

HISTORY OF GHENT BAPTIST CHURCH

The earliest of the many Baptist churches in Kentucky born of the great revival which swept over the civilized portion of the state from 1800 to 1803 was the organization now known as the Ghent Baptist Church.

At the time of the birth of this church, the state of Kentucky was only eight years old. The oldest Baptist church in the state, that at Severn's Valley, had been established less than nineteen years.

Little more than eighteen years had elapsed since Pastor Lewis Craig, seeking fertile lands, abundant game, and escape from religious persecution, had led the "Traveling Church" from Spottsylvania County, Virginia, through Cumberland Gap to Gilbert's Creek in that part of Virginia called "Kentucky County".

The muskets fired to protect the stockaded cabins of Bryan's Station, in the fight sometimes called "The Last Battle of the Revolutionary War", had been silent less than eighteen years.

Life in Kentucky was still primitive. The settlers were hardy pioneers who had only recently won their way against the dangers of Indian attack and the cruel forces of nature in the depths of a magnificent wilderness.

"Ghent Baptist Church", according to J. H. Spencer in his **History of Kentucky Baptists**, "originated from a union meeting held by the Baptists and Methodists at Port William, now Carrollton, in the winter and spring of 1800".

John Taylor, "that noble man of God by whose labors so many of our first churches were planted", says, that very early in the spring of 1800 he received a letter from Benjamin Craig, at the mouth of the Kentucky River, informing him that there was a great revival of religion in progress in that place. The distance from Bullitsburg Church, near where Mr. Taylor lived, was about sixty miles, but he reached Mr. Craig's the night the meeting was to be at his house.

"From the dull feelings of my heart", says Mr. Taylor, "I took a text which suited my own state—'Lord Help Me'. I continued but a short time, . . . after which they continued on in prayer, praise, and exhortation, with much noise at times, till late in the night. Some were rejoicing, having lately obtained deliverance; others groaning in tears under a pensive load of guilt: . . . many of the people tarried all night. . . I never heard the question—'What shall we do to be saved?' more prevalent at any time in my life, nor

had I ever so many questions asked me, for the same length of time as through the balance of this night".

Mr. Taylor expressed his fears that the union between the Methodists and Baptists would soon be dissolved. This break soon came, "when they came to divide the fish they had caught together".

On Saturday, April 5, 1800, after a day of fasting and prayer for the constitution of a Baptist church at Port William, a church of ten members was constituted, "on the doctrine and discipline of the Holy Scriptures", by William Hickman and Joshua Morris, who were among the most active, courageous, and useful of that noble band of pioneer preachers that brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to the great valley of the Mississippi. The ten original members of this church were, Benjamin Craig, and his wife, Nancy; John R. Bernard and his wife, Nancy; Mary Lindsay; Elizabeth Bledsoe; John Ramey and his wife, Catherine; Sarah Price, and Robert Scanland's black woman, "Chloe". On that same day and immediately after organization, they received by letter Joshua Morris, who became the first pastor, and by experience and baptism William O'Neal and his wife, John Price, Dorcas Ramey, Fanny Cook, and six Negroes.

The church at Port William did not adopt the ordinarily received confession of faith, and its petition for admittance into Salem Association the following fall was rejected. After this rejection, it adopted the "Philadelphia Confession of Faith", with certain exceptions, and in 1801 was received into "Elkhorn Association", the oldest Association in the state.

The church reported twenty baptized during the year and a total membership of ninety-seven.

In 1804 it united with Long Run Association.

In 1814, it changed its name from, "The Church of Port William", to "McCool's Bottom Church".

In 1816, it entered into Franklin Association.

In 1820, a division arose in the church; some took letters and formed a new church at the mouth of "Four Mile Creek"; never-the-less, in the following year, "McCool's Bottom Church", had a membership of one hundred, including forty-one Negroes.

By the middle of the century, the "Baptist Church of Christ" at Ghent, as this church had been re-named in 1845, had an enrollment of two hundred, including fifty-five Negroes; shortly after the beginning of the present century, at which time it transferred membership from "Concord Association" to the new "Whites Run Association", of which it is still a member, it numbered 217.

Its present membership is 305.

The larger increases have been made during "protracted meetings", which have been known to last for thirty days with preaching twice

a day, while as many as seventy-five additions have been received during one meeting.

The second pastor of the church was John Scott, who was called in 1803, and served the church more or less through life. He received no compensation for preaching; yet, by his practical wisdom and industry, he acquired considerable property. He possessed superior talents and was highly esteemed.

For some months, the church met in the homes of the members and, like the first disciples, "broke bread". The first meeting house, built of logs by the male members and located on Isaac Bledsoe's land in McCool's Bottom, could be used in pleasant weather only.

The second house of which we have record was located at the mouth of McCool's Creek. Funds were raised by subscription, and the contract was let to the lowest bidder. This building, with dimensions 24x30 feet, cost \$173. It was first occupied May 10, 1806, while a part of the floor was still wanting; in 1808, a plank door shutter was added. In cold weather the church continued to meet in the homes of the members.

The third meeting house was a brick house which now stands opposite the Ghent Cemetery on the Sanders Road. The building contract was let in February, 1814, for \$700. This house was first occupied in the autumn of 1815. In 1816, the lot was enclosed by a rail fence. The deed from Samuel Sanders to the trustees of the church for one acre of land was recorded June 16, 1819. The stair-case leading to the gallery was eventually moved to the outside of the house.

May, 1843, saw the beginning of plans for the interesting colonial structure in the town of Ghent, which is now the church home. The site was the lower end of John Scott's orchard, which land he donated for the purpose. The church decided to raise \$1250. by subscription, \$872 of which was made up in a month's time. The donations consisted of money and various commodities such as bales of hay, sheepskins, bags of wool, and several barrels of whiskey. The stated requirements were that the house should have no galleries and should not be put under contract until the deed was obtained. It was to be 40x60 feet and built of brick. The contract for the masonry was let to William B. Eblin at \$459, and a contract for the woodwork to Daniel Holdcraft at \$637. The group met in the new building in May, 1844. In the same year, the owner of the steamboat "Pike", donated her bell and a belfry was soon built by subscription. James Southard was the first to serve as custodian. His instructions were to open the doors, sweep the floors, build the fires, light the lamps and ring the bell, but not to buy the wood and candles. He performed these duties for \$10 a year.

Soon there was a "post and rail fence around the new meeting

house". A porch floor "made of gravel" was there by 1848. In the same year "a wrought iron fence with two gates" was completed at a cost of \$22.50.

Into its constitution in 1800, the church adopted rules of discipline, and for many years she earnestly endeavored to use them. Consequently, there were many trials, exclusions, suspensions, confessions, apologies, and restorations into full fellowship. Both black and white members were cited to appear before the church to answer charges, which were for such sins as intoxication, swearing, immorality, dancing, playing the fiddle for dancing, stealing, lying, fighting, beating wife or slave, keeping bad company, failing to attend church meeting, and, in case of a slave, running away from the master. Private offenses were settled according to Matthew 18:15-17, and members were not to go to law with each other unless they had previously laid the difficulty before the church and that body had decided that the nature of the case required a law-suit.

In 1821, a brother was excluded for joining the "Masons", but three years later he was restored to fellowship. In 1811, "it was proposed and seconded whether it was a duty to wash feet according to the command and example of our Savior. It was agreed by the church that it was the said duty and that it be left to the discretion of her members".

In 1830 the citizens of Ghent were allowed the use of the meeting house for a Sunday School, and in 1833, it was used as a day school for three months. At various times the present building has been used for such purposes as lectures and school commencements.

The first of a considerable number of members lost to the "Reformers" was Joel Ellis. In the minutes of May, 1832, we find this entry: "Reference respecting Brother Joel Ellis taken up. He being present and having imbibed some of the principles of Alexander Campbell wishes to withdraw from the church, and he is therefore no longer a member with us". In July, 1838, the church granted the "Reformers" the privilege to occupy the meeting house two days of each month, one of which was to be Sunday; but never to interfere with any appointments of the church. Two months later, however, the privilege was withdrawn.

The third pastor of the church was L. D. Alexander, who began his ministry in June, 1837. He was probably the most popular and successful minister who had ever lived within the confines of the "Concord Association". Even the educated forgot the rudeness of his language when he came before an audience, and all felt and understood what he taught. He shepherded the church from 1837 to 1848 and from March, 1859, to the close of the year. T. J. Fisher, a member whom the church had ordained as a minister in 1843, became co-pastor with L. D. Alexander in January, 1845, continuing in this relation until January, 1859, and was pastor from January,

1850, to December, 1851, with L. D. Alexander as co-pastor. Preaching one Sunday a month, the pastor received from the church as his salary for the entire year of 1846, the sum of \$75.

In 1837, the church sent delegates to the Louisville Convention. In 1844, the old meeting house was sold for \$100.

The church first sent money to the General Association in 1848.

Beginning in 1849, William Johnson was pastor of the Ghent church almost continuously for eighteen years. B. F. Hungerford took his place for a short time in 1858. Mr. Johnson was said to be "a man of good attainments, an eloquent and attractive speaker, and much loved for his deep-toned and constant piety", although peculiarly defective in his social powers.

In 1849 T. J. Fisher asked and obtained leave that a Sabbath School be taught in the meeting house.

Despite a few adversities, such as the damage caused by the falling-in of the floors in July, 1851, William Johnson saw many advancements during his long pastorate. In those years, the church began the observance of quarterly communion (1853); the pastor's salary gradually grew to \$125 a year; the old bell, being cracked, was exchanged for a new one at a cost of the old bell plus \$22.50; candles were replaced by lamps; the wood stoves were sold and replaced by two coal stoves costing \$26.40; a poll and ad valorem tax system of financing the church was adopted; in 1862 the members of the church and friends who felt interested organized a Sabbath School; and in 1866, the pulpit was moved to the back of the church house and the pews turned around. The Concord Association, of which the Ghent church was then a member, was divided into four districts. The other churches were Carrollton, Whites Run, Sharon, Warsaw, and Lick Creek.

In 1857, the following entry was made on the minutes: "Whereas the Disciples of Christ challenged the Reverend T. J. Fisher to a discussion of the distinctive differences between the Disciples and the Baptists, we as a Baptist church are unwilling that the discussion should come off at any other place than Ghent. As the challenge was given here, the discussion should come off here, and the use of our house is tendered to them to debate in".

In 1857, a committeeman was appointed to represent the Ghent church on a committee of the association, whose duty it was to select a missionary, correspond with the churches, and keep the missionary on the field.

The first record of the observance of "Thanksgiving" by the church was in 1860. September 30, of the first year of the War Between the States was spent in fasting and prayer.

W. H. Williams began the first of his series of four pastorates in Ghent in December, 1867, and ended his last in March, 1889. The

period was interspersed by the pastorates of W. S. Keene, W. S. Jermayne, G. W. Grvin, S. G. Skillman, S. F. Thompson, T. W. Beagle, R. H. Buckley, and A. N. White.

Originally the white and "colored" people were under the same covenant and governed by the same rules, although the latter had no voice in the government of the church. Six years after the war which gave them their freedom, the Negro members formed a church of their own, the mother church granting them letters of dismission.

In 1875, after much debate, it was decided that an organ should be used in church worship. The same year the annual salary of the pastor was set at \$1,000, and collections were taken at stated times for missions.

An effort was made in 1883 to raise money to build a parsonage. This resulted eventually in the purchase of a house for that purpose. It was later sold for \$900 and the funds applied to the building of the present parsonage.

Following the pastorate of C. W. Dicken from April, 1889, to August, 1890, the church was blessed with the ministry of Dr. E. N. Walne, who married a Ghent woman, Claudia McCann. They went from this church to a mission field in Japan, where they did notable work for forty-two years.

It was during the pastorate of Dr. Walne that the Woman's Missionary Society was organized in June, 1891, at the home of Mrs. Fizzie Stephenson. Among those present were Mrs. J. J. McCann, Mrs. Belle Lyons, Mrs. Jennie Baker, Mrs. Fred Stacy, Mrs. W. H. Williams, Mrs. Sue Lillard, Miss Maggie LeCompte, Mrs. Mattie Scott, Miss Ida North, Miss Laura Craig, Mrs. Jan Southard, and the hostess's daughter Margaret, now Mrs. T. C. Howard. The first president of the society was Miss Laura Craig, who served for thirteen consecutive years.

During the pastorate of J. W. Loving from June, 1892, to February, 1895, a new organ was bought.

After two years, during which H. Denning led the flock, R. C. Hubbard was initiated. Under his leadership the church held its centennial. At this celebration there was a large assembly, including many from neighboring towns and counties. The anniversary sermon was preached by the able and brilliant Dr. T. T. Eaton. Of the 187 church members, 95 answered to the roll call. The meeting was pronounced "one of the most helpful the church has had for many years."

The same year, 1900, Whites Run Association was organized. The churches of this association were Bramlette, Cane Run, Carrollton, English, Ghent, Jordan, Liberty Station, Warsaw, Whites Run, Worthville, and Port Royal.

R. C. Hubbard served until May, 1902, and was succeeded by H. F. Searey. During his term a reunion meeting with a basket dinner was enjoyed in 1904, the Sunday School was taken under direct control of the church in 1906, and a "light machine" was installed in 1907.

On June 1, 1908, W. S. Coakley came to Ghent as pastor. Wedding bells were soon ringing for he, like Dr. Waling, chose a bride from his flock, the wedding taking place in the church house in the presence of a large number of friends. In November, 1910, while Evangelist Haymore was assisting, the church experienced a great religious revival and heard many professions of faith. During his five years ministry "Elder Coakley" saw the beginning of a Baptist Young People's Union, the organization of the Four Mile Sunday School as a branch of the Ghent Church, and the purchase of individual communion sets.

In July, 1913, came R. F. Doll. He was a gifted singer as well as an able pastor, and under his guidance the small organ was replaced by a used Vocation organ costing \$275. After about a year the church sold this Vocation and bought through the Carnegie proposition a pipe organ, which was installed October 9, 1915.

Between the going of R. F. Doll in December, 1914, and the coming of L. T. Wright in June of the following year, plans for the new parsonage were adopted. The total disbursements proved to be \$2,989.84, for the house, and at a cost of \$15 it was enclosed by a hedge fence. On March 13, 1915, Will Travis was employed as housekeeper and organ pumper, with the stipulation that no one be allowed to pump the organ but the housekeeper, and he has been the faithful janitor ever since.

The early method of financing the church was by sending out individual collectors. The Simplex Envelope System was adopted in 1912, and in 1915, it was succeeded by the present Duplex type of envelope.

A. K. Johnson was pastor from 1917 to 1919. During his last year electric lights were installed in the church and parsonage at a cost of \$308.42.

Following a year's pastorate of L. A. Parker, during which the women bought a piano, the church was supplied for eight months by Dr. A. B. Langston, a returned missionary from Brazil and husband of the second foreign missionary from Ghent Church, the former Foe Duguid.

B. B. Smith was pastor from March, 1921, to September, 1923. In 1925 the cupola on the church was cut down in height.

During the pastorate of C. B. Jackson from December, 1923, to July, 1926, the plans for the annex and heating plant were drawn up, adopted, and completed. These called for an expenditure of \$4,500.

Following Roy Niager, who served from December to June, 1929, Paul A. Wieland became pastor in October, 1929, and remained five years. He initiated the Daily Vacation Bible School.

In May, 1934, the wording of the church constitution was changed to read "five members" necessary for a quorum instead of "five male members."

From February, 1935, to October, 1937, James F. Brewer was minister. In 1936, the basement of the parsonage was remodelled for the use of the younger children in Sunday School, and the part of the church lot which had once been a grave yard but from which the grave stones had long since been removed, was freed as a quiet ground.

For a brief time W. T. Edwards filled the pastorate. He was followed by W. Malcolm Fuller, who served from July, 1938, to December, 1941.

F. Raymond Dyke, who served from February, 1942, to May, 1944, proclaimed the gospel on the street as well as in the house of worship.

During the pastorate of J. Haskell Quigley from September, 1944, to August, 1946, the time worn pulpit Bible was replaced by a new one.

On September 1, 1946, J. Thornton Williams was called at a salary of \$30 per week. He saw the **Western Recorder** put into the hands of every family of the church, the salary of the janitor raised to \$20 per month, and the purchase by the church in 1947 of a Hammond electric organ.

Upon the resignation of J. Thornton Williams, H. M. Gregory, Jr. was called immediately to take his place on December 13, 1948. Under his leadership the parsonage basement has been converted into a church kitchen, a young peoples' choir has been organized, the Sunday School attendance has gone well above the 100 mark, and other improvements are in progress. "Brother Gregory" is still the beloved and efficient pastor.

In conclusion, the historians beg leave to apprehend this brief editorial comment.

When the Ghent church was organized, it was an outpost of the advancing forces of Christianity. Now it is in the very heart of the greatest Christian nation of the world. Then our church was a voice crying in the wilderness. Now it is an army, a great and victorious army, pushing its conquests to the limits of the inhabited world. While we rejoice over the glorious past, of which we are the heirs, let us rejoice more over a present so full of privilege and a future so bright with hope and so resplendent with promise.

The End