

Craft Baptist Church

On Saturday before the second Sunday in April, 1891, a meeting was held at the Shiloh Schoolhouse for the purpose of organizing a New Testament Church. Twenty-one came forward with letters in hand from the Baptist Church of Christ at Corinth to constitute the church. Following the reading of the letters and their adoption, the new church was organized with a covenant of the gospel order and articles of faith (Minutes April 1891).

A motion was made and adopted that deacons Marion D. Thompson, Obadiah M. Meador, Cornelius D. Deaton and Archer J. Holmes, who were in the constitution of the church, officiate as deacons in the new church. W.F. Murphy, C. D. Deaton and O. M. Meador were appointed as a committee to look for a suitable place to build and to report at the next conference. The new church would be called the Baptist Church of Christ at Shiloh. After the preaching service the next day the church elected E.M. Carter as pastor for the remainder of the church year. The regular meeting time was set for the third Saturday and Sunday of each month at Independence, located about one and one half miles west of the Shiloh School. A motion was made that the site committee be constituted into a building committee and to estimate the cost of materials to build and report at the next meeting (Minutes April 1891).

In May the building committee stated that they had secured a plot of land, located about five hundred feet east of the present church, on which to build the church (Minutes May 1891). Five-twelfths of one acre more or less was purchased from C. A. Walker for one dollar. The deed records, "the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, and the further consideration of the reverence and respect, which we have and entertain for Divine Worship together with the present prospect of a permanent white Baptist Church in our community" (Cherokee County Deed Records, Volume A, p 113).

The church name was changed from Shiloh to New Independence, reflecting the change in location (Minutes May 1891). In September the church sent a petitionary letter to the Cherokee Baptist Association and elected delegates to represent the church (Minutes September 1891). The Cherokee Association met with the Noonday Baptist Church in Smith County, October 16-18, 1891, and voted to receive the Baptist Church of Christ of New Independence into the association (Gaylor 2).

In March, 1892, the building committee submitted the following report: "received for building house \$121.60, paid for material and work \$121.60 and still due for material \$35.80." The church instructed the committee to make a note to Mat Chandler for the \$35.80 due (Minutes March 1892). In October, 1892, the church received \$15.70 in an offering for the building note (Minutes October 1892) and in January 1893, the committee gave their final report: "we the building committee submit the following report the hull of the house being completed and indebtedness of the house being paid off and as fare (sic) as we know there is nothing against the house and we as a committee beg to be released" (Minutes January 1893).

In May of 1899 the church voted to change their name to Craft Baptist Church of Christ (Minutes May 1899). The first associational letter of Craft Baptist Church of Christ reported: eight additions by baptism and three by letter, six dismissed by letter, one excluded and one restored. The membership was comprised of 25 men and 45 women. The church pledged financial support of two dollars to home missions, two dollars to foreign missions, two dollars to associational missions, five dollars to Buckner Orphanage and a dollar and fifty cents for minutes (Minutes August 1899). In February, 1900, the church voted to send two messengers and two alternates to meet with other Missionary Baptist churches of East Texas in Troup on April 27, 1900, to organize an East Texas Convention (Minutes February 1900).

In September 1909, a building committee was constituted to look into repairing the existing building or to build (Minutes September 1909). In October the church accepted the committee's recommendation to repair the existing building and in the summer to build a new one (Minutes October 1909). In 1910 a new building was constructed, later enlarged, and a steeple added. The church had preaching services one weekend each month until 1944, when they went to two weekends per month (Gaylor 16). In 1952, the church expanded to full time services (Gaylor 50). In 1953 four and one half acres adjoining the church property was purchased at a cost of one hundred dollars (Cherokee County Deed Records, Volume 391, P.494). The 1910 building was razed and a new building constructed on the newly acquired property consisting of an auditorium and five Sunday school rooms (Gaylor 18).

The new building became the hub of future expansion. In 1959 a choir loft and classrooms were added to the west side (Gaylor 21). In 1966 restrooms, a nursery, an office and a baptistry were added. The baptistry was made out of a steel milk cooler donated by Parlon Morton, Jr. (Gaylor 24). In 1968 a fellowship hall, kitchen and classrooms were built on the north side (Gaylor 26). In 1978 the men of the church, with Floyd Barrington as foreman and chief carpenter, built the south classroom annex. It contains four classrooms and two restrooms (Gaylor 32-33). In 1982 the family life center was constructed including a gym, a large kitchen, a reception room, two restrooms, and a storage room, and the church framed the upstairs for future classrooms. In August, 1982, the church voted to name the new fellowship and activities building the Leon and Violet Gaylor Family Life Center, in honor of Leon Gaylor's more than twenty years of service to the church (Gaylor 35-36). In 1984 the auditorium was remodeled and enlarged (Gaylor 37).

Craft Baptist Church has a record of providing for the spiritual needs of the rural community, from the protracted meetings held in brush arbors in the early 1900's, to acts of church discipline recorded in the minutes. Beginning with the twenty-one charter members the church has experienced growth over the years reaching a high membership of 398 in 1989. The first reported average Sunday School attendance was fifty-three in 1944 and that average also peaked in 1989 at 137 (Gaylor 46-48). The church also has a long account of involvement in education. Leon Gaylor received permission from the church for young ministerial students at Jacksonville College to preach in the Wednesday evening services in the early 1960's and this involvement in the training and education of young preachers continues today. The young people of the church have always had, and continue to have great opportunities and superb examples to become excellent citizens and skilled leaders in God's work.

Throughout its history, Craft Baptist Church has recorded church discipline at least fifteen different years. As a result of one incident in 1896, a resolution was offered, "resolved that whiskey drinking, visiting saloons, raffling, or any kind of gambling be prohibited by this church" (Minutes September 1896). Dr. Leon Gaylor states in the preface of his Brief History of Craft Baptist Church, "I have recorded the acts of discipline by the church, but I did not name the person or persons involved. It is my belief that the purpose of church discipline is to gain a brother or sister and not to just take them off the church roll."

Very early the church established a Sunday School and later Vacation Bible Schools in the attempt to teach the Word of God. In February, 1895, the church listened to the claims of the East Texas College at Rusk and received an offering of pledges and cash for \$12.50 (Minutes February 1895). The next month the church in their Saturday conference voted to organize a Sabbath School the next day. In March, 1896, Marion Thompson was elected as the first

recorded Sunday School Superintendent (Minutes March 1896). Since 1957 the church has provided a Vacation Bible School for the children in the area almost every year. From 1965 through 1967 Craft worked with Corinth Baptist Church in hosting schools that enrolled, 113, 145 and 157 children, respectively (Gaylor 24-26). On May 29, 1994, (Minutes May 1994) the church voted to establish Craft Baptist Christian School. The school provided Christian education for students in the area, grades one through twelve, through spring of 2004 (Minutes, April 2004).

Two former pastors had strong ties to the educational institutions of the associational work. Leon Gaylor [still living] served as chair of and instructor in the Religion department at Jacksonville College for more than twenty years (Gregson 204). Gerald Kellar [d. 2001] holds the distinct honor of having served as president of every BMA educational institution: Jacksonville College in Jacksonville, Texas, the BMA Theological Seminary in Jacksonville, Texas, Central Baptist College in Conway, Arkansas, and Southeastern Baptist College in Laurel, Mississippi (Kellar iv).

The church has historically been pastored by men of potential. Six former pastors have served as presidents of our state association; J.M. Newburn, A.L. Meador, Gerald Kellar, Leon Gaylor, Jeff Swart and Richard Smith (Ballard 5). Kellar went on to be president of the national association (Cottrell 6). More recently, Richard Smith, who accepted Craft as his first pastorate, has served as both state (Ballard 5) and national president (Cottrell 6). Joe Caudle who served the church as associate pastor would go on and retire after serving as a missionary in Mexico for twenty years. Hugh Dusza, a former youth minister, now serves on the mission field in Hawaii. These and other church leaders, including the current pastor, Leon Ross, consistently inspire young Christians to strive for all they are capable of for the Lord.

In recent years, two young ladies from the church have excelled in the Girl's Missionary Auxiliary, again illustrating that Craft Baptist Church is still influencing the lives of young people. Laura Robertson served as local, district, state and national Junior Miss GMA in 1996 (Cottrell 420). Robertson also held the office of State GMA President as well as alternate Texas Miss GMA in 1999 (Pope 6). In 2006, Libby Ross was chosen as the local, district and Texas Miss GMA (Fulton 7).

The church has throughout its history not only endeavored to meet the spiritual needs of its members and the community, but certain physical needs as well. The church maintains a food pantry that is available for those in need, providing food for those on fixed incomes, young college and seminary families, travelers, or others facing difficult times. For years the church has provided food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas so that families can enjoy the holidays. The church also has a benevolent fund, which has been used by the church to buy a tank of gas for travelers, utility expenses, prescription drug costs, or to help with the cost of medical tests or procedures. In the recent hurricane Rita, the church sheltered families who had been evacuated from the Jasper area, plus helped families within the church who were housing displaced family members with extra meals and groceries.

As circumstances constantly change, Craft Baptist Church is continuing to serve as a spiritual leader in her rural community, now extended to Jacksonville and other neighboring communities. Craft still uses the same Bible as those twenty-one who met in April, 1891, to organize a New Testament Church in the Shiloh Community. Young pastors have faithfully ministered and later become great leaders. While serving at Craft Baptist Church, they have also served the community while serving God. Many people know the location of the Craft Community because it is the home of Craft Baptist Church, truly a "New Testament Church."

Charter members of Craft Baptist Church

April 11, 1891

Bounds, John

Bounds, Susan

Deaton, Cornelius D.

Deaton, Nancy Ann

Frances, M.D.

Frances, Mary

Holmes, Archer J.

Holmes, Cata C.

Lewis, Mary

Lewis, Sallie V.

Meador, Obadiah M.

Meador, Mary M.

Murphy, William F.

Thompson, Mary

Trotter, George W.

Trotter, Mary E.

Trotter, Robert M.

Trotter, Sarah F.

Wyatt, Catherine

Wyatt, F.M.

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