Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

History of the Florence Baptist Church

By

Mrs. Blanche Beemon

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BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FLORENCE, KENTUCKY

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HISTORY OF THE FLORENCE BAPTIST CHURCH

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The Florence Baptist Church was organized, some say, about 1844. The congregation at that time consisted of just a mere handful of devout men and women. The members worked continuously for many months and upon application in April, 1855, letters of dismission from the Dry Creek Baptist Church were granted to Benjamin Dulaney, Leonard Stephens, D. M. Scott, Henry T. Snyder, Sally Snyder, Polly Scott, and Louisiana Finch for the purpose of constituting a church at Florence, Boone County, Kentucky.

Milton Wilhoit and Harriet Wilhoit, his wife, sold to D. M. Scott, Henry T. Snyder, and Benjamin Dulaney, trustees of the Baptist Church at Florence, a tract of land extending 131 feet on the east side of the Covington and Lexington Turnpike for the sum of $450.00. The deed was signed by the Wilhoits on December 17, 1855 and filed in the office of I. G. Hamilton, Clerk of Boone County, on January 3, 1856.

In the minutes of the North Bend Association of Baptists for 1855 the following record appears on page four: " On application, the church at Florence was received into union with this association and the names of the messengers, Leonard Stephens and D. M. Scott, enrolled." The statistical tables of the minutes show that there were eleven members at this time.

A small church building was erected on the lot. No records were preserved from 1855 to 1900; but some facts about the early years of the church have been obtained from old associational records and minutes.

The membership increased slowly over a period of twenty-five years. In 1880 the church had only forty-eight members. In 1890 a maximum of ninety was reached, then the number gradually diminished for several years. For six years only the four men who came from the Dry Creek Church, Messrs. Stephens, Scott, Snyder, and Dulaney, represented the church at the associational meetings.

Other names appearing as messengers from 1861 to 1895 were P. Woodyard, Wm. Clatterbuck, W. T. Brown, J. L. Bristow, Wm. Meeks, B. F. Bristow, A. Wellman, H. Taylor, H. Buckner,

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L. L. Bristow, J. S. Kirtley, W. H. Corbin, T. S. Potts, Philip Senour, James H. Senour, Alonzo Vaughn, Elbert Senour, R. W. Kirtley, Thomas Corbin, C. H. Green, A. A. Williamson, Leonard Childress, Ed. Corbin, M. Wilhoit, Wm. Johnson, Webb Smith, and Thomas Portwood.

A Sunday school was organized in 1880 and two years later had an average attendance of twenty-three. In 1884 they had no Sunday school but it was reorganized in 1885 and had an enrolment of sixty-five, an average attendance of thirty-five, and W. T. Brown was the superintendent. He was succeeded the next year by P. T. Senour and he (in 1887-88) by B. A. Dulaney. The attendance grew smaller and the school must have been discontinued after 1888. C. E. Wren was pastor in 1886, C. H. Green in 1887, and T. L. Utz in 1891. Thomas Portwood was church clerk in 1894-95.

W. N. Long says that when he came to Florence in 1898 the church was closed and remained closed through 1899 but for one occasion, the wedding of Dr, Moffett and Rue Dulaney.

In January, 1900, the Rev. S. M. Adams, of Walton, and Dr. B. F. Swindler, of Covington, held a revival meeting and there were several additions by letter and one by baptism. They began having Sunday school again. Dr. Swindler and Rev. Adams held Services one night a month for several months, then Rev. W. E. Hutton was called as a pastor. He served one year at a salary of five dollars per month. Many members were added to the church during his ministry. In 1902 Rev. S. M. Adams was pastor, in 1903 Rev. W. S. Taylor. About this time a janitor was secured for seventy-five cents a month. he to furnish coal oil and make fires. Rev. T. J. Marksberry was a supply pastor for a while, then Rev. A. Logan Vickers came in 1907.

In 1908 Rev. Vickers, assisted by Rev. C. W. Argabrite, state evangelist, held a two weeks meeting. At its close on February 13 the members were called together for the purpose of calling a pastor and if possible getting the church in better working order. Rev. G. W. Argabrite was moderator and B. A. Dulaney was clerk of this very important meeting.

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The following was adopted as a basis for the reorganization and membership of the church. Whereas: Our church has been for a number of years in a cold and indifferent spirit, unbecoming the character and life of a church of Jesus Christ, and we do now heartily repent of our sin and earnestly seek to begin anew the work that is ours as God's children and His church; and since it is desirable to have all those whose names appear upon the record of our membership share with each other in this purpose to serve the Lord; Be It Resolved: That the membership of the church, as relates to those whose names now appear upon the roll, shall be composed of all those, and only those, who shall sign the covenant and agreement herewith; and they shall constitute the church, with all the privileges and powers as members thereof.

Covenant and Agreement -- As we trust we have been led of God's Holy Spirit to sincerely deplore the state of affairs existing in the church, and, so far as we are concerned, to heartily repent of any course on our part that has brought it about; we, whose names are hereto annexed, covenant together to earnestly seek the Lord in prayer, ask forgiveness of Him and of each other; be reconciled to each other if aught has come between us; make reparation as far as possible for any wrong committed against any brother or sister or any of our fellow beings; and will strive together to maintain the services of the Lord's house, and to the best of our ability engage in His work as He shall give us strength; and that we will seek to walk as those who are born of His spirit to the honor and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Motion was made and carried to call Rev. C. E. Baker as pastor for one Sunday in each month and for two Sundays in a month if the money could be secured. Rev. Baker, being present, accepted the call. The moderator then called for subscriptions for the pastor's salary which resulted in $6.00 per month being subscribed.

Another business meeting was called on February 22 and then it was reported that $12.00 per month had been subscribed toward the pastor's salary which meant that two services a month could be secured if the District Board would appropriate the same amount.

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So services began in the little Baptist church on the second Sunday in March, 1908, with Rev. Baker receiving $24.00 per month for his services. B. A. Dulaney resigned as clerk and J. D. Mitchell was elected.

These persons signed the covenant: Mrs. E. F. Dulaney, B. A. Dulaney, Miss Add Corbin, Miss Kate Corbin, Mrs. Kate Brown, Miss Belle Long, Mrs. Mary Sydnor, Mrs. E. G. Whitson, W. N. Long, J. J. Lohline, Mrs. Mary Meeks, E. Corbin, Miss Ida Cline, Miss Marcia Corbin, Miss Viola Corbin, Mrs. Betty Drinkenberger, Miss Beryl Boyer, J. D. Mitchell, Mrs. C. W. Meyers, Miss Ethel Marquis, Mrs. Mary Slayback, M. C. Stephens, Mrs. Lula Stephens, Miss Sally Snyder, Mrs. Junetta Rice, Mrs. J. H. Ryle, and Mrs. Blanche Bagby. Later it was voted th have the covenant read four times a year.

In March, all offices excepting clerk having been declared vacant, the new church elected officers. W. N. Long was selected for treasurer, assistant Sunday school superintendent and trustee. J. D. Mitchell, already clerk, was elected superintendent and a trustee. M. C. Stephens was selected for secretary and treasurer of the Sunday school and a trustee. In the following months these three also served on numerous committees for repairs and raising funds as the needs arose.

The pastor acted as deacon for the time being. Mrs. Mary Slayback was hired as housekeeper at a salary of $1.50 per month and to be paid monthly. The treasurer's report at the close of the year 1908 showed the total expenses, including pastor's salary, missions, repairs, and incidental expenses to be $278.30, and a balance on hand of $25.18.

In October, 1909, Rev. Baker resigned as deacon and A. S. Lucas and J. D. Mitchell were selected. In 1911 John Roberts became the third deacon. Lily Bradford was elected organist. Rev. Baker resigned in February, 1912, having served the church four years. He was succeeded by Rev. C. E. Brown. The church yard was rented for grazing stock and in 1912 the sum of $5.00 was received from this source.

During these years the church maintained strict discipline, being no respector of persons in doing so. The

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peace and fellowship of the church was called for at each business meeting and if anyone was reported as walking unworthily, he or she, was visited by a committee and asked to come before the church to show cause why the church should not withdraw fellowship or to vindicate himself.

In 1913 it was voted that every member of this church report to the church at least twice a year in person, by letter, or by subscription. A Woman's Missionary Society was organized in May, 1913. Rev. G. R. Douglas was called as pastor in November, 1913, and again the next year. He was succeeded by Rev. Elmer Lucas, of Georgetown, Kentucky, in December, 1915. Electric lights were put in the church in August, 1917. J. D. Mitchell, who had been church clerk since the reorganization, died on February 16, 1918, and E. L. Aylor was elected to this office.

The church roll was revised in March, 1918, with sixty-two active members. All delinquent members were to be notified and if not heard from by August 1st their names were not to be added to the revised list. Rev. Lucas resigned July 10, 1918. Succeeding pastors were Rev. H. M. DeMoss, Rev. H. M. Gartner, Rev. John Barker, and Rev. A. R. Abernathy. In August, 1919, it was voted not to rent the church yard any more for grazing stock.

In May, 1928, the church was again pastorless and the District Board sent Field Worker W. A. M. Wood as missionary pastor and to assist in erecting a new building. The building committee was composed of Cecil Gaines, C. W. Meyers, and J. A. Lucas, with Rev. Wood as chairman. The new church, a beautiful brick building, was erected at an initial cost of $18,400.00 and was formally opened April 27, 1930, and dedicated on Sunday, May 4th, with W. D. Powell preaching both morning and afternoon. Revival services began that evening and continued through May 11 with Rev. T. C. Sleet the evangelist and D. I. Tanner in charge of the music.

There were 113 members when the church wad dedicated and the church officers were: Pastor, W. A. M. Wood; clerk, W. N. Long; treasurer, J. F. Surface; deacons, A. S. Lucas, W. N. Long, J. F. Surface, and Emmet Baxter;

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Chorister, D. I. Tanner; Pianist, Marie Tanner; Assistant Pianist, Arch Marie Lucas; Lewis L. Stephens was Superintendent of the Sunday School. Mrs. Wood Stephens was President of the Woman's Missionary Society and Mrs. Ed Sydnor was President of the Ladies Aid.

The members worked very hard, many giving sacrificially, to reduce the debt on the building. In 1931 Rev. R. F. DeMoisey was called as pastor. In 1934 Mr. Owen Bradford, who had been a member of the church since 1909, died. He, since his wife had preceeded him in death the previous year, by his last will provided that the residue of his estate, after payment of claims, should go to the Florence Baptist Church.

This generous gift aided in the removal of the existing debt, in finishing the basement and other improvements. T. C. Crume, Jr., was ordained a minister of the Gospel at the church on January 24, 1937.

In November, 1937, the church leased unto Mrs. Emma Cleek a parcel of ground in the church yard upon which to erect a dwelling and live the remainder of her life with the provision that upon her death the dwelling with any improvements that had been erected should descend to the church.

Rev. DeMoisey resigned in January, 1942, effective ninety days later. The church membership had grown to 247 during his eleven year pastorate. Rev. Harold Wainscott came to the Florence Baptist Church as pastor in June, 1942. Under his leadership the first Vacation Bible School was held in 1943 and one has been conducted every year since. Rev. Wainscott entered Southern Baptist Seminary in September, 1944, but was retained as pastor, making the trip from Louisville to hold prayer service on Saturday nights and worship services on Sunday.

In November, 1945, the deacons erected a bulletin board on the front lawn to better advertise the church program. Two rooms were partitioned off in the basement and equipped for a nursery in the spring of 1946.

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A church library was started in April. In November of the same year a house at 58 Dortha Avenue was purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Krumpleman for a parsonage and the Wainscotts moved into it after he graduated from the Seminary in May, 1947. The Training Union was reorganized in February, 1948, with Seward Abbott as director.

Miss Jean Bach, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Luther Bach, while attending Southern Baptist Encampment at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, felt called of God to be a missionary and there dedicated her life to service in foreign fields, Jean resigned her position as teacher in Covington schools and entered W.M.U. Training School in Louisville, graduating in June, 1948. A special service was held at the church May 16, 1948, with a message of testimony by Jean. The various church organiaations expressed their appreciation with appropriate gifts to her. The order of the dedication service follows:

Pastor - Realizing that all men everywhere without Christ are lost in darkness under sin and are without hope except someone tell them of Jesus the Savior

People - We dedicate Jean Bach a missionary

Pastor - With a full consciousness that the Great Commission is binding upon us today that we should go to the ends of the earth

People - We send Jean to represent us

Pastor - With deep gratitude unto God for calling her from our midst

People - We pray that He will go with her to protect, guide, bless, and make her a blessing

Pastor - Aware of the great sacrifice she is making

People - We pledge our support to her and to all missions

Pastor - Realizing her need of help from our Lord

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People ~~Pastor~~ - We pledge our prayers

Pastor - Knowing full well her need for fellowship

People - We pledge our communication.

The church gave Jean an Argus 3-C camera to take pictures of her work so that slides and strip films might be shown upon her return from the mission field. She was presented with checks from the church totaling more than $700.00 to be used in preparation for her stay of three years in West Africa. She sailed in October, 1948, to serve as a missionary teacher in the Ida Aba Girls' School in Abeokuta, Nigeria.

The resignation of Rev. Harold Wainscott was accepted with regret at the business meeting on December 8, 1948. He had served the church 6½ years. Dr. W. L. Stanfield, teacher of Homilitics at Southern Seminary, was secured as interim pastor and endeared himself to the hearts of the membership during the six months he was here.

Rev. C. L. Leopard, pastor at Glencoe, was recommended by the pulpit committee and called as pastor on May 29, 1949.

New office equipment was purchased and the balcony remodeled so that it could be used for a Sunday School class room and that more people could be comfortably seated during church services. In February, 1950, a Brotherhood was organized with A. C. Mager president. Because of increased Sunday School attendance modern folding doors were purchased to convert the basement into five more class rooms at an approximate cost of $1500.00.

Fourteen years of effort and conference with town trustees and highway department were finally rewarded when the sidewalk in front of the church was elevated and rebuilt; thanks going to Dr. Leopard, and to Judge C. L. Cropper and to the men of the church who did the work in laying the walk.

In July, 1950, the church purchased the adjoining lot having a 76 foot frontage on Main street and being the

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same depth as the church lot for $7000.00 from the Charles Tanner heirs. This same property was conveyed to Wm. H. Tanner by Bernhard and Willemina Von Boken on October 2, 1879, for the sum of $500.00. The lot has been cleared, graded and sown in grass seed and adds greatly to the appearange of the church property as well as providing some parking space.

On Sunday evening, October 22, Dr. Leopard submitted his resignation effective November 5, 1950, having accepted a pastorate at Swainsboro, Georgia. Dr. Stanfield was again secured for interim pastor.

Rev. Howard Gordon of Louisville was recommended by the pulpit committee and on December 17 he received an unanimous call to the church. The parsonage was redecorated and occupied by the Gordons on February 1, 1951.

A church-type Hammond organ was presented to the church by Mr. and Mrs. John Delahunty on May 27, 1951. It was dedicated July 15 with beautiful and appropriate services. The Methodists, Christian and Lutheran churches dismissed their evening services to be present and members of their choirs joined with the Baptists in a glorious service of song led by Mr. Paul Chaney with Mrs. Harold McKibben playing the organ.

The same day at the morning service, the note for money borrowed from the Florence Building & Loan Association to help in purchasing the adjacent lot was burned, the entire amount having been paid.

Marvin Jones was issued a minister's license and enrolled at Georgetown College in September, 1951, to prepare himself for a preacher of the Gospel.

In November, Carillon Bells were purchased and installed and are used to carry the Gospel in music to the whole neighborhood. In December, Jean Bach returned home on furlough. She has spoken and shown pictures of Baptist work in Nigeria in many churches in Kentucky and in other states during the year. She will sail for Nigeria on November 21 to renew her work there.

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Mrs. Emma Cleek (Aunt Emma to the entire church) who for fourteen years had lived in her little house in the church yard and who by her personality and fine Christian spirit had endeared herself to all, quietly and peacefully slipped away to her heavenly home on March 18, 1952. The house, then becoming property of the church, was converted into much needed Sunday School rooms and the Junior and Intermediate girls' classes convene there. Judge Groves donated a piano for their use.

A record player was presented and connected with the bell amplifiers and twice weekly a program of music is played by it.

Rev. Gordon resigned August 3 and went to a church in Marietta, Georgia. Florence church was fortunate in securing Dr. George Redding, teacher of Bible at Georgetown College to supply until another pastor was secured.

A call was extended to Rev. Roy a Johnson, of Burlington; he accepted and started his work here October 22, 1952.

The Sunday School has outgrown its present space; a building fund has been established and plans considered for an educational building to be erected as soon as circumstances permit.

There were many discouraging times for Florence Baptists during the almost 100 years since the constitution of the church. The faith and perseverance of a few consecrated people enabeled them to reorganize and begin anew. Finally better days came and progress has been rapid during the past decade.

In July, 1952, the church membership was 459; however almost one hundred of this number were non-resident or inactive. Sunday School enrollment was 286, Brotherhood 45 and W. M. U. (all organizations) 104. Gifts for missions for the year was $4104.07; with total gifts for all causes $17,727.90.

Church officers are: Rev. Roy Johnson, pastor; Blanche Beemon, clerk; Lloyd Campbell, treasurer; Dave Osborn, Ira Owens, Walter Goley, Robert Jones, and A. R. Kwozalla, trustees. W. N. Long, Ed. Bonta, Dr. Luther

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Bach, Gilby Greene, Garland Huff, Eldon Ashcraft, Seward Abbott, L. B. Simpson, Alan Utz, and Lloyd Campbell are deacons. Mrs. Harold McKibben is organist; Seward Abbott, Sunday School superintendent; Dale Jones, associate superintendent and choir director; Ann Young, Sunday School secretary; Irene Davis, B. T. U. director; Ita Owens, Brotherhood president; Blanche Beemon, W.M. U. president; and Jean Bach, missionary.