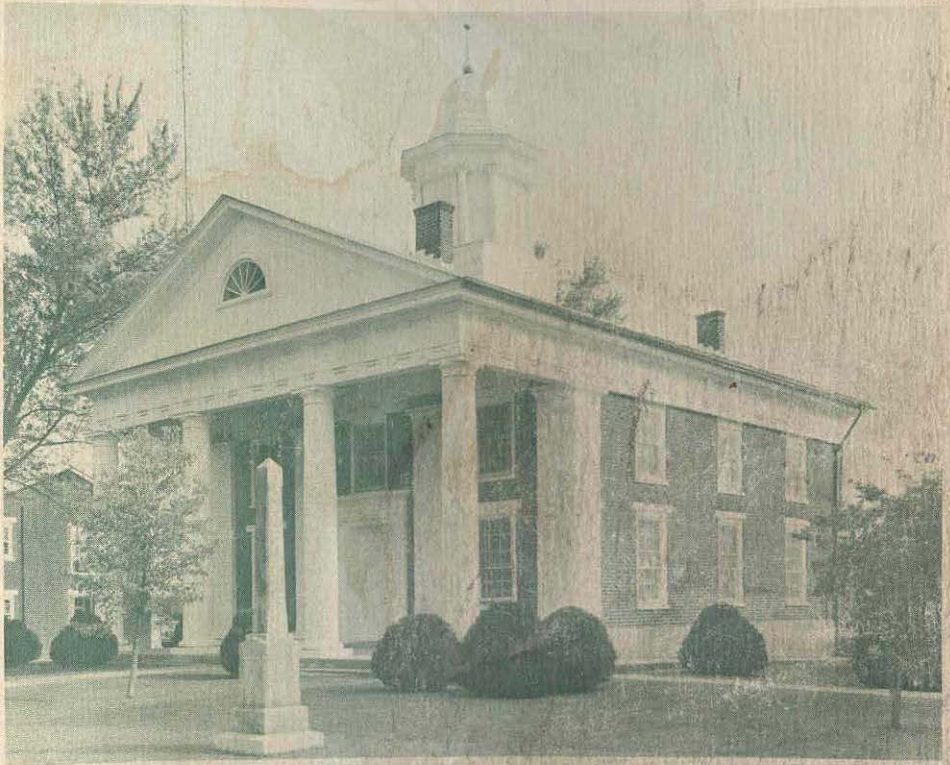


Greene County

MAGAZINE

The Baptist Church at Spring Hill - Evangelism



GREENE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME 1 APRIL 1979

(pages 21 - 27)

THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT SPRING HILL - EVANGELISM*
By Gerald H. Burnett

The Baptist Church at Spring Hill was founded prior to January 1852, when the church site and a newly erected meeting house were deeded to "the Trustees of the Baptist Church at Spring Hill" by Littleton Estes of Albemarle County.[1] Spring Hill joined Shiloh Association of the Virginia Baptist Association in 1854. Records of church meetings date from that time.

Located in Albemarle County, the church lies several hundred yards from the Greene County line. Tradition maintains that the first church meetings were held under the shelter of a sawmill that stood to the east of the present church site, and which is named on an 1870 map of Albemarle County as Estes.[2] The church has drawn its membership primarily from residents of Marsh Run and Priddy's Creek watersheds in Greene and Albemarle Counties.

In 1854, church business was a mixture of emotional evangelism and pragmatic attention to the spiritual and moral welfare of its members. At the June meeting of that year,[3]

"...the church convened for worship, preaching by Bro. Creel. The subject was one of interest to the church as it told of the warfare between the flesh and the spirit, foundation of the discourse was from Romans, 8th Chapter. The church then convened for the transaction of business. Enquiry was first made respective to the fellowship of the church when it was started out.

"That N. Derror was engaged in a fight not long since with Jas. Carrie. After some consultation, it was moved that Derror be excluded, not only for the charge brought against him today, but from other activities well founded in truth to be sustained by the church. The motion seconded [Sic] and decided that he be excluded.

* © Copyright by Gerald Hampton Burnett, Historian of Spring Hill Baptist Church, 1979. All rights reserved.

"A Resolution was then read by the clerk being previously drawn off by him, which Resolution read as follows:

'Inasmuch as there are names on the church book of whom we know nothing as to their religious walk or who absent themselves from the regular church meeting as though they did not consider that such was a duty, resolved therefore, any member absenting themselves from regular meeting without sufficient reason made known by them or some one or two of the members will be excluded for absence ...'

"Then moved that a committee be appointed to attend to the seats and raise [Sic] money for the same. Brethren B. Marshall, Bro. Gilbert, Bro. Ancil, and C. W. Norford was [Sic] appointed.

"Notice was then given for Baptizing tomorrow morning at Bro. Pleasant Cason's at 9 or half past 9 o'clock. Then adjourned to meet in the morning according to the appointments. Accordingly at the hour appointed for Baptism, the following were immersed: Sisters Drucilla Estes, Susan Estes, and Mary E. Riner. Then repaired to the meeting house. Owing to the inclement day, congregation not so large. Preaching by Pastor. Dismissed."

[Signed] "James W. Norford"
"[Clerk]"

Ponderous, thorough, and at times petty, the church meeting, like the prose of the church clerk, moved slowly to conclusion.

The climax of the church year was the arrival of the days in late October or early November, when the members' corn was in the shock, but before winter roads prohibited travel. It was at this time the Protracted

THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT SPRING HILL - EVANGELISM

Season was held, which consisted of unhurried and uncounted days of preaching and prayer accompanied by the conspicuous feeding and socializing ritual of dinner on the churchgrounds.

Because Spring Hill did not have a salaried pastor until after 1860, the church elders and those from neighboring churches shared the extended duties of "preaching, exhortation, exertion, and prayer." [4]

On October 7, 1854, a Protracted Season began which lasted for several weeks. During its course, forty-one persons were baptized. The meeting was sustained through the combined efforts of elders Benjamin Creel, Thomas Garnett, and Phillip Carpenter. The church records preserve the extended fervor of the fall meeting of 1854:

"... met again after prayers. Preaching by Bro. Creel and invitation by Bro. Garnett. Then adjourned to meet by early candlelight. The exercises continued in this way with a good deal of vigor until Thursday night during which time seventeen were received for Baptism. On Friday morning the 13th, assembled at Bro. Fray's Mills to administer to ordinance of Baptism. Eighteen were Baptised. Friday 20th, 13 were Baptized. Met again for preaching when notice was given for Baptism again on Friday before the 2nd Sunday of November. Met according to appointment at the River. Ten were Baptized. Notice for meeting at night, accordingly met at early candlelight." [5]

In terms of the numbers baptized, this Protracted Season was the most successful in the history of Spring Hill Church. This strenuous evangelical effort attracted members, visitors from other churches, and spectators, as those without a formal church affiliation were called.

In following years, the excitement and enthusiasm continued. During the meetings of 1855, sixteen persons were baptized, thirteen white and three black. One of the most emotional accounts in the church records was in response to the meetings of 1856, which were held in May. This meeting was conducted by Brethren Creel, Carpenter, and Williams. Brother Phillip Carpenter had arranged for a visiting speaker, but on Monday evening, the speaker failed to appear much to the embarrassment of the Elder; however, the meeting continued:

"The church was made to rejoice, and to praise God for his loving kindness, while a large concourse of spectators would only look on with seeming indifference to their soul's best interest in following the sister's example. Services were protracted by singing, exertion, and prayer. [6]

On Saturday, April 21st, "brethren from sister churches Swift Run and Pleasant Grove was [Sic] invited." [7] Unprecedented crowds attended. The following day the church met ...

"... at the usual hour of preaching, a much larger congregation of sisters besides the spectators, making in all a good congregation. On the following day the church was filled to overflowing from the order of so large a congregation, and the attention with [which] they listened shows that they were interested in the very interesting discourse." [8]

In November of the same year, another Protracted Season was called which continued for eight days.

Protracted Seasons have continued in all subsequent years with the exception of the years 1863, 1873, and 1904. In 1865, Protracted Seasons were first held in August. This practice alternated with that of the fall

THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT SPRING HILL - EVANGELISM

meeting until 1874, when "On motion it was agreed that the 1st Sunday in August be and is hereby set apart for the commencement of our Protracted Meetings until otherwise changed by vote of the church." [9]

This custom has been continued to the present time [1979] with the exception of the year 1904. Because of an Associational meeting at Priddy's Creek Church and other church meetings, the August meeting was postponed indefinitely in that year. This omission was a matter of some concern at the September church meeting, and as a result, Reverend Saunders was authorized to secure a minister for the Protracted Season in the following year.

Protracted Seasons which have been especially notable included that of 1865 when the large crowds that were anticipated were an impetus for the creation of a Vigilant Committee which was appointed to preserve order. Again in 1866, "Friday before [the] 2nd Sunday was set apart as a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer for the prosperity of the church at this place and a general revival of the true spirit of Christianity among all the members, and all [of] the members of the church urgently requested to meet at the church on that day." [10] Later, during the meeting of 1870, twenty-one new members were received, and in 1891, thirty new members were baptized during the course of the Protracted Season.

Terminology as related to the Protracted Season needs some explanation. The Protracted Season was a special type of church meeting of at least one week's duration. "Meetin'" is generally interchangeable with the words Protracted Season, or Revival. Revival usually refers to the meetings during the 20th century and purveys a feeling of less intensity. Changes have slowly eroded the fervent nature, the extended time, and the unhurried pace of the Protracted Season. As early as 1912, the church approved a motion to have but one sermon per day and to dispense with dinner on the church-grounds on Mondays. Dinner was continued on other days, however, and as late as 1918 the church voted to affirm the practice of meeting "all day with Dinner on the Grounds." [11]

THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT SPRING HILL - EVANGELISM

In 1923, however, the church "decided to change the way of having our Protracted Meeting from all day with Dinner on the Grounds to two sermons in the afternoon." [12] In recent years, the title of Protracted Season has languished. Revival, as the August meetings have been called for more than fifty years, consists of six evening services of an hour in duration.

Dinner on the grounds has more recently been limited to special occasions, notably Homecoming, which has been held at five-year intervals since 1954. Today, older members of the church lament the passing of the earlier customs and recall with fondness those days of preaching with dinner on the churchgrounds.

One senior member [13] recalls with a smile the experience of a lady from near Burnley Station who attended with a large umbrella into which she stuffed all manner of edibles at the dinner hour. Having nearly filled the umbrella, which was an unusually large one, with fried chicken, ham, breads, and sweets, she was afterward among the few who felt prepared for a sudden shower. When rain began to fall, she thoughtlessly lifted her umbrella, thereby releasing the cache of foodstuffs upon herself to the amusement of large crowd of onlookers.

The development of evangelical meetings at Spring Hill from leisurely and extended periods of spiritual and social edification to more abbreviated forms parallels the practices of many other rural churches in Greene and Albemarle Counties.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Albemarle County Deed Book 50, p. 450
- [2] Green Peyton's Map of Albemarle County, Virginia, Albemarle County Historical Society Edition 1971
- [3] Spring Hill Baptist Church Record Book, 1854-1873, pages unnumbered.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Ibid.

THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT SPRING HILL - EVANGELISM

- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] Spring Hill Baptist Church Record Book, 1910
- [12] Ibid.
- [13] Mary Durrer Burnett, b. 1902, who has been a member of Spring Hill Baptist Church since 1913.

Other General Reference Sources:

Burnett, Aubrey H., "Notes on the history of Spring Hill Baptist Church," 1954.

Fray, A. Gaines, "Revised notes on the history of Spring Hill Baptist Church," 1966.

Snow, Christine Gilbert.

Spring Hill Baptist Church Record Book 1874-1910.