

PINTLALA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Next Meeting:
April 13th—2:30 p.m.
Pintlala Baptist Church



*c/o Pintlala Public Library
255 Federal Road
Hope Hull, Alabama 36043*

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April 2014

Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church, Montgomery County, Alabama



Photograph courtesy of Gary P. Burton

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Message Page 2
In Memoriam—Jean Stubbs Dean Page 2
April Program..... Page 3
Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church,
Montgomery County, Alabama Page 4

From the President

The Mildred Smith project has languished for quite a while, but good news is on the horizon.

Younger generations may not be aware that Mildred Smith of Dublin was a prolific columnist for local news outlets for decades. She wrote about community events at least once per week. Her combined work is voluminous, reflecting a weekly column for at least four decades. Mildred Smith was not a historian; however, her reporting described life in south Montgomery county in memorable and vivid fashion. She chronicled reunions, school events, sporting events, civic and social gatherings. Names of participants are mentioned. Beginning in the 1930s Mildred Smith was on the ground covering just about everything. It was hard to escape her awareness and her pen.

In 2003 the LeGrand Civic Club disbanded and a generous gift of \$1000.00 was given to the PHA to help preserve the work of Mildred Smith. There were twelve remaining active members when the organization ceased to exist. Jamie Sharpe, Mary Raley, Catherine Sellers, Joyce Black, Gladys Suggs Cutts, Frankie Davis, Myrtie A. Mills, Betty Madison, Virginia Sellers, Hattie McLaney Smith, Gloria Williams, and Janice Wolfe.

We mourn the passing of Jean Dean who, along with Butch Moseley, invested countless hours in the research room of the Alabama Department of Archives and History copying Mildred Smith news articles from microfilm. Their work has been necessary and foundational to this project.

Yet a serious obstacle remained. Each column would require typing/transcribing because the news articles from microfilm were often poor in quality. Scanning them would not work. Recruiting volunteers who would key in the text of each Mildred Smith article has been hard.

Now thanks to voice recognition software which the PHA has acquired, a volunteer may read a passage which is automatically entered into the appropriate format. While a little cleaning up may be necessary, the process will be far less laborious. We are thankful for Jean Ivy, Alice Carter, and Jerrie Burton who will be helping make this project happen. Progress is on the horizon.

Gary Burton, President
garyburton1@charter.net

In Memoriam—Jean Stubbs Dean

Long time PHA member Jean Stubbs Dean passed away on March 20, 2014. Jean suffered a stroke in early January and remained in a nursing facility until being taken to the hospital where she died. Jean served on the PHA Board as member-at-large, Place 1. She worked diligently on the Mildred Smith project and was anxious to see it completed. It is ironic that the same week of her death PHA acquired a soft ware program that might help us achieve Jean's goal.

Thank you, Jean Dean, for your contributions to Montgomery County history and bless you.

PHA Program for April 2014

Pintlala Historical Association will meet on Sunday, April 13 due to Easter observance on the regular meeting date. For our program, we “will be on the road again.” We will gather at Pintlala Baptist Church at 2:30 p.m. and journey to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Charles McLemore, 1442 West Old Hayneville Road. This home incorporates the Peter Mastin McIntyre home formerly of Highway 331. If you will recall our visit to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Paul Moore in April 2006, part of the McIntyre home was sitting in the Moore’s side yard. The plan was for the Moores to use the building on their property. However, in 2008 the building was purchased by Dr. and Mrs. McLemore and moved to ten adjoining acres. It is now a charming home and grounds with magnificent views. The McLemores have been most gracious to allow us to visit.

There is a ramp available for those unable to use steps. (It is steep.) See you on April 13 when hopefully Spring will truly have returned!

Alice Carter
Program Chair



Photographs courtesy of
Mrs. Charles McLemore

The McLemore House (Before)



The McLemore House (After)

Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church, Montgomery County, Alabama

By Alice T. Carter with contribution by Jeffrey C. Benton

Introduction

Climbing an upward grade at the intersection of Montgomery County Road 61, the Ramer-Naftel Road, and Montgomery County Road 011, the Enzor Road, one encounters the view of a simple, lovely, old church—Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church. This area of the county, known for years as voting Beat 15, has been referred to by several names over the years. The first appears to be Tucker's Store, Tucker's Cross Roads or just Tuckers. These various names are seen on census records. The second name for the area is Stoddard and, as seen in Conecuh River Primitive Baptist Association records, Stoddridge. All of the names are derived from the local post office name, which is now Grady, Alabama. The Stoddard name was begun in 1884 when Nathan F. Stoddard was named postmaster and held that responsibility until the Post Office was discontinued and mail went to Grady in 1910. There are also references in documents referring to the community immediately around the church as Ebenezer. Settlers to this section of the county made their way by wagons primarily from South Carolina and Georgia.

Early Baptist Denomination in Alabama

It is helpful to take a look at the Baptist denomination in Alabama in the years preceding the founding of Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church in 1836. W.G. Robertson author of an early history of Montgomery County, *Recollections of the Early Settlers of Montgomery County and Their Families in 1892*, states that the Baptist denomination was the largest at the time of Montgomery County's earliest settlement in the early 1800s. The Alabama Baptist Association, the fourth oldest association in Alabama, was at its birth made of four churches all constituted around the time that Alabama became a state in 1819. The four were: Antioch Baptist established June 5, 1818 followed by Bethel Baptist (Pintlala) in February, 1819; then Elam Baptist in June, 1819 and Rehoboth Baptist in late 1819. History was made at a meeting of the Alabama Baptist Association at Bethel in October 1837—the denomination split and was the end of a unified Baptist Church in Alabama. The split was based on opposing theological philosophies of Missionary versus Primitive. An historic marble marker acknowledging the split was placed at Bethel Baptist Church in 1923 by the Women's Missionary Union. Many families were divided on this issue, causing much heartbreak for many church members. The Primitive sect were also known as "Old School," "Regulars," "Anti-mission" and "Hard Shell" according to W. G. Robertson.

Members of Bethel Church had already begun their departure as early as 1833 when some moved their membership to other churches embracing the non-fellowshipping doctrine. An example at Bethel was William Jones Pouncey who had been received at Bethel in 1828 and dismissed in 1833 to constitute a new church. That new church was Bethlehem in south Montgomery County. Ebenezer was the next Primitive church to be established in 1836. Pisgah Primitive Baptist Church near Ramer, initiated by the Rushton family formerly of the Ebenezer Church, was constituted in 1842.

Development of Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church

Church minutes for Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church begin with the constitution of the Church on February 6, 1836. The minutes, thankfully, have been transcribed by two people. The first transcription was completed by an unknown person for years 1836-1859 and by Ruby Smith Hassell for years 1866-1899 from original minutes in her private collection. These are the only known existing minutes for Ebenezer, however, there may be other minutes remaining in private hands of which I am unaware. It is immediately noticeable that minutes for the Civil War years of 1861-1865 are missing. Minutes for this period in our state's history and for the Conecuh River Baptist Association, of which Ebenezer was a member, may be found on microfilm at Samford University Library, Special Collections. These minutes have been copied and will be on file at the Pintlala Library, Ethel Tankersley Todd Historical Section.

Those reading the minutes from both individual churches and associations will realize that the minutes take a very formulaic style. Some are written in beautiful penmanship with correct spelling and others are not easily read. Age has not been kind to the papers, particularly for the associational minutes. Church clerks gave details of members received (usually by letter, experience or baptism) and those dismissed. Dismissals were based on various reasons among which were “dancing and fiddling”, intoxication, fornication, falsifying their word, profane language or by the member’s request. Members seemed to come and go at each church, often being dismissed and then reinstated some years later. The first set of transcribed church minutes, 1836-1859, found at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, clearly define the constitution of the church:

The Constitution of the Baptist Church of Christ known by the name of New Ebenezer took place on the sixth day of February 1836 by the following Elders: John Robertson and William J. Pouncy on the following Articles of faith:

Art. 1st. We believe in the Being of God, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Eternal, and unchangeable, in his nature possessing Inflexible Justice, holiness, love, mercy and truth, and God reveals himself in his words in the character of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Art.2d. We believe that the old and New Testament to be the revealed mind and will of God and the only Rule of Faith and Practice.

Art.3d. We believe in original sin.

Art.4th. We believe in man’s incapacity by his own Free Will and Ability to recover himself from the fallen state in which he is in by nature.

5th. We believe sinners are justified in the Light of God by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

6th. We Believe that God’s Elect shall be called justified and glorified.

7th. We Believe Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and washing of the Saints’ feet are Gospel ordinances and that Immersion is the only scriptural mode, and Believers the only subjects.

8th. We believe that none but regularly baptized members in good standing only have a right to the Lord’s table.

9th. We Believe ordained ministers in good standing only have a right to administer the ordinances of the gospel. Constituted Churches ordain ministers and deacons.

10th. We believe in the Resurrection of the dead and a general Judgment, and that the Joys of the Righteous and Punishment of the wicked will be Everlasting.

The seven constituting members of New Ebenezer were: Bretheren Fielding Hogan, Simon Russell, John Gardner and Stephen Gardner; Sisters: Mary Hogan, Nancy Russell and Elizabeth Gardner. Fielding Hogan was ordained as a deacon and William J. Pouncey agreed to serve as pastor. The Ebenezer Church is referred to by various names in church minutes: New Ebenezer, The Baptist Church of Christ at Ebenezer, The Baptist Church and simply Ebenezer Church. The word “primitive” was voted to be retained in its title by a voice vote of the congregation on September 4, 1846. On October 28, 1848 a black man named Benjamin, property of Simon Russell, was received by experience. He is the first African American found in the minutes accepted as a member, a few others joined him in ensuing years. Russell had been ordained a deacon in 1836. Six months after the constitution of New Ebenezer at the August 6th meeting after divine service, consideration was given to the building of a meeting house and a committee of “three and two of our friends to say in what form we should build: whether we shall build a new house or enlarge the old one. The committee reports to build a new House.” This is the only mention of a previous meetinghouse found in the church minutes.

In the September, 1836 minutes the group chose delegates to the “Conaco” Association. This is a

corruption of the word Conecuh of which Ebenezer became a member. Baptist Associations are organizations made of churches of similar theological beliefs and usually in close geographical regions. Associations are the only form of church union among the Primitive sect according to Thomas Owen in *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*. Owen also explains that no acts of the associations were binding on the member churches, each church was completely independent. The Conecuh River Baptist Association was constituted at Hopewell Meeting House, Pike County, Alabama on November 7-9, 1828 as recorded in a bulletin from the first session republished in 1960 by A. C. Carter, Clerk of the 131st session of the Conecuh River Association. This bulletin has been digitized by Samford University Library. The Conecuh River Association was eight years old when Ebenezer Church became a member. In 1839 the Conecuh River Association adopted a Non-fellowship Resolution found in minutes on microfilm at Samford University Library that states:

We will not hold in fellowship any church that holds any member in her that is a member of any of the following institutions to wit— Theological schools, State Conventions, Missionary societies, Bible Societies, Tract Societies, Sunday School Unions, temperance societies nor any other Society that is tributary to the missionary plan as it now exist in the United States. Neither will we knowingly correspond with or receive correspondence from any Association that holds churches in fellowship holding members in them who are members of any of the above named institutions; together with any other society claiming to be axeliary to the Church of Christ. Amended in 1857— Nor members belonging to the Masonic Fraternity, Odd Fellows, Sons of Temperance or Know Nothings, nor any other Secret Society that does exist or here after may exist founded on the wisdom of man..

This Resolution leaves no doubt as to the philosophy of the Association or Ebenezer Church. Hosea Holcombe, minister of the gospel based on the missionary theological philosophy and author of *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists In Alabama* has much to say about the Conecuh River Association, which included Ebenezer Church. Holcombe writes: *We learn that some of the churches of this Association, passed resolutions, a year or two ago, declaring non-fellowship with benevolent institutions and their opposition to missionaries preaching among them. When one church has passed a non-fellowshipping resolution, and some of those who were concerned were anxious for its repeal, there was an elder (Mr. J. W. Pouncy) who Peter-like, was for drawing his sword, and pouncing upon them, saying, he would not submit; and before he would be imposed upon by missionaries, or their schemes, he would shoulder his fire arms,....* This description of William Jones Pouncey (misidentified by Holcombe as J.W. Pouncy) is one indicator of the vitriolic feelings of certain Primitive Baptists regarding their missionary professing brethren.

In January 1839 the minutes of the Church state “the Church resolve that no preacher who belongs to the institutions of the day to wit the missionary and institutions shall have liberty of our house to preach in neither will we receive a charge against any member of our church from any missionary member.” However on January 19th, 1867, minutes from Ebenezer church record: “Taken into consideration a former resolution of the church that we will not suffer other Denominations especially the Missionary Baptist into our Church Meetings or Conferences but will grant them the liberty of our House to Preach funerals So called Sermons when they Bury their Dead in our Church yard or vicinity but to make no regular appointments therein.” William Jones Pouncey was serving as pastor of Ebenezer at the time of the recorded minutes. This seems to be a modest change in position in regard to the Missionary Baptists. The church resolved in 1858 to dispense with quarterly communion and foot washing to a yearly basis.

Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church remained a member of the Conecuh River Baptist Association from 1836 to their last listing as an active church in the Association report for 1914. A. P. Smith of Naftel was listed as clerk for Ebenezer with 16 members, quarterly services and M. V. Gibson listed as pastor. Smith was also the delegate to the Association meeting. After 1914 Ebenezer is listed in the tabular form in the Conecuh Associational minutes, but no reports are given other than in 1916 when L.A. McVay was listed as pastor. The church was not listed in 1919 but is once again shown in 1921 without information. It appears from these records that Ebenezer was suffering a slow death and as of 1926 Ebenezer drops off the Conecuh River Association reports entirely. One is left to ponder if the church continued to hold services in

the old building or if it simply died out. It is documented through oral history that funerals continued to be held in the building as late as 1961 when Mrs. Corinne Farmer's funeral service was conducted there on September 17. Ruby Smith Hassell recalls cleaning the church for the service.

Bretheren whose names appear in church minutes or associational minutes on a regular basis as pastors include but are not exclusive to: William Jones Pouncey, O.P. Cook, R. F. Missildine, W.C. Hayes, J.P. Norman, J. A. Mills, W. N. Hays and M. V. Gibson. These same men often served other churches and at times served multiple churches at the same time. The moderator of the conference or business meeting held after divine services was frequently the pastor.

Annual meetings of church associations were events of importance to the local churches. The meetings usually lasted three days. In 1864 during the Civil War era, The Conecuh River Baptist Association of the Primitive Faith and order held its annual meeting at the Ebenezer Church, October 8th-10th and those serving as delegates from the church were W. J. Pouncey and Thomas Caffey. The annual session of the Association was once again held at Ebenezer, October 8th-10th, 1898 including R. C. Morrison and W. N. Hays as delegates.

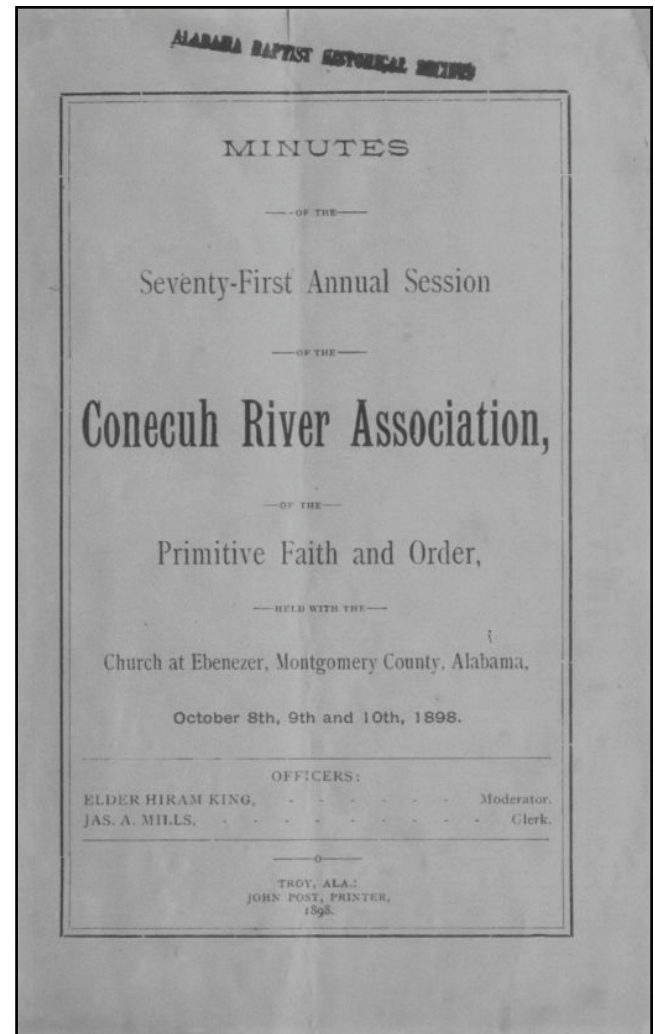
An interesting but confusing fact regarding the Conecuh River Baptist Association detailed by Thomas Owen based on a 1906 census report of churches showed Conecuh River Baptist Association No. 1 (eight members) and No. 2 (sixteen members). The minutes for this association found at Samford Library, Special Collections do not attest to there being two different associations. However, notes from a verticle file at Samford Library, Special Collections state that the association was divided in 1939 into Conecuh River Association No. 1 and No. 2. There just simply seem to be no details of this division to be found.

Ebenezer—The Meeting House

Information on the physical plant of Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church located in the community now referred to as Grady is not plentiful. The August 6, 1836 church minutes written six months from the date of constitution state that the church met in conference after divine services and the second point of business considered the building of a meeting house, selected a committee to say in what form the building should take; the next statement from church minutes raises a question—"whether we shall build a new house or enlarge the old one", where was the old meeting house? The appointed committee reported to build a new house. The next reference to the meeting house appears in the November 1886 minutes—50 years after the first mention of construction: "...the committee appointed by the church to get up funds to cover house & was requested to make a report or approximate as near as possible the amount received & expenders. Said report to be made at next conference." No further mention of this committee was found in minutes.

An entry for meeting house issues appears again on May 1893 when the committee raising "funds for sash (window sash) for the meeting house was extended till further on." No further mention was found.

A news clipping from an unidentified source in 1950 found in an Ebenezer notebook compiled by Ruby Smith Hassell lists physical meeting house improvements: asbestos siding, new doors and concrete steps.



Photograph courtesy of Gary P. Burton

Hassell suggests that perhaps the tin roof coverings over the steps may have been added at this point in time. Hassell provided further oral history of the meeting house for 1955. Herbert Bell has told her that he was the “gofer” at age 15 for a group of five men, Willis Bell, Charlie Smith, Clyde and Reul Royal and Cecil Dorsey, who worked to install wooden shutters over the windows that had recently been vandalized by youngsters throwing rocks.

1956 funeral services for Frank Russell took an unexpected turn when the center floor beam of the church collapsed. It is evident that repairs were made to the building at an unknown date.

Retired Lt. Col. Jeffrey Benton, architectural historian, visited Ebenezer on March 20, 2014 and has provided the following architectural commentary of Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church:

To be considered a successful church building, the structure must conform to the denomination’s doctrine and form of worship.

The Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church building is practical, simple, plain, unadorned. Today, admirers of the modernist architecture movement would find the building an example of “form following function” and “less is more.” However, admirers of traditional, high-style architecture and post-modern architecture would find the building to be too austere. Actually, the building is firmly grounded in the folk or vernacular tradition of American meetinghouses that dates to early colonial New England and to nonconformist or dissenter chapels in old England. At first, these meeting houses consciously rejected the high-style ecclesiastical architecture associated with the established Church of England—after all, architecture is a form of religious, political, and socio-economic communication. By the time Ebenezer was built, however, the vernacular meetinghouse “style” had become the American norm, especially in rural or remote areas, and in the 1830s, south Montgomery County, Alabama, was both rural and remote. Ebenezer is a traditional and conservative, not a fashionable, building.

The building itself may be vernacular, but it is well built—over-built by today’s standards. The 30-by-40 foot building’s 12-inch square sills originally rested on cypress piers around the perimeter, as well as one timber support down the middle of the structure. Sills, piers, and timber framing were probably all cypress, felled in a nearby wetland, squared up with broadax and adze, and pulled to the building site by oxen. (In the 1950s, the cypress piers were replaced by brick piers, the weatherboarded exterior by asbestos shingles, and the entire interior—except for the floor with its original wide planks—was sealed with narrow pine boards. These mid-century alterations almost completely conceal the structure’s timber framing.) Heavy timber-frame construction joined by mortise and tenon, pegs and treenails/trunnels, dates to the Middle Ages, if not before. With the coming of the circular saw in the decades just before the Civil War, timber-frame construction was gradually replaced by the light balloon-frame construction of 2-by-4 inch studs held together by nails. In those decades, planing mills and factory-made window sashes and doors contributed to a national uniformity in buildings, which in time replaced traditional, regional variations. Daniel Pratt’s industrial village just north of Montgomery had such mills.

Ebenezer, however, predates all the changes of the Industrial Revolution, of factories and railroads. Its vernacular style and building tradition derives from the East Coast from the Chesapeake to the South Carolina Lowcountry. Although most rural folk would have been familiar with these traditional building practices and with the symmetrical form, there is evidence that Ebenezer had at least supervision from a master carpenter or a housewright. The hand-hewn timbers supporting the 12-foot ceiling are attached to the plate at the top of the wall by a series of evenly and closely spaced tenons that are cut off flush with the ceiling timbers. There are no pegs or treenails, just expertly cut tenons and mortises. This must be the work of a master builder.

Other than this unusual ceiling timber framing, the interior is unremarkable for its time, place, and denomination. The principal door on the southwest longitudinal side opens to a cross aisle. The longitudinal aisle runs from the single door in the gable end to the podium on which the pulpit once stood. Other than the unusual ceiling framing, the only decorative elements in the room are the pews—actually the

aesthetically-pleasing, curved pew ends. Originally, the timber framing was probably exposed with no interior sealing. Later there would likely have been wide board sealing, and then, in the 1950s, the narrow horizontal sealing. There is no evidence of a stove, but at some time a potbelly stove probably stood in a sandbox or on an iron plate at the crossing of the two aisles in the middle of the room.

As plain as the exterior and interior of Ebenezer Church appear to the modern eye, it conformed to the Primitive (Old School, Hard Shell) Baptist faith that separated from other Baptists in the early 1830s because they rejected mission boards, Sunday schools, and theological seminaries—in fact, any religious practice not mentioned in the New Testament. The denomination rejects being called ultra-Calvinist and Protestant; rather Primitive Baptists claim the denomination represents the original, uncorrupted New Testament church founded by Jesus Christ. Their services focus on preaching, praying, and a cappella singing, usually shape note or Sacred Harp singing. There are two ordinances: adult baptism by immersion and closed communion with wine and unleavened bread, often accompanied by foot washing. The communion table was probably on the floor immediately in front of and below the pulpit on its podium.

The Ebenezer Church building corresponds to the congregation's religious beliefs and practices

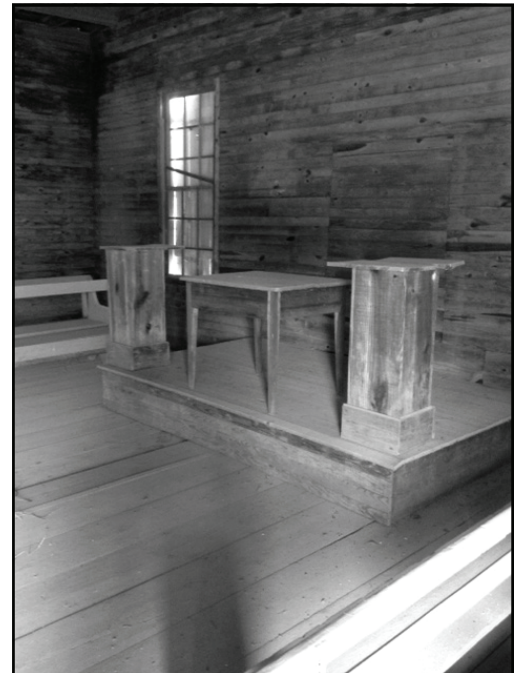
Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church was surveyed and application presented to the Alabama Historical Commission by Ruby Smith Hassell in 2008—the application was accepted and the church is duly listed on the Alabama Historic Register of Landmarks and Heritage.



Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church



Pews, showing scrolled ends



Podium area of Ebenezer Church

Photographs courtesy of
Gary P. Burton

The Cemetery at Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church

There are over 267 graves, not including unmarked tombstones, spread out over the sloping hill behind the simple one room church in southwest Montgomery County at the corner of the Naftel-Ramer and Enzor Roads. To the casual observer strolling through the cemetery, one is struck by the repeated names of families such as Russells (32), Hudgens (17), Stoddards (14) and Boothes (12). One can only imagine the genealogical ties of the families found here. Brothers married sisters and cousins married cousins. Many of those resting here were members of Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church, but not all. The oldest marked grave is that of Martha Butler, born on August 13, 1828 and died twelve years later in September 1840. There

are three graves belonging to individuals born in the eighteenth century—William Cooper, 1795; Phereby Cooper, 1797 and John C. Courtney, 1776. Families tended to be buried near each other, but not always in marked off lots. Some are marked with boundries of native stones, concrete blocks or stone curbing. Only one family is buried within an iron fenced lot—three members of the Martin Oliver Merritt family. There



M.O. Merritt plot, only one with a fence.

Photograph courtesy Ruby Smith Hassell

are graves for men who have served their country in time of war and peace. Confederate soldiers resting at Ebenezer are: A. H. Courtney, Pvt., A. M. Hudgins, Pvt., Martin Oliver Merritt, Pvt., Thomas Jefferson Russell, Pvt. all of the beloved Co. E., 33rd Alabama Infantry Regiment; H. R. Mosley (Moseley), Co.E., 33rd Alabama Cavalry; John W. Davis of Co. B, 17th Alabama Infantry; A. J. Hudgins, Pvt., Co. F, 2nd Alabama Cavalry; Thomas Jefferson Boothe, Co. K, 33rd Alabama Infantry; James W. Wayne, served in a Homeguard Branch of Thomas R. Stacey, Co. (Stacey is buried at Bethel Cemetery); Nathan F. Stoddard, the Alabama Reserves, 1864 -1865; Alfred Allen Stoddard, Pvt.,Watts Guards, 1864-1865. There are numerous other men with military associations buried at Ebenezer. The list would be too lengthy to include here. Some have tombstones designating their service.

Interestingly the five constituting members of the church in 1836 are not found resting at Ebenezer.

The Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church had members of the African American race who were slaves of their white owners and according to oral history some were buried at Ebenezer. Today there are six African American graves visible on property adjoining the Ebenezer Church Cemetery. Their connection if any to those buried in the church cemetery is unknown. A listing for these six burials is found at the end of



Broken African American tombstone.
Photograph courtesy of Gary P. Burton

the article. Descendants of those buried in these graves tended them in years past but as of 2014 the markers have fallen into disrepair.

It is evident that descendants of those buried at Ebenezer care for the graves of their loved ones, however, some of the older graves are in need of proper cleaning and some repair. The cemetery was listed on the Alabama Historic Cemetery Register in August, 2007 by Ruby Smith Hassell. Today the cemetery is supervised by Joan Collier, assisted by Katie Russell Cleghorn. These two ladies are devoted to caring for those buried at Ebenezer and would like to see a cemetery association organized to aid in its care.

Ties to the Confederacy

Not only was Ebenezer Church the center of religious life in the southwest Montgomery County community sometimes referred to as Ebenezer, but home to men and their families who were filled with love and loyalty to their southern heritage. With the drums of war beating throughout the entire country, and the secession of Alabama from the Union on January 11, 1861 men primarily from southwest Montgomery County gathered March 12, 1862 on land across the road from the Ebenezer Church to form Company E of the 33rd Alabama Infantry Regiment. It is not known on which parcel of land the enlistment event took place. One can imagine the highly charged emotions of all gathered near the beloved church. Ten

companies made up the 33rd Regiment. According to Confederate Muster Rolls, nearly 120 men answered the call to duty and sacrifice for their Confederate States of America on March 12, 1862 at Ebenezer and at Ramer on March 14, 1862. The late reporter, Mildred Smith, who worked for the *Montgomery Advertiser* for many years, wrote in an article for the *Troy Messenger* on Monday, February 27, 1967 that William Lowndes Yancey spoke at the enlistment gathering at Ebenezer. However, no documentation for this can be found to date. Yancey was a fiery orator, leader of the secessionist movement in the South and served as a senator from Alabama in the Confederate Congress held in Richmond. Another unanswered question in this investigation is why reporter Smith and also publisher, Allen Rankin attribute the 1861 date to the enlistment and mustering of Company E. None of the muster rolls or regimental histories use that date but rather the 1862 date. Men and boys of varying ages from 16 to 45 followed their commander Captain Henderson Hiram Norman, age 48, to Greenville, Alabama to board train cars for Pensacola, Florida on April 29, 1862 where the 33rd Regiment was organized. The company was given their basic training there by General Braxton Bragg. Some sources state that Bragg's trainees were the Confederate Army's best trained. This regiment entered the conflict with about 500 men/boy soldiers who saw action at Corinth, Mississippi, Tupelo, encamped at Chattanooga in July, 1862, marched to Kentucky and on October 8,

1862 the regiment was in its first major battle at Perryville, Kentucky. Here the regiment learned the horrors of battle with approximately 500 men entering the conflict with only 88 men at battle's end. The soldiers of Company E were honored in 1933 along with the founders of the Ebenezer community when a rustic monument of native stones incorporating a concrete plaque was placed in the churchyard. The wording of the plaque states: *To the memory of the pioneer settlers of Ebenezer community and the soldiers of Co. E,*



Photograph courtesy of Gary P. Burton

33rd Alabama Regiment, CSA. "There Were Giants In the Earth In Those Days." Scratched in the mortar holding the stones together is the date of the monument, 1933—in two places actually. The monument was unveiled by Mrs. Birdie Amanda Smith Fletcher of Birmingham, daughter of A. P. (Lonnie) Smith, who in 1929 founded the homecoming events at Ebenezer in memory of his mother, Parthenia Amanda Singleton Butler Smith long-time member of Ebenezer who died in 1911 and is buried there.

Heritage and Homecoming at Ebenezer

The church and community of Ebenezer share a long and rich heritage. From the days of church constitution in 1836 to the initiation of homecoming gatherings in 1929 by Alonza Pitts (Lonnie) Smith in memory of his mother, Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church still stands as a beacon for families tied to it by common family threads and patriotic service to our country.

Willie Grey Smith, mother of Ruby Hassell, was for several years diligent in clipping articles from newspapers regarding the homecoming celebrations at Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church. The first saved article was from the year 1933 in the *Montgomery Advertiser* and written by its editor, Grover Hall. He reported that descendants of the church founders and members of Co. E, 33 Alabama Infantry Regiment gathered to honor the 100th anniversary of the church founding. However, this does not add up to the correct number of years if the founding of the church is based on the constitution date of 1836. This would have been only the 97th anniversary. Were members holding divine services somewhere in 1833? At this same gathering, a marker described earlier in this paper was dedicated. Circuit Judge Walter B. Jones, son of two-time governor of Alabama (1890-1894) and Confederate officer Thomas Goode Jones, suggested the marker and attended the homecomings on a regular basis, delivering thoughtful addresses to the crowds that swelled at times to over 1000. In 1933 it was observed by attendees that a new ceiling, tin roof and paint had been added to the church. For this special anniversary gathering the pulpit area of the church was accorded baskets of flowers given by Rosemont Gardens of Montgomery, Mrs. J.L. Johns of Montgomery and Mrs. Hiliary Hassey of Grady. The monument was unveiled by Mrs. Fletcher as described earlier. Speakers were A.P. Smith, Montgomery attorney Lew P. Sanderson, John C. McLendon of Luverne, Montgomery Probate Judge W. W. Hill, Judge Grover C. Hall, Thomas Price and J.L. Kyle. The congregation enjoyed the singing of hymns, including "Precious Memories" that became the theme song for the homecomings. The event always included the spreading of basket lunches under the trees of the church lot, which covers 5.2 acres according to Ruby Smith Hassell.

Reporter Mildred Smith wrote that in 1935 the main address of the day was delivered by Dr. L. N. Duncan, President of Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University). He stressed the importance of agriculture to our country and encouraged farmers to "hold their heads high." Others on the program were the always present, Judge Walter B. Jones whose topic was "The Christian's Philosophy of Life"; W. B. Kyle of Wetumpka, a favorite and often humorous speaker; J. C. McLendon, editor of the *Luverne Journal*. Congregational singing and basket lunches added to the harmonious spirit of the day. Dr. Hubert Searcy, President of Huntingdon College in Montgomery (a Methodist school) spoke in 1938 along with Congressman George Grant, Judge Walter B. Jones, attorney Vaughn Hill Robison, Algernon Blair, Ray Rushton and W. B. Kyle of Wetumpka. Sprinkled throughout the presentations was the singing of hymns and special music by the Providence Quartet and the Sunshine Quartet. 400 attendees were recorded and enjoyed basket lunches in the churchyard.

W. S. Duke of LaPine was the chairman of the 1941 homecoming that had an attendance of 100. Judge Walter B. Jones gave a patriotic talk concluding "Ebenezer homecomings bring people nearer to God and sent home with nobler purposes." Speakers included Montgomery attorneys L.J. Black, Robert Stewart, Vaughn Hill Robison; J.C. McLendon of Luverne and W. B. Kyle, Wetumpka. Special music was interspersed with the speeches. The 1949 gathering established the Ebenezer Memorial Association with J. Byron Smith as president, Capas Hudgins, vice-president, Clyde Royal, secretary and Mildred Smith of Dublin elected as historian. The purpose of the organization was to preserve the church and cemetery and sponsor the annual homecomings. President Byron Smith was the son of A. P. Smith, the founder of the homecoming celebrations and the Ebenezer Homecoming Association which was discontinued during World War II.

In 1950 the homecoming event's principle address was given by Judge Walter B. Jones with other presentations by W. B. Kyle of Wetumpka and Montgomery attorney William Inge Hill.

The last published account of an Ebenezer homecoming saved by Willie Grey Smith was for 1967 and was a recount of earlier celebrations.

These and other homecoming celebrations were times when families would have their reunions, often coming from great distances to reflect on their heritage, ancestors and to continue relationships old and new.

W. G. Robertson, author of a small history of Montgomery county in 1892 and son of John Robertson, one of the constituting elders of Ebenezer, described the Primitive Baptist "family": *It is a good old family; they are honest, good citizens and neighbors; straightforward and correct in all their dealings with their fellowman; drink a dram whenever they want, but never drink to excess. They were the original old soldiers of the cross, and served their day and generation, and have accomplished a good work.*



Alice Carter and Jeffrey Benton at Ebenezer Church,
March 20, 2014, photograph courtesy of Gary P. Burton

Addendum:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN BURIALS
Beyond the Fence
Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church
Montgomery County, Alabama
Surveyed by Gary Burton
March 2014

Catherine Pettaway

Died 1925
 Age 72
 At Rest

Latitude: 32.016815 GPS Reading
 32° 01'0.537N GPS Reading
 Longitude: -86.234374 GPS Reading
 86° 14'3.747"W GPS Reading

Drainage Pipe Markers & Joseph Sidney Guice (unreadable marble)

Born 1902

Latitude: 32.016557 GPS Reading
 32°00'59.6000"N GPS Reading
 Longitude: -86.234424 GPS Reading
 86°14'3.925"W GPS Reading

Annie Pettway (Porous Slab)

Died
 February 22, 1949
 Age 87
 At Rest

James Pettway

1855
 May 30, 1925
 He is not dead, but sleepeth

Latitude:32.016569 GPS Reading
 32° 00'59.648"N GPS Reading
 Longitude: -86° 234418 GPS Reading
 86° 14'3.905"W GPS Reading

Three Toppled Stones

J.J. Taylor

April 3, 1826
 February 12, 1926

Open Bible (Top)

Wesley McCants

Born 27, 1862
 Died February 19, 1889

Latitude: 32° 016514 GPS Reading
 32° 59.451"N GPS Reading
 Longitude: -86.234207 GPS Reading
 86° 14'4.945"W GPS Reading

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- Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church Minutes, Collection of Ruby Smith Hassell and transcribed by Hassell
- Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, Microfilm, #284, ADAH
- Ebenezer Notebook compiled by Ruby Smith Hassell
- Papers of William Lowndes Yancey, ADAH
- Early Montgomery County Post Offices File compiled by Laurie Sanders. Pintlala Branch Library

Acknowledgments:

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**PINTLALA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**

*c/o Pintlala Public Library
255 Federal Road
Hope Hull, AL 36043*

NEXT MEETING

**APRIL 13, 2014
2:30 P.M.**

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If you are interested in genealogy, please indicate family surnames _____

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