

A Dream Renewed In Each Generation

A History of the Earle Street Neighborhood

Early history - The history of the Earle Street area dates back to the late 18th century, when Elias Earle settled in Greenville. One of the first settlers in the area, Earle purchased land in what is currently the James Street and Earle Street areas. One of Greenville's earliest homes, now a historic landmark, is "Whitehall," located at 310 West Earle Street. Built in 1813, Whitehall was the summer home of Governor Henry Middleton, used as a refuge from the intense heat and devastating malaria outbreaks in Charleston, then the state capital. Not until the 1910s and 1920s did Earle Street experience dramatic growth as an in-town neighborhood. This growth prompted the need for a place to worship, and the idea for Earle Street Baptist Church was brought to life.

1890-1929 - During this time period, textile mills were becoming the new workplace in the city of Greenville as well as surrounding smaller cities. Many of the mill workers came from a rural farming culture dominated by Protestant evangelical churches. During their move to a more urban environment, their religion was in the midst of revival, and they brought their denominational beliefs with them. In 1890, 37 percent of Greenville County's population were church members from varying denominations. By 1916 church membership had grown to 52 percent. Southern Baptists were predominant among these denominations. ESBC's beginnings in 1922 were a part of this growing trend among Baptists in Greenville.

Despite the ups and downs that were unique to the textile industry in Greenville and the uncertainty that came with World War I, the population of metropolitan Greenville continued to grow. Its population increased by 20 percent between 1920 and 1930. This increase can be attributed to the farm and factory economy attracting related businesses from northern states. This type of population growth in metropolitan Greenville created a need for more churches in the downtown area such as Earle Street Baptist Church. Everything would soon become uncertain and dark, though, when local banks such as Woodside National Bank began to fail as the Great Depression loomed.

1893-1930

1893 - Rutherford Street Baptist Church is established on Rutherford Street, north of Stone Avenue.

1903 - Rutherford Street Baptist Church votes to move to Pinckney and Lloyd streets and takes the name Central Baptist Church.

1907 - 1909 - Central's pastor, Dr. J.A. Brown, raises the idea of starting a church in the Earle Street area.

1913 - On Central's 20th anniversary, Dr. Brown again proposes establishing a church in the Earle Street area.

October 12, 1921 - Representatives of area Baptist churches meet and support the founding of a new Baptist church.

October 1921 - Sunday afternoon services begin at the home of Mr. and Mrs. L.R. Tuten on Earle Street, directly across from the eventual site of the church.

September 11, 1921 - A group interested in forming a new Baptist church met at the Rutherford Street home of Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Keys.

J. C. Keys - J. C. Keys played a prominent role in the organization of Earle Street Baptist Church in 1921 and 1922 and filled significant leadership positions during the early years of the church. Mr. Keys was a member of Central Baptist Church, where his parents were charter members and where the idea of a new church in the Earle Street area had been born. In September 1921, a group interested in forming a new church met at the Keys home on Rutherford Street. Six months later, on March 12, 1922, Earle Street Baptist Church was established with 117 members.

The Sunday School was organized the following week, with 119 on the roll. J. C. Keys was named superintendent of Sunday School. He continued to serve in that position and as a deacon, providing invaluable leadership to the young church. Mr. Keys was a co-owner of The Baptist Courier, heading its printing operation. He founded and led Keys Printing Co. and held several posts with the South Carolina Baptist Convention, including secretary-treasurer of the Ministerial Education Board. Born in 1882, J. C. Keys died Aug. 8, 1935. In his obituary, The Greenville News observed that "Mr. Keys was a prominent civic and religious leader."

January 19, 1922 - First meeting of the Definite Aim Aid Society, which would later become the Woman's Missionary Union, with 13 women present.

March 12, 1922 - Formal organization of Earle Street Baptist Church, with a membership of 117 and an offering of approximately \$200 for missions.

March 19, 1922 - Sunday School is organized with 119 present. SC Baptist Convention General Board provides a tent to be used for worship services until October.

June 12, 1922 - The State issues the charter to Earle Street Baptist Church.

July 25, 1922 - Ground is broken for the church building. Church member Henry P. McGee does the honors, using a silvered spade.

1922 - Rev. J. Furman Moore is named the first pastor.

October 1922 - Due to coming winter weather, the church begins meeting in a house on Wilton Street, constructed and provided at no cost by Henry P. McGee for use until the church building is completed.

November 4, 1923 - The first service is held in the new sanctuary.

January 1924 - Dr. Ellis A. Fuller becomes pastor.

January 1926 - Dr. T. Baron Gibson becomes pastor.

September 1928 - Dr. I.L. Yearby becomes pastor.

1930 – 1950

and the History Continues...

1930 - 1949 - The Great Depression brought bank closures and textile cutbacks. Few citizens of the Greenville area were untouched by this massive blow that directly affected their survival. However, the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 began to bring a respite from this daily suffering. Beginning with banks, FDR implemented the New Deal. The impact of this plan on Greenville was staggering. Agricultural and textile reforms restored security to Greenville citizens, offering low interest rates and secure wages. Farmers and textile workers were given help in such a way that they continued to work hard, pulling themselves out of their poverty. Through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), young men found work on projects that included the construction of Paris Mountain State Park and Cleveland Park. Churches like ESBC offered hope and fostered solidarity during the trying years of the Great Depression.

Although a revival of spirit was felt throughout Greenville, more dark days were coming. A nationwide epidemic of polio reached Greenville in the summer of 1939, with 16 cases being reported in the county prior to August 15. Even churches were affected as Sunday schools, summer camps, and other activities where children gathered were closed. Also in 1939, the looming conflict overseas was threatening to involve the United States in another war. The coming war would bring greater change for Greenville than any armed conflict since the Civil War. The first peacetime draft was implemented in September of 1940, resulting in 122 men in the city of Greenville being called to serve. Many others volunteered. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, an estimated 100 young men from the greater Greenville area were serving in the Pacific. Normal life in Greenville shifted to adapt to the effects of war. Churches were performing wedding ceremonies to fit the schedules of soldiers. Churches were also used as meeting places for groups such as the Red Cross and other relief groups to make care packages with bandages, clothing, and non-perishable food to aid soldiers and European citizens caught in brutal war.

During the war, Greenville's demographics changed and diversity flourished since the area was an ideal location for military training facilities which brought in soldiers and their families from all over America. Some made Greenville their permanent home, resulting in greater church diversity.

Postwar Greenville, like other cities, experienced many changes. Due to the demands of war, there was a clothing shortage as well as a lack of housing. Agriculture faded into the background, but textiles were thriving due to their vital role during the war. Textile mills in Greenville had been top providers of tents, uniforms, and bandages. Other industry growth in Greenville was also beginning to take hold. Determined recruiters like businessman Charles Daniel pulled in non-textile manufacturers from various regions in the United States, coaxing these industries to invest in Greenville.

September 1932 - Dr. William L. Ball becomes pastor. His 13-year tenure will exceed the combined tenures of all the previous pastors.

March 14, 1943 - Victory Sunday, celebrating the satisfaction of the building debt.

November 19, 1946 - Ideal Laundry explosion breaks windows on the west side of the church and damages the baptistery window. Late in the afternoon of November 19, 1946, Greenville's Ideal Laundry exploded when 5,000 gallons of propane gas caught fire. The explosion leveled more than 100 homes and damaged dozens of others. The explosion killed six people, injured 150 and left 400 people homeless. Earle Street Baptist Church did not escape the impact of the shock waves, which were felt as far away as Gaffney, 60 miles away. Church member Mr. George Muckenfuss remembers that day well. Following is his recollection of events: "I was 14 and lived on East North Street near where Laurens Road begins. In the kitchen after supper, I heard a sound like really loud thunder. Looking west through the window, I saw a huge fire in the distance. Flames were leaping up and pieces of lumber and other debris were falling back down into the fire. The next day we learned it was the Ideal Laundry at the corner of Buncombe and Echols streets. It was the worst disaster in the city until that time. Later in the week I went by the church to see the damage done there. A number of window panes in the sanctuary had been broken out. Around back . . . was the mangled lead and glass of the baptistery window. The explosion itself had not knocked the window out – it just loosened it. It fell out the next night during choir practice. There was no educational building until 1951, so the window was in the back wall of the church. I went back to the church again . . . and got enough glass and lead from it to make an 18- by 27-inch window. I got a frame for it and mounted it at home, exposed to the outside light so that I could see it every day. This experience led to a 41-year 'career' in leaded and stained glass . . ."

November 1946 - Rev. Nathan C. Brooks becomes pastor.

March 1947 - Stone Avenue Elementary School property is purchased.

March 1948 - Mrs. J. Albert Bramlett joins church staff as secretary, clerk, and hostess. She served on staff until 1966.

May 1948 - Planning begins for the new education building. W. E. Freeman is chosen as the architect.

October 1948 - Church unanimously approves the plan to establish a kindergarten, which becomes the second church kindergarten in South Carolina. Tuition is \$10 per child, with a \$2 registration fee.

June 1948 - Church joins Foreign Mission Board's Salary Support Program. Miss Virginia Miles, a Southern Baptist missionary nurse in Indonesia, is assigned to the church under the program.

January 1949 - The church appoints a committee, chaired by W. R. Ellis, to consider establishing a mission in the Northgate area.

1950 – 1970

and the History Continues...

1950-1970 - The influx of industrial companies sparked growth within Greenville's expanded city limits, but more so outside those limits, to what many Americans would come to call suburban neighborhoods. This suburban flight also initiated the concept of suburban shopping malls. As result, downtown shops and stores were motivated to relocate to suburban areas in order for their businesses to thrive. In 1965, what would be the largest mall in the state, McAlister Square, was built. The two anchor stores at this mall were Ivey's and Meyers Arnold. Both of these major retailers moved from downtown, contributing to its decline. As early as 1957, Charles Daniel noted that Greenville's downtown was "unclean and neither attractive nor competitive with comparable progressive cities." In 1964, in what would be his final show of dedication to downtown renewal, Daniel broke ground on the 25-story Daniel Building on North Main Street. Following its lead, other landmark businesses came to downtown Greenville. While these efforts kept downtown alive, the decline in city population would take four decades to reverse.

Earle Street Baptist Church, for years a unifying entity for the community, continued in this role despite the rise and fall of membership. Membership often reflected the local population decline then and reflects the population increase today. While local population size is not the only factor in church decline or growth, it does play a major role. During times of decline, the church had to reach into current members and reach out to those who were in the suburbs.

1950 - Church acquires adjacent Ferguson property on Earle Street for \$3,000.

October 1950 - Northgate Chapel is organized as a Baptist church.

1951 - Education building completed.

September 1952 - Dr. C. Earl Cooper becomes pastor. The church begins having two Sunday morning worship services.

1952 - The Congregation votes to name the new education building in honor of Mrs. Kiddie Crisp.

July 1955 - Church establishes an air conditioning fund.

1957 - Church organ electrified.

September 30, 1957 - Linda Brown (Ard) at the Girls' Auxiliary Coronation Service.

1958 - Church acquires Tuten house directly across Earle Street. This is where the first Sunday services had been held in 1921.

March 1959 - Family night suppers started.

August 1960 - Dr. Henry L. Anderson becomes pastor.

1966 - Pastor-owned homes replace parsonage arrangement.

1966 - Rev. W. Harold Killian becomes pastor, serving until 1986. His 20-year tenure is the longest in ESBC history up to that time.

1970 – 1989

and the History Continues...

1970-1990 - Between the years 1970 and 1990, the population of the city of Greenville was on a steady decline. While the civil rights movement brought necessary change and began the work toward equality, its struggles took their toll on every aspect of society, including inner-city unity and stability. However, Greenville's surrounding areas continued to be attractive to outside industry. In 1975, François Michelin noticed the textile industry history of the area and the hardworking individuals whom the industry had produced. Because of this instilled work ethic within the population, he decided to open his operation here. Many of the first-generation employees at Michelin came from the textile industry in Greenville.

1970 - Church acquires the adjacent Allison property on Earle Street for \$7,500.

1970 - Rev. Killian washing the first church bus.

1971 - The church acquires the property of church member Mrs. "Kiddie" Crisp on Stone Avenue adjacent to the former Stone Avenue School, which became known as the "Kiddie Crisp building."

Mrs. B. B. "Kiddie" Crisp -

Mrs. B.B. "Kiddie" Crisp was a charter member of Earle Street Baptist Church, transferring her membership from First Baptist Church of Greenville. She was a much loved elementary school teacher at the Stone Avenue School, which was adjacent to her residence on Stone Avenue. At Earle Street, Mrs. Crisp taught and directed the Primary Department in Sunday School from the founding of the church.

Generations of students in public school and Sunday School remember her as a kind and loving teacher. Commenting on a photo of the June 1946 Vacation Bible School, Jane Shipp recalled, "I guess all of us had Mrs. Crisp for school as well as SS. She was a kind, gentle lady. Her love of children was apparent in everything she did." Mrs. Crisp could quiet a group of children with a few words, according to Helen Bowen Tedards. "Now boys and girls," she would say, "Mrs. Crisp wants you to settle down and pay attention." Stone Avenue School was built in 1917 for grades one through three. Stone School, built on Wilton Street a few years later, was for grades four through six.

The school system consolidated the two in the 1940s, and Earle Street bought the property in 1947. The building was named the Kiddie Crisp Building, and it has accommodated children's Sunday School classes, Boy Scout Troop 30, a Vietnamese congregation, and numerous church activities. Kiddie Crisp was a joyful servant of God and His church. On the occasion of Earle Street's 57th anniversary in 1979, she said, "How many times have I said with the Psalmist: 'This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.' May the tie that binds our hearts and hands together continue to be a great blessing and of great service to thy Kingdom's work."

1982 - The church adopts a policy of providing a home for furloughing missionaries. Bequest from the estate of Mr. Elof Peterson provides a house for this use.

August 1983 - The church elects its first female deacon, Mrs. Jean Cochran. This action is particularly progressive during this time period in a Baptist church.

September 1983 - ESBC participates in a pastoral exchange with Millbrook Baptist Church in Southampton, England.

1985 - Choir members rehearsing before worship service.

March 1986 - Sixty church members attend retreat sponsored by Long Range Planning Committee.

August 1987 - Dr. James G. Wooten becomes pastor. He serves Earle Street for 21 years, which is the longest tenure for any of the church's pastors to date.

August 30, 1987 - Installation service for Dr. Wooten

December 1988 - First Christmas tree in the sanctuary.

1988 - ESBC is recognized by the Southern Baptist Convention as PACT Church of the Year for its long-range planning and revitalization processes.

August 1989 - ESBC takes its first mission trip, leading Bible School and other mission projects in St. Croix, Virgin Islands.

June 1928 - Church member and employee Miss Helen Gibson is honored for her long-time commitment to the church. She served in various roles from the 1920s into the 1960s.

In 1924, while Dr. Ellis Fuller was pastor, Miss Helen Gibson became affiliated with Earle Street Baptist Church, beginning duties as superintendent of the Junior Department in Sunday School. She had just completed her training at the Woman's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Kentucky. In June 1928, she was employed by the church as enlistment secretary and later became church secretary, a position she held until 1948. When Earle Street held its 25th-anniversary session of Vacation Bible School, Miss Gibson had served as principal of the summer program for 24 of those years. She retained this place of leadership until 1960. "My greatest joy through the years," she insisted, "came from working with the young people."

1990-2009

and the History Continues...

1990-2009 - In 1992, BMW made its home in the upstate, bringing more employment and stability to the area. Suburban areas continued to expand in Greenville County as a result of many companies moving in from all over the United States and the world. However, the city of Greenville continued to decline in population. Some long-time downtown Greenville families decided to move farther out into the county while others stayed through the changes. Local churches like ESBC welcomed the new population occupying suburban areas. New churches were opening in these newly developed areas outside the city of Greenville, but ESBC maintained its membership and even experienced growth.

July 4, 1990 - Members of ESBC and other community members participate in a

cookout, patriotic singing, and parade down Earle Street.

1989-90 - Renovations to the church's education building are proposed and approved.

April 7, 1991 - Missionaries Charles and Betty Bedenbaugh are honored for three decades of mission work.

1992 - The church's new pipe organ is delivered, installed, and dedicated.

1994 - A Vietnamese congregation meets at ESBC from 1994–2002 in order to establish their church.

1995 - The church establishes an Endowment Fund with gifts in honor of Mr. Ernie Merck.

1995 - The construction of the new Family Life Center begins.

2000 - The church acquires an office building on Stone Avenue for \$355,000, eventually designated as the Scout Building.

September 11, 2002 - A memorial service is held one year after the 9/11 terror attacks.

March 7, 2002 - Central Baptist Church closes, and its congregation begins to worship with the congregation at ESBC.

2003 - The church begins to hold two worship services each Sunday morning.

April 13, 2003 - Members of Central Baptist Church officially join ESBC.

April 8, 2007 - Two checks are presented to church from the former Central Baptist Church. The checks, for a total of \$651,941.77, retire ESBC's building fund debt and add more than \$385,000 to the endowment.

2007 - Renovation of the first-floor preschool area and installation of partitions in the Fellowship Hall are completed.

June 3, 2007 - Minister of Music and Worship, Rev. Janice Hinnant, is ordained by the church as its first female minister.

December 21, 2008 - The church votes unanimously to call Dr. Stephen Clyborne as senior pastor.

January 1, 2009 - Dr. Clyborne takes office as senior pastor, exactly seven years after he joined the staff as associate pastor.

February 2009 - New stained-glass windows are installed in the sanctuary, replacing

the original 1923 windows. A church member's anonymous donation pays the entire cost of the project.

2009 - ESBC members Mrs. Teri Parker Lewis and Mr. Noah Garrett give a dramatic presentation on the life of South Carolina missions pioneer Hephzibah Jenkins Townsend.

January 18, 2009 - Installation service for Dr. Clyborne.

2010–2030

and the History Continues...

2010–2030 - Not until the early 1990s did the downtown area begin its re-urbanization journey. This process involved steady attempts to reverse 40 years of declining city population. These efforts included investments in infrastructure and granting renovation, single, and multi-family building permits and have attracted many types of businesses to the downtown area. On May 25, 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau population figures revealed that Greenville had become the fourth fastest growing city in the nation.

New building projects attracted visitors and residents to the downtown area. The Liberty Bridge (completed in 2004), a uniquely designed suspension bridge in Falls Park, embraces modernization through its progressive architecture and honors history through its location over the Reedy River. The falls of the river are where Richard Pearis, the first European settler in the area, established a trading post in 1768 in order to trade with the native Cherokee people. In the Stone Avenue area, many real estate projects have emerged, bringing a surge of population growth around Earle Street Baptist Church. One such project is Main and Stone, a “mixed-use” complex with both residential and commercial space, completed in 2017 on the corner of Main Street and Stone Avenue just a few blocks from the church. Another example close to the church is the North Pointe project, also a mixed-use complex, located at the triangle of Stone Avenue, North Church Street, and Wade Hampton Boulevard. This type of development in the downtown area contributes not only to Greenville's growth but also to that of churches like ESBC.

In the downtown area, a new demographic of young professionals has also emerged. This group is made up of the younger generation of longtime Greenvillians as well as young transplants moving in from all areas of the country. This resurgence is reflected in the life of the church in Greenville. ESBC welcomes all individuals and families who are new to the area on a regular basis. The congregation reflects the unique demographic of Greenville's downtown population in that members include older experienced professionals, many of whom are descendants of workers in the once-booming textile industry which originally put Greenville on the map. In combination with this group, church members also include some of the energetic tech-savvy Millennials who are bringing new ideas and modernization to the church while respecting its tradition and history.

Earle Street Baptist Church is in part unique because it has maintained the same traditional worship style that was vital to its growth as a new church 100 years ago. Although many churches rely on other worship styles for growth, ESBC seems to be attracting the young modern population because of its traditional approach. Like some other downtown churches, ESBC has endured historical cycles that bring change, improvement, and social movement.

August 19, 2012 - In 2002, eighty years after Earle Street was established by members of Central Baptist Church, Central closed its doors after years of declining membership. The remaining members joined Earle Street in a new beginning together. In many ways, the circle of life was complete, as we welcomed into our home the one who gave birth to us.

On August 19, 2012, Earle Street and Pelham Road Baptist churches, which were both established by Central, joined together for worship at the old Central Baptist Church building, 90 years after Central established ESBC. Dr. Stephen Clyborne preached the sermon, entitled "Who Could Have Imagined?" based on Ephesians 3:20-21:

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we could ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." This excerpt from the sermon also weaves Dr. Clyborne's personal story into the stories of Central and Earle Street:

"Who could have imagined that in 2002, when I was called to serve at Earle Street as the associate pastor, my home church, the church where I was reared and baptized and ordained, Central Baptist, the mother church of Earle Street, would vote to close its doors and join Earle Street? Who could have imagined the mother church and the daughter church worshipping under the same roof at the same time when I was joining the staff of the daughter church? Who could have imagined that, almost overnight, in addition to finding a new church family at Earle Street, I would be reunited with my home church family at Central, worshipping with my own parents again, and the people from Central who had such a profound impact on my life? Who could have imagined how the circle of life would be completed for the two churches and for me as well? Only God."

2011 - The church establishes a dual Sunday School schedule.

2010 - ESBC participates in Operation Inasmuch, an annual one-day mission blitz when church members go into the community to serve in various ways. Churches across the nation participate in this effort, based on the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25:40: "Truly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me."

2013 - Every summer since 2013, our older youth, college students, and adults have the privilege of serving children in the South Bronx by partnering with "A House on Beekman." This organization exists to create a seamless series of programs from birth to career that empowers the next generation of the South Bronx to reach its full potential. It is a blessing to be able to invest in these children each year and to be able to see how God is working in their community and generation.

2017 - Earle Street members join together to participate in Habitat for Humanity, providing labor to give housing to those in need.

2017 - Older youth, college students, and adults serve in Patate, Ecuador. They lead Bible School and participate in manual labor projects.

2017 - As a way of ministering to church members and their families, WMU members knit beautiful blankets and shawls to give to those who are sick or dealing with other difficult life circumstances.

June 4, 2017 - Members celebrate in a “Living Stones” groundbreaking for the new addition. These living stones and cornerstone were incorporated into the new addition to the education building.

2017 - Families participate in fall and spring camping trips to Table Rock State Park and Devils Fork State Park. This event is a time of intergenerational fellowship including games, hiking, picnics, campfires, and worship.

2015–2016 - The ESBC youth choir joins other youth choirs in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for Festival By the Sea. Every spring since 1999, the youth choir has participated in this weekend-long event where youth choirs combine to practice and then perform specially chosen music. It is a time for praising God and learning Scripture through singing.

2017 - WMU annual picnic to raise money and awareness for the Janie Chapman offering to support Baptist missionaries in South Carolina.

2017 - XYZ senior group day trip to The Cove, Christmas 2017.

2018 - Children’s basketball.