

**FLORIDA NEWS**

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**LOCAL**

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# Dry Prairie Baptist Church celebrating 100th birthday

The church, located in the unincorporated Duette community 30 miles northeast of Bradenton, celebrates its centennial today.

**MARC PERRUSQUIA**

Herald Staff Writer

DUETTE — Brenda Amlong's fondest memories are of this country parish they call the Dry Prairie Baptist Church.

She met her husband in the church. Married him there, too.

It's no surprise that Amlong plans to return today to this rural church, tucked far into Manatee County's northeast corner, to help the congregation celebrate its 100th birthday.

"It's the center of our lives," said Amlong, 32, a church member since her parents attended a revival at Dry Prairie Baptist Church when she was 11.

"One of the neatest things about this church is that everybody knows each other," she said.

The church, located in the unincorporated Duette community 30 miles northeast of Bradenton, celebrates its

centennial with services at 9:50 a.m. today.

Lunch and fellowship will follow. At 2 p.m., the congregation plans to honor former pastors and their wives with gifts of cookbooks and commemorative plates.

Ethel Peterson plans to be there.

She grew up in Duette, back when every family ran a small truck farm and children attended "strawberry school," taking their "summer" vacations from December to March to help in the strawberry harvest.

And always, there was the church.

"It means so much, I don't know where to start," said Peterson, 64, who now lives in Palmetto but still attends church in Duette. "It's just a wonderful place to go worship — the people are so friendly. You meet everyone with a hug."

The Southern Baptist-affiliated church was founded in 1888. Settlers built a church of rough, unpainted lumber and created pews from hewed logs. Church members recently have had fun digging through records, turning up interesting footnotes like this: The first pastor to draw a salary was the Rev.

H.D. Mann, who was paid \$50 a year during his service in 1907 and 1908.

The original building was eventually replaced with a modern church and fellowship hall.

Some of church's 100 members trace their roots through six generations back to the church's original founders. Family involvement has been strong for Brenda Amlong. She has taught Sunday School for 14 years, her father was song leader for 13 years, and her husband Michael is a deacon, as was his father.

**CHURCH**

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# CHURCH

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Amlong said some of her fondest memories include the Sunday services and the hearty lunches served up under the country sky.

"We'd just eat under the oak trees," she said.

Members agree the church has always been a tight-knit family.

"If anyone gets sick, or there is a death, the ladies all fix dishes and see that everyone's taken care of," Peterson said.



AL ANDERSON/Bradenton Herald

**Dry Prairie Baptist Church has been there for residents of Duette for 100 years.**