

**REMARKS**  
**DELIVERED AT BANKS CHAPEL**  
**UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**IN GRANVILLE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

**May 20, 2012**

**On the Occasion of its 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

**By**

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**Columbus, Georgia**

On behalf of the Banks clan gathered here today, I want to extend both my congratulations on this special occasion and our appreciation for being invited and included.

For 250 years this chapel has been a place for members of this community to gather and worship God. For all of these years it has also borne the name Banks and honored the man and the family who were the original benefactors of the chapel. The Banks family left Granville County shortly after the American Revolution, but their legacy here has remained in the name of “Banks Chapel,” for which we Banks descendants are both proud and grateful.

I therefore thought it might be appropriate on this anniversary occasion to look back 250 years and reflect, for just a few minutes, on the man whose memory you continue to honor.

His name was Thomas Banks. He was born in 1709 at a place called Mantapike on the Mataponi River in King and Queen County, Virginia, about 30 miles northeast of Richmond. His father and grandfather before him had owned the extensive Mantapike Plantation, and worshipped in the nearby Mataponi Church, which was the parish church for St. Stephens Parish. Thomas Banks was baptized in this old colonial church in 1709, and the building still stands today.

Since Thomas Banks was not the eldest son, he did not inherit Mantapike. Instead he received lands a little to the northwest in what became St. Margaret’s Parish of Caroline County, Virginia. This is near the town of Bowling Green. There he settled and married Sally Chandler. They had several children before Sally’s early death, and then he married her younger sister Betty Chandler. Thomas and Betty’s eldest son was named Ralph Banks – and he figures prominently in our family history.

Most of the records of Caroline County, Virginia, were burned during the Civil War, but from what survives, we do know that Thomas Banks was not only a large landowner but he also held official positions in the county, served as attorney for various neighboring families in handling legal matters, and operated a local tavern or ordinary which, in the Virginia tradition, would have been the center of

the business and social community in that part of the county. He may also have been a vestryman of St. Margaret's Parish, and we have every reason to believe that he took a leadership role in local religious matters.

In 1762, 250 years ago, he moved to Granville County. We don't know the exact reason, but we can assume it was because of economic opportunity as this area was becoming more settled and more prosperous. Thomas Banks had plenty of capital, and he decided to invest it here. He was 53 years old and he came here with his second wife Betty and four living children – the oldest 18 and the youngest, Ralph, only 5. Four more Banks children were born in Granville County over the next 12 years.

Thomas amassed over 2600 acres of land here, on both sides of Quick Sand Creek, including the spot where we sit today, and he provided this land for a chapel – where he and his family as well as his neighbors could worship God, at first in the Anglican tradition, but later as Methodists.

Thomas and his children – by then mostly grown – made another radical move in 1784. This time it was to northeast Georgia, where he and his sons received grants of thousands of acres of land and where they settled and most of them lived for another generation. Thomas was 75 when he sold out in Granville County and moved to Georgia. His wife Betty was dead, but he returned to Granville County in 1786 and married a third time to a young widow, Mrs. Susannah Preddy Hurt. They had a son born two years later when father Thomas was 79 years old.

The following year, which was 1789, Thomas Banks died. The records of his estate in Georgia indicate extensive landholdings there, as well as slaves, horses, cattle, blacksmith tools, surveying equipment, carpentry tools, and lots of corn, grain, flax and other crops and supplies – but no wine. I think he gave up the tavern business when he became a Methodist.

Thomas and his sons established a Methodist meeting house, today called Coldwater United Methodist Church, on their plantation lands in Elbert County, Georgia, so we could say that he was the founder of not just one but several churches. He had known Bishop Francis Asbury here in Granville County in the early 1780s, and the Banks family hosted Asbury numerous times in Georgia.

Asbury found them warm and hospitable as well as zealous in their support of building up the church. So I don't think it is a stretch to say that Thomas Banks was influential in the spread of Methodism from the Carolinas to Georgia. And that tradition continued – children and grandchildren of Thomas participated in the founding and fostering of Methodist churches almost everywhere they settled across the South – in western Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and even on to Texas and the West.

These are the surviving facts about the man who established this chapel and gave it its name. What doesn't survive is much information about Thomas Banks as a person. We can only surmise, based on the personal information we do have about some of his children, especially his son Ralph. We have descriptions of Ralph written by family members who actually knew him, and if the son was anything like the father – and I suspect he was – then we can apply this 100-year old description of Ralph Banks to his father Thomas, your church's founder:

“He was industrious, honorable, judicious, upright, successful and sometimes autocratic toward those over whom he exercised legitimate authority, yet genial, hospitable, honored and esteemed. He was a man among men who made his mark on his community in his day. He had those characteristics that make the good citizen, the good neighbor, the good friend, and the good father. He centered his life around his devotion to God, and his daily life included family worship. He raised his children to love and fear the Lord, and when they became old, they did not depart from it.”

As the spiritual descendants of Thomas Banks, you, the present-day congregants of Banks Chapel, have also lived this prophesy. You have served the Lord in this place for all these years and all these generations. You have sent your sons and daughters out to far-away places, just as the Banks family moved on in what was still the early days of Granville County, taking the strength of their faith with them. We, the Banks descendants, are proud of our family heritage at Banks Chapel but also proud of the congregation here today – that you have survived, and thrived and continue to worship in this sacred spot that was first consecrated through the efforts of Thomas Banks, a worthy God-fearing Christian, so many years ago.