldest Methodist Church west of New Bern, and contains some of the timbers of the original log structure. (Photo by David Rouse)