

CHAPTER NINE

EARLY PROTESTANT CHURCHES

In order to understand early religious conditions in this county it will be helpful to know at least the general religious situation in the territory from which this county was settled. In the country in which most of our ancestors were born, the eastern highlands south of Pennsylvania, the Episcopal Church was the established one. It was supported by a general tax; it was administered by self-perpetuating bodies of vestrymen, usually chosen from the Tidewater gentry, and having no appeal to, and, seemingly, little use for the common people.

Among these 'common people' the Baptists seem to have been the first dissenters to openly challenge the power of the Episcopal Church, and at first they bore the entire weight of the battle. This situation continued for something like ten years, until the Methodists, who

did not generate much force until about 1770, joined them, and thereafter the religious battle was as fast and furious as the Revolution itself, both going on at the same time, and being more or less related. The dissenters gained ground over the known fact that many Episcopalians were loyal to England (so were not a few Methodists and Baptists, but they probably did not make so much noise about it as others). In cases where congregations of the two churches accompanied by their pastors moved over the mountains to the west from which comparatively safe ground (safe at least from the tax collectors) they sent support to their brethren who had elected to stay behind.

About the time the patriots won the war the dissenters began to win also. The tax for the support of the Episcopal Church was abolished in Virginia and the Carolinas after much of the population had refused to pay it for years anyway. Acts providing for complete separation of church and state were passed by all the above states, not fully effective, however, until about 1835. The upshot of the struggle was that the dissenting churches became supreme in the mountains and some what east of them, and the Episcopal Church remained the most influential in the sections nearer the sea, but without state support. The Presbyterian Church, which had started as an ally of the Methodists and Baptists, remained so until the end of the struggle. But it became far less effective as time passed owing to the fact that it required its ministers to be university educated. No facilities for such education existed in that section, and when from death or other reason the ministers of that faith who came from Ireland and Scotland were removed from the scene of action there were no successors to take their places. The Presbyterian organization dwindled almost to the vanishing point. This condition was later remedied by the organization we know as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which subscribed to about all the doctrines of the original church except that

of requiring the pastors to be university educated.

While the church was more closely related to our early settlers than it seems to be today, it is quite an effort to trace its early activities in this county. We know ministers were among the first settlers and first visitors, too, but the creeds and the organizations they represented are now unknown. At the beginning of our history, both recorded and traditional, the Methodist and Baptist churches seem to have been leaders in the county, and it is more than likely that they played leading parts in ministering to the spiritual needs of this section from the very start.

While it is generally stated that Fee Fee Baptist Church, organized in St. Louis County in 1807, was the first Baptist church in the region west of the Mississippi, this fact is vigorously disputed by a number of historians, in particular Allan Hinchey. In his Stories of Southeast Missouri published some time back in Cape Girardeau, the statement is made that the first Baptist church in that territory was Bethel Baptist, organized on Randall's Creek in Cape Girardeau County in 1806, by Reverend Daniel Green, a Virginian. Hinchey further stated that Reverend Thomas Johnson, a minister of that faith, had been west of the river as early as 1799 in which year he baptized Mrs. Agnes Balleu in the waters of Randall's Creek near the later site of Bethel Church. As tending to show that the first settlers took their religion very seriously, a woman member of this congregation was 'churched' in 1818 for wearing gold earrings, but was acquitted on it being proven to the satisfaction of the congregation that she wore them 'for the benefit of her health (eyesight), and not from vanity or for display.'

The next forty years of Baptist church history in this county are now lost to us, but from later events it is likely that most of the preaching under the auspices of that church was casual, and that there was little or

no church organization. But ministers of that faith held services fairly regularly, first in one place and then another, usually scattered schoolhouses of which there were beginning to be a few at widely-spaced intervals.

Our chief interest in Baptist churches organized before their history begins in this county is in Fee Fee, which was brought into being by the labors of Reverend Thomas Roy Musick, two of whose daughters married David Martin and John Underwood, which see.

One of the very oldest Protestant churches in present Maries County, second only to Bloomgarden Methodist in point of years, is Friendship Baptist Church. In fact, Friendship is the oldest church organized here still functioning, services having been suspended at Bloomgarden a number of years ago, while Friendship, moved, reorganized, and its name changed a time or two, is still flourishing in Texas.

Friendship Baptist Church was organized at the home of John Stone 'in Pulaski county, on the watters of the Big Maries,' in 1845, although the records contain the minutes of meetings as early as 1844. John Stone's house, a log building twenty by twenty feet inside, built of hewn logs with faces of fifteen to eighteen inches and dovetailed corners, still stands and is in daily use as the central portion of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Adam Copeland, at Old Weldon. Mrs. Copeland is the granddaughter of Dr. B. F. Bumpass, whose family has owned the tract for at least seventy-five years. It is in excellent repair and may now be entering the second century of service, John Stone having entered the land it stands on in 1840.

The early minutes record that the meeting to organize was presided over by Reverend John M. Chaudon, and that John and James Gibson were then, or already had been, consecrated as elders. In addition, the following were listed as members of the organizational meeting: John Gibson, James Gibson, Ambrose Y. Stone, John P. Robertson, James L. Robertson, Mary M. Gibson (wife of John), Margaret Gibson, Sidney E. Stone, Celia Stone, Mary Davidson, Abigail Robertson, and

Olivia Catherine Robertson. It is reasonably sure that Barnett Finn belonged to this church either then or later, as did John T. (Thomps) Powers, and that these two families, together with Edward Moss, were about the only members of the congregation that did not go to Texas. The delegates to the Annual Baptist Association (its name and place of meeting not given) in 1852 were John Gibson, Edward Moss, Alexander Powers, Ambrose Y. Stone, John T. Powers, and Reuben G. Stone. The delegates in 1853 included some of the above persons and William Cansler, reciting that the latter had united with the church by letter in 1850.

Meetings were held regularly at the Stone home from 1844 to 1853, the pulpit usually being filled by the Gibsons, particularly John and James. John Gibson must have been ordained soon after the church was organized, for there are records of his preaching there during and after 1846 up to the time he moved to Texas in 1853. In Texas he settled on Pecan Creek in present Llano County on the Colorado River above Austin. Reuben Gilmore Stone went there at the same time and settled on Walnut Creek in Blanco County some six miles from the Gibsons. Others of the Maries County church must have gone to Texas at the same time or soon after, for they met and organized a new Baptist church there in 1854, the minutes of the meeting being entered on the records of Friendship Baptist Church, which had been taken along, either by accident or design.

The formal organization, however, was delayed until the first Sunday in August, 1855, at which time the Gibsons and Stones were among the persons signing the roll of the new church, which then or a little later was christened Little Hope. In everything except its name and location it was a continuation of old Friendship Church. Land for a building was donated in 1856, and a building eighteen by twenty-four feet was erected in 1858. John Gibson and William Cansler were on the building committee. The name was changed to Pecan Creek

Church in 1859, under which name it continued until the outbreak of the Civil War, meetings being suspended in January 1862. Regular meetings were resumed in August 1865 and continued until August 1881, at which time the name was again changed, this time to Macedonia. It still exists under this name and is the mother church of several congregations that were formed during the settling of the country in territory formerly served by this church alone. Macedonia is a member of the Perdenales Baptist Association of Texas, and has a long and honorable career there as one of the mother churches of a vast section of Texas, now thickly settled.

The Stone and Gibson families, who played a leading part in organizing Friendship Church, came here from Osage County several years before that time, and lived along the upper Big Marias until the fifties, when most of them went to Texas. William Gibson, who also went there but later returned to this county, lived at the Joel Hale place and near there from the time of his return until his death in the early eighties. His wife was a daughter of Reverend John T. Powers, and his account will be found under the Powers name. James Gibson lives at what we know as the Lewis Eads place, Silas Gibson at the Duggan place, and John Gibson's place has not been certainly identified, but is thought to have been on Dog Tail Creek, not far from the church. Such descendants of John and James Gibson as are at hand will be found in the Latham sections of the chapter on Early Physicians. The Stone family seems to have completely disappeared from this county, such of them as did not go to Texas having moved to Arkansas a great many years ago. A member of this family, Reverend William Stone, preached at Little Flock several times after its organization in 1885, and his visits seem to have been the last connection of the Stone family with this county.*

* The foregoing information about Friendship Church was furnished by Miss Rina Latham of Alamogordo, New Mexico, whose mother was a daughter of Reverend John Gibson, and whose father was a son of Dr. V. G. Latham.

The Author

Also among the older Baptist churches, perhaps the very oldest in its part of the county, was Hopewell, which has a known history of at least seventy-five years, and a traditional one much farther back. The first church building was on the Thomas Moreland place, now owned by Chris John. Mr. John remembers going to church there when he was a very small boy. Some fifty odd years ago the church site and a part of the building were moved to and incorporated into the present Lone Star Schoolhouse, and is yet a part of that building. (The Lone Star School District itself was the outgrowth of a still earlier district known as Stony Point, also the Barnwell, and due to the fact that church services were held there also, there was some confusion as to the name of the church, some of the older citizens remembering it as Stony Point).

The Hopewell congregation used the Lone Star Schoolhouse as a place of worship for fifteen years or so until the completion of the new church at Broadway on land donated by Judge Marcus B. John. After occupying the new building, about 1904, the congregation was and still is known as the Broadway Baptist Church.

These two are the oldest Baptist churches in the county whose histories are fairly complete, but no others were of equal or greater age. Beulah Baptist in the northeast corner of the county, High Gate in the east end, and several on this side of the river must now be approaching their centennials if the facts were known. C. C. Myers in his lifetime told the writer that when he was a small boy he attended Baptist church in 'Sinful Bend' in a log building on the Moon--now the Tony Hutchison--place. Reverend Elijah Fann and Reverend Briggs were among those who preached there. If this church had a name it is not now recalled, but has been called Union Hill ever since the first congregation began to hold meetings in the log Schoolhouse on or near the site of the present Bend School, after a period of worship in a log building on the present Charles Brown

place. It now has its own church building on a site about a mile from its first location.

All the above churches were Missionary Baptist, and this branch still makes up the bulk of the membership in this county. In addition, the church has from time to time been represented by the Predestinarian and United branches; the former had a church building and congregation on the old George Pendleton farm in an early day, Reverend Davis Woody being one of the ministers. Reverends Vardy Burgess and Hard in Beckham seem to have been the only ministers of the United branch whose names have come to hand. Reverend Winningham seems to have been a member of the Advent Baptist church, not further identified, and to have preached in the Tavern section, but no organized congregation of this branch is known to have existed.

Except in very general terms we know as little about the early day Methodist churches in this section as we do about the Baptist. Reverend Allen H. Godbey of Durham, North Carolina, long a minister of the St. Louis Conference and who has done a great deal of work historically, writes that prior to 1819 there was no church work carried on west of Aboeuf--now Union--Circuit. In that year a new circuit was laid out reaching to the Osage River and known as the Gasconade Circuit. It existed for almost twenty years. In 1825 John Glanville, father of the first Mrs. William H. Bowles and of Octavius Glanville, was the circuit rider, he being the only man to fill the place who had any future connection with this county. The circuit was subdivided and the name changed in 1837.

As in the case of the Baptists, the first Methodist church west of the Mississippi River is popularly supposed to be McKendree Chapel, also organized on Raddall's Creek in Cape Girardeau County in 1806, and still in use occasionally. However, Reverend Godbey writes that this is also in error, and that organized Methodist

churches were in existence in northeastern St. Louis County as early as 1798. At any rate, both were in existence many years before Methodism made its appearance in Maries County.

Reverend Millard Shockiey, Superintendent of the Lebanon District of the Southwest Missouri Conference of the Methodist Church, writes that it is a tradition in his family that a great uncle, first name unknown, came to this county about 1823, organized a little class, and built a church somewhere along the east side of the Prairie, in the general neighborhood of present Bowles Chapel. According to this tradition he died shortly after, unmarried, the church burned and the congregation scattered because no one took the place of his uncle in the ministry.

Whether or not the date is correct, it was not long after this time that Reverend Pinnell began preaching at Double Chimneys. After a few years in the Presbyterian Church and certainly before 1844, the Johnsons, Abraham and Myscal, became ministers of the Methodist Church with headquarters at Bloomgarden. The latter died in the faith, but in his later years Abraham again united with the Presbyterian Church and served as a minister in it. A detailed account of these men and their church activities will be found under their names in the chapter devoted to their families. Bloomgarden flourished for almost a hundred years, but the building has now been torn down and the congregation has affiliated with churches elsewhere. Double Chimneys, first was organized at the Pinnell place, ceased to operate about 1880, its place being taken by Bowles Chapel, less than a mile away. The church building at the latter site remains, but has been converted to other uses and services are no longer held there. Vichy Methodist Church was organized about the same time as Bowles Chapel and has also been abandoned and its property sold to the Church of Christ, so that now there is no Methodist congregation east of the river except that at Belle.

West of the river the congregations at Branson and Vienna are the only ones of any age still in existence, the oldest one on this side, Carnes Camp Ground, and the second oldest, Kenner, having long since been abandoned. Carnes Camp Ground was largely built around the activities of Reverend Jehu Carnes, and Kenner around those of Reverend Elias Kenner; upon the death of the former and the removal of the latter the congregations at these places soon fell apart. Branson Church is the successor to the Branson Camp Ground on the upper Big Maries, which was established there some years after Friendship Baptist Church was discontinued. Methodist services were also held regularly at the Dillard Green place on the river for a number of years, but a search for any record is handicapped by the fact that this was truly a community church, open to all, and ministers of other churches held forth there about as often as did the Methodists.

Search is also handicapped by the fact that many of the early day Methodist ministers had no particular charges. Reverend William J. Robertson and Reverend William Shockley, both prominent in its affairs, each spent at least fifty years in its service as ministers in this county, but neither of them ever had a fixed circuit as ministers of that faith have today.

During a great part of the time we cover the Methodist and Baptist churches were about equal in membership and number of churches. But at the present time the Baptists far outnumber the Methodists in both, the latter now having not to exceed four congregations in the whole county.

For some reason not now evident the Presbyterian Church never secured much of a foothold here. In the forties of the last century frequent meetings of the Cumberland branch of the church were held at Rock Springs, and it is more than likely that there was a regularly organized congregation. Reverend John Avery of the

Dillon settlement was one of the ministers. The Johnsons, Abraham and John M., and also William L. Pinnell were also ministers, but after a few years all three entered the Methodist Church. Pinnell and John M. Johnson remained there until their deaths, but in his old days Abraham Johnson re-entered the Presbyterian Church and died in that faith. Reverend Avery either moved away or became inactive through age, and such membership as had belonged to this faith gradually affiliated with other churches. If a Presbyterian congregation has existed in this county since that at Rock Springs, the fact has not been noted.

The Christian Church did not make a recorded appearance in this county until after the Civil War. Reverend T. J. Shelton and Reverend Huston L. Ferrell, both on the east side, being among the very earliest ministers of this faith of whom we have record.

Such facts as maybe obtained concerning the Lutheran Church are noted in the chapter on the German Colony on Lanes Prairie, where it has long maintained the only such congregation in this county.



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