

## LuRetta United Methodist Church 1893-1993

**William Campbell Murphy gave the land and much of the lumber used in erecting the LuRetta United Methodist Church. The oldest records of services held at the church indicate that the church began about April 16, 1883.**

**The following history of the church was written in September, 1988, by Frances Wade Ostergren, grand-daughter of William Campbell Murphy.**

**"My maternal grandfather, William Campbell Murphy, gave the land and much of the lumber used in erecting the small church called LuRetta, in the fifth district of Sevier County. He was also responsible for the naming of the church.**

**The land was part of the Old Cannon Farm, four miles north-west of Sevierville, with access to Old Knoxville-Sevierville Pike Road, He received the farm from his father, Col. James Crawford Murphy, of the Harrisburg community. W. C. Murphy built a home for himself and his family on this farm in 1885, moving there from a previous home in Sevierville.**

**The lumber was bought second-hand, from a church, the old Sevierville Methodist Church South, which was being-demolished to make way for a larger building for the Southern Methodist congregation. My grandfather bought the old building and had it torn down and moved down in the country, to be re-built there as a simple one-room building. The only elaborate thing about it was to be a pretty little belfry, part of the roof. The old bell continues to ring each Sunday, up to the present. tune. No doubt, other things had to be purchased new at this time: roofing; nails; clear window glass, etc. The church was built by James H. Thomas (Gusty). His salary was one dollar a day.**

**William Campbell Murphy specified that the name of this little chapel was to be "LuRetta", to honor the memory of his two wives: Loretta MacBath (called "Retta"), then deceased, and his second wife, Lucy Rawlings ("Aunt Lu"). As the Murphy's were of the Methodist faith, this church was to be under the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church South Conference; but anyone, regardless of secular belief was welcome to attend and participate in the church activities. Many of the people in the neighborhood were, in fact, Baptists.**

**When my grandfather's family moved to the farm to live, there was no**

church nearby . There was a schoolhouse, Low Gap, where public school was conducted for the elementary grades, three or four months of the year. As in many other country schools of those times, Sunday School and other social gatherings took place in Low Gap School. However, my grandfather came to believe that there ought to be a real church nearby for his children and others living in the community, so he initiated the move to establish a church.

I had thought the date for this to be about 1888, but I have been told it was a bit later, 1893. The deed for the land donated for the church would reveal the exact date.

My mother, youngest child of W. C, and Lucy Murphy, recorded in her memoirs that her Papa was the teacher of a class of young ladies (Sunday School) in 1892. She wrote: 'We had a big Thanksgiving turkey dinner, with all of Papa's Sunday School class of young ladies invited. ' I had supposed this to mean a group from LuRetta Church, but it could have been from Low Gap School.

In the same memoirs, of the year, 1893, Mother spoke of being the daughter of a Sunday School Superintendent. I believe my grandfather was the Sunday School Superintendent at LuRetta from its beginning until his death, in 1901. Of 1894, my mother wrote of a County Sunday School Convention, held in May for two days, "Knowing we would have guests at our house, Mama had our whole house cleaned to perfection, and new curtains up. Had "Aunt' Nan Coleman cooking for some days. Fine food everywhere, and lots of company"

At LuRetta, they usually had a preacher for Sunday services once a month. He generally took dinner with "Brother Murphy" and often came for over-night, enjoying 'Southern Hospitality.' Personally, ( have found hospitality to be the most generous in rural areas.

Now, a few comments about the original building, and the way affairs were run. The church was built high off the ground, with no underpinning, on the summit of a wooded hill. The narrow, winding dirt road up the hill was easily rutted, and hard to traverse in bad weather. A few rode up with horse and buggy, or on a saddle horse, but most people walked to services. There was an iron bell to ring before and again at the beginning of meetings, and a long, iron wood-burning stove to provide a degree of heat in cold weather. The wooden pews were finished with clear varnish, but the wooden floors were bare and unfinished. There was a foot-pumped organ to sustain hymn singing. They had a pulpit, one or two small tables and a few straight chairs. There was an out-door privy for women and children to use; men used the bushes, if need occurred.

There were four classes in the Sunday School. The adults, mostly men, were in one group; girls and young ladies in another; boys in a third; and the youngest children were in the "card class.". For the collection, some of the grown-ups might contribute 25", but most people gave 50 or a penny, or nothing. The entire collection for any Sunday might run 650 or so, says Harold Murphy, who attended LuRetta, though not in the beginning years.

I do not know what they paid their preachers back then; it was surely some specified amount, but not much. Also, literature had to be bought, and a few other supplies. I just supposed that Grandfather Murphy made up the balance needed from his pocket. After he died, my Uncle Frank took his place, acting as Superintendent most of the time, until he lost his farm, and he and his remaining family had to move away to Virginia to live, in 1935.

It would be of interest to know, but I cannot say, how many were enrolled as members, or what the average attendance was. My mother, Hattie M. Wade, and her sister, Anna M. Bryan, transferred their church membership from LuRetta to the Southern Methodist Church of Main Street, Sevierville, in 1922. Having married, and moved away to other communities to live, they had taken part in various church activities, but had not seen fit to move their church membership until this time.

Luretta has been remodeled, enlarged and improved in many ways in the last 50 years. You can drive up the hill in a car now, instead of having to leave your car at the foot of the hill. whereas country schools are long-gone, country churches are still serving an important place in community life in Sevier County."

Frances Wade Ostergren  
September, 1988

### 1993 CHURCH INFORMATION

Pastor: The Rev. Charles W. Whetsel Church School Sunday  
Superintendent: Coyle Fox Assistant Superintendent: Jerry Burns  
Trustees: Harold McCroskey; Wayne Myers; R. B. Newman Church  
Treasurer: Harold McCroskey Worship Committee: Mrs. William Swann;  
Mrs. Willa Mae Finchum Education & Evangelism Chairperson: Mrs. Agnes  
Newman Administrative Council Chairperson: Eldridge Burns

LURETTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH is a part of the Sevierville United Methodist Circuit in the Maryville District of the Holston Conference. The Rev. Doug Smith is the District Superintendent. The Rev. Clay Lee is the resident bishop of of the Holston Conference.