

# Bethel Presbyterian small, but is history

By LOUISE McCOLLUM  
Guest Columnist

**H**ISTORIC BETHEL Presbyterian Church in Chattooga County's Gore Community, founded before the Civil War, held its homecoming on Sunday, Oct. 2, and its history is notable.

Regular services are no longer held at Bethel church. It is now called a chapel and a department of the Summerville Presbyterian Church. The chapel has seven active members, including Mrs. Montine Jones, 97, and her sons David and Sam. She and her sons still live on the farm bought by her father-in-law in 1838, the year Chattooga became a county.

The other members are Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Holt, who look after the chapel property, and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Everett.

Mrs. Everett is a descendant of the founders of the church.

On Sept. 9, 1846, a petition was sent to the Cherokee Presbytery from some members of the Pleasant Green Church, which was located near the Gamble Spring in Chattooga County. In the petition, three reasons were set forth for organizing the new church.

"The great distance to Pleasant Green Church, members could not attend regularly.

"PLEASANT GREEN would not suffer any loss by a new church being organized, as they did not want to employ another minister, but to continue to support the pastor supply of Pleasant Green Church.

"That we live in a valley destined soon to become a large population and we wish to erect the standard of Presbyterianism that other denominations of Christians in our midst may know us and love us as a branch of the Church of Christ, and those who live among us, both saved and unsaved, who may decide to join our

branch of God's church may have a church home."

The petition was signed by Jack O. Scott, Thomas Kendrick, Andrew Couey, Martha D. Kendrick, Henry L. Couey, Samuel B. Maloney, Farby Couey, Martha Burns, Elizabeth A. Couey, James A. Buchanon, A.B. Maloney, Susan E. Scott, Jane Maloney, Augustus Bryant, Naomi Bryant, Martha Wright and Naomi Herndon.

According to the minutes: "The petition was read and approved by Presbytery at that time. Rev. John M. Caldwell and Andrew Lockridge were appointed a committee of Presbytery to hold a meeting in that part of the county seat east of Taylor's Ridge on the 24th of October 1846, and if the way be clear to organize a church. The above meeting was held at the time appointed by Presbytery."

A sermon was preached by A.Y. Lockridge from the 20th Psalm, 5th verse. "We will rejoice in thy salvation and in the name of our God we will set up our banners."

THE FIRST BUILDING the church occupied was built of logs and stood just east of the present building.

The present gleaming-white church is situated on a hillside among stately trees.

Built before the Civil War, it was not ceiled until 1869, then remodeled in 1878 and painted in 1879. It has been virtually untouched by modern times. The heating system is scarcely noticed. The electric lights are encased in quaint oil lamps, which hang from the ceiling. The unpretentious, quaint charm, character and strength of yesteryear are felt keenly as one enters this church.

The late "Miss Mag" Weesner played a foot-pedal organ there for years.

The pulpit was made from a sweet-gum tree cut and donated by the Rev. T. C. Crawford, who served as pastor of the church for 37

years, beginning in 1847, one year after the founding of the church.

When stragglers from Gen. William T. Sherman's Union army came through, they raided the Rev. Crawford's home and took everything that would do for them or their horses to eat. The horses left a little corn on the ground, and Mrs. Crawford picked it up, washed it, beat it up and made bread for a meal.

The first high school in Chattooga County was established at the Bethel Church. According to a history by the late Sam Jones in 1929, the Rev. T.C. Crawford came to Chattooga County from North Carolina in 1846 to teach school. Jones wrote: "The Rev. Crawford was no ordinary man. He was a man who had ideals and vision, a Daniel Boone, an Abraham Lincoln, or a Woodrow Wilson."

WITH THOSE IMPOSING characteristics, it is no wonder that he was successful in the carrying out of his dream of the establishment of the first high school in Chattooga County, in 1847, at Bethel.

He was quoted as having said: "The greatest need to the community and county is educated men and women to be leaders and teachers."

He advocated free tuition to all high-school pupils, and according to the

historian, young men and ladies from all over the county and adjoining counties — even ones in Alabama and Tennessee — came to the school. The first building the school occupied was made of logs and stood just east of the present church.

The report continued: "His life and influence did not die with the mortal man, but lived on thereafter, and is still alive today (1929). The old church has been loyal and faithful to her master, and the school is still living, a great monument to this great and noble man.

"As a result of the church and school in this community, there have gone out 14 ministers of the Gospel, 14 doctors of medicine, two foreign missionaries, more than a hundred school teachers, five state senators, five representatives to the Georgia legislature, one Superior Court judge, and hundreds of good, moral, Christian men and women in the business world, who are loyal to their training."

Those outstanding students went to a school that had no electricity, no plumbing, no computers, and no air conditioning.

I MIGHT ADD that the teachers were allowed to teach and discipline, free of political interference, and the parents taught the students to respect the teachers.

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## HarvestFest cancelled

"A benefit that does not generate any proceeds for the intended cause doesn't benefit anyone."

That's how organizers of the Blue Ridge HarvestFest characterized their surprising decision recently to cancel the event.

Originally scheduled for Oct. 7-9 at Cherokee Farms in LaFayette, the event was to be a benefit for hurricane relief.

According to Margaret Pitcher of High Sierra Music, the California-based organizers, lackluster ticket sales and the ripple effects of Hurricane Katrina have left them with little choice but to cancel.

"In our fifteen years of presenting music festivals, High Sierra Music has never cancelled an event," Pitcher said. "This was an extremely difficult decision for us."

Pitcher said HarvestFest ticket-holders who purchased tickets with a credit card will be refunded automatically, while those who

