

Old Brier Creek Has Interesting 166-Year History

By RUTH LINNEY

Roaring River.—Building a brick or stone church at Brier Creek because of its antiquity and as a memorial to Major J. H. Foote and other illustrious members was suggested by Rear Admiral P. W. Foote, a former member of the congregation, and other expatriated Wilkes natives. The present church, though dating from 1883, is quite attractive and commodious. Constituted June 8, 1783, Brier Creek was long considered the oldest Baptist church in the Northwestern corner of the State. Recent articles have stated that both Beaver Creek Baptist church and Roaring River Primitive Baptist church, near Traphill, were constituted in 1779.

This is probably true. But it will be remembered that at that time the county was newly founded, the population sparse, and the churches relatively few.

Eleven Charter Members

When constituted June 8, 1783, by Lewis Shelton, George McNeill, and John Cleveland Brier Creek had eleven charter members: — Benjamin Martin, John Parks, Benjamin Toney, Gooding Sicking, Jacob Madcaif, Charles Bond, Diana (Harrison) Martin, Elizabeth Toney, Sarah (Harrison) Thurmond, Hannah Garrison, and Mary Calaway. Old records declared, "It was the first and only Baptist church in

Brier Creek Church 166 Years Old



the Northwestern counties and several counties west, except George McNeill's church on Reddies River".

John Cleveland, brother of Colonel Ben and Capt. Bob Cleveland and like them a hero of King's Mountain, was the first pastor, while Richard Allen, first sheriff of Wilkes county, was the first clerk. Rev. Thomas Mastin was also an early pastor. Richard Allen, Jr., succeeded his father both as sheriff and as clerk at Brier Creek. They came from the White Plains section across the Yadkin; the two Richard Allens served as clerk 41 years.

Association Organized

In a festive Thanksgiving time, Nov. 23, 1822, the Brier Creek Association, thirteenth oldest in North Carolina, was organized at Brier Creek church. The following delegates, many from considerable distance, composed the convention:—From Brier Creek, Thomas Mastin, William Gilliam, William King, John Martin and James Martin; Bethel, William Dodson, Sr., William Dodson, Jr., and George Gilreath; Fishing Creek, Jesse Adams, Joshua Johnston, and W. W. Wright; Little River, John Swaim, James Robinett, and Archibald Brown; Mitchell's River, Stephen Potter, John Marsh, and Gideon Potter; Snow Creek, John Angel; Roaring River, Thomas Douglas and Elisha Richardson; Zion Hill, William Mitchell and Jonathan Woody; Cool Spring, Ambrose Johnson and David Jacks.

According to Major Foote's history, "These churches had formed a part of the Old Yadkin Association." Rev. Thomas Mastin was first moderator and Col. James Martin first clerk, James Martin was also clerk of Brier Creek church after 1839. The association met semiannually in 1834. In 1831 Rev. Samuel Waite, founder of Wake Forest, visited the association, preaching at the session at Bethel. A schism on the subject of missions developed in 1838.

Four Buildings

Brier Creek has had four buildings including an arbor for outdoor services. The first was a small log building erected in 1783. The second, a larger log building, was built in 1820 and used for more than 50 years. It had a gallery for colored members. In 1865 money began to be solicited for an arbor; Joel Dimmette, a skilled carpenter from across the Yadkin, had charge of building it several years after. In 1883 a frame building was

completed in time for the centennial of the church. In 1904 it was painted. In 1921, the association having gained a year by meeting semiannually, it was moved, remodeled, and repainted in time for the centennial of the association. Dr. Lawson Harrill, a Confederate captain, deeded the site for the church from the Bryan - Carmichael - Harrill plantation. Rev. D. W. Pool preached at the centennial of the association in 1921.

At the centennial of Brier Creek in 1883 Rev. Sanford Brown delivered the sermon and Major J. H. Foote the address on "The Progress of Baptist Principles." At the sequicentennial in 1933 Rev. N. T. Jarvis, pastor, gave the address of welcome; Rev. W. E. Linney, author of "The School of the Prophets" preached. Rear Admiral P. W. Foote, son of the old major, made an address. Remarkably, about 50 people who had attended the centennial attended the sequicentennial.

Pastors and Clerks

Except for Rev. N. T. Jarvis, Rev. Jesse Adams and his son, Rev. Franklin Adams, probably served longer as pastor than anyone else. Rev. Franklin Adams left his property to Brier Creek as an endowment fund. Rev. W. A. Myers, pastor for many years, was noted for building new churches wherever he went. Rev. Noah Jarvis became pastor in 1902, and except for a part of 1919, remained pastor for 37 years, or until he became almost helpless from a stroke in 1939. Rev. R. R. Crater, a grandson of "Uncle Billy" Myers, former pastor, has been pastor for more than 13 years. Mr. Crater was elected in August, 1936; Mr. Jarvis was pastor emeritus but preached frequently.

Thomas Foster was clerk a very long time until he left in 1883 to join Oak Forest. Squire George W. Sale was clerk 47 years and a member 77 years. His son, Worth Sale, is present clerk. Squire Sale's daughter, Miss Mattie E. Sale, for 50

years a teacher in N. C., is historian of the church and second oldest member. Her cousin "Uncle Dick" Walker, now 89 or 90, is the oldest member. Miss Mattie has done more than anyone else to keep the old church alive.

Brier Creek helped educate one young man for the ministry and teaching—the late Solomon D. Swaim.

Historic Cemetery

The cemetery is one of the oldest and most historic of the section; it is said to be one of the few in Wilkes whose graves are listed in a book on old cemeteries. It contains the soapstone tombstones of Benjamin and Diana Harris Martin, charter members who died more than 120 years ago, though their ashes still remain at the Douthit farm where they were buried and formerly lived. Soapstone also marks the very old grave of Rev. Thomas Mastin, early pastor and first clerk of the association, and that of Col. James Martin of the war with the Creek Indians, first clerk of the association and son of Benjamin and Diana. Here also is the grave of Major J. H. Foote, once Latin professor at Wake Forest, author of a history of the association and other religious pamphlets; and that of Capt. A. H. Martin, Confederate hero slain at Amelia Courthouse. There is also the grave of his brother, James Oscar Martin, racy scholar, vagabond and speculator, sheriff of Wilkes and superintendent of schools in the sixties.

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