

# Starling Avenue Baptist Church

## *A Gathering of Years*

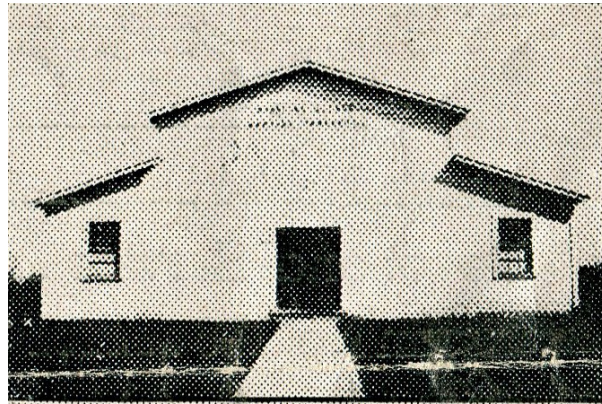
1935-2010

Early twentieth century Martinsville, Virginia, was a growing but still small, close-knit community of people. A large portion of the people in the newly developed "Southside" of town depended on their feet for transportation. Most of their destinations were within a few blocks: factories, stores, entertainment, banking. Some saw the desirability of a neighborhood church. In the summer of 1925 a tent revival was held on Askin Street with Reverend J. S. Riddle of Danbury, North Carolina, an independent evangelist with the Methodist Protestant Church. It was an interdenominational effort with the hope a neighborhood church would be the result, but no plans for planting a church came of it.

Nevertheless, this revival planted the seeds for a second, held in a tent in June, 1927, near the intersection of Starling Avenue and Bridge Street (Bridge Street would later be widened and renamed Memorial Boulevard). Reverend Walter Hughes, an evangelist with the State Mission Board of North Carolina, conducted the services, which began on June 19<sup>th</sup> and were to last three weeks. At the end of that time, the services had been so well attended, with around one hundred people making professions of faith, that the revival was extended for another three weeks, and then for two more. At the conclusion of the revival, First Baptist Church, led by its pastor Dr. J. P. McCabe, purchased the property on Starling Avenue on which the revival had

been held. One lot was bought from S. D. and Lucy English for \$1,200, and later two more lots were bought from F. E. Sites for \$1,000. Part was paid for in cash and part was financed. It was stipulated that a "Missionary Baptist Church" would be built on the property.

In 1929 a one-room frame tabernacle was built, and on September 15<sup>th</sup> a union revival was begun in the tabernacle. Protestant ministers from churches in Martinsville conducted the services. Reverend Charles Reed, pastor of Anderson Memorial Presbyterian Church, preached the opening service. Ministers from the Baptist, Methodist, Disciples of Christ, and the Christian churches also conducted services. The choirs for the revival were made up of people from the different churches.



At the conclusion of the revival, a mission Sunday School was organized under the leadership of First Baptist Church and Dr. McCabe. W. D. Nunn, one of the converts in the 1925 tent revival, was the first Sunday School superintendent. Sunday School was conducted on Sunday afternoons with teachers from different churches coming to teach. This continued for four years.

In 1934, Sunday School was moved to Sunday mornings with worship services following. Reverend J. R. Yarbour and laymen from the Sunday School conducted services.

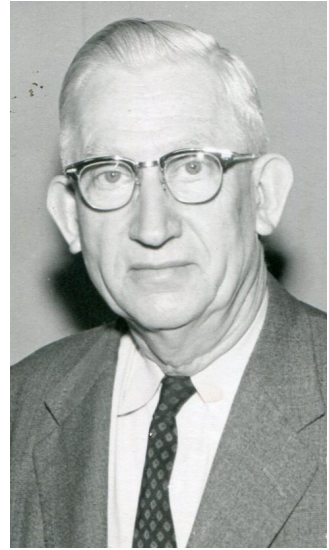
### 1935

In May, 1935, Sunday School workers felt that it was time to formally organize a Baptist church. It would be called "The Starling Street Baptist Tabernacle." Reverend J. R. Johnson, superintendent of missions for Southwestern Virginia of the Virginia Baptist Board of Missions and Education, came to Martinsville to assist in planning the new church. The construction on the tabernacle was completed in September, and November 24, 1935, was set for the formal organization. Dr. McCabe was chairman of the committee to organize the church. Other members of the committee were Reverends J. R. Johnson; W. J. Yeaman of Bassett; L.P. Soots of Fieldale; J. S. Riddle of Danbury, North Carolina; M. B. Major; and A. F. Yarbour of Martinsville. The New Hampshire articles of faith and church covenant, generally used by churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, were adopted. There were eighty people who expressed a desire to become members of the new church.



From those first members, a nominating committee was elected: Mrs. H. T. Dillon, Chairman; Mrs. J. R. Chappell, Mrs. J. F. Floyd, Mrs. E. K. Thornton, and Mrs. E. N. Hylton. This committee presented the following names to serve as the Board of Deacons: W. O. Minter, Irvin Minter, E. B. Wood, W. D. Nunn, W.T. Rutledge, J.F. Floyd, H. T. Dillon, E. K. Thornton, H. S. Minter.

It was decided that the rotation system would be used and that when a deacon had served his term, he would not be eligible for re-election to the board until one year had elapsed. W. O. (Owen) Minter was appointed church treasurer and H. T. (Trotter) Dillon was appointed church clerk.



The Deacons elected **W. O. Minter** chairman of the board of deacons, and he was added to the nominating committee.

Local knitting mills were still getting orders, but the effects of the Great Depression were far from over.

### 1936

Deacons served as the first pulpit committee. They recommended the church call **Reverend Thomas Waitt Fryer**, a pastor of several churches in and around Scottsburg, Virginia.

The young Rev. Fryer was a native of Galax, Virginia, and a graduate of Roanoke College and Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was married to the former Pauline Harp, also a native of Galax, and they had one son, Tommy.

The pulpit committee offered him the position of pastor of the church, and on February 15, 1936, at 3:30 in the afternoon Reverend Fryer preached his first sermon to a congregation that packed the tabernacle. Dr. J. P. McCabe, as moderator of the Blue Ridge Association, was joined in welcoming the new pastor by B. L. Fisher, on behalf of the businesses in the city as well as Wesley Methodist Church, and by Rev. Charles Reed, pastor of Anderson Memorial Presbyterian Church, also representing the Martinsville Ministerial Alliance.

The Board of Missions and Education of the General Association of Virginia Baptists extended liberal financial aid in paying a large portion of the pastor's salary.

The young and energetic pastor took the helm of the new congregation and the church grew rapidly. The Sunday School was modernized, a graded Baptist Training Union was organized, the Women's Missionary Union was started. A large percentage of the members pledged to tithe. The church began with a strong organizational and financial groundwork.

The congregation held its first business meeting on April 15, 1936, with Rev. Fryer presiding. E. K. Thornton brought two recommendations to the floor. The first was that the charter roll of the church membership be closed as of April 10, 1936. The recommendation was adopted, and all people who were members as of that date signed the charter. The second recommendation that a committee be appointed to beautify the church grounds was discussed but it was decided instead to leave the grounds as they were and appoint a committee to make repairs as needed.

Reverend Fryer wanted membership in the church to mean more than just shaking hands with the pastor and a name written in the church roll. He wanted those who presented themselves for membership to be given a copy of the church covenant. If, after consideration and prayer, the person

was willing to sign the covenant, they would be accepted into membership. The charter members also were asked to sign the covenant.

At the first business meeting Reverend Fryer called the roll and passed out covenant cards for those present to sign. Thirty-five members were absent and Reverend Fryer called on the deacons to contact all who had not signed their card, to talk with them and give them ample time and opportunity to sign before their names were dropped from the church roll.

The church delayed putting the covenant plan into effect until October 12, 1936. By that time, one hundred and twenty-seven people had signed the cards with more ready to hand theirs in.

At that first business meeting, W. D. Nunn explained the church debt consisted of two notes in the amount of \$250.00, each held by Mr. J. R. Taylor, and a third for \$50.00 held by Dr. McCabe. The notes were due July 10, 1936. The deacons recommended that the church take immediate action to collect the money to pay the debts. Pledges were asked for from the members and the sum of \$478.00 was pledged. By July all but \$16.97 had been collected. It was decided that the amount would come from the church treasury. W. O. Minter, W. D. Nunn, and E. B. (Earl) Wood met with Mr. Taylor and paid the notes in full and had the deeds marked satisfied.

On July 19<sup>th</sup> Starling Avenue Baptist Tabernacle and First Baptist Church held a joint Sunday evening "Victory Service" to celebrate the payment of all indebtedness on the property. Miss Dovie Hylton of Starling Avenue Baptist Tabernacle wrote the program for the service.

The treasurer handed in his report. The balance on hand August 14, 1936, was \$166.35. From August 14<sup>th</sup> through November 18<sup>th</sup> \$629.54 was added to the balance. W. O. Minter reported that ninety

percent of the church members were giving to the church and eighty percent were giving to the Cooperative Program.

At that first business meeting it was also decided that elected officers would serve one year terms, January 1 through December 31, and would be eligible to succeed themselves.

It was decided to purchase one hundred and twenty-five *Modern Hymnals*, paid for by a free-will offering. All members were contacted to give so they could be a part of the purchase. The hymnals were purchased at a cost of \$65.00 per one hundred. By November, \$87.75 had been collected, and Edd Draper recommended that Reverend Fryer purchase the hymnals when he went to Richmond in November.

### 1937

The pastor and deacons worked out the 1937 budget. Reverend J. R. Johnson, representing Southwestern Virginia Board of Missions and Education, helped in this process.

#### 1937 Budget

Sunday School	\$150.00
BYPU	\$60.00
Pastor's Salary	\$1000.00
W.M.U	\$12.00
Water, Lights, and Fuel	\$50.00
Janitor	\$72.00
Music Director	\$100.00
Miscellaneous	<u>\$116.00</u>
Total	\$1560.00

Reverend Fryer had led the church in organization. He held the business sessions at the close of the Sunday morning services so that as many of the members could be included as possible.

The deacons asked Reverend Fryer to explain the tithing system to the church. He explained that as many as would tithe for the first three months of the New Year, one third would go to missions and two thirds would go to local expenses. All gifts above

the tithes would go to the Building Fund. It was also asked that the different departments put any extra money that they had into the building fund.

Reverend Fryer was a fiery pulpiteer. He spoke out on community issues. The *Martinsville Bulletin* recorded a sermon that Reverend Fryer preached at a Sunday evening service in which he was very adamant about the social halls right outside the city limits. He told of the dancing and drinking in these places. A murder had taken place at one of these establishments and he accused the local police of failing to do a complete investigation. His said, "there is no need to allow the strongholds of hell to continue until it comes to worse—then it will be too late." He asked church members if they were aware of the conditions so close to the city and in the shadows of the church. Reverend Fryer spoke forcefully of the need for the church members to begin to live the lives proper for members of Christ's church. Reverend Fryer went on to say that the church had become powerless because of its failure to take a stand on so many issues of the day, demanding vigorously that the church right itself with God and stand for a consecrated membership; that it would stop disgracing the name of God and acting as an agency of hell by permitting men and women to remain in it who were unrepentant sinners without trying to save their lives.





The tabernacle was overflowing and people were standing at the doors and at the windows and in the yard to hear these sermons.

There were 240 people enrolled in Sunday School and room for 200. The building could no longer house the standing-room-only crowds that came, and the building was improperly heated for the cold weather.

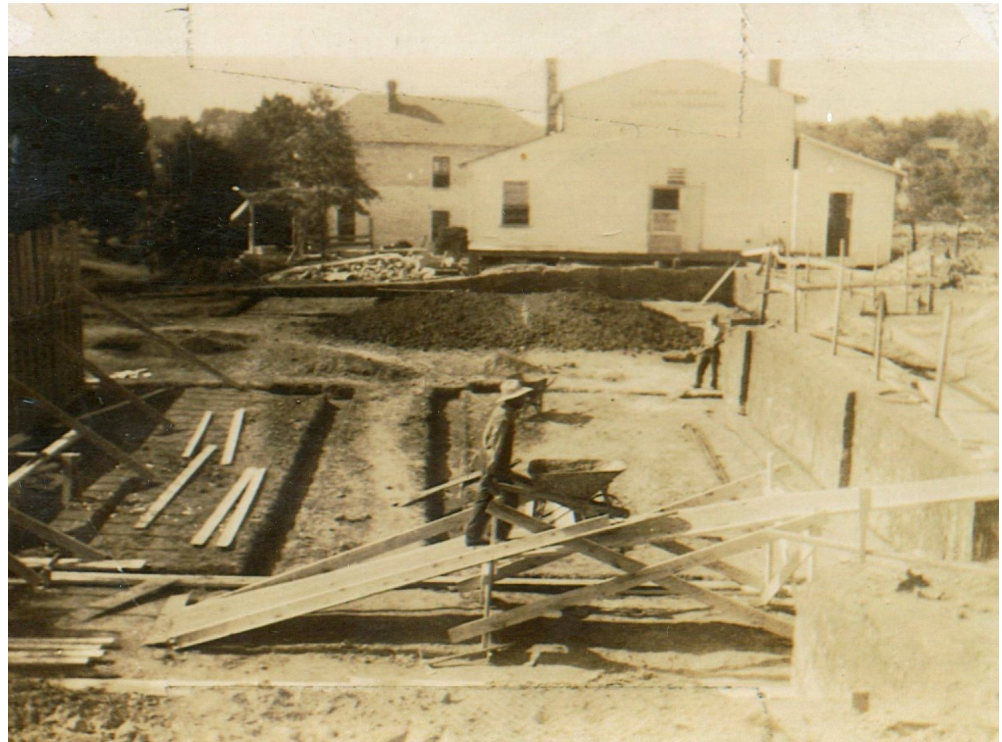
It was time for a new building. C. K. Howell, a local architect, was hired to draw up plans for a new structure. The plans called for a spacious building with an auditorium over a full-size basement. The cost was estimated at \$40,000.00. It would be built of cinderblock and brick veneer and steel construction. Edd Draper was selected to be treasurer of the building fund and chairman of the finance committee. Mr. Draper had the authority to pay all bills up to \$100.00 with the approval of Reverend Fryer or W. O. Minter. All other bills would be paid by the order of the church. Mr. Draper, Mr. Minter, Mr. Laffon, and Mr. W. W. Cooper were designated to pay Mr. Howell for the preliminary plans and to pay him a retainer fee. It was also decided to hire Mr. Howell to supervise the construction. His fee would be 5% of the cost of the building. Reverend Fryer, Edd Draper, and W. O. Minter were given authority to appoint any committee that they considered necessary to assist in soliciting for the building fund. A

committee was organized to get bids on materials and on construction of the church. E. K. (Ellis) Thornton, H. T. Dillon, Edd Draper, W. O. Minter, and Mrs. H. T. (Annie) Dillon were appointed by the pastor to work out the best plan to finance the cost. Work began on Monday, June 21, 1937. It was agreed that after the foundation was poured, to go as far as the cash would allow.

*G. T. White told the story of sending one of the employees from his dealership with a truck for Rev. Fryer to use during the digging of the foundation. The man came back with the truck and said he had not seen any preacher, just someone in overalls with a wheel barrow. The man he had seen was, of course, Rev. Fryer, who with the other men of the church pitched in to give sweat equity to the building.*

*When factories were working short weeks, some members would donate their free days to the construction of the church. Addie Sheppard Cruise recalled the women of the church cooking up big meals for the workers.*

*In the photo below the tabernacle is visible behind the area being prepared for concrete.*



K. C. Whittle from First Baptist Church advised the finance committee to present a paper for church members to sign, committing their all to backing the building fund. Seventy members signed this document. The church decided to borrow the remaining money.

After finding the local bank unreceptive, W. O. Minter, Edd Draper, H. T. Dillon, H. S. Minter, E. F. Helms, A. L. Lancaster, W. J. Chandler, Annie Dillon, Hazel Thornton, and W. D. Nunn were appointed to study two loan offers. One was Atlantic Life Insurance Company and the other was from Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company. The committee recommended that of the two offers, Jefferson Standard Life of Greensboro, North Carolina, made the most favorable offer. The church voted to accept it. The church borrowed \$15,000.00 from Jefferson Standard to complete the building.

Soon after the church was organized on November 24, 1935, trustees were appointed, but through an error they were not recorded and approved by the Circuit Court of Henry County. Reverend Fryer had attorney W. R. Broaddus draw up papers to present to the court that E. B. Wood, W. D. Nunn, H. T. Dillon, W. O. Minter, and Edd Draper were to become trustees of the church. This was accepted. Mr. Dillon asked for and was given copies of all deeds to the church property along with deed book and page recorded which W. R. Broaddus, acting attorney for the church, arranged.

## 1938

On Sunday morning, February 6, 1938, during the Sunday School hour, the church met in a called business meeting to decide how to calculate the actual cost of the church building. There were people who had worked on the construction of the



church, donating their time, and gifts of materials had been given to the church. To get an actual figure, all of this had to be added to the cost.

Seats for the auditorium were still to be purchased at \$1.50 a seat and to be paid for over a five-year period at 6% interest. These would be theater-type seats.

Reverend Fryer announced that the formal opening of the new church building would be March 20, 1938.

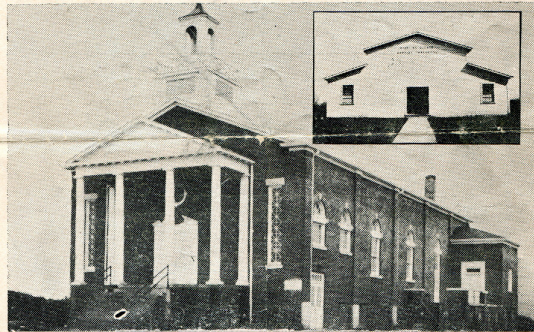
Sunday morning, March 20, 1938, was a memorable day. Starling Avenue Baptist Church held its formal opening with an all-day service. Praises and thanksgivings were given to God and to Jesus Christ for making a way for the church to become a reality. It was noted as one of the most beautiful brick structures in this area of the state. In the Southern Colonial architectural style of some of the older Virginia churches, the new structure was a great asset to the community, seating around 450 people.



## Starling Avenue Baptist Church

MARTINSVILLE, VIRGINIA

REV. THOMAS W. FRYER, Pastor



"THE OLD AND THE NEW"

Formal Opening Services

SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 1938

Dr. F.W. Boatwright, president of the Baptist General Association and president of the University of Richmond spoke at the 11 o'clock service. Frank T. Crump, executive secretary of the Virginia Baptist Board of Missions and Education; J. R. Johnson of Galax, superintendent of missions for Southwest Virginia; and Jessie R. Johnson, first vice president of the General Association, also spoke. Dr. McCabe spoke during the afternoon service and Reverend Fryer read a congratulatory letter from Dr. C. W. Reed, pastor of Anderson Memorial Presbyterian Church. Wesley Methodist Church called off its services to worship with Starling Avenue Baptist Church. It was noted that one of the local furniture factories had made tables for the Sunday School class rooms and had made the beautiful pulpit stand and other tables in use.

On opening day of the new building, there were 226 church members. The Sunday School had grown to between 325 and 350, and Training Union had an attendance of 120. The church led the Blue

Ridge Association in giving to missions and was regarded as one of the most progressive churches in the entire state.

In April, Reverend Fryer suggested that the church begin subscribing to the *Religious Herald* at a cost of \$1.50 per person. The cost to the members was at club rates. Mrs. Annie Dillon and Mrs. Jinx Roach were appointed to get the club together.

In May Rev. and Mrs. Fryer attended the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, representing the church.

J. R. Johnson, Superintendent of Missions and Education for Southwestern Virginia, came to the church in June to preside over a meeting to recommend raising the pastor's salary. The Mission Board was still helping to pay the pastor's salary. They had contributed \$800.00 in financial aid for both 1937 and 1938. The pastor's salary was \$83.24 per month, and the recommendation was to raise it to \$100.00 a month. It was also recommended that the church pay his house rent and purchase a lot for a parsonage. All recommendations were approved.

Mrs. H. T. Dillon, Mrs. E. N. Hylton, Mrs. R. E. Byrd, Edd Draper, W. W. Cooper, W. D. Nunn, and Fred Mills served on the committee that was chaired by Mr. W. O. Minter to look for a lot to build a parsonage. They recommended that a lot in Chatham Heights be bought for \$100.00 from T. M.





and Dorothy Ford and D. H. and Greyson Pannill. A loan was secured through the FHA with monthly payments not to go over \$25.16 a month. Fred Mills, J. T. Laffon, R. E. Hardy, W. W. Cooper, J. D. Draper, J. A. Koger, Mrs. Mae Minter and Mrs. Fryer were appointed to look into the design and cost of the house.

The committee could not find a plan that suited them for \$25.16 a month house payment. They brought the matter before the church and were given permission to find a suitable plan not to exceed \$35.00 a month for a house payment. Plans were drawn up, and W. R. Broaddus, church attorney, handled all legal paper work. The loan was secured through the FHA. Mr. O. D. Ford, Morgan Simmons, and Mr. Simmons of American Furniture gave a complete bedroom suite for the parsonage and W. M. Bassett Furniture Company gave a dining room suite.

### 1939

The deacons called the church into business session on January 3, 1939 at the morning worship service to dispose of outstanding business. The finance committee reported that the church had debts of \$241.11 owed to Draper Lumber Company and \$142.00 owed to Lester Lumber Company. Item two was that the church needed a new stoker for the heating

system. Item three was W. O. Minter asked that the finance committee be authorized to buy footage behind the church from Mr. Fisher so that the property lines would run straight. All items were approved. The debts were paid, the stoker was bought, and the land was purchased.

February, 1939 was the third anniversary of Reverend Fryer's ministry to this church. To mark the occasion, Lester Bowles, W. O. Minter, Mae Minter, Claude Minter, W. D. Nunn, Edd Draper, Mrs. G. W. Allison, and Trotter Dillon were appointed to plan an anniversary program. Speaking at the service was Kennon Whittle and Dr. McCabe along with Reverend Fryer. Mr. Whittle asked that the youth of the community become trained church and civic leaders. Dr. McCabe called for a devoted membership committed to the sacred duty of giving the Gospel to the entire world. W.O. Minter paid tribute to Reverend Fryer for the leadership that he had given the church the three years that he had been its pastor. The membership had grown to 300 people and had completed a beautiful new church building and constructed a modern parsonage for the comfort of the pastor and his family. Mr. Minter went on to compliment the growth of the Sunday School and the Women's Missionary Union work. He said that the church would continue to grow and prosper as long as the individual members would keep the windows of their hearts open to the sunshine of God's love and let Him lead in all their activities. Dr. McCabe gave a strong appeal that the church continue to be a shining light in the Southside section of the community.

When Reverend Fryer entered the pulpit on Mother's Day 1939, he found a package neatly wrapped with a white rose lying on top of it. Unwrapping the package,