



**CHURCH GROUP**—Seen here is a recent picture of William Monroe Taylor's Sunday School class. He is third from the right on the front row.

## IN YEARS GONE BY

# William M. Taylor Of Altamahaw Has Outstanding Church Record

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For a number of years I have been hearing of Will Taylor of Altamahaw. Who hasn't that has lived in this neighborhood for any length of time? Mr. Taylor has a church record that few, if any, living mortal can rival.

He will be 83 years old Columbus Day which falls next Friday. And in spite of his advanced years, and the automobile accident he was in last February, which fractured his knee, he is able to get about and to teach a Sunday School class. He has been teaching Sunday School classes for 45 years and is not tired yet.

Every summer since 1900 he has been a representative of the Morton Township Non-Denominational Sunday School Convention, attending 56 consecutive sessions without a miss. That is something to write about.

I have longed to meet the old gentleman for quite some time. One Saturday afternoon not long ago I came across one of his neighbors, Wake Spoon, who kindly consented to take me to see Mr. Taylor. As soon as Spoon



WILLIAM MONROE TAYLOR

stopped his car in the front yard of the Taylor home, Mr. Taylor was on the front porch ready with an extended hand to greet us. Considering his age, I was agreeably surprised to see that he looked

much younger than his years, and spoke with a clear and strong voice. He limped slightly, due to the accident last winter, and carried a cane which he didn't lean on too much.

Mr. Taylor was born on a farm in Caswell County and was given the names William Monroe. The middle name, was for Monroe Hazel, a prosperous farmer in our neighboring county to the north. His father and mother, John and Mary Katherine Taylor, moved the family to Altamahaw when Will, or Willie, was eight years old.

It will be recalled that Berry Davidson and John Q. Gant established the Altamahaw village when they built the cotton mill on Haw River. Berry Davidson owned and operated a grist mill and a saw-mill there, and when he got the "cotton mill fever" which was raging among the ambitious in the late 1870's and 30's, he decided a cotton mill would be a good venture.

Since cotton mill machinery then was expensive as it is now, David-

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son looked for a partner with money to invest. He interested John Gant, who was then running a general store in Company Shops, in the project. And since Gant had learned quite a lot about the manufacture of "Alamance Plaids" working for Edwin M. Holt at the Alamance Factory, he was an ideal partner for Davidson. The first unit of the cotton mill was started in 1881. That was the year Will Taylor's dad moved from Caswell to Altamahaw.

Speaking of Berry Davidson reminds us of the old story about the brick for the mill building running short. They made the brick on the site, as was the custom in the nineteenth century, since it was cheaper to make them than to import them from Greensboro or Durham.

Davidson had charge of making the brick and sawing the lumber for the mill building. Gant, from time to time, drove over to Altamahaw to see how things were going. It seems they were paying the brick maker by the thousand brick, possibly \$5 a thousand. One day John Gant drove up, and surveyed the situation. "Look here, Mr. Davidson," complained Mr. Gant, "we are not going to have enough brick. Your estimation was too low!"

"I'll fix that," replied Mr. Davidson, and he did. He quietly changed the brick forms so as to mold longer and thicker brick. It didn't take as many of the larger brick as it would have of the regular size brick, so Mr. Davidson's timely act saved the extra expense of making and laying more brick.

Soon after John Taylor moved his family to Altamahaw, where he and members of his family got jobs in the cotton mill, Berry Davidson built a small church for his Methodist Protestant brethren. The John Taylors joined that little church in the wildwood, and William Monroe Taylor has been a member ever since. And while Berry Davidson built the church and "started the ball rolling"; it was Will Taylor who, more than anyone else, kept that "ball rolling."

Mr. Taylor, like most old-timers, learned to read in a one-room schoolhouse. His first and only teacher was Anna Iseley who later married Beaugard Cliner. Mr. Taylor said that he had lost track of his boyhood teacher, but thought it possible that she was still living.

John Taylor got a job as teamster for the Altamahaw Mills and hauled yarn for filling and warps to other mills who did weaving. Like the Holt and Carrigan factory on Alamance Creek and John Newton and Sons at Saxapahaw only yarn was made in the Altamahaw Mills for the first few years. When the E. M. Holt Plaid Mills was started early in 1884, that mill became a regular customer of the Altamahaw Mills. And John Taylor hauled the yarn on a wagon the nine miles from Altamahaw to Company Shops.

The wagon in which the yarn was hauled to Company Shops, and-or Burlington, was equipped with a large bureau-like box painted red. And the box had drawers just like a bureau—each drawer carried a specific yarn for filling and warp, in skein of on quills. That red box attracted a lot of attention along the way, and caused many people to ask John Taylor what was in the red box. Every time John gave them a flip-pant answer.

Wesley Cates moved his family to Company Shops the same year that John Taylor moved to Altamahaw. The two men came in contact frequently when Taylor came to Company Shops on business. The two men became good friends. Wesley could pry information out of John that others couldn't.

So, one day Wesley inquired of his friend from Altamahaw, "John, what's in that red box?" John Taylor had already delivered the yarn to Plaid Mills, and every drawer of the box was empty. He could tell his friend the truth without divulging any company information. So John replied drily, "Nothing, but bung-holes and tunnels."

Willie Taylor, who was nine years old in 1882, went to work in the cotton mill, his first job being to feed loose cotton to the hopper of the breaker lapper. When his dad was hauling yarn to Plaid Mills, that mill never did any spinning. Will was packing yarn into the drawers of the red box to be delivered to Company Shops. When Will was fifteen years old, which would make the year 1888, Altamahaw installed looms and began the production of "Alamance Plaids." It was that year that Will Taylor learned to weave. He not only became a good weaver, but he learned to fix looms.

While Will Taylor was learning the transformation of cotton staple to cotton cloth he was going to Sunday School every Sunday morning and exploring the woods and the river in the afternoon. In church and Sunday School he learned the word of God: in the woods, fields and stream, he learned the works of God.

Will Taylor learned to read quite young, and began reading the Bible long before he was twenty. His interest in the scriptures gave him the power of concentration; and concentration, as he analyzed each paragraph, gave him a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. And his understanding of the scripture fitted him for the excellent Sunday School that he is.

Mr. Taylor, like the late Will Rogers, is quite a humorist in his own right. It will be remembered that Will Rogers got his homespun philosophy across to his audience with wit and humor. Well, it is Will Taylor's knack of savoring the scripture lessons with wholesome wit and humor that makes him popular with his class. That is why he is much in demand to teach Sunday School classes, not only at

Fairview Methodist Church, at Altamahaw, but at other denominations in neighboring communities.

His good speaking voice and wholesome wit was recognized by merchants when he was barely out of his teens. So, he was induced to try his hand at auctioneering. He auctioneered at stores in the neighborhood that had slow-moving and heavy inventories. He did well and kept it up on Saturday evenings after the cotton mills had shut down for the week.

Mr. Taylor married Anna Lewis October 8, 1893, just four days before his 20th birthday. This couple lived happily together for more than 50 years, and raised nine children, including four girls and five boys. All are married but two of his daughters.

Mr. Taylor has been living in retirement for several years, and still drives his car to the store and Post Office every morning through the week. And if he fails to show up at the neighborhood stores any morning, the store keepers become apprehensive and go over to his house to see if he is well and up and about.

During the 45 years Mr. Taylor has been teaching Sunday School at Fairview Methodist Church, his class has grown from a mere handful to the 50 or more pictured here. The members of Mr. Taylor's Sunday School class are enthusiastic about the Scripture lesson because he radiates enthusiasm. Mr. Taylor has not grown tired because teaching Sunday School is a labor of love with him.

It is a far cry from the unpretentious weather-boarded church building that Berry Davidson built in the early 1880's to the modern brick church of today. Prior to 1938, Fairview Methodist Church was protestant, but in May of that year the Methodist Episcopal Church South, the Methodist Episcopal Church north of the Mason-Dixon Line, and the Methodist Protestant were united under one banner. At this time the M.E. and M.P. Churches of Altamahaw and Ossipee merged with the Fairview Church.