



HISTORIC MARKER DEDICATED--Principals in the dedication of a Texas Historical Society Medallion marker at the New Hope-Bethel Baptist Church are shown following the unveiling Sunday. They are, from the left, Dr. Joe Mason of Marshall, dedication speaker; Mrs. Belva Beall who did the research on the church history; Mrs. Zeda Schulze, county historical commission chairman; Pastor W. T. Love who has served the church as pastor since 1937; and the Rev. J. T. Owens of Woodville, association missionary. The marble mounting for the marker was donated by Geo. B. Partin & Son Company of Nacogdoches and was erected by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lawrence of Wyman Roberts Funeral Home in San Augustine.

--Rambler Photo

(The letter I never sent
We died

Dear J. B.

Since we are all getting
older I am glad to see you are
still being used. I read in the
Enterprise where you are holding a
revival there in Woodville!

Also I saw where you had
the funeral for Mrs R. A. Smith

So few of my peers are
still active!

I'm always watching the
oldest. So congratulations on your
strength & hopefully, good health.
Belton

**ORIGIN AND SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF NEW HOPE-
BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH IN EAST TEXAS**

**By
BELVA VICKERS BEALL**

The New Hope-Bethel Baptist Church in East Texas is believed to be the oldest Baptist Church in Texas (1). It is located 1/4 mile off Highway 87, four miles north of Milan, Texas. Earliest name of the Church was Bethel. Why it was later changed to New Hope, no one seems to really know. One of the early members, however, H. B. Reeves (1876-1971⁶⁷), deceased, attributed the change to a whim of a contemporary of his, ^{C. W.} W. G. Hancock, longtime brother moderator and church clerk, and a very active member of the church, by saying, "Bro. Hancock was always trying to do something(2).

As a present member of the larger body of the Southern Baptist Convention and the smaller body of Sabine Valley Association, the church is now known as New Hope. For thorough identification, however, the membership of the church desires to retain both names in this research.

From 1849 to about 1927 this church was a Missionary Baptist Church belonging to the Central Missionary Baptist Association (3).

(1) "Footsteps of The Flock or Origin of Louisiana Baptists", by Elder Ivan M. Wise of Batherwood, Louisiana, written in 1910. This History book is owned by Mr. Hoyt Neel, Negreet, Louisiana, great grandson of Elder William Cook.

(2) Mrs. Lela Reeves Bourghs, daughter of H. B. Reeves.

(3) Associational minutes 1886. I quote: "The 37th Annual Session of the Central Baptist Association met in Nacogdoches, Texas, on Friday, September 24, 1886..."

New Hope Bethel Baptist Church was begun as a Mission in the winter of 1818-1819 by Elder William Cook of Negreet, Louisiana. Elder Cook is the principal individual responsible for the founding of this preaching station. Elder Cook migrated from North Carolina, through South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia to Southwest Louisiana sometime before 1813 (1). A brother, Green Cook (2), had already come to Southwest Louisiana upon receiving a grant of 841 acres of land after 1805 (3). Elder William Cook followed his brother around 1815 and began preaching in Negreet, Louisiana, and among friends in East Texas in Sabine County soon after his arrival in Southwest Louisiana (3). The date of his birth is not known but he died September 27, 1829, and is buried in Siloam Cemetery near Negreet, Louisiana. Only a rough slab with his name marks the grave of this pioneer preacher (4).

Among Green and William Cook's descendants in Sabine County are Travis', Lewis, Fergusons, Neals, Morris' and Sibleys (5).

(1) "Footsteps of The Flock...." Page 140, footnote, page 142.

(2) "Footsteps....." note, page 142.

(3) Appendix II to "Footsteps...." by M. G. Antony, page 182, also "Footsteps..." page 171.

(4) Siloam Cemetery, Siloam Church, Negreet, Louisiana, also "Footsteps....." page 170.

(4) Appendix II, page 181.

(5) Mrs. Blanche Toole, member of Daughters of the Republic of Texas and Researcher for membership in same.

Location of the little log cabin which served as the Mission Station in 1818-1819 was located on, what is now, FM Road 276, one mile east of the present site of New Hope-Bethel Church. The land on which the log cabin was located was ^{later} owned by Allen Chambers (1813-1884) (2), or probably by his father, Henry Chambers, of whom we have no record of birth and death (1).

According to Mrs. Ethel Morris Greer (3), former Secretary and active member of New Hope-Bethel church, her mother, Mrs. Della Neal Morris, now age 92, remembers walking down what is now FM Road 276, looking for the calves with her grandmother, Mrs. Elizabeth Mason Neal (1829-1911) (2) who pointed to a little log cabin by a Catawba tree and said "That's where Bethel Church began".

Mr. Bud Greer (3), age 77, husband of Mrs. Ethel Morris Greer says, "I saw the little rotted down log cabin before the Catawba tree blew away".

Mrs. Ida Neal Lord (3), age 87, and a life long member of New Hope-Bethel church says, "My father, J. B. (Pap) Neal, (1856-1941) (2) often said to me, "This is where old Bethel Church stood at one time.

(1) Mrs. Velma Chambers, great granddaughter of Allen Chambers.

(2) Gravestones in Mason Cemetery.

(3) See statements, signed, on separate page.

The five acres on which the present church building stands was donated by J. G. Mason (1839-1911) for the location of a church building and a cemetery, according to his grandson, D. C. Gellatly. (Court House records at Hemphill were destroyed by fire).

From log cabin in 1818-1819 to a wood structure in 1841, (2) improved and remodeled and used for both a church and a school until after the turn of the century, New Hope-Bethel is now a brick building with carpeted sanctuary and four Sunday School rooms (1970). It contains a baptistry and inter-com system for nursery workers, is air-conditioned and centrally heated. It also has stained glass windows and is sheetrocked throughout. Both the church piano and organ were stolen in 1972, but the piano has been replaced and a burglar alarm installed. It has never ceased to be a viable working body and W. T. Love, the present Pastor, has been there for 36 years.

In the Texas Historical Quarterly (3), page 145, Republic of Texas, Houston County, the following article appears by The Pilgrim Church of Regular Baptist Faith and Order; "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: This is to inform you that on the 7th day of February 1841, a church known by the name of Bethel in Sabine County was constituted by the authority of this church...."(3). From the same Quarterly the statement is made that this church (Bethel) was disassociated from Pilgrim Church over a doctrinal disagreement and became a part of Sabine Baptist Association organized along Missionary lines (W. T. Parmer's notes). According to associational minutes in the New Hope-Bethel files, Parmer seems to be in error about the name of the Association. It was Central Missionary Baptist Association(2).

(1) Mason Cemetery.

(2) Associational minutes of Central Missionary Baptist Association (1886-1917). Local church minutes from 1871 to present date. Earlier minutes were burned in the home of its church clerk.

(3) Texas Historical Quarterly, page 145.

From Crockett's History (1), I quote: "Mr. W. W. Halbert of Sabine County is authority for the statement that the first Baptist church in the old municipality of San Augustine was situated at New Hope about five miles north of Milan. There was a church called Bethel in that neighborhood in the early years of the Republic and was perhaps established upon an earlier foundation". (Log Cabin Mission-Beall).

From this New Hope Church, W. W. Halbert and other members established a Mission at Fox Hill near Milan which became what is now Bethany Baptist Church in Milan.

Letters (2) to George Crockett from J. M. Carroll found in Stephen F. Austin University Library contain the following footnote to a letter written May 2, 1923: "On examination, I find that most of what I had, concerned Sabine County rather than San Augustine County. When I wrote I had the two counties confused in my mind". (Carroll was ill-Beall)

(1) "Two Centuries in East Texas" by George Crockett, page 296.

(2) "Collections by George Crockett on San Augustine County Baptists" - Stephen F. Austin University Library.

Excerpt from Footsteps of The Flock, or Origin of Louisiana Baptists, by Elder Ivan M. Wise, relating to Elder William Cook and his life and early work in East Texas are appended to this paper. Also a photograph of New Hope-Bethel church as it was constructed in 1870 and as it now is.

The constituency of New Hope-Bethel church seeks, with the approval of the Sabine Historical Society Committee, to have this structure declared a "Recorded Historical Landmark" because of its age and service and for its historical value in East Texas for the past 156 years.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Footsteps of The Flock or Origin of Louisiana Baptists" - Elder Ivan M. Wise.

Associational and Church minutes 1836-1917

Mason Cemetery gravestones, Milan, Texas

New Hope Cemetery gravestones, Milan, Texas

Siloam Cemetery, Negreet, Louisiana

Mrs. Blanche Toole, DRT Member, Hemphill, Texas

Texas Historical Quarterly, Republic of Texas, page 145

"Two Centuries in East Texas" by George Crockett

"Collections by George Crockett on San Augustine County Baptists".

Mrs. Ethel Greer, Milan, Texas

Mr. Bud Greer, Milan, Texas

Mrs. Ida Lord, Milan, Texas

Mr. D. C. Gellatly, Milan, Texas

Mrs. Velma Chambers, Milan, Texas

Mrs. Lela Bourghs, Milan, Texas

STATEMENTS FROM LIVING LOCAL MEMBERS OF
THE NEW HOPE-BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH

Mrs. Ethel Morris Greer, former Secretary of New Hope-Bethel Church says "My mother, Mrs. Della Neal Morris, now 92 years of age, remembers walking with her grandmother, Mrs. Elizabeth Mason Neal, down what is now Fd Road 276, looking for the calves. Her grandmother would point to a little rundown log cabin by a Catawba tree and say, "That's where Bethel Church began".

Signed: Ethel Morris Greer

Mrs. Greer's husband, Mr. Bud Greer, age 77, says, "I saw the little rotted down log cabin before the Catawba tree blew away".

Signed: Bud Greer

Mrs. Ida Lord, age 97, says "My father, J. B. (Pap) Neal, said of a spot on what is now Fd Road 276, 'That is where Old Bethel church stood at one time'".

Signed: Ida Lord