

PINTLALA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Next Meeting:
July 15th — 2:30 p.m.
Pintlala Baptist Church



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

Volume XXI, Number 3

July 2007

Abner C. McGehee

(July 1, 1914 — December 1, 1988)



*Abner and friend on horse,
date unknown*



c. 1969



*Abner and sister, Edna, at Hope
Hull United Methodist Church,
date unknown*



*Abner with nieces and nephew, children of
his sister Edna Cauthen, c. 1955*

2007 OFFICERS

President	Gary Burton	(334)288-7414
Vice President	Lee Barnes	(334)288-4855
Secretary	Karon Bailey	(334)281-6239
Treasurer	Thomas Ray	(334)288-3368
Parliamentarian.....	Jack Hornady	(334)396-2130
Program Chairperson ...	Alice T. Carter	(334)281-3708
Members at Large		
Place 1	Jean Dean.....	(334)548-2167
Place 2	Mary Ann Venable	(334)288-3234
Place 3	Rene Barnett	(334)288-0231
Place 4	Judy Burton	(334)288-3585

All photographs this page, courtesy Abner Cauthen

President's Message

A few days ago I found myself with a free afternoon in Washington D.C. while attending a Baptist meeting. So I rode the Metro to the National Archives in order to see the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom. Viewing the documents which defined us as a nation was a mystical experience for me: the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Proclamation, and others. The next best thing is to see them online:

<http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/visit/rotunda.html>

As I entered the magnificent edifice housing the National Archives I saw the grandiose inscription: "The Past is Prologue". It is so true. You and I are reaping a harvest of freedom because of those who sowed the seeds of commitment and sacrifice in a bygone day.

What is true on the national level is also true locally. It is sad when persons live in a community like Pintlala and choose to remain unaware of a rich heritage, oblivious that others have gone before us still extending their influence into our day and time. The study of history is the mother of all disciplines. Without it, there can never exist a culture of refinement; nor can there exist a rational basis for hope. The future will always be shaped by the past. Professor Walter Shurden refers to "historical amnesia".

We are only one generation away from forgetting who we are as a people. Supporting the PHA is an important way for caring persons to learn, educate, and preserve our colorful history and heritage. We must choose to care.

Gary Burton, President

PHA July Program

Pintlala Historical Association will meet on Sunday, July 15 at 2:30 p.m. at Pintlala Baptist Church. "Sweet and Humorous Memories of Abner C. McGehee" will be our program topic. Community residents Wallace Bush, Collins and Kate Olive Gordon and others will share their memories of this one and only community resident.

It has been requested many times over the years to have a program on Abner. His reputation as a "character" has remained among community residents these many years after his death in 1988.



October 2007 Program

Advance notice is being given for our October meeting. The date will be changed to the FIRST Sunday in October rather than the third Sunday as is our normal schedule. October 7th will be our meeting date.

We will have the privilege of touring Magnolia Crest, the Warren Henly Stone home and the Stone church which are on property now owned by GE Plastics in Burkeville.

In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we note here the passing of Charles Hall in June. He and his wife Lurline were PHA members since its inception in 1978. Charles could be counted on to accompany Lurline and Ethel Tankersley Todd on Cemetery excursions. His memory bank was often probed for information on Bethlehem and Mt. Carmel communities.

We will miss his quiet, southern ways. Our sympathy is extended to Lurline and the Hall family.

Electious Thompson (1750-1840)
Revolutionary War Soldier and Church Planter In Central Alabama
By Gary P. Burton

It is difficult to imagine the state of Alabama with only a few churches. Such was the case in the years before statehood in 1819. When President Thomas Jefferson, on behalf of a young and struggling nation, acquired the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 (530,000,000 acres) from France, he later commissioned the construction of the Federal Road enabling the transportation of the U.S. Mail from Washington D.C. to Fort Stoddert, Alabama and on to New Orleans. The road would follow a loosely defined Indian trading path and bring thousands of settlers into the region of Alabama and Mississippi known as the Southwest. By 1814 Andrew Jackson would use the same road to move his troops eventually to New Orleans and in the process break the back of the Creek Indian Nation at Horseshoe Bend.

The Federal Road bisected the heart of central Alabama. Homesteaders flooded into the area ripe for settlement. Churches were almost non-existent. Ministers were few. Living was hard; travel was arduous; life was fragile.

Electious Thompson would not make his way into central Alabama via the Federal Road. The 68 year-old veteran of the Revolutionary War came from Kentucky. Born in Maryland, Thompson completed his military service in the cause for independence, and in 1790 converted from Catholicism and became a Baptist minister. At forty years of age, Electious Thompson left Maryland for Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky before his four year sojourn in Montgomery and Lowndes counties in Alabama. From 1819-1822 Thompson preached and started new churches in an area described as "deserted for the gospel."

Early Years and Revolutionary War Experience

Electious Thompson was born in Prince George County, Maryland in 1750 near what would become Washington, D.C. His father died in the French and Indian War fighting in the company of a young George Washington. James Thompson, according to records of Maryland troops, was probably with General Braddock when Braddock was mortally wounded and, more than likely, Thompson was mortally wounded himself during the attack on the advanced post at the Loyalhanna in October 1758.

Some time later the nine-year old Electious Thompson was entrusted to the care of an uncle who placed him on a sea-going vessel in order for him to learn the skills of a mariner.

In 1776 Electious Thompson enlisted from St. Mary's County, Maryland in the War for Independence. Thompson was engaged in the battles of Blackstone's Island and White Plains serving under George Washington, now a general. In addition, he saw action under Colonel Smallwood, Captain Allen Thomas and First Lt. John Stuart. In 1778, Thompson volunteered from Prince George County and served under Captain White of the Maryland Militia.

Electious Thompson in Central Alabama

Primarily the Rev. Mr. Thompson founded two churches in Montgomery County, the Elim (Elam) Baptist Church on the Wetumpka Highway north of Montgomery but just south of the Northern Bypass and Bethel Baptist Church in Pintlala located in the Southwestern part of the county. He preached in the city of Montgomery but certainly a few years before the genesis of First Baptist Church. Thompson was in central Alabama before and after statehood was acquired. It appears that the Revolutionary War soldier arrived in Montgomery County in 1818 and departed for Morgan County in early 1823.

It should also be noted that while in central Alabama Electious Thompson preached at the Providence Baptist Church in Dallas County according to 1821 church minutes. He was a property owner with land patents for the area west of Pintlala Creek along Highway 80 intersecting with County Road 37 in Lowndes County.

Electious Thompson was not alone in starting the Bethel and Elim churches. The Rev. James McLemore was a co-founder. The two comprised an interesting team of church planters. How Thompson and McLemore connected is not clear. What is clear is the age differential between the two men. When Thompson arrived in Pintlala he was 68 years old; McLemore was 36. Electious Thompson had started churches in Kentucky and perhaps elsewhere. Although much younger, James McLemore came into central Alabama via the Old Federal Road from Jones County, Georgia having the experience of a seasoned pastor. Thompson would invest his life as a minister for approximately four years and then remove himself to Morgan County, Alabama where he eventually died close to ninety years of age. Even there he would continue to preach and supply churches. Records of Electious Thompson's involvement with the Elim Church beyond its founding seem to be non-existent. James McLemore remained to serve for the balance of his life as pastor of Elim and intermittently as pastor of the Bethel Church in Pintlala. He died at 52 in 1834.

Preaching in Montgomery's Courthouse

It is important to remember that Electious Thompson came to Montgomery County before the city of Montgomery was incorporated. It wasn't until 1819 that the small villages of East Alabama and New Philadelphia merged to form the city of

Montgomery and the county held its first election. The infant town would witness the construction of the Globe Theatre on Market Street and the Montgomery Hotel in 1821. While Thompson was holding forth for the Providence Church in Dallas County and ministering in the Elim and Bethel churches, the city of Montgomery was only months old. Electious Thompson would become a resident of Morgan County before the flowing artesian well became the focal point of Court Square.

There was no Baptist church in the new city of Montgomery. B.F. Riley comments on the new, but unchurched city. "Baptists had lived in the growing time of Montgomery from the earliest periods of settlement of the state, but no organization had been attempted up to this time. Such men as Revs. James McLemore, Electious Thompson, and Alex Travis would occasionally preach in Montgomery, but the services were held either in the Courthouse or in private homes." About the courthouse, Mary Ann Neeley summarizes, "The first courthouse, completed in 1822, stands near an artesian well at the western end of Market Street, the main thoroughfare of New Philadelphia. This wooden building and a later 1835 brick one served the populace until after the city became the state capitol in 1846."

Electious Thompson in Pintlala

James McLemore and Electious Thompson comprised the presbytery when the Bethel Baptist Church was begun in 1819. Church minutes begin:

"Articles of Faith of the Church of Christ at Bethel Montgomery County Alabama territory Recd at her constitution on the 13th of February 1819 which constitution was performed by the following Elders (Viz) Electious Thompson and James McLemore."

The church began with six men and six women as charter members: Maximillian and Elizabeth Armstrong, John and Jarusha Loftin, Edward Moseley, and Amy Pyle. The Reverend Thompson, although a founding minister of the Bethel Church, did not join the church until October 1821. Thompson's son, Electious, Jr., had joined the church four months earlier. Son Electious was 31 years of age, born in Virginia. The older Thompson had convened the church at its conference in September 1819, a privilege accorded ordained clergy regardless of membership. Interestingly the minister Thompson's wife, Eliza, is given no mention in the Bethel minutes although, Rebecca, the wife to the minister's son was a member of the church, having joined in August 1821. It is assumed that Eliza Thompson died while in Montgomery County. One can think speculatively of any number of reasons why Electious Thompson, Sr. was so long in joining the Bethel Church:

- For the initial months of 1821, Thompson was preaching for the Providence Church of Dallas County.
- His early membership may have been in the Elim church.
- His wife may have been experiencing a physical decline and required his assistance.

Perhaps Electious, Jr. and Rebecca arrived in Montgomery County to attend Eliza or to take care of Electious, Sr. who was past seventy. By the time Electious, Sr. joined the Bethel Church, James McLemore was no longer the pastor although he would serve in subsequent years.

On the "fourth Sabbath" of October 1821 Electious Thompson was received into the membership of the Bethel Church. There were several incentives for joining. He was a co-founding pastor, his son and daughter-in-law were already members, and he, along with James McLemore, would serve as part of the presbytery to ordain George Brown as a deacon on the same day. Perhaps there was another incentive too. Although probably not present on the day when the minister Thompson joined the Bethel Church, the pastor was Lewis "Clubaxe" Davis. Like Electious Thompson, Davis had served in the Revolutionary War. The intersection of two Revolutionary War soldiers surely made for interesting dynamics in the context of the Bethel Church. According to Hosea Holcombe, *The Christian Index* made mention of Davis' death in 1835 and his Revolutionary War experience. B. F. Riley speaks of his preaching style, respectively:

"Died at his residence in Autauga county, Ala., on the 3d day of February, 1835, the Rev. LEWIS C. DAVIS, in the 79th year of his age. Mr. Davis was a native of Hanover county, Va., and enlisted in the service of his country, in 1777, and served faithfully three years, the time for which he enlisted. He joined the main army under Gen. Washington, a few days after the battle of Germantown. He was with the army in winter quarters, at Valley Forge. In the spring he marched into New Jersey. In June he was at the battle of Monmouth; from there to White Plains; thence to King's Bridge, in New York; thence to Bound Brook, in New Jersey, into winter quarters. In the spring of 1779, under Gen. Wayne, he marched to West Point; thence to Stony Point, and sided in storming the Fort at the point of the bayonet; from thence to Morristown, where he received his discharge."

"The pseudonym which he assumed was derived from the custom prevalent among the early settlers of the use of the club ax in preparing timber for building purposes. After the tree had been cut to the ground, the club ax was used 'to score in, block and chip,' which was the rough work, and which left the timber in a most rugged condition. The rough work of the club ax was followed by the hewer with the broad ax, the use of which was to trim and polish the timber for final use. By this rude rhetoric, Mr. Davis

would contra-distinguish himself from the more polished, cultured minister. And he was true to his assumed name. His preaching was a strange conglomeration of ridicule, sarcasm, exhortation, denunciation, pathos, humor and zeal. He was totally indifferent to the manner of the expression of his thought, and was thoroughly merciless in the expenditure of invective. It was thoroughly understood by everyone who heard him that he was ready to sustain with physical force, if necessary, any utterances which fell from his lips while in the pulpit."

The church which met monthly would allow the October 1821 meeting to be its last for the year.

During the time Thompson was associated with the Bethel Church, the congregation functioned without an official meeting house. It was often discussed, rudimentary plans were developed, and a location was secured. According to church minutes, serious discussions about a building in which to meet did not transpire until 1825 by which time Electious Thompson was residing in Morgan County. Even though the church did not possess its own structure, meetings doubtless were held in homes or outdoors when weather permitted. Without a meeting house, the church nonetheless functioned in matters of receiving, disciplining, and dismissing members, both black and white. The church ordained deacons and ministers, observed communion once per quarter, and engaged in footwashing once a year.

When the Bethel Church convened in January 1822 Electious Thompson would witness much activity. Along with Maximillian Armstrong and George Brown, Thompson was given the responsibility of reviewing the proposed Rules of Decorum and reporting at the next meeting. In a similar manner, Thompson was asked to work with George Brown and John Pouncy to examine the "church book" (financial records), also with a view of reporting in the next meeting. L. "Clubaxe" Davis asked to be relieved of pastoral duties right after John Pouncy had "raised the tunes."

In the February conference the Rules of Decorum were adopted with some amendments and the financial report was approved. George Brown accepted the pastorate of Bethel Church.

In the same meeting Henry King was appointed a deacon. Immediately King sought endorsement to start a mission church on Catoma Creek. In the language of the minutes, he "made application to become an arm of this church on Catoma Creek." The Bethel Church responded to King's request the next month by authorizing John Loftin, Samuel Pouncy, McArmstrong (Maximillian Armstrong), and George Brown to visit "the shoals of Catoma."

It is noteworthy that Electious Thompson, Jr. was placed "under censure" of the church. The nature of his offense is not disclosed in church minutes. Investigating and adjudicating charges against church members were part and parcel of the Bethel Church culture. The "case" against Electious, Jr. was continued in April and in May the church's censure was removed. In the meantime the mission church on Catoma was given the name Hopewell. It should not be surprising that the month of August witnessed strong encouragement from the Bethel Church for Hopewell to become a fully constituted church with Electious Thompson, Jr. joining Henry King, David Roach, and Francis Daniel and wife along with "Sister Goodson." After the brief censure at the Bethel Church, perhaps Electious, Jr. desired an understandable change of scenery.

Dynamics within the Bethel congregation were interesting if not amusing. Electious Thompson and his son would observe the intense dispute between Amy Pyle who charged McArmstrong with some financial impropriety with the church books. There was no resolution so Amy Pyle was excommunicated.

In an unrelated situation, "Sister Morgan" was interviewed by an investigating committee which concluded with the thought, "they think hur not in hur right mind and laid hur under the censure of the church."

The last mention of Electious Thompson's involvement with the Bethel Church (December, 1822) was with regard to the planned ordination service of Samuel Pouncy. In the language of the early church minutes, "cawel the following Brothering as a Presbatterry to aid in his ordination (to wit) Electious Thompson Senr and James McLemore; also agreed that the Friday before shall be observed as a day of fast and prayer to god for a Revival of Religion in this settlement."

Then the minutes state, "Dismissed Brother Electious Thompson Senr by Letter." The December 1822 meeting with the Bethel Church was the last one for Electious Thompson. Samuel Pouncy eventually withdrew his name from consideration for ordination by February 1823. Presley Dodson was asked to replace James McLemore and serve with Thompson the previous month. However, the presbytery never materialized because Thompson had departed for Morgan County, Alabama.

Early Marriage Records in Montgomery County

Electious Thompson officiated at three weddings:

- William McDade and Anabella M. Turner April 30, 1819
- Philip Thompson and Margaret Brown Boles November 30, 1821
- William Spencer and Sally Long November 30, 1821

Electious Thompson in Dallas County

Only brief references are made to Electious Thompson in the minutes of the Providence Baptist Church of Dallas County, located south of Orrville on Boguechitto Creek.

“Bro. Thompson” is mentioned as preaching in April, June, July, and August. Choosing a location and building a meeting house were issues while Thompson was engaged as a preacher. The general location was decided in May of 1821 (Section 27, Range 8, Township 15). Thompson was also on hand when an interesting issue was resolved:

“Question: Whether this meeting house shall be free for all denominations.

Answer: No, but shall be called the Providence Baptist Church of Christ and the church at liberty to invite whom she pleases.”

An important commentary on the Providence Baptist Church is provided in the Minutes of the Alabama Association according to Holcombe. In 1822, the year following Electious Thompson’s preaching, the Association dispatched James McLemore and Samuel Ray to visit all the churches with the association in order to “ascertain their minds relative to missions, both foreign and domestic, and report to the next association...” The following year, a sobering report was made. None of the churches was receptive to embracing the cause of missions, only the Providence Church desired to promote domestic missions. Perhaps Thompson’s preaching had been influential.

Thompson’s Final Years

The year 1823 found Electious Thompson moving to Morgan County, Alabama where he would spend the rest of his days until his death in 1840. The Revolutionary War veteran would continue to preach in the churches of Morgan County. The grave of the intrepid church planter is located in the Russell Cemetery across from the Pines Southern Missionary Baptist Church. *The Huntsville Democrat* published a lengthy eulogy, July 17, 1841, as a tribute to Electious Thompson’s life and work. His grave is appropriately commemorated by the Burleson Mountain DAR Chapter. The gravestone attributes three achievements to Electious Thompson: “Doctor of Divinity, A Free Mason, and a Soldier in the War of 1776.

This author has limited the scope of this article to Electious Thompson’s work in central Alabama. Research, with an expanded article in view, continues to be done.

Acknowledgements: I am indebted to Stan Stokes, descendent of Electious Thompson and native Texan. Stan works as a mechanical engineer in the Saudi Arabian desert. We were connected by Ralph Foster, historian for First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

The scope of Electious Thompson’s life extends well beyond central Alabama and is the object of ongoing research. Elder John Sparks, author of *Raccoon John Smith: Frontier Kentucky’s Most Famous Preacher* has provided helpful information and insight into Thompson’s Kentucky years as a pioneering Baptist preacher.

Sources

Benjamin F. Riley, *History of Baptists in Alabama in 1808, until 1894* (Birmingham: Robert & Son, 1895), p. 80

Minutes of the Alabama Baptist Association

Hosea Holcombe, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Alabama, 1840*, reprinted in 1974 by the West Jefferson County Historical Society

Marriage Records, Montgomery County, Alabama

Morgan County, *Alabama Heritage Book*

Maryland Historical Magazine, *French and Indian War*, Roster of Maryland Troops, 1757-1759

Baptist Project, prepared by Michael Vaughn Sims, December 8, 2000

Central Alabama Genealogical Society Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 1; January 26, 1988

James Spurlock Farior, *Joseph O. Thompson and Annie Magruder Thompson – A Genealogy*, 1985

Pension Records, Revolutionary War

Mary Ann Neeley, *Montgomery: Capital City Corners*, Arcadia Publishing, 1997

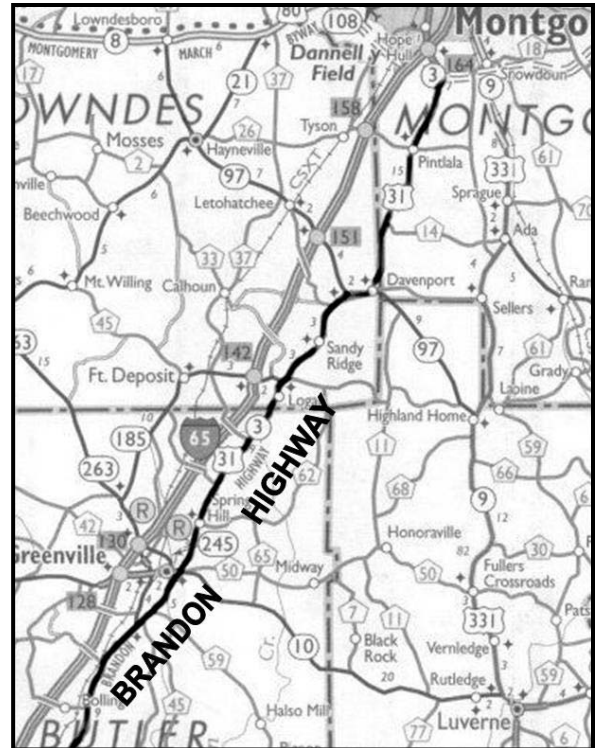
Minutes, Bethel Church, Montgomery County, Alabama (1819-1823)

Where Is The Brandon Highway?

How many of you who live in the PHA area and travel Highway 31 north to Montgomery or south to Spanish Fort, Alabama know that you are on the Brandon Highway?

It's true- Highway 31 from Montgomery to Spanish Fort is named for Governor William Woodward Brandon (1868-1934) who served one term as Governor of Alabama from 1923 through 1927. Brandon followed Governor Thomas E. Kilby and preceded Governor Bibb Graves. Brandon was elected state auditor in 1907 and in 1918 he ran for governor against Kilby and came in a close second in the race. He was elected governor in 1922 over Bibb Graves. His campaign platform focused on economy in government, no new taxes and he defended the practice of leasing convicts as laborers. Brandon created the Alabama State Docks Commission which was seen by many as his most notable achievement. Brandon used bond funds from the Kilby Administration to improve Alabama's roads.

In 1911 the state legislature established the state highway commission though there was little to administer! William Simpson Keller (half brother to renowned Helen Keller) was selected as the first chief highway engineer. He was eminently qualified with a 1893 degree in civil engineering from the University of Alabama. Keller was charged with designating which state roads were significant enough to form a system of trunk or state roads. In 1915 the legislature approved thirty-four state trunk roads. Ultimately, in 1926, a route beginning in Ardmore, Alabama, passing near the center of Montgomery, cutting through Pintlala and continuing south toward Mobile, was adopted and numbered U. S. Highway 31. This road included a branch which cut eastward at Montgomery through Troy to Dothan, all named the Bee Line Highway. The section of Highway 31 from the city of Montgomery south to Spanish Fort, where it meets U.S. Highway 90, was named the W. W. Brandon Highway in honor of the governor who in 1923 began the reorganization of the state highway department. Both names, the Bee Line and Brandon, remain on official highway maps but there are no road markers indicating that highway 31 as it runs through Hope Hull/Pintlala is named the Brandon Highway.



Portion of official Alabama highway map
See map printing of Brandon Highway just above
bold letters of same

The next time you drive from Montgomery to Spanish Fort on highway 31 think of Governor William Woodward Brandon!

Sources:

Samuel L. Webb, and Margaret E. Armbruster, editors. *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001, 170-173.

Grady, Alan. "Aunt Babe, Uncle Simp and the Origins of U.S. Highway 31." *Alabama Heritage*, Number 47 (Winter, 1998), 8-21.



**PINTLALA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**

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

NEXT MEETING

JULY 15, 2007

2:30 P.M.

PINTLALA BAPTIST CHURCH

Join the Pintlala Historical Association
Please mail completed form, fee & dues to :

**Pintlala Historical Association
c/o Thomas Ray
2995 Pettus Road
Hope Hull, AL 36043**

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

Phone (Home & Office) _____

E-Mail Address _____

Areas of Interest _____

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

\$5.00 Registration Fee (One Time) - \$10.00 Annual Dues