

A Historical Sketch of Bethel Presbyterian Church

Historic Old Church is Mother of Presbyterian Churches in This Section—Records Show It is Nearly 150 Years Old—Present Edifice, Built in the Fifties, is Well Preserved—Troops of General Sherman Encamped on Church Grounds in 1865—Rev. A. D. Carswell is the Present Pastor.

By REV. A. D. CARSWELL

The writer is greatly indebted to Rev. W. C. Brown, Barium Springs, N. C., for most of the information contained in this paper. Mr. Brown, shortly after coming to Raeford, May 1, 1907, began to collect data for a history of Bethel Church. He soon found that, like so many of our older churches, the early records had been lost up to about 1874. After conferring with some of the older members of the church at that time, a number of reliable dates, clippings, etc., were collected, all of which were lost when Mr. J. A. Blue's home was burned April 4th, 1908. However, with a very few exceptions all of this material has been collected again. We are greatly indebted to the following for valuable assistance they rendered in collecting these facts: the late Duncan E. McBryde, Thomas McBryde, Mrs. S. C. McFadyen, Mrs. Elizabeth McLeod, J. D. McLeod, J. W. McLeod, J. W. McLaughlin, Roderick McMillan, Frank P. McNeill, Rev. W. A. McLeod, of Texas, W. J. McDiarmid, and the family of Rev. Archibald McQueen.

The exact date of the organization of Bethel Church is not known, and never will be unless other records are discovered. The late D. E. McBryde was confident that it was organized in the year of 1785. (Mr. McBryde was buried at Bethel February 4, 1911.) He said that his father was baptized in the year 1785 at the time the church was organized or at a service near the site of the present church soon after organization. He didn't say whether his father was an adult or an infant at the time of his baptism. Tradition, gathered from many sources, say that for several years previous to the organization preaching services were held at several places in this section by different preachers and at irregular intervals. Four of these places mentioned are a stand in the Shiloh community south of Moutrose, another near Timberland, another at New Garden, the home of Rev. John McIntyre, on the Raeford and Lumber Bridge road, about 2 1/2 miles from Raeford, and another was near Beaver's Dam, near the present church. It is thought that the church was organized at the last named place.

Mr. D. E. McBryde said that the first building, a log structure, was erected soon after the organization of the church. The log church stood in front of the present building, out near the road and a little to the right as you look from the front door of the church. The second building about the size of the present one was a frame structure, built it is thought, during the pastorate of Rev. John McIntyre; but the date is not known. It stood at the rear of the present building and about ten feet from it. It stood lengthwise East and West, with a door in each end, and a broad aisle running through the center of the church from door to door. The pulpit was at the middle on the South side of the room. It had a sounding board over head. Another aisle extended from the pulpit across to the opposite side. In the center of the long aisle was a Communion table, about 15 inches wide which extended from door to door with a break at the center from the cross aisle. There were benches on both sides of the table for use of communicants. Some time after the building was finished a shed was added, extending along the North side, for the colored people, and the weatherboarding was taken off so they could see the preacher, Malcolm Shaw bought this second building and used it to build a residence where Mr. J. C. McLean now lives in Raeford. The third building which is now being used was finished in the latter part of 1855 or early in 1856. Mr. Peter Monroe was the carpenter who put up the building. Mr. John D. McLeod says that the carpenters who were working on the church made his mother's coffin there in 1855.

The church was remodeled inside about 1888 or 1890. The pulpit was changed from the South side of the building to the North side. The change made such a difference in the appearance of the interior of the building that many people on Home Coming day who had not been to Bethel in the last forty years, said that they could hardly realize they were in their old home church.

About 1915 new pews were purchased for the church, and the old ones were sold to the old Shiloh Presbyterian Church.

In 1926 the church was painted inside and out, a new pulpit and furnishings were purchased, which greatly improved the appearance of the building. The property at present is in a fine state of preservation, and is held in great reverence by

all who worship within her sacred walls.

We give below a copy of the original deed for the church lot from Rev. Colin Lindsay, and papers showing that the boundaries of the lot were changed later by exchange with Mr. P. McEachern:

State of North Carolina, Robeson County.

This Indenture made the Twentieth day of January, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Six, between Rev. Colin Lindsay, of the County and State aforesaid, and John McNeill, Duncan McNeill, Lauchlin McNeill, Normant Stuart, John McEachern, and Alexander McLeod, planters, in Robeson County and also in Cumberland County, Trustees of the Church on Beaver Dam in said County of Robeson.

Witnesseth: That the said Colin Lindsay, for in consideration of sum of Ten Shillings, species money, to him in hand paid by the aforesaid Trustees above mentioned at and before the sealing and signing of these presents, the receipts and payment whereof is hereby acknowledged, he the said Colin Lindsay, for himself and his heirs, doth hereby bargain, sell, aline, enfeof and confirm unto them, the said John McNeill, Duncan McNeill, Lauchlin McNeill, Normant Stuart, John McEachern, Alexander McLeod, Trustees of the aforesaid Church of the Beaver Dam, their heirs, executors and assigns forever, a certain piece or parcel of land in the said County and State aforesaid, situated, lying and being as follows: South of the Beaver Dam Creek, beginning at a stake four yards below the well formerly belonging to James Furgerson, Sr., on the bank of said Creek on the public road leading from McLaughlin's Bridge to Fayetteville, running N. 5 W. 11 chains to a stake, then West 14 chains to a stake, then South 6 chains to a stake, then direct to the beginning, containing 10 acres of land, it being part of the survey granted to James Furgerson, Sr., by patent bearing date 1771—the 18th day of November, containing 100 acres, beginning at a block on a hill near the West side of Beaver Dam Branch of the Raft Swamp, about three hundred yards above the Muliato Road, and running thence South 50 W. 31 chains 63 links, then N 40 W. 31 chains 63 links, then E 50 W. 31 chains and 63 links, then direct to the beginning, containing one hundred acres as aforesaid.

Which said piece or parcel of land, with all ways, woods, waters and every other appurtenance, thereunto belonging appertaining to the said Colin Lindsay, for himself, his heirs, executors, hath hereby sold, set over, conveyed, released, and confirmed in open market to the said John McNeill, Duncan McNeill, Lauchlin McNeill, John McEachern, Normant Stuart and Alexander McLeod, Trustees of the aforesaid Beaver Dam Church, their executors, administrators doth hereby covenant and promise to and with said Trustees, their heirs, executors or assigns, that he, the said Colin Lindsay, his heirs, executors, shall and will forever warrant and defend the aforesaid 10 acres of land as aforesaid with all and every of its members and appurtenances, free from all lawful claims of any person or persons whatsoever, unto the said Trustees above mentioned, their heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, forever.

In witness whereof the said Colin Lindsay hath hereunto set his hand and seal the day and year above written.

Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of
DUNCAN MCBRYDE,
COLIN LINDSAY, (Seal)
JOHN FURGERSON,
July Term, 1800.

This deed was proved in open court—the oath of Duncan McBryde and ordered to be registered. Recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds of Robeson County, N. C., in Book C.C., Page 245.

The paper showing the change in boundaries of the original plot of the Bethel Church land as conveyed by Rev. Colin Lindsay in 1796. The original: N 5 W. 11 chains to a stake, then West 14 chains to a stake, then South 6 chains to a stake, then direct to the beginning. The Church land after the change: Beginning with the original tract of the Church and running with the road N. 81 W. 10 chains to a stake by a short leaf pine, thence N. 9 E. 10 chains to a stake by a pine, thence S. 61 E. 10 chains to a stake in Beaver Dam Swamp, then a direct line to the beginning.
Sept. 3, 1871.

D. L. MORRISON.
Land being of little value at that time it is thought that the log church was built some time before



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they received a deed for the lot, the owners being glad to have a church near by.

Ministers who have served the church: All reports indicate that Rev. Colin Lindsay was the first pastor of Bethel. Mr. Lindsay was born in Scotland, and came to this country some time during the latter part of the Eighteenth Century, and was connected with Orange Presbytery from 1792 to 1803. During this period he served Bethel Church. He owned a tract of land in upper Robeson County, and sold ten acres of this land to the Trustees of Bethel Church, where old Bethel Church now stands. Mr. Lindsay lived and died near the church. He appears to have been the first missionary of any kind in the Blue Springs township. Bethel Church was organized by Mr. Lindsay some time before the year 1800.

The Minutes of Orange Presbytery state that on October 4, 1797, a petition went up from Bethel, Gum Swamp, Lumber Bridge and Shoe Heel praying restoration of Mr. Lindsay.

There is a story which is told about Rev. Colin Lindsay's mother being buried alive (of course she was thought to be dead at the time of her burial). Grave robbers took her body up at night, and started to cut off her finger in order to get her gold ring; but she suddenly came to life, and the grave robbers fled. Mrs. Lindsay walked to her home with her grave clothes on and frightened her husband nearly to death. Rev. Colin Lindsay claims to have been born after this occurrence. It is said he often made mention of it in his preaching.

Mr. Lindsay's wife was a member of the Hamilton family of Scotland. She survived her husband several years. Her friends in this country urged her to return to Scotland after Mr. Lindsay had trouble with the church, but she refused to do so.

Rev. Lindsay's trouble started with the church in this country after he bought a yoke of oxen on Saturday and drove them home on Sunday. Mr. Lindsay defended himself before the church, by saying, that there was nothing to feed the oxen on at the place where he had made the purchase. Brother Lindsay made his defense Scriptural by pulling the ox out of the ditch. The Minutes of Orange Presbytery show that Mr. Lindsay was suspended a number of times for intoxication, and finally expelled from the ministry.

Rev. Colin Lindsay died December 1, 1817, age 73 years. His remains rest in Stewartville cemetery, about four miles from Laurinburg, N. C.

Rev. John McIntyre was the second minister to serve Bethel Church. Mr. McIntyre preached there for 53 years. Rev. W. A. McLeod of Texas, tells about talking with Rev. Angus Johnson who knew Mr. McIntyre personally. Mr. Johnson relates something of unusual interest about Mr. McIntyre's life and work in connection with Bethel Church. He said: "On one particular occasion a great meeting was in progress at Bethel; but Mr. McIntyre, having recently been thrown from his horse, as he traveled about in his ministerial capacity, was laid up in his home for repairs. But his home was at the old mill on the 'Beaver Dam,' not far from the church. He sat in his house, with arm in sling, when he heard the congregation begin to shout in a way that would have done credit to a Methodist meeting. This stirred the old man's spirit. Like Job's horse he scented the battle from a far and yearned with irresistible longing to take part. Finally he stood it as long as he could, he struggled to his feet, got his coat, and threw it over his shoulders, and ran as fast as his aged limbs would permit, and got to the church in time to have a part in the season of rejoicing."

But the most remarkable thing he told Mr. McLeod about Mr. McIntyre was the stand taken by this grand old prophet against the use and traffic in drink. Rev. Johnson said: "I went to see Mr. McIntyre just before he died, and though he was an old man, nearly a hundred years old, his mind was clear. He took me by the hand as I was leaving, and

told me to take a stand for temperance, saying that he hated all forms of strong drink and longed to see it driven from his people."

"For a man in that age to cherish and express such sentiments would have been out of the ordinary. But for a Scotchman, among a purely Scotch people, in that age of universal whiskey still and cider barrel, it was a marvel! If the spirit of the sainted McIntyre could revisit the old scenes today how he would leap for joy, to find that the legalized Rum Deamon has been driven from the borders of the Old North/State."

When the first building of old Montpelier Church was dedicated, Rev. John McIntyre was present and offered the dedicatory prayer on the very day he was a hundred and two years old. This was the last public prayer he ever offered, and within just a few days he was called to be with the Lord.

Rev. McIntyre's mortal remains sleep in Antioch cemetery, over which we find this inscription: "Rev. John McIntyre, Born in Argyle-Shire, Scotland, August 24, 1750, Died November 17, 1852, Age 102 years, 2 months, 23 days."

Rev. Hector McLean served the church about one year, from 1837 to 1838, and then moved to Antioch and Philadelphia Churches, where he spent the remainder of his life.

Rev. Hector McNeill, born in Richmond County, N. C., May 4, 1807, studied under Rev. Hugh and Duncan McLaurin in his native county; entered Union Theological Seminary in Virginia 1830; licensed by Fayetteville Presbytery at Brown Marsh Church in 1833; called to St. Pauls, Bethel and Lumber Bridge in 1839. He began serving these churches at once and was installed pastor of each of them in 1842. He married Miss Mary Purcell, daughter of John Purcell, January 2, 1840. In 1852 by reason of poor health his relation to St. Pauls Church was severed at his own request. For the same reason Rev. Malcolm McNair was called and became co-pastor in 1859. These two ministers then served Bethel and Lumber Bridge until Mr. McNeill was called to be with God on the night of November 22, 1871, age 64 years, 5 months, 18 days.

It was during Mr. McNeill's pastorate that Gen. W. T. Sherman and his soldiers camped at Bethel Church, March the ninth to the eleventh, 1865. Sherman's report to the War Department shows that his headquarters were at Bethel Church at that time. He arrived in Fayetteville March 12, 1865. While at the church the soldiers took the benches out in the grove to sit on. The property was abused to some extent, but not more than would be expected. After the soldiers left the following requests were found written on a blank page in the Bible: "Mr. McNeill will please preach a sermon on the illusions of pleasure and hope."

"Mr. McNeill will please prove the absurdity of the Universalist doctrine."

"Mr. McNeill will please preach a sermon from the first Epistle of John 4th chapter, 4th verse."

"Mr. McNeill will please pray for old E. S. B."

By order of W. T. Sherman, Maj. Com'd. U. S. Forces.

This old Bible has been kept, but the writing has faded so that it is hardly legible. This copy was made by Rev. W. C. Brown, while pastor of the church in 1907 or 1908, before it had faded so much.

After Mr. McNeill's death Rev. Malcolm McNair continued as pastor of Bethel until about 1873.

Licentiate Daniel McRae served the church for part of the year in 1874.

Rev. John Coble served the church about three years.

Rev. Coble was followed by Rev. Archibald McQueen, who served the church three years. During the pastorate of Rev. A. McQueen there was a great revival meeting. Rev. Martin McQueen and Rev. D. A. McRae assisted the pastor. There were about 130 additions to the church; fifteen of them being negroes. Perhaps these were the last negroes to join the church. During the first eight days there was apparently no interest whatever in the meeting, but on the eighth day Mr. John McPhatter came forward and screamed out: "O God have mercy on my soul." It is said that his conduct was so electric that it drew a great multitude with him. The people rose up and stood on seats and filled the aisles. Mr. McPhatter was present at the Home-Coming August 2, 1931, and told about this meeting.

Rev. W. A. McLeod says: "The great old grove around the church used to be full of horses and bugles, some fine, indicative of thrift; others related to them as an old-fashioned Ford of today is to its most elaborate and costly neighbor. And many were the neighs and incessant brays one heard from the grove, horses and mules giving vent to their feelings merry or sad. We would stand around outside the church while the older ones met and greeted old friends for a time. No, not all, went inside either. I well recall that certain sons of

outside to swap yards and knives, and once in a while, coarse scolding by their loud and unseemly laughter. I don't know after all, if the world was not as bad then as now. The size of the coterie outside depended somewhat on the drawing power of the preacher who might be holding forth within. If he chanced to be some feeble brother of mean attainment, the contingent outside would be big; while a preacher like Rev. Archibald McQueen would reduce it to the vanishing point. Once after Mr. McQueen had preached as only he could preach, a gentleman said to one of the outsiders, who on that particular day had gone inside to the services: "I tell you McQueen is a great preacher. The other replied, My God ain't he solid. And with him solid summed up all possible praise."

Again we quote Dr. W. A. McLeod, he says: "I recall one occasion long ago, when a great company of colored people came down from the gallery after the white congregation had retired, took seats in front of the pulpit, while the minister and elders gave them the Communion. Among other things about that day which struck me was the singing of these colored people. I can still see the old black faces of many of them, serious and kindly as they sat and drank in the words of the white preacher."

Rev. A. Furgerson was Stated Supply for some time. During the year of 1855-1856 the church had no regular services. The church was supplied during 1837 by Rev. J. H. Colton. Rev. A. M. Watson was elected pastor, but never installed. He preached about six months in the year 1837. Mr. Watson had a severe spell of sickness from which he never recovered sufficiently to resume his work. In the years 1838-1839 the church had no pastor or regular supply. Rev. J. W. Johnson preached from 1839-1894. Rev. O. A. White was Stated Supply from June, 1895, to the close of the year. In 1896 and 1897 the church was again without pastor or regular supply. Rev. F. P. Ramsay was pastor part of 1898. Rev. R. W. Alexander was Stated Supply from June, 1898, to December 24, 1900. Rev. L. A. McLaurin served as pastor from December 22, 1901, to September 23, 1906. Rev. W. C. Brown, June 23, 1907, to June 1, 1916. Rev. Eugene Alexander from June 25, 1916 to February 25, 1922. Rev. A. D. Carswell from October 1, 1923, to the present.

Some of the first officers of Bethel Church: Elders, Murdoch McRae, Daniel McArne, Daniel Patterson, Murdoch McLeod, George Patterson was Clerk of the Session from about 1839 to 1870. Buffalo Patterson 1830, John McLaughlin, August 17, 1833, William L. McDiarmid, August 17, 1833, David McDiarmid, August 1, 1839, Phillip McRae, October 16, 1847, John W. McLaughlin, May 8, 1875, Neill McFadyen, May 8, 1875, Murdoch McRae, May 8, 1875, John D. McLeod, May 8, 1875, J. F. McRae, April 13, 1890, M. A. Clark, April 13, 1890, A. P. Dickson, May 13, 1893, H. McC. Currie, May 13, 1893, R. J. McNeill, May 13, 1893, W. J. McDiarmid, November 5, 1899, D. M. Keith, November 5, 1899, Thomas McBryde, September 3, 1917, N. A. McDonald, September 1917, W. A. Wright, October 12, 1919, Ryan McBryde, October 12, 1919.

Deacons: David Currie, Neill Sinclair and Duncan Currie, were elected about 1855. H. D. McLean, A. P. Dickson, April 3, 1890, J. F. Currie, April 3, 1890, John Duncan McLeod, April 15, 1900, Wallace McLean, April 15, 1900, Alex Sinclair, April 15, 1900, Angus Keith, October 25, 1903, N. A. McDonald, December 8, 1912, J. M. McNair, December 8, 1912, W. A. Wright, September 9, 1917, Ryan McBryde, September 9, 1917, Luther Clark, October 12, 1923, McQueen Johnson, September 12, 1919.

Present officers of Bethel: Elders, John R. McNeill, M. A. Clark, W. J. McDiarmid, W. A. Wright, Ryan McBryde, Deacons, W. A. McLean, D. H. Pearson, McQueen Johnson, Arthur Parks, Neill Clark.

Present membership of Bethel Church 130 members. The membership of the church is larger than it was forty years ago. In 1891 the Session reported 100 members.

The church has had a Sunday School for years. We are sorry that we are unable to get any information about the early organization of the Sabbath School. The membership of the school at the present time is eighty-five, three officers and eight teachers.

The Woman's Missionary Society was organized at Bethel Church in 1893, by Mrs. Elizabeth McRae, Mrs. Isabella Lamont was elected President, and Mrs. A. P. Dickson, Vice-President. The Society met once a month, with very few members to assist the officers with the struggling organization. The President was a lady thoroughly consecrated to the Master's work, and she gave freely of her time and means. She lived seven or eight miles from the church, but the work was constantly on her mind. This organization has changed its name to the Woman's Auxiliary, which is still functioning in the church, and has a membership of fifty.

"Bethel Church is the oldest organization in this section. Up until

about 1840 people used to come from Antioch, Sandy Grove, Montpelier, Dundarrach, Philadelphia, Bethesda, Shiloh, Philippi and Raeford. It was seldom that the entire congregation got there, except on Communion occasions, when the preaching always began on Friday. There were always four sermons a day, two in the church, and two at the stand. In those days the Sacrament was the greatest occasion of the year." The above information is quoted from an article written by the late John D. McLeod.

Back in the Forties people used to come to Bethel Church in buggies, wagons, horseback and many walked seven and eight miles to worship in the old church. The good women didn't have to stay at home back then to prepare dinner for the ones that had gone to church, dinner was prepared on Saturday and they carried it along with them Sunday morning to Bethel. People in those days were not afraid of imposing on the Lord's hospitality by staying too long at His church, like so many of our good people today who are so busy that they can't get to church but once a year, and some once every five years.

We regret exceedingly that we cannot give a complete history of Bethel Church. The little material that we have gotten together is but a small fragment of Bethel's one hundred and forty-six years continuous service to this community and the world. We feel that if these walls could speak today, and the ground beneath our feet cry out, perhaps, their messages would be so inspiring as to magnify the accomplishments of Bethel's past a thousand fold. We shall never know the full work and worth of old Bethel Church until we pass to the Celestial City and read her record from the Archives on High.

This paper was read at the Home-Coming of Bethel Church August 2, 1931.

S. P. Jackson, of Lenoir County, harvested four tons of oat hay and 13 tons of lespedeza hay from the same six acres of land this year.

CLASSIFIED ADS

LOST—One wheel and tire from State Highway truck Tuesday afternoon. \$5.00 reward if returned to Curtiss Connell.

FOR SALE—SEED RYE, OATS, barley and wheat.—A. A. Harris, 11-6p-d.

WE BUY OLD HORSES AND COWS—If of no farther use and not diseased, your stock can be sold to The Moore County Hounds, Southern Pines, N. C., 10-1f

FOR RENT—Four room house on Stewart Street, in good condition. Also upstairs apartment in my home. Mrs. M. J. McNeill, Box 223, Phone 351, Raeford, N. C. 31-2t

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