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The story and history of Farmington Baptist Church written by M.N. Walters.

**Chapter 1**

By the late 1770’s the Revolutionary War was going on and great terror and danger to life and property prevailed in the newly formed colonies of the Atlantic Seaboard. Gangs of Tories invaded homes, burned crops, and destroyed property of the Colonial settlers seeking independence.

Meanwhile, far to the West stories were filtering back as to the lands painted by nature with the brush of profusion, wilderness and majesty Buffaloes bellowed and fought around the salt licks, deer stalked down the streams to slake their thirst and bears passed through the cave and underbrush.

Some 300 years have passed since hardy settlers had carved the lands of the East into a dwelling place – Now that same spirit of ‘Newness’ was found again in the hearts of men.

The flag of Spain had been raised over the “Great-Bend” area of the rushing Tennessee River, during the years of 1512 to 1699. De Soto had passed through the area claiming it from the Cherokee and Choctaw Indians from the Crown of Spain. Marquette and Joliet came from France and planted the French Banner in the soil from 1699 to 1763. Col. Abraham Wood, in the name of the King of England, while searching for an outlet to the ‘ South Sea’, later known as the Pacific Ocean, raised the English flag in the year 1763.

By now, hunters, explorers, traders, and travelers were blazing the way for the settlers, whose entry was marked by increased interest. Indians had for many years resisted the influx of the white man, but now his impoverished and destitute condition made by the Indians along the great ‘Tenese’ ( Tennessee River ).

It remained for the Revolutionary War to reveal that Spain had again had brought sufficient pressure to bear that Spain withdraw all hope of settling the land. From earlier years, Georgia, as a colony and later as a state, had claimed all the land south of the Tennessee to the Mississippi River as their rightful land. This was divided by the Georgia General Assembly in 1795, into plats of a newly created County called ‘Burbon’, and sold to speculators. The people of the United States became indignant and the Georgia Legislature passed a Rescinding Act in 1796 . But the speculators refused to give up their bargain. Near war broke out repeatedly between the ‘settlers’ and the intruding ‘speculators’ who sought possession of the land. The area passed into the hands of the young government of the United States.

Thus, the land of the present-day Mississippi was divided between old ‘ West Florida’ – a coastal band extending below the 31st Parallel; the Mississippi Area, between the 31st and 32nd Parallel; and North of the 32nd Parallel to the borders of the State of Tennessee form claimed by Georgia, now an area under the jurisdiction of the United States. When Congress organized the Territory of Mississippi from the old Mississippi Area, the land North of the 32nd Parallel was under the care of the Mississippi Territorial Governors. Disputing this claim were the Choctaws and Chickasaws of what is today North Mississippi. These claims were not resolved until the final treaty with the Indians in 1832, when the Indians gave up their last claim to the lands of Mississippi.

The settlers from the North and East were already tilling the soil and erecting their homes in the area, making private peace with the red-men. Among these earliest settlers were numbers of Baptist, along with others of various religious persuasion. From Georgia, Virginia, South and North Carolina they came, lured by stories of fertile soil and abundant wildlife.

A group of these moved into the Farmington area and began their new life. Of them it can truly be said, ‘It is a common ground, indeed for true American greatness and heroic courage – a place of pioneering giants – the land of hope and promise, in the midst of hardship and burden’.

**Chapter 2**

With the settlers to this area came not only their physical possessions, but also their spiritual heritage. A group – how many we do not know – set up a Baptist Church, fostered on faith, determined by God’s Grace to see their children and their children’s children reared in a God-like manner. Thus near 1800, the Baptist Church of Farmington had it’s beginning. The location selected for this infant endeavor was beside a wilderness road which ran North and South, near-by the center of the thriving community. The high ground of the area provided swift run-off of the rain waters, and yet the land was level enough to provide ample area to stake the teams of horses and oxen, which brought them to worship. Soon the infirmities of old age, the difficulties of the region, and illnesses required that a suitable place be found to decently ‘bury-their-dead’. North of the Church some one-fourth mile a site was cleared and settlers sorrowfully buried their loved ones.

Worship at the Church was regular, the Sabbath was observed as best they could, what with so much work to do, and so little time for finishing it. Various pastors, along with traveling preachers found their way to the young Church, and shared their ministry with these hardy pioneers. The building, as their homes, was of native logs, but served the people well.

The area was now called ‘ Madison County of the Mississippi Area,’ and as such was governed by the laws of the United States and the Territory of the Mississippi. After the appointment of Governor Sargent, he, along with later Governors Claborne and Holmes, by appointments, conducted the legal affairs of the white man. The first ‘white-man’s-law’ was established under a tree by a judge holding court in the community of Troy, South of Farmington.

In 1817, Congress admitted all the land of the Territory of Mississippi as the State of Mississippi, and by 1832, the northern part of the state was safely within her bounds. This area was within the limits of old Tishomingo County.

The Community of Farmington continued to prosper, as did the Church. The physical property was marked by a need for incorporating the land surrounding the Church into a town. This was done by an act of the legislature of the State of Mississippi in 1838. Prosperity continued so much that the town limits were increased in 1839 and again in 1842. The latter extension included the provision that residents within the corporate limits were only required to give work to the roads within the town six days per year, and not have to work other roads at all.

Farmington Academy was chartered in 1839, to be set up ‘within or near’ the Town of Farmington, for the purpose of the ‘encouragement of learning amongst the students. ‘Likely this was established on the site of the present church building, as in 1842 Thomas Dobbins gave deed to ‘an acre’ of additional burying ground bounded on the west by the eastern line of the school property.

The Town of Farmington, (A contraction of Farming-town?) now had within its area a Church, several homes, General stores, a Post Office, Blacksmith shop, Saddle and harness shop, and a ‘wheat-fan’ Manufacturing plant, which sold over the state. On Feb. 5, 1849, a Masonic Lodge was chartered, being Farmington, No. 116, F. & A. M.

**Chapter 3**

As the Railroads in other areas built up the towns, the railroad sounded the decline of the once prosperous Town of Farmington.

In 1855, the Mobile and Ohio, and the Memphis and Charleston, crossed some four miles west of the town. Rails being the chief transportation of this era, much of the prosperity soon began to re-locate in the vicinity of the rail crossing. Soon the ‘pride of Northern Tishomingo County’ began to wane, many of its merchants and shops moving into Crosstown. Later this town was renamed Corinth, which soon became the center of trade for the area.

The settlers spiritual ties were still anchored firmly to the Baptist Church at Farmington – the church continued enjoying a measure of success in the Master’s work. Here in 1853 a famous son of the area was ordained to the Gospel Ministry – Mark Perrin Lowery, Civil War hero and founder of Blue Mountain College in later years. The Church was affiliated with the old Chickasaw Baptist Association for many years and on September 14-17, 1855, entertained the 17th anniversary of that large body of Baptist.

Upon the growth of Corinth, the Masonic Lodges at Farmington and Danville consolidated in 1857 and formed Corinth Lodge No. 116, F. & A. M., taking the number of the former Farmington Lodge.

The clouds of war hung heavy over the land, and the few slaves held by the citizens of Farmington their work and worship with their masters. Soon war with its fury burst forth over the land. The representatives of Old Tishomingo County split their votes concerning seccession, but yielded to the will of the majority vote of Mississippi, and thus became the second state to join the Confederacy. Residents of the area joined more than 80,000 Mississippi troops serving the Confederate Army.

Far to the north of Farmington in rapid succession the battles of Fort Henry, and Fort Donelson set the stage for Shiloh. On April 6 and 7, 1862, the booming guns of that battlefield duels could be heard in Mississippi. The dead, dying and wounded, along with the survivors of the Confederate Armies were brought and trekked back through Farmington, toward Corinth, where another stand was intended. On May 3, 1862, a skirmish between forces of the Union and Confederates was at Farmington; also on May 4, and May 8, other skirmishes were fought.

May 9 brought full battle to Farmington. The Union forces led by Maj. Gen. John Pope and the Confederate forces led by Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn were ready for battle. One account of the battle relates, ‘On the 8th of May, General Pope, commanding the advance of the Federal Army, moved with two full Brigades and occupied Farmington. Gen. Beauregard determined to accept the guage of battle thus thrown down to him, and at once moved out to the attack. Generals Bragg and Hardee were to attack the right and center while General Van Dorn attacked the left and rear. General Price moved out with his force to within an easy march of the rear of Pope’s command without molestation or even the knowledge of the enemy. Early on the morning of the 9th, the signal guns were fired and the whole army began to advance. General Hardee attacked the enemy with such spirit as drove him at once from his line of works, and the Missourians coming in contact with one of those Mississippi swamps that is almost impassable, the enemy made safe his retreat before his rear could be reached. But he left his headquarters tent, telegraph operator and office, with all his dead and wounded in the hands of Confederate General Halleck. Although more than double the force of the Confederates, Pope absolutely refused come out into the open ground and give battle. General Beauregard withdrew his forces inside the fortifications around Corinth. The battle was familiarly known as ‘The Farmington Races’.

The battle of Farmington left as casualties for the Union – 16 killed 148 wounded, and 192 missing. For the Confederates – 8 killed, 189 wounded, and 110 missing.

On May 10, 12, 19 and 22 additional skirmishes were fought in or near Farmington.

**Chapter 4**

After the actual battlefields moved away from Farmington the area was used primarily as a hospital zone for the wounded Union forces from this and other battles. The blood of many brave men stained the ground around hills where once stood the town. Most, if not all the homes, stores and shops of Farmington were destroyed. The building of the church was torn down and used as flooring for the tents of the Union soldiers encamped on the site. Membership in Farmington Baptist Church told the toll of the ravages of the war, dropping from 64 in 1860 to less than half that number in 1866.

Slowly the life of the land was restored, the church site was moved to the site formerly occupied by the school, beside the cemetery. Here cannon raked trees stood like sentries, breastworks, trenches, and gunsite emplacements marked the hillside on which the church and cemetery stood. Undaunted in spirit the Baptists set about erecting their second building for worship. This was a ‘shanghai’ frame structure consisting of a large single room for Worship – the first building on the present site of Farmington Church. It stood until 1904, when, because of natural deterioration, it was needful to remove it and erect a new building. The new building was build along the same style, having a ‘ship-lap’ exterior.

The prosperity of the church was marked by growth. Great men had come and gone and the church continued to be a landmark for the area. By 1870, its membership almost equaled its pre-war high of 102.

The yellow fever disease of the late 1800’s was felt in the area, and was noticed by a decrease of membership of the church.

In 1884 the famous debate between political candidates was marked by the address of ‘Private’ John Allen on the grounds of Farmington Church. At various times the church building served as a school-house for the pupils of the community.

In 1943, disaster struck again, as on a beautiful Sunday morning the membership was assembling for regular worship. To their horror, they arrives to see their building going up in flames. Heavy were their hearts as they beheld – cried the wife of one of the deacons, “Look, – the Church is burning.” ‘No’ her husband replied, ‘Only the church-house is burning. The church will be there when we all get there.’ The Spirit prevailed, and on the that morning enough finances were raised to begin immediate construction of a new building.

Thus, the fourth building was erected for Farmington Baptist Church. Later additional additions were made with enlarged Sunday School rooms, etc. In 1964, a complete renovation and addition of large brick auditorium was completed. So that in the fall of 1964 the church in its new building welcomed the 158th Anniversary Session of the Mississippi Baptist Association.