

Centennial Anniversary of Rocky Fork Church 1921 ---J. H. HARDY

The one hundredth anniversary of the constitution of Rocky Fork church, near Columbia, Mo., was commemorated in a meeting held on the fifth Sunday in July, the meeting commencing on Friday before at 2 p. m. The ministers present were Elders L. T. Sapp, Ira Turner, Walter Cash, and the pastor, Elder J. H. Hardy. Elder Cash, preached each day and Elder Sapp preached Saturday night.

The subject for the sermon Sunday morning was the doctrine of the atonement, as this is the distinguishing doctrine of the Primitive Baptists. The Primitive Baptists stand today where the church has stood in all the centuries as to what Christ accomplished in his death, and the certainty that his blood was not shed in vain in any instance.

After the morning sermon there was an intermission for lunch and when the congregation was called together again, Elder J. H. Hardy read a historical sketch of the church which he had prepared from the church minutes. The closing remarks were made by Elder Cash, and the meeting closed with extending the hand of love and fellowship.

THE CONSTITUTION AND ARTICLES OF FAITH OF THE PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH KNOWN AS ROCKY FORK AT HINTON, MISSOURI

"This day, 26th of July, 1821, we whose names are hereunto annexed have covenanted and agreed to live together in a church capacity, on the following principles, VIZ.:

"Art. 1. We believe in the only true and living God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost and these three are one.

"Art. 2. That the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice.

"Art. 3. We believe in the doctrine of election, and that God chose his people in Christ before the foundation of the world.

"Art. 4. We believe in the doctrine of original sin, and in man's impotency to recover himself from the fallen state he is in by nature, either in whole or in part, by his own free will and ability.

"Art. 5. We believe that sinners are justified in the sight of God, only by the righteousness of God imputed to them.

"Art. 6. We believe that God's elect shall be called, converted, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit during this life.

"Art. 7. We believe the saints shall be saved by grace and never fall finally away.

"Art. 8. We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of Jesus Christ, and that true believers are the only proper subjects, and that baptism is by immersion.

"Art. 9. We believe in the resurrection of the body, and general judgment, and that the punishment of the wicked and the joys of the righteous will be eternal.

"Art. 10. We believe that ministers have no right to the administration of the ordinances, only such as are regularly baptized, ordained and set forward to the work of the ministry."

The following are the names of the eighteen persons who signed the original constitution and became the nucleus around which have gathered hundreds of others to establish

and maintain a church home for the Lord's people, which has been under the providence of God, preserved to this day, and has provided a haven of rest for the weary pilgrims from life's rudest tempests:

Zachariah and Malinda Jackson, Mary and Rosanna Slocumbs from Chariton church, Howard Co., Mo.; Thomas and Casy Tipton, Smith and Nancy Turner, and Dolly Barnes, from Mt. Vernon church, Boone Co., Mo.; Hiram Phillips from Little Bonne Fern me church, Boone Co., Mo.; Hiram Crews from Freedom church, Gararre Co., Ky.; Polly Williams, Caleb and Lovey Fenton from Mays Lick church, Mason Co., KY.; Phebe Goslin from the church at Johnson; Lewis and Rhoda Smith from the church at White Oak Pond, Madison Co., Ky. Sally Hendricks from Tates Creek church, Madison Co., Ky.

Their order in constituting themselves into a religious body was witnessed by Elders Edward Turner, Thomas Henson and Robert Dale and Brethren Thomas Todd and Reuben Riggs.

At the first meeting of the church they agreed to be known and called by the name of Freedom, but at the regular meeting of the same body in April 1822, they agreed to be known and called by the name of Rocky Fork. It is presumed it was because there was another church in the association called Freedom. At their first meeting they designated the fourth Sunday in each month as their regular time of meeting, and ordered a letter prepared to present to the association, and appointed a committee to draft rules of decorum. Rocky Fork church was at once admitted into Mt. Pleasant association, which held the same doctrinal principles as those upon which the church was constituted. Time forbids that we give here their articles of faith.

The churches composing the Mt. Pleasant association were Mt. Pleasant, Salem, Mt. Zion, Bethel, Rocky Fork, Cedar Creek, Salem (Coat's Prairie), Providence, Lebanon, Columbia, Happy Zion, Mt. Ararat, Little Bonne Femme, Chariton, Mt. Gilead, Mt. Vernon, New Hope, Dover, Nettle Meeting House, Union, Liberty (Fulton), Mt. Moriah, Sugar Creek, Middle River, Freedom, Muscle Fork, Little Union and Mt. Vernon.

The twenty-eight churches had a total membership of 1,174. Her correspondence at that time, 1826, was Cuivre, Fishing River and Concord, with all of which Rocky Fork is in correspondence today, either directly or indirectly.

Salem association was organized at a meeting which convened with Cedar Creek church in Callaway Co., Mo., on Oct. 20, 1827. A committee composed of one member from each church framed a constitution identical in principle, and nearly so in words, as that of Mt. Pleasant association from whence they came. It was not for any deviation, either in doctrine or practice on the part of either side that they formed the new association, but purely for convenience.

The churches entering into the organization of Salem association upon the principles of faith and practice held by Rocky Fork and her sister churches today, were, Little Bonne Femme, Mt. Zion, Rocky Fork, New Providence, Cedar Creek, Salem (Coat's Prairie), Union, Providence, Liberty (Fulton), Columbia, Middle River, Freedom and Enon. Two years later, Goshen and New Salem were admitted, three years later Concord, and seven years later Nashville was admitted. The original thirteen churches show a total membership of 511.

In 1836 there was present from Mt. Pleasant, a corresponding association, two letters and two sets of messengers. Neither were received, but a committee was appointed to investigate the matter. The next year, 1837, Salem association met with Rocky Fork church. At this time the committee made its report, which was received and acted upon, and agreed to correspond with the anti-missionary party. It was proposed also to correspond with the missionary party, which was rejected. For this reason, Elder James Suggett, moderator, and Elder R. L. Thorn as clerk, withdrew from the association. Elder T. P. Stevens and Overton Harris were chosen moderator and clerk.

New Liberty church had been constituted by thirty-three members who had refused to go into Little Bonne Femme association with New Salem church, and in 1833 was admitted into Salem association.

In all these severe trials it is useless to say that the hearts and faith of men have been tried, good and honest people have differed in their opinions concerning the teaching of God's word to such an extent that they could no longer live together in peace and fellowship, and precious brethren have been separated. Today finds Salem association composed of four churches, numbering about 500 members living together in sweet peace and fellowship upon the same principles of faith and practice of the fathers of a century ago.

We mention this that those of us who live to this day may be assured that the problems of former days were not easy nor the burdens light.

There has been with Rocky Fork, as with every other true church, problems that could not be rightly solved by human wisdom, which has caused them, as it has the saints of all ages, to seek divine light and wisdom.

Nor is their faithfulness reflected alone by their standing in the association, for the church has had many trials, and the records show where they stood on many important subjects. When she had passed only her fourteenth milepost, and so many of the churches (Baptist churches) of Missouri were organizing societies of various kinds, Rocky Fork sent the following reply to the Baptist Centennial convention (March, 1835): "The church, obtaining a request from the Baptist Central convention to the Baptists of Missouri, and desiring to give them their views on the proposed constitution of said convention, agrees to answer them as follows: The Baptist church of Christ at Rocky Fork believe the Missionary society, the Bible society, the Tract society, the Temperance society, and Sunday school Union society, with all their limbs and auxiliaries, have been the means of bringing much scandal and disgrace in the church, and do declare a non-fellowship with them as religious institutions, believing they are unauthorized in God's book."

Then again, in the record of November, 1898, we find a resolution concerning the conduct of two former pastors who had labored among them, and with the blessings of the Lord had baptized many of their number, as other records show, but who had stepped aside, and as they believed, were teaching things not in accord with the primitive doctrine and practice of the church. The following resolution passed at the ratio of 13 to 1: "Whereas Elders James Bradley and E. H. Burnham have departed from the doctrine and practice of the Primitive Baptists, by teaching that the preached or written word is the means by which sinners are regenerated or born again, and by advocating the establishment of Sunday schools in all the churches, therefore be it "Resolved, that

they and their co-laborers be debarred from preaching in our church house, and we hereby instruct our housekeeper to lock the door against all such."

Evidently, throughout all the years Rocky Fork church has believed their second article of faith. They have believed that God's word is an infallible guide to them in faith and practice, and earnestly endeavored to find a "thus saith the Lord" for all their doctrinal foundation. Surely we can find no fault with that disposition, and may their steadfastness be an inspiration to us to ask for the old paths, "and go forth by the footprints of the flock."

Now a word as to their practice. How have they builded upon their foundation? They started out by appointing a time for the service of their God--a good beginning. They held union meetings with other churches of their faith and order, and visited and worshipped their Lord together. It appears they desired not to "neglect the assembling of themselves together." I think they desired to fulfill the divine injunction to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." With this desire for the lives of the members to be an ornament to the doctrine of grace they have recorded a few rules, one of which we will notice now.

In January, 1834, a rule was passed which reads this way: "Any male member missing two meetings shall be sent for." I believe they should have included the sisters also. They seemed to carry this one out. There is on record many times where brethren have been visited by a committee from the church because of nonattendance at the regular meetings of the church. Usually they came and made proper acknowledgements, but a few did not and were dropped from the roll. As a rule the members seemed to value the standing of the church in the community, and their own standing in the church.

One brother appeared before the church and informed the church that he had had a disagreement with a neighbor and had been guilty of using language that was dishonoring to his God and a disgrace to the church. The church heard him, beheld his sorrow and repentance, and restored him to fellowship.

Two points in this incident are worthy our special notice. The first is, the brother realized (though no member of the church knew it and no charge had been preferred against him) that when he had committed an act dishonoring to his God and a disgrace to the church that he was not in fellowship with the church. May you and I remember that, for the church does not stand for things that are dishonoring and disgraceful. The other point is, that the brother knew that the only way he could feel in full fellowship with the church (and you know fellowship is a feeling) was to go to her, confess his fault and receive forgiveness with all its sweet evidences. May we not forget.

Another incident we will relate, not because it may appear funny or ridiculous, but because it represents a real condition men had to contend with then as now. You and I may imagine it was easy in those good old days to be a devout Christian, but it was just as much of a warfare then as today, for they possessed the same disposition, the same carnal nature as we do today. The incident was like this: A brother complained to the church that a certain brother had said that Brother Jackson had a devil in him as big as a bulldog. Admitting this accusation might be true (however Brother Jackson's record in the church leads me to believe it untrue), does that justify a brother in saying that of a weaker brother? I think not. Does the love for the fellowship of the church, and a desire for her high standing in the community, justify the other brother in bringing the matter to

the attention of the church? If done in the right spirit, I think it does. There are many things of interest on these lines, but time forbids that I mention more.

With a short sketch of the church's meeting houses and its pastors, I close.

In April 1822, the committee previously appointed for the purpose, presented plans for a meeting, house. They had selected a location one-fourth mile south of St. Charles road on C. Fenton's land near a spring. For good reasons the house was not built there, but on another location, near Richard Jones' on the Huntsville road in 1822. I presume that is the present location of the church. In 1872, a new house was built on the old site. There was probably one built between the time of those two but I failed to get the date. This house was destroyed by fire and the present house built.

The church has had many pastors and distinguished visitors during the past century.

Elder Thomas Henson, her first pastor, served from 1821 to 1829, eight years.

Elder Thomas Payton Stevens served from 1829 to 1840, eleven years.

Elder Peter Kemper served from 1840 to 1873, thirty-three years. The faithful labors of Elder Kemper are worthy of special notice. He served the church continuously for thirty-three years. The records are complete with the exception of a few leaves being lost out of the book. During this period it is only recorded once that there was no meeting on account of bad weather; only twice that he did not act as moderator, and one of those times he was absent on account of sickness, and his death occurred before the next regular meeting.

Elder E. H. Burnham served from 1873 to 1877, four years.

Elder Wm. H. Powell served from 1877 to 1882, five years.

Elder Jas. W. Bradley served from 1884 to 1887, three years.

Elder Benjamin H. Owings called in 1888, died four months later.

Elder Ira Turner made his first visit to this church in April 1889 and was called to the care of the church in May 1889. After having the confession of faith read he accepted the call, and served as pastor until November, 1896, seven years.

Elder Walter Cash made his first visit to the church in June 1891.

Elder G. E. Edwards was called in 1896, but moved away after one month.

Elder W. M. Startzman was called in 1897, but for a few years meetings were not held regularly nor records well kept. He served to about 1901.

Elder B. F. Query served from about 1901 to 1908, seven years.

Elder S. L. Pettus served from 1908 to 1915, seven years.

Elder Jerry Brown served from 1915 to 1918, three years.

Elder J. H. Hardy called in 1918

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