

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Bullittsburg Baptist

By

[see note on first page]

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BULLITTSBURG BAPTIST

Contributed by Mrs. C. S. Weakley
Historian Rebecca Bryan Boone
34 Tremont Ave. Fort Thomas, Ky
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In 1797, the year George Washington was finishing his second term as President of the United States, a hardy band of pioneers in Boone County, Kentucky, were building a church.

The same church still stands and remains a place of worship. It has survived the elements, Indian warfare and all destructive influences. Today it gives promise of rounding out another century as a house of God. The pioneer workmen built better than they had any idea. Its thick walls are just as sturdy as they were in the infant days of the Republic.

The structure is located seven miles northwest of Burlington, in the midst of a community known as Bullittsburg. To members of the Baptist faith in Northern Kentucky it is known as the "mother church". From it sprang all Baptist congregations in Northern Kentucky. To the majority of Baptists, Bullitt's Bottoms, where the church was founded in 1794 is known as North Bend.

The Bullitt's Bottoms settlement was one of a few scattered throughout Northern Kentucky. It was, perhaps, the first one to erect a church.

The "mother church" was constituted as the "Baptist Church of Christ", according to Mrs. George Kreylich of Burlington, a member of the congregation and an authority on its history. It apparently is the oldest church left standing in Kentucky. As far as is known the churches erected about the same date, or prior to it, have been torn down for one reason or another.

Records Guarded Carefully.

Records of the church are guarded carefully in a vault at the Boone County Courthouse at Burlington.

A perusal of these records reveals that JOSEPH REDDING and WILLIAM CAVE were the two men who had the most to do with organizing the church in 1794. Elder John Taylor of Virginia moved to the settlement with his family and was ordained as its first minister in 1797.

The first members of the church, according to the records were LERVIS DEWEESE--JOHN HALL..ELIZA HALL..CHICHESTER MATHEWS..JOSEPH SMITH..and LEANNAH SMITH. Whether the descend-

ants of these pioneers still live in Northern Kentucky could not be ascertained.

The settlement was known as "Bullitt's Bottom" according to Mrs. Kreylich, because a Mr. Bullitt owned the greater portion of the land of this section. Doubtless ~~this~~ is Thomas Bullitt, who surveyed and laid out a town on the site now occupied by the city of Louisville in 1773. A Kentucky historian, Ed Porter Thompson, relates how he negotiated with the Indians at a point on the Ohio opposite old Chillicothe. Bullitt told the Indians of a plan of white men to settle in Kentucky and apparently obtained their consent to proceed. It appears likely that while he was in this section he staked off a portion of the land in Boone County for himself.

The new settlement of Bullittsburg, or Bullitt's Bottoms, was exposed to Indian depredations, Mrs. Kreylich points out in her discussion, but there are no records to prove that the church or ~~members~~ members of its congregation were ever attacked.

After the church building was constructed things went along smoothly. Other pious men made their way to Kentucky and the new settlement. Late in 1797 Elder George Eve of Virginia arrived and united with the church. He assisted Pastor Taylor in spreading the Gospel until 1800

"During the years following " Mrs. Kreylich states, "many able men were active in the church. Among them were Chichester Mathews, Philemon Vorters, William Cave, Absalom Graves, William Gaines, Jeremiah Kirtley and Thomas Henderson. The last named Henderson was a minister of considerable reputation.

SERVED BY TWO MINISTERS

Ministers were more plentiful in those days than at present, it seems, as the records show that two or more pastors served the church at the same time.

Eager to see the Gospel spread to other sections, the Bullittsburg folk went to adjoining settlements to organize churches. It was through the zeal of these pious men and women that the early Northern Kentuckians owe their religious training. Many churches were established by them in Southern Indiana as well.

Beginning in 1822, Elder Robert Kirtley served as pastor, assisted by Elders James Dicken and Absalom Graves. In 1826 both Dicken and Graves died. For thirty-seven years thereafter Elder Kirtley was the sole pastor. Such a situation had not existed since the second year of the founding of the church.

In 1862 Elder Kirtley's son, J.A. Kirtley, became assistant pastor of the church. He continued in this capacity until his father's death, in 1872, when he took over the pastorate. He served until his death in 1898. Thus a father and son served the church as pastors for seventy-six years.

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After this church had a number of pastors for short periods. Among them were Elders Hoover, Sproler, Early, Skillman and Brooks.

In March 1913, Elder J.W. Campbell became pastor. He still serves the old "mother church" in this capacity and hopes to continue for many more years.

ESTABLISHED AS NEEDED

According to R.S. Cotterill, author of "History of Pioneer Kentucky," the early Kentuckians were not distinguished for their religious piety. Despite this fact it appears that churches were established as rapidly as they were needed.

Cottrill states that as late as 1792 only one-third of the population of Kentucky were members of the churches. At this time the creeds in the State were the Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and Catholic. In 1787 he says there were but fifty Catholic families in the State, and these were grouped together in Marion and Nelson Counties. There were no priests in the State at that time.

The early Presbyterian centered around the Rev. David Rice, who like the early Baptists, migrated from Virginia here. In 1783 the Rev. Rice organized three congregations at Danville, Cane Run and Lick's Run. The church had a slow growth, there being but ninety members in 1786, according to ~~Cottrill~~ Cotterill.

Methodism came in with ~~the~~ a boom in 1788. Several circuits were formed in rapid succession between Lexington and Madison and the Limestone.

BAPTISTS OUTNUMBER OTHERS

The Baptists outnumbered all denominations from the beginning. Squire Boone, whose fame is known to most Kentuckians, was a Baptist preacher and did much to spread the faith.

The Rev. William Hickman is generally regarded as having been the first Baptist minister to enter the State. His closest contemporary was the Rev. Peter Tinsley. Some authorities give Tinsley credit for preaching the first Baptist sermon in the shade of a great elm at the big spring, now in the corporate limits of Harrodsburg.

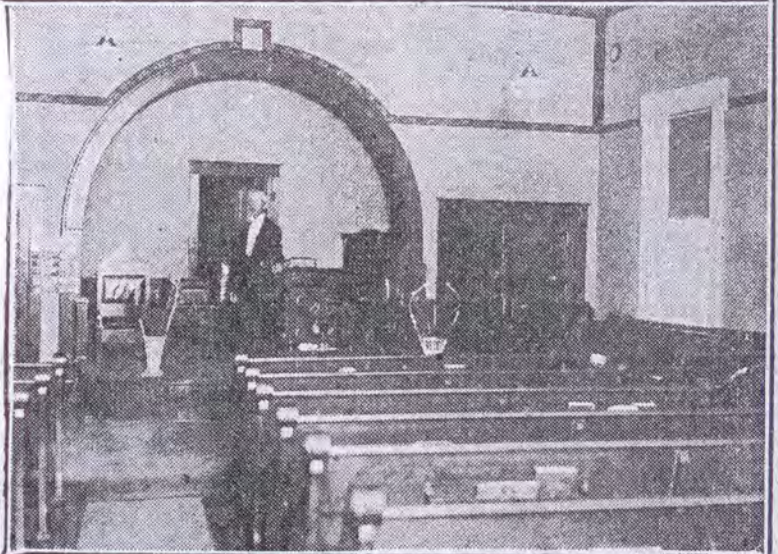
It is claimed that the first organized Baptist church was that of the Rev. Lewis Craig, at Craig's Station, on Gilbert's Creek, in Garrard County, a few miles east of Lancaster. This church was organized in Spottsylvania County, Virginia and the members traveled together to Kentucky. It was a church on the road literally speaking.

ESTABLISHED
IN BOONE COUNTY
AT BULLITTSBURG
IN 1797

Northern Kentucky Boasts Oldest Church in the State

FATHER AND SON
SERVE BAPTISTS
AS MINISTERS
FOR 76 YEARS

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Picture No. 2 shows the interior of the church with Elder J. W. Campbell standing in the pulpit. The third picture shows the present officers of the church. From left to right are: Charles Stevens, treasurer; G. B. Yates, deacon; E. A. Martin, clerk, and the Rev. J. W. Campbell, pastor.

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NORTHERN KENTUCKY BOASTS OLDEST CHURCH IN
THE STATE.
BULLITTSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH BUILT 1797 .



Shown above are pictures relating to the oldest church now standing in Kentucky. The Baptist Church is located at Bullittsburg, seven miles northwest of Burlington, in Boone County. It is 134 years old, it having been built in 1797.

Picture No. 1 shows the church as it looks today. The exterior has never been changed but the

interior was remodeled in 1858 and again in 1924.

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Note-See Spencer's History of the Baptists, page 292