

Prairie Home Baptist Church

Prairie Home, Missouri 65068
(660) 841-5262

Hal McNeal, Pastor
10:00 a.m. Sunday School
11:00 a.m. Worship Service

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|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Township: | T-47-N | Organized: | 1890s |
| Range: | R-15-W | Disbanded: | No |
| Section: | 20 | Active: | Yes |
| Map: | Click Here | Updated: | July 19, 2005 |

Cemetery: There is no cemetery associated with this church.

Area: Prairie Home, Missouri

Records: The early church records were lost. The location of the rest of the church records is unknown at present.

History:

Home of Prairie Home Baptist Church Reveals Struggle of Builders From "Memorabilia of Cooper County", 1990

"I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord."

Sometime during the early '90's the Baptists living in Prairie Home began to feel most urgently the need for a house of worship. The Baptist churches nearest them were the ones at Providence and at Pisgah, and with the roads mere lanes thru the woods then, practically hub-deep in mud through the long winters and late springs and almost equally as deep in dust in the hot, dry summers, the task of getting to meet was one that tried the stoutest hearts, and only the most devout managed to negotiate it perhaps a few times each year. Thus the folks who really needed it most, were, perforce, kept without the fold. At that time the only means of transportation were the horse, the mule, the farm wagon, the time honored spring wagon, with an occasional "surrey" owned only by the most prosperous who, then as now, were not always the most godly.

Talk Leads to Action

The main topic among the Baptist men when they got together which was more often than the women, with their many household duties and the wants of their numerous progeny to attend to, could manage it, was "we must have a meeting house of our own." To quote from the late Mark Twain's famous remark about the weather "Everybody was talking about it but nobody did anything." It remained for two godly women to take matters into their own hands and do something about it. They were Mrs. W.H. Ellis Sr., mother of the present W. H. Ellis, at Woodland, and Mrs. Gray Thomas, mother of W.E. Thomas, of Kansas City and of Mrs. Anne Gray Smith, of Marshall. So, one morning, bright and early they hitched to the family "buckboard" "Old Dick" the Ellis family horse, (beloved by the Ellis children who naturally resented their old Dick being removed daily from their play) and started out on their rounds of soliciting funds for a church building, returning each evening worn and weary, but jubilant over the few dollars they had succeeded in getting pledged, rejoicing in their work for the Master. Thus was the ball start rolling, gaining momentum each day until finally the church building was assured. Sam Carpenter, father of George A. Carpenter, was the largest single contribution.

A lot on the west side of the village was purchased from the late Dr. S.M. Teel, himself a Baptist, and plans went forward for the building, a crude wooden structure possessing neither beauty of

line nor adornment, but even so, a place of their own, a house of shelter and a house of God. The building committee was W.H. Ellis, Geo. S. Stemmons, and the late Joel Byler and Sam Carpenter, but they did not fool round with architects, blueprints or any such newfangled notions. The church was properly organized under the direction of the Rev. Tate, drawing from the membership of the Providence and Pisgah churches principally, the charter members lined up and everything ready for the dedication of the building.

Charter List Lost

Owing to the loss of the early church records we have been unable to get a list of the charter members and also the name of the minister who preached the dedicatory sermon, some of the charter members we have consulted insisting it was the Rev. S.M. Brown, of Kansas City, because no Baptist church of that day considered itself properly dedicated unless he did it; some of them giving the resident pastor at that time of the Boonville Baptist Church, still others saying that it was the Rev. Milford Rigg, who was at one time at the head of the Home for Aged Baptists at Ironton. Be that as it may, the church was dedicated on the second Sunday of May 1896, but without the presence of the Mrs. Ellis, Sr., who had helped to make the occasion possible, as she had died the previous month, secure in the knowledge that her dream of a church house had come true. The great day finally dawned with two long services, at which the children, lined up and draped around the edges of the rostrum for lack of room, and too close to the pastor to allow for any undue levity, suffered untold agony at the long period of inactivity, to say nothing of their discomfort at having their usually free and untrammelled feet confined within the torturing bounds of "Sunday" shoes, of the fashionable "toothpick" variety. Sam Ellis, then a little boy, remembers nothing of the sermon but he does remember his tortured toes. "At long last came the dinner hour, but no basket dinner on the grounds that day, tho everybody took a crowd of relatives and friends home with him. What was a big dinner to them when they were having untold spiritual nourishment, such a "feast of reasons and flow of soul?"

The first couple married in the church was Nora Don Carlos and Leslie Smith.

The first board of deacons was W.W. Ellis, George S. Stemmons, and Robert Hornbeck tho Mr. Hornbeck removed shortly after that to Jamestown. The first pastor, who came once a month, was the Rev. S.B. Whiting, at the munificent salary of \$250 per year. For years the Sunday School was kept alive by a faithful few: George S. Stemmons, supt; Mrs. Anne Gray Smith, organist; Miss Sadie Mills, (herself a member of the Walnut Grove Christian Church) chorister; and Graham Ellis as the main body of the Sunday School, with occasional additions of a few of the other Ellis children, notably Mary and Sam; and the late Miss Sallie Richie who faithfully and lovingly attended to her lowly duties as "door keeper in the house of her Lord," until she decided that some of the church women were not pleased with the quality of her work, and then it was all off, and she did not mean "maybe," Later, the school attendance was increased by the Methodist children who had their own Sunday School in the afternoon in the lower story of the old Masonic building (later burned) which was at that time their place of worship until they built about 1916 or 1917, their own commodious church in the village. We must not fail to make mention of the late James B. Brosius, who though himself a Presbyterian, was always in his place and as he was afflicted with deafness, sat close to teacher or pastor that he might not miss a word.

"Pup" A Regular Attendant

A history of the Baptist church in Prairie Home would not be complete without mention of "Pup" Stemmons, the Stemmons' family dog, who for years never missed a service. No matter how sound asleep she might be, at the first peal of the bell summoning to worship, up she'd get, make her toilet by a few shakes of her brown, woolly coat and off she'd go to meeting, where she took her place with decency and decorum, thereby setting a good example in her faithful dumb beast way, to many of us who do not always respond so readily to the call to service.

Edward Ellis was the first clerk of the church and a very efficient one whose faithful accounts of the work done are lost, much to our regret. Some of the early ministers were J.D. Odom, Rev. White, W. T. Russell, followed by W.M. Tipton, all of them serving the church once a month. Rev. Tipton first agitated the question of a parsonage which became a reality about 1915, built in the east end of town just back of the present church building. Rev. L.E. Hedrick and family were the first to occupy it, the church at that time having gone to "half time" and then to "three quarters time" and finally "full time" under Rev. W.B. McGraw, successor to Rev. Hedrick. The pastors in order following Rev. McGraw were: J.B. Smith, C.W. Kent (who died during his pastorate at Prairie Home) E.H. Michalkowsky, L.E. Brown, O.A. Blaylock and the present young pastor, G.E. Purvis, under whose enthusiastic leadership the church has taken a new lease on life.

Membership Grows

The membership has been constantly building up by means of conversions. Baptists moving into the community, and revivals held annually since the organization of the church without a single omission that we have been able to find any record of, sometime as many as 50 uniting with the church at that time as was the case in 1935 during a series of meetings held by the Rev. Jno. F. Vines, of Kansas City.

During the pastorate of the Rev. McGraw, and largely through his efforts, the membership was made "new church conscious." So, preaching often about it and holding "pep" meetings, the present beautiful church, a \$35,000 building perhaps the most commodious rural church in the state was made possible. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hornbeck donated the lot on the village Main Street, plans went forward, and the church erected to meet its growing needs. The building was dedicated on June 16, 1921, the Rev. S.M. Brown, of Kansas City, preaching the dedicatory sermon, with other sermons preached in the basement and on the grounds to the overflow crowd who came from far and near to attend. A dinner long to be remembered by its variety and quantity was served on the grounds to the crowd at noon, each housewife having baked five or six cakes, twice as many pies, and cooking other things in proportion so that no one would be turned away hungry.

On The Upgrade

The church, tho suffering its occasional depressions throughout the years is manifestly on the upgrade with its graded Sunday School using the six point record system, and definitely on its way to attaining the denominational Standard of Excellence; its several B.T.U. organizations; its active W.M.U. with monthly meetings and which has clothed a child at the denominational orphanage at Pattonville since 1925; its weekly prayer service; its monthly workers' conference; and with every one working for the growth of the church in all of its departments. Membership reported at the 1936 annual Association by the church clerk, H.L. Carpenter, was 377. Chas. Miller is Sunday School Supt.; Albert Hornbeck, assistant; Mrs. Addie Johnson, secretary - treasurer, with her several department assistants; Adella Patrick, pianist; and each class is organized. The church has maintained two Daily Vacation Bible Schools, one last year and one now in progress. The Board of deacons is: J.C. Hornbeck, Dr. A.L. Meredith, Perry Dungan, Morton Tuttle, J.D. Byler, W.H. Ellis, R.W. Lacy; C.S. Platt, George A. Carpenter, H.L. Carpenter, George S. Stemmons, J. T. Alexander, Dr. Meredith is also the church treasurer and one of its most ardent supporters in every branch of the work. He is moderator of the Concord association and one of the most outstanding laymen in the state, and is a member of the State Executive Board of Directors.

Truly Prairie Home Baptist church has come a long way since those two saintly women hitched up "Old Dick" that sunny morning and started on their rounds of collecting funds for a House of God.

Note: I am indebted to the following for information on the early history of this church - W.H. Ellis, Mrs. Rylie Ellis Tuttle, Mrs. Robert Hornbeck, Mrs. Mary Ellis Simmons, Edward E. Ellis of Adair, Okla., and George S. Stemmons.

by Mrs. George S. Stemmons

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