

# The end of an era: South Norfolk church closes its doors after 125 years

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The founding year of the first church in South Norfolk was 1892. The Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed were things of the past, streetcars pulled by horses soon became available and ferries plowed the waters of the Elizabeth River. Horse and buggies continued to be a mode of transportation until early into the next century, when the automobile began to replace them.

It all started with the donation of two lots at the corner of Liberty and 22nd streets. It was there that the one room Liberty Street Methodist Episcopal Church South was built. Dedication took place in May 1892, and the Rev. Robert Tankard Waterfield became its first pastor.

At that time, the young village of South Norfolk consisted of dirt streets and wooden boardwalks. The area where the church was constructed contained a short section of boardwalk in front and the remaining sidewalk was a dirt path bordered by tall, young trees. Eventually, streetcars ran down the middle of Liberty Street, taking people to and from Berkley and Norfolk and members of the church congregation to worship services.

The membership of Liberty Street Church grew until it was too large for the existing building, and a committee was appointed to find property on which to build a larger structure. In 1914, lots were purchased at the southwest corner of Ohio and Jackson streets in South Norfolk. In 1919, a large three-story home and surrounding land at the corner of Chesapeake Avenue and Ohio Street were made available to the church. The lots at the corner of Jackson and Ohio Streets were then sold, and the property on Chesapeake Avenue was acquired.

On Jan. 31, 1920, the cornerstone of the Chesapeake Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church South was laid, and construction began. The change in location necessitated a change in the name of the church. After many

hardships, the building was completed at a cost of \$50,000, and the congregation took possession in January 1921.

Approximately 50 years later, an inspection of the sanctuary revealed that termites had done irreparable damage and the building would have to be demolished. This was accomplished, the ground was treated and a new church building was constructed on the same corner. The congregation moved into the completed sanctuary on Jan. 24, 1971.

A service of dedication was held on Sunday Nov. 19, 1978. The entire church debt had been satisfied, and all future services were well-attended until about the year 2008. By that time, many older members had passed away and there were few new additions to the church roll. Since then, many members have moved and changed their membership to other houses of worship.

After more than 125 years and 41 pastors, a sad day arrived. The last traditional worship service was held at 11 a.m. on Sunday Dec. 31, 2017. The service was led by the Rev. Robert L. Morris Jr. He had previously served the Chesapeake Avenue United Methodist Church from 1980 to 1984. The title of his sermon on Dec. 31 was "The Cycle of Life."

I was privileged to be a 50-year member of the Methodist Church on Chesapeake Avenue and taught the older Adult Bible class for 10 of those years. One of my resolutions for the New Year is to find a new place for my church membership.



Liberty Street Methodist Episcopal Church South existed until 1920 in South Norfolk.



The second Chesapeake Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church South closed its doors due to low membership on Dec. 31, 2017.