

150th Anniversary of Rocky Fork Church 1971--Mae Wayland, Clerk

Rocky Fork Primitive Baptist Church, now located at Hinton, Missouri, located about six miles north of Columbia, is one of the oldest churches in the state. In fact, it is older than the state itself; as it was organized July 26, 1821 and Missouri was admitted to the union August 10, 1821. The Church's covenant and original documents, now in a vault at the Missouri State Historical Society, bear the words "Territory of Missouri".

Eighteen persons gathered together for the purpose of organizing a church and signed the original constitution which became the nucleus around which have gathered many others to establish and maintain a church home for the lord's people which has been under the providence of God, preserved to this day, ISO years and has provided a haven of rest for weary pilgrims from life's rudest tempests.

The names of the charter members and the church from which they came are as follows: Zachariah and Malinda Jackson, Mary and Rosanna Slocumbs from Chariton Church, Howard County, Missouri; Thomas and Casey Tipton, Smith and Nancy Turner, Dolly Barnes from Mt. Vernon Church, Boone County, Missouri; Hiram Phillips from little Bonne Femme Church, Boone County, Missouri; Hiram Crews from Freedom Church, Gararre County, Kentucky; Polly Williams I Caleb and Lovey Fenton. from Mays lick Church, Mason County, Kentucky; Phoebe Goslin, Johnson Lewis and Rhoda Smith from White Oak Pond Church I Madison County, Kentucky; Sally Hendricks from Tates Creek Church Madison County, Kentucky. Their order in constituting themselves into a religious body was witnessed by Elders Edward Turner, Thomas Henson and Robert Dale and brethren Thomas Todd and Reuben Riggs.

It is of interest to know that Elder Robert Dale was a member of Bethel Church located eight miles north of Rocheport, Missouri and Elder Edward Turner was from Mt. Zion, five miles south of Fayette. It is also of interest to know these two Elders helped in the organization of Cedar Creek Church July 14, 1821 just 12 days before Rocky Fork was organized. At the first meeting of the church they agreed to be called by the name of "Freedom" but at their regular meeting, by the same body, in April 1822 they agreed to be known and called "Rocky Fork". It is presumed that they changed the name because there was another church called "Freedom" in the Mt. Pleasant Association into which they were admitted soon after "Rocky Fork" was organized.

Also at their first meeting they designated the 4th Saturday in each month as their regular meeting time. According to the old records, only the Saturday meetings of business were recorded; however, we know they had preaching on Saturday and Sunday (which they called "lord's Day") but the minutes show no record of it except once in April 1845 was this record-The Church having a rule that preaching on Saturday be before the business meeting agree to alter that rule and for the future, preaching to be after the business meeting. The records also show each business meeting began with prayer. According to legend the first meetinghouse a log building, was located about three miles northwest of Columbia on an old Indian Trail. Nothing remains on that site today except maybe a few gravestones may be found in the cemetery.

In March 1822, brethren Thomas Tipton and Hiram Phillips were appointed to select a piece of ground for a meeting house, not less than one and one-half acres. In April 1822

the committee previously appointed presented plans for a meetinghouse. They had selected a location on Caleb Fenton's land, one-fourth mile south of the St. Charles road near a spring. In May 1839, action was taken on building a meetinghouse but was laid over until July 1839 when they agreed to build where the old one now stands. On account of some dissatisfaction it was moved that the Church re-consider their act. A committee was appointed and the Church agreed to 'abide by the committee's decision.

They agreed to build near Rocky Fork Creek where the St. Charles road crosses the creek as the most local site for the Church to be built. Committee released. The house was to be built of timber, the size 16' by 30' with small apartments in the center projecting out 4' and 10' long.

They further agreed that said house be furnished with stoves. In June 1840 the Church was informed: that the lot of ground near Rocky Fork Creek on which She designed building was washing away. On receiving this information they unanimously agreed not to build there.

In July 18 motion and second that this Church make one more effort to procure a tot of ground to build a meeting house on and all the members present are equally at liberty to name where they prefer it. By their act they agreed to build on a lot near Richard Jones on the Huntsville road and the Church orders her trustees to obtain title and subscription papers for the purpose of procuring funds for building the house.

We found a letter dated June 18~ from Austin Bradford to the Church which states that he is willing that the "Church at Rocky Fork shall build their meeting house between Richard Jones and myself at my northeast corner and will secure to the Church the use of said ground as long as they use it for a Church provided Richard Jones and Thomas Holloway who join me at said corner will agree to give the same privilege by securing the same quantity of land say one acre each, making the lot to contain three acres but the timber on said acre, I reserve; only the use of the land I transfer'..

In December 1842 Thomas Holloway and Caroline, his wife, for" the sum of \$5 gave one acre of land to the Church. The trustees at this time were Lemuel Searcy, Abraham Davenport and Thomas Wingo.

It took time and hard work to erect and furnish a building. At one time the Church ordered her trustees to employ a workman to make benches for the meetinghouse. There is also a record of a list of money and materials for re-covering one meetinghouse as follows:

Joseph Brown 21000 shingles Richard R. Pace 1,000 shingles
James Tipton 1,000 shingles David Shock 1,000 shingles
Richard Jones 1,000 shingles Lemuel Searcy 1,000 shingles
Lemuel Batterton 1,000 shingles Peter Kemper 1,000 shingles
Abraham Davenport 3,000 shingles Anderson Kirby 1,000 shingles
These were evidently handmade. Money was contributed as follows:
Stanfield Porter \$1.50 Jesse Murphy \$2.00
Joseph Brown \$1.75
Money appropriated for covering house was as follows:
Stanfield Porter \$2.50 William Brown \$2.50
Thomas Wingo 5.00 Lemuel Batterton 2.00

David Shock 2.50 Jesse Murphy 2.50
L. B. Searcy 5.00 Peter Kemper 3.00
Richard R. Pace 1.00
A total of \$26.00

In 1872 a new house was built which was destroyed by fire for another was soon built. In December 1876 motion and second that the Church receive the new church house and discharge the building committee. This building burned about 1913 but was soon rebuilt and must be the one we use today.

The little group began to grow at once. The day they were organized a sister was received for baptism and others soon after either by letter or baptism.

In October 1821 brethren Smith Turner and Zachariah Jackson were mentioned for deacons but choosing deacons was postponed until the next meeting. Elder Thomas Henson was chosen as supply pastor. He answered the call in December 1821. Brother Hiram Phillips was called to act as standing clerk until relieved by the Church.

This early Church was very strict in her rules of decorum. They firmly believed in presenting their bodies a living sacrifice and if a member was absent from meeting, the Church appointed a brother or brethren to visit this member and request he come to the next meeting and give reasons for his absence. If they did not have satisfactory reasons they were excluded if they did not attend. The records show where the Church ordered brethren to fill their seats at meeting. If there was trouble among members it was brought before the Church to be settled. One brother asked for admission by letter but it appears he and a sister (of the Church) had existing difficulty; so it was laid over until next meeting.

It seems they were not hasty in making decisions but took time and probably much prayer before acting on this occasion the decision was still laid over until another meeting.

Disrespectfully of an old sister... Another, brother informed the Church that there were reports circulating against him that were dishonorable to the cause of God and he wished the Church to know that those reports were in a good degree false. Another brother informed the Church he had been excluded from a Baptist Church in Kentucky, this church had since become extinct and was, therefore, no way of his taking the ordinary steps to regain his standing.

The Church investigated the matter, decided the church in Kentucky did not pursue a justifiable course in his exclusion. This brother told his experience which the Church approved and they received him into their fellowship. Another instance (in later years) one member refused to commune with the Church. The Church requested his reasons which proved satisfactory.

In another case motion and second to call for a committee of two members from Zoar, three from Union and two from Cedar Creek to assist Rocky Fork in a settlement of a difficulty between a sister and the Church. These churches complied and they advised a reconciliation. The Church withdrew her charges and all were in peace again.

Rocky Fork was not the only one to have troubles. As records show one time Goshen Church requested messengers from other churches including Rocky Fork to try to settle existing trouble in Goshen Church. Rocky Fork replied with requests to come together, confess faults and forgive. We mention this so those who live in years to come will know that problems of former days were not easy nor the burdens light.

There has been with Rocky Fork, as with every other true church, problems that could not rightly be solved by human wisdom, which has caused them, as it has the Saints of all ages, to seek divine light and wisdom.

Before Rocky Fork had passed her fourteenth milepost when so many of the Baptist Churches in Missouri were organizing societies of various kinds, the Baptist Central Convention of Missouri requested the views of other Baptist Churches in Missouri. Rocky Fork sent this reply -" The Baptist Church of Christ at Rocky Fork believes the Missionary Society, The Bible Society, Tract Society, Temperance Society and Sunday School Union Society with all their limbs and auxiliaries have been the means of bringing much scandal and disgrace in the Church and do declare a non-fellowship with them as religious institutions believing they are unauthorized in "God's Book".

In November 1893 there is a record concerning two former pastors who had labored among the Church and had baptized many of their number, as records show, but who had stepped aside and, as the Church believed, were teaching things not in accord and practice of the primitive doctrine of the Church. It is resolved that they be debarred from preaching in our church house and ordered her housekeeper to close the doors against such.

In August 1823 it was agreed that the Church take into consideration the washing of the saint's feet. This was laid over until November 1823 when they agreed to wash one another's feet for those who feel it their duty to do so but those who do not, they would not feel hurt.

In September 1823 among those received for baptism were "Joe", brother Fenton's black boy and "Adam" John Black's black boy. Missouri being a slave state, these were evidently slaves. One time the Church authorized the trustees to use the meeting house, or suffer it to be used for teaching singing school. The teacher to be bound for any damage it may sustain.

In June 1848 a well was dug at the Church by Richard Jones, Abraham Davenport and Joseph Brown, the Church to bear the expense to them. In April 1877 the trustees were ordered to have gutters and pipes fixed underground to run water to the cistern and a sweep pole fixed to draw water with. In December 1878 a committee was appointed to ascertain the cost of fencing the meetinghouse. In February 1879 it was agreed to fence the house at a cost of \$22 or \$23.

One notation said on account of troublesome times the Church held no meetings December 1861, also January, February and March 1862. Another notation stated lowering to the great Infusion in our nation we have done no church business from September 1865 to May 1881.

According to the dates it must have been during and right after the Civil War (1861-1866)

One time the Church ordered the clerk to examine the records and enroll the names of all the persons who have joined the Church since it has been constituted and place the names of males and females in different columns so that She may know, at any time, her strength. The Church later agreed to relieve the clerk from this and just report the present strength (November 1861).

August 1873 the Church licensed brother V. H. Powell to speak in public. In February 1876 he was ordained to the full work of the ministry. In January 1877 he was called as pastor. Brother Richard R. Pace was also licensed to preach by Rocky Fork. Brother A. Batterton was liberated to exercise his gift in public in the bounds of this Church in December 1822. The Old records are difficult to read and at times there is no record at all of some months meeting. The pages in the oldest book are yellow with age and the writing in places so dim it is almost impossible to read. The edges of some of the pages are crumbled and lost. What is left has to be handled carefully. They are so old and brittle. We will go back now to the first meeting of the Church. We find at this meeting a letter was ordered prepared to be presented to the Mt. Pleasant Association and appointed a committee to draft rules of decorum. Rocky Fork was at once admitted into this Association on which held the same doctrinal principles as those upon which the Church was constituted.

Names of the Churches in this Association are as follows: Mt. Pleasant, Salem, Mt. Zion, Bethel, Rocky Fork, Cedar Creek, Salem (Coats Prairie), Providence, Lebanon, Columbia, Happy Zion, Mt. Ararat, Little Bonne Femme, Chariton, Mt. Gilead, Mt. Vernon, Jew Hope, Dover, Nettle Meeting House, Union, Liberty (Fulton), Mt. Moriah, Sugar Creek, Middle River, Muscle Fork, Little Union and Mt. Vernon. These twenty-seven churches had a total membership 1,174 (1826).

Salem association was organized at a meeting, which convened with Cedar Creek Church in Callaway County on October 20, 1827. A committee composed of one member from each church framed a constitution identical in principle and nearly so in words as that of the Mt. Pleasant association from which they came. It was not from any deviation in either doctrine or practice on the part of either side that they formed the new association but purely for convenience.

The Churches entering into the organization of Salem Association were: Little Bonne Femme, Mt. Zion, Rocky Fork New Providence, Cedar Creek, Salem (Coats Prairie), Union, Providence, Liberty (Fulton, Columbia, Middle River, Freedom and Enon. The total membership of these churches was 511.

As we are writing the history of Rocky Fork Church we will give her record only, which was Rocky Fork messengers; Smith Turner and Samuel Searcy; membership: 41; contributions: \$1.25. It's of interest to note the contributions for associations in those days ran from 50 cents to \$2.00. Two years later Goshen and New Salem Churches were admitted, three years later Concord and seven years later Nashville.

In 1836 there was present from Pleasant Association two letters and two sets of messengers. Neither were received but a committee was appointed to investigate the matter. The next year Salem Association met with Rocky Fork Church. At this time the committee made its report, which was received and acted upon and agreed to correspond with the anti-missionary party. It was also proposed to correspond with the missionary party, which was rejected. For this reason Elder James Suggett, moderator,

and Elder R. L. Thomas, clerk, withdrew from the Association. Elder T. P. Stephens and Overton Harris were chosen moderator and clerk.

By this time New Liberty Church (near Ashland) had been constituted by 33 members who had refused to go into Little Bonne Femme Association which was known to be a missionary church at this time, with New Salem Church and in 1833 was admitted into Salem Association. Good and honest people have differed in their opinion concerning the teaching of God's word to such an extent that they could no longer live together in peace and fellowship and precious brethren have been separated.

On the 100th birthday of Rocky Fork Church only four churches remained in Salem Association which still were trying to walk in the old paths. These were Rocky Fork Union, New Liberty and Goshen. Later Goshen putted off and went progressive.

In August 1962 at the business meeting at Rocky Fork a motion made, seconded and passed that Rocky Fork Church dissolve ourselves as an Association this year on account of some trouble in sister churches in another Association; however, a stipulation was made that if the other two churches, Union and New Liberty, wanted to have an Association Rocky Fork would go along with them, which they did. So in September 1962 Salem Association met with New Liberty Church in September 1963 the Association met with Union Church which was the 136th meeting of that Association and also the last.

In July 1964 at the business meeting at Rocky Fork it was agreed to have a visitation meeting, it being Rocky Fork's time to have the meeting. This was done for no other - reason but to try to keep down trouble in the Church This kind of meeting is an annual affair now and Salem Association is no more. The only difference between a visitation meeting and an Association is no business is done. All the time is taken for worship. All who wish are welcome to come. Rocky Fork Church, on this her 150th birthday is still no different in faith and practice than it was when first organized. The articles of faith and rules of decorum are the same.

There have been numerous clerks, moderators, deacons and trustees. The records are incomplete in places so we do not have the names of those in full. The names of her pastors and the years they served are approximately as follows -Elder Thomas Henson: 1821-1829; Elder Thomas Peyton Stephens: 1829-1840; Elder Peter Kemper: 1840-1873; Elder E. H. Burnham: 1873-1877; Elder Wm. H. Powell: 1877-1882; none recorded for: 1882-1884; Elder James Dradley: 1834-1887; none recorded for: 1887-1888; Elder Benjamin H. Owings: 1883 -died four months later; Elder Ira Turner: 1839-1896; Elder G. E. Edwards: 1896 - served one month then moved away; Elder M. Startzman: 1897-1901; Elder B. F. Querry: 1901-1908; Elder S. L. Pettus: 1908-1915; Elder Jerry Brown: 1915-1918; Elder J. H. Hardy: 1918-1958; Elder Atley L. Sapp: 1958-to present.

Here are a few remarks of special interest. Elder Peter Kemper served the Church continuously for 33 years. It is recorded only once there was no meeting on account of bad weather. Twice that he did not serve as moderator. One of those times he was absent on account of sickness and his death occurred before the next meeting. Elder J. H. Hardy was ordained to the gospel ministry at New Liberty Church in 1917. Rocky Fork had the privilege of their ordained help assisting. He was called as pastor in 1918. In 1948 Elder Wilmer Harper was called as assistant pastor with Elder Hardy because by this time Elder Hardy spent some winters in Florida. In October 1952 Rocky Fork called Elders Hardy and Harper again; also welcomed the help of Elders Atley

Sapp and Haskell Wren who had been ordained to the gospel ministry in October 1951 (Rocky Fork's ordained help assisting).

In May 1953 Elder Harper wrote the Church asking to be released from duty as assistant pastor. His request was granted with regrets. He served 5 years with Elder Hardy. On account of Elder Hardy's age and health, Elder Atley Sapp was called as pastor October 1958 and Elder Hardy as honorary pastor for the rest of his life. He died July 7, 1959, making him 40 years as active pastor and nearly one year as honorary pastor. His faithful companion died one week after he did. In March 1935 brother Alvin Palmer reported that the Mutual Telephone Company wanted to lease the plot of ground lying east of the highway belonging to the Church on which to build a small building to house the switchboard and use for switchboard operator to live in.

They agreed to let them lease it for one year. The trustees were to make the deal and decide on the price to charge the company. In March 1942 Saturday services were discontinued for the time being due to gas rationing. They were resumed for the first time since the war in February 1946.

Electricity was installed in the church house in 1946 and water some time later. In 1967 a new kitchen was added and in December 1969 two new gas furnaces were installed. The present time of meeting is the third Sunday in each month at 10:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., and Saturday night before at 7:30 p.m.

The present number of members is 16. Some of these are not physically able to attend services. Their names and date received or baptized and how received are as follows:

Grace Bricker April 16, 1950 letter
Mae (Benskin) Wayland May 21, 1950 letter
Maurice Benskin September 3, 1950 baptism
Beulah (Eldridge) Gholson July 16, 1961 letter
Bertha Fenton November; 17, 1904, baptism
Ima Gibbs August 20, 1960 letter
Harry Gholson August 20, 1961, letter
Libby Hulen February 15 1942, relation
Myrtle Kemper October 16 1960 relation
Floyd Kemper, August 17 1969, baptism
Eula (Martin) Palmer July 16 1913 baptism
Lena (Palmer) Snell November 10, 1921 baptism
Lindell Pace August 17, 1969 baptism
Sarah Pace August 17, 1969 baptism
Beulah (Rippetto) Hartley May 19, 1951 baptism
Oral B. Wayland May 31, 1924 baptism

Sister Bertha Fenton has been a member longer than any now living. She joined November 1904. In 1950 she left and went to a Methodist Church but was not satisfied and was reinstated in 1954; therefore, she has been a member for 63 years. The newest members are sister Sarah Pace and brethren Lindell Pace and Loyd Kemper. The oldest living member is sister Ima Gibbs. The youngest member is brother Maurice Benskin. The present deacons are brethren Harry Gholson and Oral Wayland. The present pastor and moderator is Elder Atley L. Sapp and the present clerk is Mae Wayland.

--Mae Wayland, Clerk, 1971