

OXFORD, GEORGIA

Sixteenth United Methodist Historic Shrine

The 1972 General Conference of The United Methodist Church has officially designated the Town of Oxford, Georgia as the sixteenth historic shrine. This designation followed careful study by the Committee on Historic Shrines and Landmarks of the Commission on Archives and History, and the Commission's recommendation to the General Conference.

The conception of Oxford and its subsequent development were steeped in Methodism. Emory College was chartered December 19, 1836, when Georgia Methodists expanded their educational program; the college was named for Bishop John Emory. Early in 1837, the Board of Trustees of Emory College purchased land near Covington and set aside 330 acres for a collegiate community. The proposed town was named Oxford in honor of the English university where John and Charles Wesley were educated. A Methodist minister and surveyor, Edward Lloyd Thomas, was chosen to plan the town of Oxford. The streets were named for Methodist founders and leaders: Wesley, Asbury, Pierce, Whatcoat, Hammill, Haygood, Clarke, Watson, Collingsworth, Fletcher, Moore. These names are in use today.

In 1915-19 Emory College expanded and became Emory University on the present-day Atlanta campus. The birthplace at Oxford retained the sub-freshman section of Emory and was known as Emory University Academy until 1929; Emory Junior College was then established, and in 1964 it was renamed Oxford College of Emory University.

Ignatius A. Few, the first president of Emory College, built his home in 1837, about one-half mile north of the college on Wesley Street. The home was owned by several individuals, not all of whom were presidents of the college. In 1889 Young L. G. Harris purchased the home and presented it to the Board of Trustees as the official residence of the president of the college. Today the president's home is in good repair and is a well-defined historic landmark.

The Old Church stands on Wesley Street, between the president's home and the college site. The central section of the structure was built in 1841 and two wings were added in 1880. This building represents the ties between Oxford, Emory College and Methodism. Here on Thanksgiving Day 1880, Atticus G. Haygood delivered his famous sermon, "The New South." A copy of this sermon so stirred the New York philanthropist, George I. Seney, that he contributed \$130,000 to Emory College. Of this amount \$50,000 was used for the construction of Seney Hall in 1881. This Hall, with its

clock bell striking the hour, stands today as the administration building on Oxford Campus. The bell itself was a gift from Queen Victoria of England in mid-nineteenth century to Alexander Means, fourth president of Emory College.

Means was an extraordinary person—Methodist minister, educator, physician, scientist. The Means home, "Orna Villa," is well preserved and is located only a few hundred yards from the college campus. The Georgia Historical Society has provided a bronze plaque on the premises to indicate the historical significance of this building.

Near the Old Church is the site of "Kitty's Cottage." Kitty was a mulatto slave girl willed to Bishop James O. Andrew, president of the Board of Trustees of Emory College, with the stipulation that she was either to go to Liberia or to remain in the United States as free as the laws of Georgia would permit. Her decision to remain in Oxford, technically the slave of a Methodist bishop, partly brought the organization in 1845 of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Kitty's Cottage was moved to Salem Campground, some seven miles away, in 1938.

Oxford Cemetery, now called the "Westminster of Georgia Methodism," is a part of the original plan of the Town of Oxford. Bishop James O. Andrew and members of his family, including the slave girl Kitty, are buried there. Others buried in the cemetery include two other Methodist bishops, Warren A. Candler and Atticus G. Haygood; presidents of nine colleges; and a number of Methodist ministers and professors of Emory College.

Numerous other buildings and sites within the Town of Oxford have Methodist historical interest and lend significance to the designation of Oxford as a United Methodist historic shrine.