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The Sardis Community

The area surrounding Sardis Road in Mecklenburg County traces its roots to a courageous and faith-filled group of Scotch-Irish settlers. Like many colonists who emigrated to America in pursuit of religious freedom, so too, did these Presbyterian pioneers. As word spread that the backcountry of the Carolina Colony was a land of fertile soil, healthy climate, and affordability, the county of Mecklenburg was established in 1762 honoring King George's new bride, Queen Charlotte. This was a territory "largely unexplored and uninhabited except for the native Indians who hunted its vast woodlands" (Reid 1). Surely, these determined pioneers settling in the Sardis area of Mecklenburg would face "new circumstances in the wide-open spaces of freedom," but these freedoms would be realized in exchange for the extreme hardship of a new life carved in the wilderness (Reid 13).

Relentless in their pursuit, wherever the industrious Scotch Irish settled, their first priority—beyond building shelter for themselves— was to erect a "meeting house" for the worship of God (Reid 7). With the focus of shared faith, the families of five men— John Black, James Boyes, William Irwin, John Kirkpatrick, and Matthew Wallace— were formally recognized by the Presbytery of the Carolinas as Sardis Church on February 24, 1790, and thus the Sardis community became official. The fingerprints of these fearless families and this congregation continue to leave an indelible mark beyond the walls of this historical church into the surrounding community through the hallmarks of education, reconciliation, hospitality & recreation.

Education. In 1804, Sardis called its first regular minister, Isaac Grier, who would pastor the church for 38 years. With a commitment to education, Dr. Grier

established Sardis Academy, an influence that would be far-reaching as many leaders in the community and in wider circles received their training here. Moreover, many entered into the ranks of Christian ministry. It has been said, “As Virginia became the mother of presidents, so Sardis became the mother of ministers” (Reid 40). Generations of Christian educators and missionaries have emerged from Sardis Church with a legacy that reaches from the corridors of schools and churches within Mecklenburg County to the far reaches of the globe. Today, the Sardis area boasts 3 private schools- Providence Day School, Charlotte Country Day School, and Charlotte Christian School– serving as reminders of the legacy of education so esteemed from the early days of this community.

Racial Reconciliation. Early church records indicate “servants” were a vital part of the social and economic structure of this farming community. These slaves were taught to read, write and were “members admitted to the full privileges of the church” (Reid 98). Outside the church, they were not considered equal and received a burial with only a small fieldstone marker– obscured for years behind what is now the Boy Scout Hut on Sardis Road (Funk and Schwab). With the economic and social cords of slavery wrapped around the agricultural society of this time period, it would be in its 225th year that Sardis would tangibly bring the beginnings of reconciliation to this tarnished past. Through the collaborative efforts of a Sardis church member, an Eagle Scout, a UNCC professor, and the local chapter of the Colonial Dames, this slave cemetery was properly memorialized in October of 2015 with a ceremony, monument, and fenced enclosure for the 80 plus slaves who were laid to rest in this location (Funk and Schwab).

Hospitality & Recreation. Today, the historic Whitehead Manor Conference Center can be found on the corner of Sardis and Rama Road. A venue equipped to host various events, the original manor house structure on this property with its “grand

porches, sweeping breezeways, courtyards, and old-growth trees” was erected in 1895 by Dr. R.G. Miller, pastor to Sardis Presbyterian from 1887-1925 (“About Us”). Deeded upon his death to his 8 grandchildren, this Victorian home stayed in this family for 71 years. Traveling to the intersection of Sardis and Boyce Road, James Boyce Park can be found. Named for the “Boyes” family of original Sardis Church settlers, Mecklenburg County Parks & Recreation built this public venue on the farmland of these pioneers (Whitacre). Walking trails, practice fields, playgrounds, and picnic shelters offer free recreation to the people of Mecklenburg County and pay homage to the land that was tilled, toiled, lived, and loved by this colonial family of Sardis.

*(**Of personal note: This area of Charlotte has been an integral part of shaping who I am. Attending Charlotte Christian School, having sports practices at Boyce Park, and working at Whitehead Manor where I travel as a server up and down the small back staircase used by the “servants,” I share a living, personal connection with both the past and the present of Sardis.)*

Works Cited

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