

**Memories of Early Years of Peachtree Road Church,
1934 - 1938**
by Ann Thornton Hale Clarke

My father, (Alton) Lee Hale, was pastor of Peachtree Road from 1934 until his death from cancer in 1938. When we moved to Peachtree Road Church, both the church and I were 9 year's old. One member commented when we arrived that both the church and I were the same age. I remember that the people of Peachtree Road were just lovely. They welcomed us to the parsonage, which was a rental house at 25 East Shadowlawn. It was a small brick house on a small lot - so different from the parsonages in the small towns in which we had been living. The house seemed so tiny after the big, old barny houses we'd lived in, with big tall ceilings and large rooms. We'd previously been in old houses on big lots. It was at East Shadowlawn that the church needed the extra bed for my grandmother, who came with us. We were the only preacher's family that came to any church that I know of who had a mother-in-law with them. I did not know it caused consternation to have her come with us. City living was new to all of us, except Daddy.

My grandmother was Mary Harris Armor, temperance lecturer, well-known during the early 20th century.

I was thrilled to pieces when he announced that the church was going to buy a two-story brick farmhouse near the church property. The address was 3116 Peachtree Road. Daddy felt the preacher should live next door to the church. When the property on Peachtree Road came on the market, he urged the church to purchase it, and they did. The church was so tiny, I don't know how they managed it. The parsonage was purchased in April, 1935. When I left home for school one morning, Mother said, "When you come home, come to the new house." And I was so excited all day, waiting to go home and see the new house. However, the huge cement front porch had to be cut off the house. Sardis Way was going to be cut through to Roswell Road, and the porch would have hung over the new street. Later, I watched workmen place the big, heavy stones down Sardis Way next to the house to build the wall. I believe the stone may have been Stone Mountain granite.

The lot the house was on was full of fruit trees. There was a huge apple tree outside the window of the bedroom that my sister and I shared. Sirron Nurseries, next door to the parsonage, fronted on Peachtree Road, but they were not there long. The church needed to add Sunday School space. Sirron Nursery was owned by the Norris (candy) family. I don't know what the Sunday School building was originally like, but I know they kept adding onto the same building, cutting a door each time they added a new space. They also added an office.

We loved living next door the church, because people coming to the church would just drop by the house. The members were so warm and welcoming. I don't remember any of our doors being locked in the daytime. We loved having people come over, even if it was just for a few minutes.

I remember on Mother's birthday one year, the women of the church gave her a Birthday Shower. And one Christmas, they gave Mother and Daddy a beautiful set of china and crystal, which was a huge gift. It was a surprise. Mother was so happy, because she'd never had a complete set of matching dishes. Daddy was so happy, because Mother was so happy.

Mother complained because she could never get her hands on the car. When Daddy was not visiting the sick or going to church meetings, he was out roaming the countryside, looking for people moving into new housing, visiting people, just stopping by, looking for new members. As a child, I'll never forget that he could remember not only the names and addresses of people, but also their telephone numbers. Sometimes he would say to church members, "These people have moved into your neighborhood. You might want to visit or call them. Their address and telephone number are ..."

The church was started in the Salters' living room. They were such good people. My mother went to Mother Salter often for advice pertaining to the church. I may be mistaken, but I think Mother Salter was in charge of furnishings for the church. I thought the Salters lived in the country when I first saw the house because Mrs. Salter had a yard full of flowers. They covered both sides of the walkway to the house.

Originally, the sidewalks on Peachtree Road weren't paved. They were paved in front of our house and the church when Sardis Way was cut. From beyond the church to R. L. Hope School (to which I walked), the sidewalks were white sand.

The Sunday School building caught fire one Wednesday night when we were eating supper. My sister looked out the window, pointed, and stuttered out, "Fire." Someone had started a fire in the stove to warm the building for Prayer Meeting. The church was wooden then. As it was later discovered, there was a crack in the flue and sparks had set the roof on fire. The roof and the building part way down burned. Daddy called the Operator and asked for the fire department, which came quickly. The whole community found out about it, and the next day when I went to school, every teacher asked me about it.

Apparently, the church was unlocked 24 hours a day. My mother sent me over to the church before breakfast one morning to find the janitor. I called out his name, and heard someone scrambling to get out. It seems a vagrant had used the church for sleeping the night before.

I remember one night, seeing the Ku Klux Klan congregate on Roswell Road in their white robes and hoods. They were a formidable site.

And I remember so well what Tommy Salter talked about the Brunswick Stew and the barbecue. The men of the church dug deep pits under the wooden Sunday School building to cook the barbecue. The men stayed there all night, keeping the fires going, and turning the spits, and when Daddy took me down under the building the next day, I was amazed that the buildings hadn't burned up.

My father had an easy manner about him. He made friends easily and quickly, and the church grew quickly under him. One member remarked that, "The church really began with Brother Hale."

When the church found out Daddy had cancer, they asked the Bishop and Cabinet not to appoint him District Superintendent to the Emory at Oxford District, but to send him back to Peachtree Road so they could look after him. And they did. They gave the whole family a vacation to Daytona Beach the next summer. And Dr. Boland came down during our trip to make sure Daddy was alright.

After my father died on Thanksgiving Day, 1938, the church asked us to stay in the house for one year. We all marveled at their generosity. It enabled Mother to get her teaching certificate, and it prepared us for the move, later on, to College Park. When what was left of our family would talk about "Peachtree Road," it never meant the street, but always meant the church. They were the most warm-hearted people; I've never seen anyone like them since.

I would say that the people of that church were the most generous-hearted. There were never any fights, disagreements, or unhappiness that I knew about.

May 25, 2005