

## Davis/McLeod (Dothan) District Brief History



Amassing the history of the Davis/McLeod (Dothan) District, one must mention Bishop Riley F. Williams, the first Jurisdiction Bishop of Alabama. Bishop Charles H. Mason, founder and organizer of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), commissioned this anointed servant of God to the State of Alabama as noted in Matthew 28:19: *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Bishop Riley Felman Williams was born in St Francisville, West Feliciana, Louisiana, on May 18, 1897. After his conversion to holiness in New Orleans, he left for Florida. After fellowshipping with brothers like Bishop Cohn and Bishop Nesbitt, the Lord led him to Thomasville, Georgia. In his memoirs, Bishop Williams states the following:

*I heard the Macedonia call through Sister Matilda Berry of Troy, Alabama, saying, "There are two sisters over here contending for the faith; come over and help us." So, after receiving the sanction of Bishop Mason, I took over Alabama. I preached on the streets daily, and the Lord restricted my ration to ten cents per day, with which I purchased white potatoes. In the morning, we ate liver and white potatoes for breakfast and gravy and potatoes for supper. One day while sitting under a grocery shed, I saw the postman coming. If this postman leaves me a letter from Bishop Mason with some money, I will go to Alabama. Sure, enough, the postman stopped at my gate with a letter; I ran to the house and opened my letter. It was from Bishop Mason, who was in Los Angeles, California. It read as follows:*

*Dear Sir:*

*While praying this morning, your suffering came before me. So here is a little help of seven dollars. May the Lord bless you.*

Bishop Williams left his wife with their three-month-old baby for Alabama. He met Sister Matilda Berry in Dothan, Alabama, and they boarded the train for Samson, AL. Upon arriving in Samson, he met J.M. Mainor, J.H. Thomas, A.L. Burke, the Smith brothers, L.H. Ford, and 44 others who had dissented from the Triumph Church. Under J.M. Mainor's leadership, they were planning to organize an independent church. They met in a Methodist church in Samson where Bishop Williams preached from Luke 24:49 – *"Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."* This service lasted through midnight, and the building overflowed to the outside, where individuals sat in trees and atop cars. Everyone was eager to hear the Gospel message. On Sunday, when this group of leaders met, they decided to join the Church of God in Christ under the leadership of Bishop Williams. The Church of God in Christ officially originated in the City of Samson, Geneva County, Alabama.

In 1920, Bishop Williams became Overseer, spending months in Alabama preaching on the streets, storefronts, and bush harbors. He pastored and built churches in High Bluff, Dothan, Abbeville, Capps, and East Birmingham. Under his leadership, by 1926, the Alabama Jurisdiction consisted of 19 churches, most of which were in the lower part of Alabama.

Bishop Williams even lived briefly in Abbeville, teaching the Saints the way of holiness and the doctrine of sanctification as essential to humanity's salvation. He had a significant impact in

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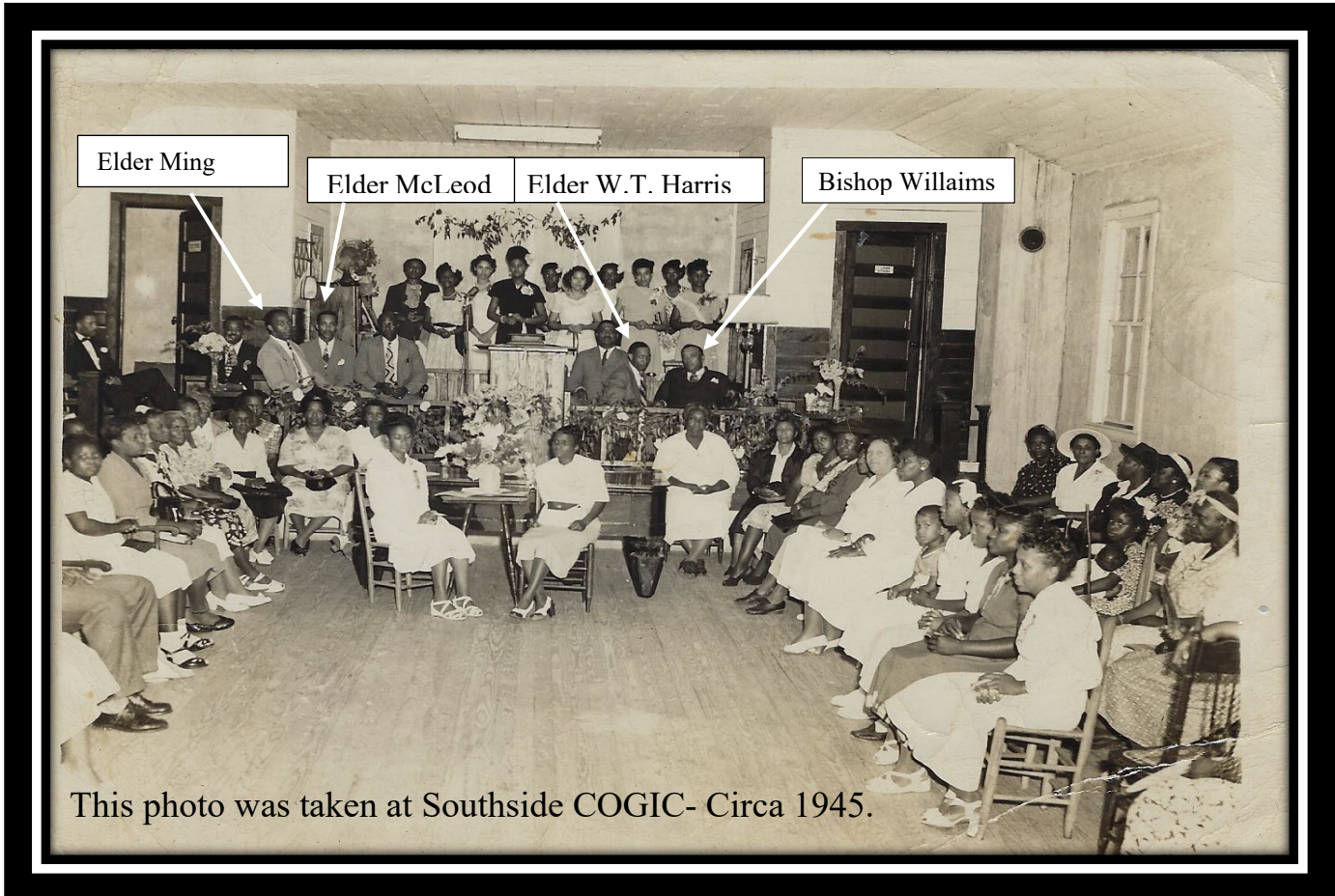
Alabama, encouraging the Saints to draw closer to God and live a life of holiness. He taught that sanctification was the only path to salvation and encouraged them to strive for holiness. In his memoir, he stated that the churches where he presided as the pastor included East Birmingham and Abbeville. In East Birmingham, he purchased three lots and built a church and parsonage, and the church size was 40ft by 82ft. In Abbeville, the building size was 36ft by 55ft. Also, he organized and constructed a school in Abbeville for the saints' children that he called Franklin Baldwin Institute of the Church of God in Christ on three acres. The state board of education furnished two teachers - Sister Eufaula Franklin and Sister Sally Baldwin. These two blood sisters were educators who left Birmingham, AL, with a serving spirit and longing to teach the Saints children in this rural community far away from city life. During this time, many African Americans did not have access to public education, especially in the rural parts of Alabama. The students in this school were grouped according to age and grade level. The enrollment consisted of 25 to 35 students. During the 1940s, a school building was constructed out of concrete blocks by Deacon Charles Vaughn, Brother Dot Peterman, and other carpenters in the church. This building consisted of five classrooms and an auditorium. When Bishop Mason commissioned Bishop Williams to build a temple in Memphis (later known as Mason Temple) in 1941, these same men met him in Memphis to construct this building, now a memorial landmark. The COGIC membership of Alabama played a pivotal role in establishing our national Church of God in Christ. *(Excerpt from the History of Abbeville COGIC).*

In this context, the question arises, how did a man from Louisiana come to these rural towns like Abbeville, Capps, and Samson in the lower part of the state to start churches? Undoubtedly, one of the answers is the working of the Holy Ghost since one story explains it this way: *Bishop Williams was in Georgia and requested to purchase a train ticket to Alabama as far as he could go. At that time, that train last stop occurred in Abbeville. When he got off the train, he started walking and heard a group of ladies talking about a revival. This conversation gave him confidence that he was in the right place. Then, he continued walking toward the African American community, and a lady sitting on her porch saw this stranger walking into the community. This woman recognized the man from a dream and shouted to her family, "That is the man I saw in my dreams." When Bishop Williams reached her with the leading of the Holy Ghost, he placed his hand on her head, and she received the Holy Ghost and began speaking in tongues. From this convert, who was Missionary Minnie Lee Jones, COGIC became a reality in Abbeville. A similar story about Bishop Williams exists in every rural community like Abbeville. (Excerpt from the History of Abbeville COGIC).*

Bishop Williams took on numerous roles in COGIC. He served as overseer for the State of Georgia for 23 years and became overseer for Ohio in 1931. In addition, he was appointed Home and Foreign Mission Board President and Vice-President of the Education Board.

Bishop Williams attended both public and private schools in Louisiana. He also attended Selma University in Selma, Alabama, and Baptist College in Birmingham, Alabama. He completed his bachelor's degree in theology at Cleveland Bible College. He took Business Law and Philosophy courses at the graduate level at Western Reserve University and received his Doctor of Divinity Degree from Greater Payne University of Birmingham, Alabama. Bishop Williams credited his 33+ years of training under Bishop C.H. Mason as the most profitable for his ministry success. From 1920 until his death on March 18, 1952, at 54 years old, Bishop R.F. Williams served as the bishop of the Alabama Jurisdiction.

## Davis/McLeod (Dothan) District Brief History



Many churches in the Davis/McLeod District can identify their foundation as bush harbors in the 20s, such as the community of High Bluff that evolved into Bellwood COGIC and the community in River Junction that became St. Roberta COGIC in Geneva. This evolution of COGIC churches via synchronization of the Holy Ghost led men to these rural communities for the sole purpose of Kingdom work. These pioneers were as follows: Elder Dan Swinton, Elder Mance Floyd, Elder Phillips, Elder Bukes, Elder Aaron Smith, Elder Robinson, Elder J.M. Manior, Elder T.M. Allen, Elder Alto Burks, Elder D.Q. Smith, and Elder E.D. Roberts.

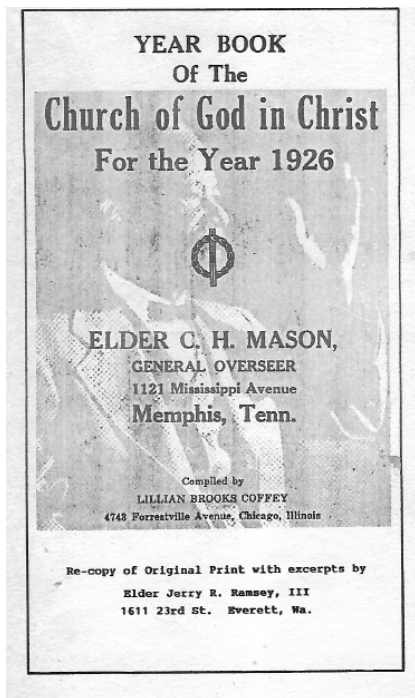
*(Excerpt from a Women's Day Program Booklet and History of Bellwood and St. Roberta COGIC)*

According to the late Dr. J.C. McLeod, the first convocation in Alabama occurred in 1923 in the Dothan District. Since these churches had no established buildings except bush harbors as meeting places, Bishop Williams rented an old pool hall in Hartford. Considering these communities had an agricultural economy, the most convenient time to conduct meetings was from late October to early November after the harvest season. This time of year was ideal for meetings as people had a food surplus and could gather without worrying about tending to their crops. Additionally, the weather was mild, and traveling during this time of year was easier. Furthermore, the days were still long enough that meetings could run late into the night, allowing the saints to worship and praise God. *(Excerpt from Dr. J.C. McLeod's Autobiography)*



# Davis/McLeod (Dothan) District Brief History

By 1926, according to the Brother's Church Report for COGIC, Alabama had the following established churches: the majorities in lower Alabama.



Brothers' Church Report						
November 25 - December 15						
ALABAMA—Elder R. F. Williams, State Overseer						
December 8						
	Tabernacle and Saints' Home	Repre- sentation	Elder			
	Temple		Mason	Total		
Slocumb—E. M. McNeir.....	\$2.00		\$2.00	\$4.00		
Edgewater—Shed Smith .....	5.00		5.00	10.00		
Ensley—J. H. Featherston.....	2.00		2.00	4.00		
Birmingham—R. F. Williams.....	4.00		\$2.00	7.00	13.00	
December 4						
Copps—J. M. Mainor.....	1.00		1.00	2.00		
New Brocton—W. M. Burks.....	1.50		1.50	3.00		
B. Springs—E. M. McNeir.....	1.00			1.00		
Pine Grove—E. D. Roberts.....	3.50		4.00	7.50		
Eufaula—E. M. McNeir.....	1.25			1.25		
Highbluff—F. M. Allen.....	1.00		1.52	2.52		
Castleberry—Joe Griffins.....	2.00		2.00	4.00		
Traceville—H. T. Christian.....	1.25		2.00	3.25		
Geneva—A. W. Smith.....	1.50		2.00	3.50		
Samson—W. H. Johnson.....	1.25		2.00	3.25		
Dothan—F. M. Allen.....	1.00		1.00	2.00		
Abbeyville—R. F. Williams.....	2.50	\$2.50	2.50	2.50	10.00	
December 7						
Berry—George Vivlan .....	2.50	2.50	1.00	4.00	10.00	
Westfield—D. W. McWilliam.....	5.00			6.00	10.00	
December 8						
Dothan—Offering from District Meeting.....	2.00	1.45		4.00	7.45	
Slocumb—E. M. McNeir.....	2.00			2.00	4.00	



Above is a photograph of a district meeting in Abbeville with our elders seated, including Supt. M.W. Davis and District Supervisor Rosa Lee, who is standing by him.

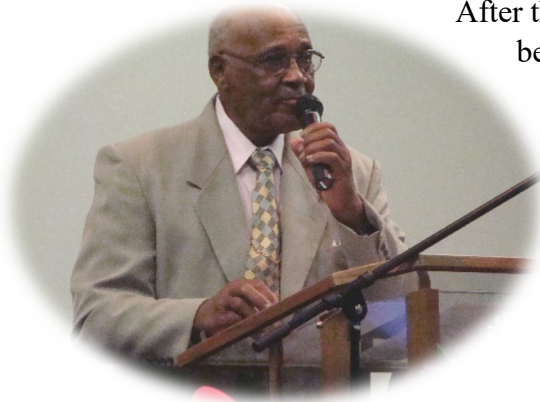
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*"In the year 1930, Elder M.W. Davis was ordained to the ministry. Elder Davis was appointed pastor to Bellwood, Elba, and Troy that same year. In 1937 he was appointed District Superintendent of the Montgomery District, where he served for six years. In 1942 he went to Dothan to pastor the Southside COGIC. They had to relocate the church, so they purchased property at 504 Houston Street in Dothan. Elder Davis was appointed and served as the Dothan District Superintendent until his death.*

*(This excerpt was from a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary program from Supt. Davis).*



Therefore, in the late 30s or early 40s, these rural churches from Henry, Houston, and Geneva counties formed the Dothan District under the leadership of Supt. M.W. Davis. Pictured above is a district meeting under Supt. Davis's leadership alone with the first District Missionary, Missionary Rosa Lee.



After the death of Superintendent M.W. Davis, Elder J.C. McLeod became the Superintendent in March of 1981. The District was renamed in honor of Supt. McLeod and the late Supt. M. W. Davis as the **Davis/McLeod District**. Under Supt. McLeod's leadership, as well as pastoral duties, he continued a hands-on approach, as noted in his building skills. Many churches formed new looks with added fellowship halls to accommodate the saints.

Supt. McLeod served for 18 years; he relinquished these immense responsibilities to Supt. William Brown. Supt. Brown understood the duties and responsibilities of a superintendent from his experience as the district chairman and from the tutelage of his late father, Elder R. Brown, pastor of Brown Memorial COGIC, who was one of the earlier pioneers in COGIC in Alabama. Supt. William Brown served from 2009 to 2016. Please note that under Supt. Brown's leadership that the number of churches grew to as many as 20, extending into the following counties – Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Henry, Houston, Geneva, and even Georgetown, Georgia.



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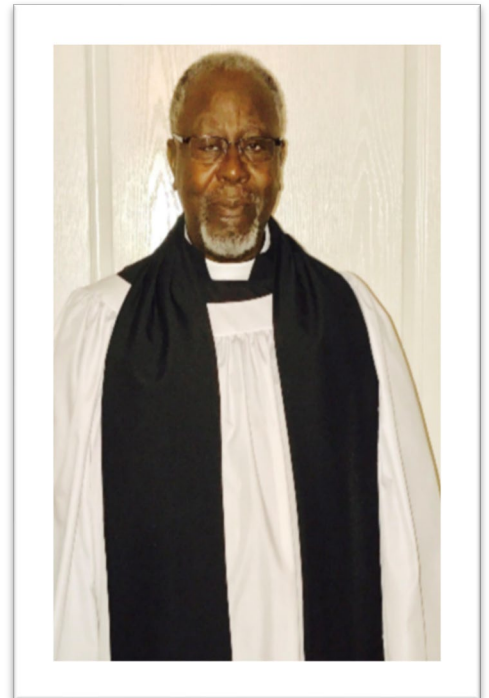


In February 2016, Elder Rufus Lee became the superintendent after Supt William Brown. Supt. Lee's vision for the district entails that ***“we, the people, will become one.”*** This vision supports unity for the saints of Davis/McLeod District. Just as the Savior emphasized unity with His Father in John 10:30 prior to facing antagonistic Jews by saying, *“I and my Father are one.”* Such oneness fuels resilience when facing opposition in doing **Kingdom** work.

Currently, this district consists of the following churches under Supt. Rufus Lee's leadership:

<i>Abbeville Memorial COGIC</i>	<i>Abbeville, AL</i>
<i>All Nations Deliverance COGIC</i>	<i>Ozark, AL</i>
<i>Bethlehem Temple COGIC</i>	<i>Bellwood, AL</i>
<i>Church of God In Christ No. 1</i>	<i>Dothan, AL</i>
<i>Greater Holy Temple</i>	<i>Elba, AL</i>
<i>Lighthouse COGIC</i>	<i>Georgetown, GA</i>
<i>Living Water COGIC</i>	<i>Hartford, AL</i>
<i>Macedonia COGIC</i>	<i>Edwin, AL</i>
<i>Memorial COGIC</i>	<i>New Brockton, AL</i>
<i>*New Glorious COGIC</i>	<i>Elba, AL</i>
<i>St. Paul COGIC</i>	<i>Ashford, AL</i>
<i>St. Roberta COGIC</i>	<i>Geneva, AL</i>

*\*This church transitioned to the Troy District under the leadership of newly appointed Superintendent James Starks as of April 1, 2023.*





# Davis/McLeod (Dothan) District Brief History

## *District Supervisors*

As noted earlier, the first District Supervisor of the Dothan District was Missionary Rosie Lee from the Abbeville Memorial Church of God in Christ, who served alongside Superintendent M.W. Davis. Upon her demise, the District Supervisor of the Women's Department was led by Missionary Channie Tolbert. Missionary Tolbert served brilliantly and



diligently for several years. After her demise, Missionary Minnie Stovall followed in her steps leading the women of Davis/McLeod (Dothan) District to another renowned status in Alabama Jurisdiction Number One. She continued to serve under the leadership of Supt. Rufus Lee. Mother Stovall has served in several capacities during her 60+ years at Macedonia COGIC, including Sunday

School Teacher, Home, Foreign & Mission

Teacher, Christian Women's Council Teacher, and Prayer Warrior.

Mother Stovall ministers every First Sunday at Macedonia COGIC as the Women's Day speaker under the leadership of Pastor Larry Newman. Mother Stovall believes you must prepare yourself to become a warrior for Christ. In that regard, she completed training at the Bishop O. L. Meadows School of Ministry and studied piano for four years. For her faithful and dedicated service, she has received numerous awards, including the Certification of Appreciation for Faithfulness and Dedication to the Alabama First COGIC Jurisdiction;



Vacation Bible School Service Awards; Certificate of Appreciation as District Missionary at the Fifth Annual Women's Convention; Alabama First COGIC Jurisdiction Award for Highest Number of Delegates to the Women's Convention; Key to The City of Geneva, AL, and she was chosen one of the **100 most Influential Women in the National COGIC** and many other recognitions. In 2020, Mother Stovall relinquished her role as District Supervisor to Mother Sheron Lee. Before this transition, Mother Lee served as the Assistant District Missionary after her appointment in 2012. Mother Lee is a member of the Church of God in Christ no. 1 in Dothan, where she serves in many different roles, including - Sunday School teacher, Usher, Jr. Choir President, YPWW Vice/President, CWC teacher, and Missions teacher. Mother Lee is the Bible Band Teacher, Sunday School Assistant Secretary, Mother's Board, and Hospitality President. Mother Lee is serving alongside Superintendent Rufus Lee to move the Davis-McLeod to new heights, especially after the world Pandemic and our churches' challenges during post-COVID-19.

Presently, they are leading our churches to the promised land of growth and stability, and the district recognizes and appreciates their efforts. With their leadership, Davis-McLeod is poised for a brighter future ahead.

