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Bits and Pieces

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Three Hardin County Churches named Mount Zion

by Paul W. Urbahns (July 2020)

Most Hardin countians are familiar with Mount Zion Baptist Church, located on 21 Mount Zion Road in an area just off Dixie Highway between Radcliff and Elizabethtown. This church was formed on February 17, 1838 at the home of Rev. Jacob Rogers, who was then pastor of Mill Creek Baptist Church, presently located in Radcliff, Ky.

The name Mount Zion, in a Biblical context, generally refers to a city rather than a mountain. The Holy Bible identifies it as the place where Yahweh, the God of Israel, dwells, and the place where he is king.

It may seem a little strange that over the years there have been at least three churches in Hardin County using the same name.

The story, I have to tell does not go back to Biblical times, but rather starts in 1816.

Rev. James Haycraft III, was the son of James Haycraft (b. 1751–d.1782), and when his father died, young James was raised by his uncle Samuel Haycraft, Sr. (b. abt 1752 – d. Oct 1823) a farmer in the Mill Creek area of Hardin County.

It was this Rev. James Haycraft III that was associated with the Sevens Valley Baptist Church, and represented that congregation at associational meetings for several years up until 1816. In 1817, Rev. Haycraft and John Wilson, gathered an early Mount Zion congregation with ten members. These two men represented this new church at the Salem Association of Baptist Churches annual meeting. The actual location of this Mount Zion Baptist Church is still unknown at this writing.

The following year, 1818, the church reported a membership of 45 which was a substantial increase over the previous report. Rev. Haycraft was joined by John C. Hicks as representatives.

John C. Hicks was the father of George H. Hicks, born December 22, 1814. This would have made George four years old at the time of the establishment of the church, so he probably attended this church with his family as a youth. George H. Hicks would later profess “the religion of Jesus Christ” at Rudes Creek Baptist Church, which joined the Salem Association in 1819, according to J.H. Spencer in his, “History of Kentucky Baptists.” Hicks went into the ministry, and ordained by Rev. Jacob Rogers and his father-in-law Calmore Lovelace. There is no mention given of this early Mount Zion congregation in any known published biography of Rev. George H. Hicks.

Rev. James Haycraft reported a total membership of 39 in 1819 and was accompanied to the associational meeting by Jasper Terry, David Greenwalt and J. Friend. This would indicate Terry, Greenwalt, and Friend were probably deacons.

The 1820 Associational minutes indicates the church was only represented by David Greenwalt. By 1821 the membership had dropped to 29 and was represented by Rev. Haycraft and Jasper Terry.

During the years, 1822, 1823, and 1824) the church did not send a representative nor submit an annual letter.

However, there is a mention of Haycraft in the 1824 associational minutes.

Summing up the situation, J.H. Spencer wrote: ‘Mount Zion church, of which Elder James Haycraft was a member, for some reason now unknown, had withdrawn from the association; whereupon that body adopted the following resolution. “That this association consider Mr. James Haycraft a disorderly preacher, who has withdrawn from us in a disorderly way, and refuses to give up his credentials.”’

Jon Whitfield, Meade County historian, provided the following explanation for the term “disorderly.”

Whitfield writes, “The 1824 period was a time when the Campbellites were giving the Baptists trouble and I’ve noticed that most of those who were dismissed as “disorderly” were accused of being Campbellites.” This was a term for followers of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, who were committed to restoring primitive Christianity, also known as the Restoration Movement. Other prominent individuals in the Restoration Movement included Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott and "Raccoon" John Smith.

The mention of Rev. John “Raccoon” Smith’s name brings to mind an 1885 interview with Pamela Cowherd (1805 – 1901), where she recalled hearing Raccoon Smith as a circuit riding minister speaking at the Mill Creek Baptist Church in its earliest days.

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Whitfield continues, “Further, if he was out of fellowship with the association, he probably couldn’t have gotten another church, so seems the natural order of things that that he may have gone outside the association, or went west, or pastored a Christian Church.”

Jon hit it on the head when he suggested Rev. Haycraft may have gone west.

Charles A. Haycraft, Executive Director of the Association of Descendants of James Haycraft, Immigrant in Bondage, provided the following information about Rev. Haycraft and his family.

“Rev. James Haycraft was born about 1780 and married Francis Van Meter and they had nine children. The family moved as a group in 1839 to Macoupin County, Illinois where Rev. Haycraft was the pastor of a Baptist church until his death on June 2, 1948.”

Based on the recent discovery of a deed by Hardin County researcher Johnny Lay, dated February 1833, the second Mount Zion Church appears to have formed in the Upton area. This was just seven years after the previous Mount Zion dropped from sight.

The deed, gives us the names for the Trustees of “the Methodist Meeting house named Mount Zion.” David Wright; Benjamin Utterback; William E Milson (or Wilson); Price Sullivan; and Isaac Walden are listed as trustees. John and Sarah Rider deeded the three acres of land. It is unfortunate that early deeds do not list the source deed for the land being sold. Further research by Johnny Lay to determine what properties John Rider purchased led to two deeds. The first, dated 1820, transfers 48 ½ acres to Rider on the northwest corner of the big road from Elizabeth Town to Munfordville. This could be the forerunner of present-day 31W which would have run through Upton prior to its establishment. Rider also purchased an additional 76 acres in 1823, and that deed is also so nondescript that the land could have been most anywhere.

A review of online copies of the Journal of Kentucky Annual Report, Methodist Episcopal Church South does not shed any information on this congregation.

One possible location of the church was at the present-day Big Spring Cemetery in Upton. The two earliest family burials in the Big Spring cemetery are related to this mystery church. William C. Rider (1834 - 1835) and John A. Rider (1823 - 1846) both sons of John Rider. John Rider died in September 1848, is also buried there with his wife, Sarah, who died in 1878.

The next family to be buried in the cemetery was descendants of trustee Price Sullivan. We find Aaron A Sullivan, (1859-1863), the son of Robert Black Sullivan (1830 - 1907) and his wife Mariah J. Upton (1839 - 1863). Robert B. and Mariah were married 19 Oct 1855, in Hardin County.

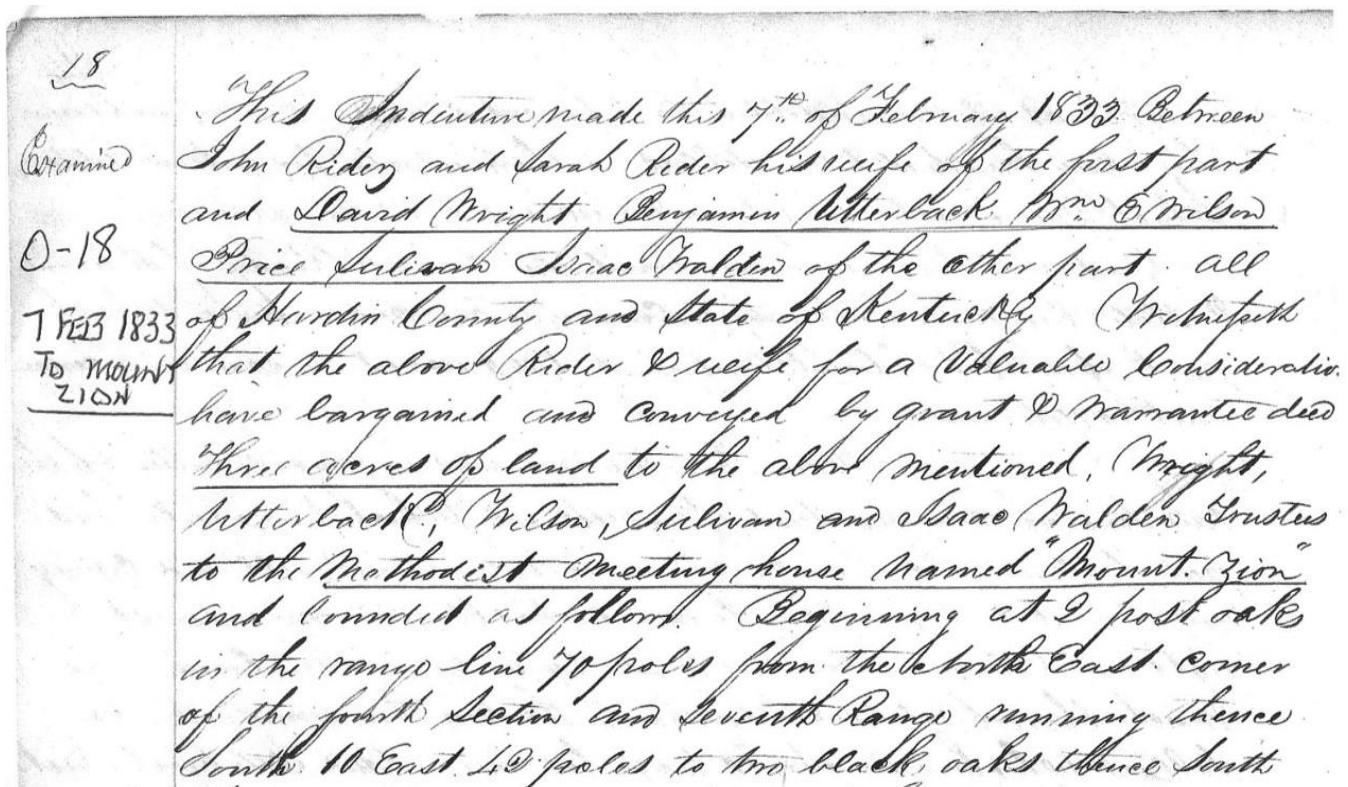
DID YOU KNOW THAT: Mount Zion is a rural unincorporated town in southeastern Allen County, Kentucky

To add to the confusion, if you Google "Upton-Zion United Methodist" it returns the street address of 233 Big Springs Rd. which just happens to be the address of the Methodist Church parsonage in Upton.

The third Mount Zion is the Baptist Church presently located just off Dixie Highway between Radcliff and Elizabethtown, mentioned in the opening paragraphs. This was the most successful of the three, celebrating its 150th Anniversary in 1988.

It was my hope that the minutes of the present Mount Zion Baptist Church might shed some light on why the name was selected or was it simply a "reorganized" version of the first church. However, an extensive review of the church records has failed to show any connection, to the two previous Mount Zion churches.

In conclusion, it certainly seems unusual for three churches bearing the same name to be in the same county during a period of less than two decades.



The image shows a handwritten deed document on aged paper. On the left margin, there are handwritten notes: '18', 'Examined', 'O-18', and '7 FEB 1833 TO MOUNT ZION'. The main body of the document is written in cursive and reads: 'This Indenture made this 7th of February 1833 Between John Rider and Sarah Rider his wife of the first part and David Wright Benjamin Utterback W^m E Wilson Price Sullivan Isaac Walden of the other part all of Hardin County and State of Kentucky Witnesseth that the above Rider & wife for a valuable consideration have bargained and conveyed by grant & warranty deed three acres of land to the above mentioned, Wright, Utterback, Wilson, Sullivan and Isaac Walden Trustees to the Methodist Meeting house named "Mount Zion" and bounded as follows. Beginning at 2 post oaks in the range line 70 poles from the North East corner of the fourth Section and Seventh Range running thence South 10 East 40 poles to two black oaks thence South

Deed dated 17 Feb 1833 where John and Sarah Rider transferred three acres of land to the Methodist Meeting house named, "Mount Zion." Church Trustees are listed as: David Wright; Benjamin Utterback; William E Milson (or Wilson); Price Sullivan; and Isaac Walden.

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Hardin County researcher Johnny Lay doing deed research in the Hardin County courthouse.



Big Spring cemetery in Upton is the most likely site for the Mount Zion Methodist Church established 1833.

PRESIDENT JOSH COOPER:

I hope that everyone had a happy holidays. Fitting for our group, we can now say that 2020 is “history”...both good and bad! **We will not meet in January.** Hopefully, it will be safe for us to meet again in person at some point this year. I will refrain from making predictions, as those have proven wrong in the past. My wish is the July meeting, if not sooner. Mr. Urbahns’ article on Mt. Zion Churches, makes me wonder: What was the first church established in Hardin County, where was it located, and what if anything, might remain?

Josh Cooper

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