

Bethel Presbyterian small, but is history
by Louise McCollum, Guest Columnist

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Historic Bethel Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga counties for community, founded before the Civil War held its homecoming on Sunday October 2nd and its history is notable.

Regular services are no longer held at Bethel Church it is now called a chapel and a department of the Summerville Presbyterian Church the chapel has seven active members including misses **MONTINE JONES**, 97 and her sons **DAVID** and **SAM**. She and her sons still live on the farm bought by her father in law in 1838 the year to do you became a county.

The other members are Mr. and Mrs. **TOMMY HOLT**, who look after the chapel property, and Mr. and Mrs. **HENRY EVERETT**.

Mrs **EVERETT** is a descendant of the founders of the church.

On September 9, 1846, a petition was sent to the Cherokee Presbytery from some members of the Pleasant Green Church, which was located near the Gamble Spring in Chattooga County. In the petition, three reasons were set forth for organizing the new church.

"The great distance to pleasant green church members could not attend regularly."

"Pleasant Green would not suffer any loss by a new church being organized, as they did not want to employ another minister, but to continue to support the pastor supply of Pleasant Green Church."

"That we live in a valley destined soon to become a large population and we wish to erect the standard of Presbyterianism that other denominations of Christians in our midst may know and love us as a branch of the Church of Christ, and those who live among us both saved and unsaved who may decide to join our branch of God's church may have a church home."

The petition was signed by:

JACK O. SCOTT
THOMAS KENDRICK
ANDREW COUEY
MARTHA D. KENDRICK
HENRY L. COUEY

SAMUEL B. MALONEY
FARBY COUEY
MARTHA BURNS
ELIZABETH A. COUEY
JAMES BUCHANAN

A. B. MALONEY
AUGUSTUS BRYANT
NAOMI BRYANT
MARTHA WRIGHT
NAOMI HERNDON

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According to the minutes: "The petition was read and approved by the Presbytery at the time. Rev. **JOHN M. CALDWELL** and **ANDREW LOCKRIDGE** were appointed a committee of Presbytery to hold a meeting in that part of the county seat east of Taylor's Ridge on the 24th of October 1846, and if the way be clear to organize a church. The above meeting was held at the time appointed by the Presbytery."

A sermon was preached by a **A. Y. LOCKRIDGE** from the 20th Psalm, 5th verse. "We will rejoice in the salvation and in the name of our God we will set up our banners."

THE FIRST BUILDING the church occupied was built of logs and stud just east of the present building.

The present gleaming white church is situated on a hillside among stately trees.

Built before the Civil War it was not ceiled until 1869, then remodeled in 1878 and painted in 1879. It has been virtually untouched by modern times. The heating system is scarcely noticed. The electric lights are encased in quaint oil lamps which hang from the ceiling. The unpretentious, quaint charm, character and strength of yesteryear are felt keenly as one enters the church.

The late "Miss **MAG**" **WEESNER** played a foot pedal organ there for years.

The pulpit was made from a sweet-gum tree cut and donated by the Reverend **T. C. CRAWFORD** who served as pastor of the church for 37 years beginning in 1847 one year after the founding of the church when stragglers from General **WILLIAM T. SHERMAN** Union army came through they raided the Rev. **CRAWFORD**'s home and took everything that would do for them or their horses to eat. The horses left a little corn on the ground and Mrs Crawford picked it up, washed it, beat it up and made bread for a meal.

The first high school and Chattooga County was established at the Bethel Church according to a history by the late **SAM JONES** in 1929. The Reverend **T. C. CRAWFORD** came to Chattooga County from North Carolina in 1846 to teach school. Jones wrote: "The Reverend Crawford was no ordinary man he was a man who had ideals and a vision, a Daniel Boone, an Abraham Lincoln or a Woodrow Wilson." With those imposing characteristics it is no wonder that he was successful in the carrying out of his dream of the establishment of the first high school in Chattooga County in 1847 at Bethel.

He was quoted as having said: "The greatest need to the community and county is educated men and women to be leaders and teachers."

He advocated free tuition to all high-school pupils, and according to the historian young men and ladies from all over the county and adjoining counties — even ones in Alabama and Tennessee — came to the school the first

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The report continued: "His life and influence did not die with a mortal man, but lived on thereafter, and is still alive today parentheses 1929 parentheses, the old church has been loyal and faithful to her master and the school is still living a great monument to this great and noble man."

"As a result of the church and school in this community there have gone out 14 ministers of the gospel, 14 doctors of medicine, two foreign missionaries, more than a hundred school teachers, five state senators, five representatives to the Georgia Legislature. One Superior Court judge and hundreds of good moral Christian men and women in the business world who are loyal to their training."

These outstanding students went to a school that had no electricity, no plumbing, no computers and no air conditioning.

I might have that the teachers were allowed to teach and discipline, free of political interference, and the parents taught the students to respect the teachers.