

A

BRIEF HISTORY
OF

LIBERTY
BETHESDA
UPPER ZION
&
ZOAR
BAPTIST CHURCHES

PROLOGUE

The Baptist faith had a difficult time becoming established in Caroline County, especially during the year 1771. The Established Church was of the Episcopal faith, which was also the Established Church of England. St. Mary's Parish in this area objected to the other religions which, at that time, included Quakers and Presbyterians as well.

In 1922, a monument was dedicated in Bowling Green to the memory of six Baptist ministers who were imprisoned in the Caroline County jail in 1771. -The monument has since been moved to Carmel Baptist Church, the oldest church of this faith in the county. The names appearing on this monument are: Bartholomew Chewning (also spelled Choning), John Young, Lewis Craig, Edward Herndon, John Burrus and James Goodrich (also spelled Goolrich). Several of these names will appear in the following narratives of the four Baptist churches established in this immediate area. Proponent of these imprisonments was none other than Edmund Pendleton - coming to their defense was Patrick Henry of Hannover.

Such names as John Waller, James Pittman, James Ware, Hipkins Pitman and Younger Pittman will also appear in connection with these Churches: and these men were imprisoned, whipped or threatened during their ministry in this county, also. Some were imprisoned many times in the Fredericksburg jail and jails of surrounding counties.

Despite persecutions, the church had become strong enough by 1763 to hold organized services. It was later, however, during June, July and August of 1771 that most of the imprisonments took place.

On the following pages are brief histories of Liberty, Bethesda, Upper Zion and Zoar Baptist Churches. They played a major roll in the establishment of the Baptist faith in Caroline County, and especially in this immediate area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Facts for this brochure were taken from the following writings:

COLONIAL CAROINE by T. E. Campbell

IMPRISONED PREACHERS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN VIRGINIA
By Lewis Peyton Little

BETHESDA, LIBERTY BAPTISTS, CAROLINE COUNTY, VIRGINIA
By Rev. Norman Luck

Information for brochure compiled by Mrs. John Wright

LIBERTY BAPTIST CHURCH

Liberty, one of the first Baptist churches organized in this section, now serves as the Post Chapel of Fort A. P. Hill. The present building was constructed in 1850. Made of brick, it is a one room rectangular building with two front doors and two rear doors and galleries running along both sides and across the back.

The church's history, however, goes back further than this, for on August 23, 1796, a contract to build Liberty Meeting House was drawn up. (Early records of the church have been lost, but an authoritative copy of this contract was preserved by Miss Augusta Bradley. These papers were given to the Reverend Amos Clary in July of 1938 to have copies made. The Reverend Clary died in August of that year and to date the papers have not been found).

Under this early contract, James Pittman and William Taliaferro engaged Absalom Bradley to build Liberty Meeting House for the sum of 50 pounds. The building was to be 20 X 32 feet with a shed 10 feet wide, and there was to be a five foot pitch the entire length of the building. In this first building there were to be two galleries, 8 X 20 feet.

Liberty was a member of the Goshen Association until 1813; and the Reverend Hipkins Pittman is said to have been Liberty's first pastor. During the decade of 1790 to 1800, Reverend Pittman was a resident member of Reed's, now Mt. Horeb Church; and the distance was not too great for him to have ministered unto Liberty. (Reed's Church was actually an "outhouse" dedicated to the worship of God) It is said that Reverend Pettman was once threatened with the whip for preaching, but the threat was never carried out.

There are no records to show who served Liberty from 1819 to 1827 when Reverend Lawrence Battaile became the pastor. Under his care, Liberty grew and prospered. During the years 1830 to 1851, the names of 193 white and 396 Negro members appear on the church rolls.

There were many meetings held for the instruction and discipline of the colored members. Church discipline was strict and impartial. Throughout the years, charges were brought for non-attendance, intemperance, immorality, dishonesty, dancing and attending ball, barbecues and the theatre.

In these meeting, held on Saturday, many members related their experiences and were received for baptism. All business was transacted by the male members of the church.

The Reverend George W. Trice was pastor from 1848 to 1868. During this time, Liberty erected a new house of worship (present building) and it was dedicated in 1850. In August, 1868, a resolution provided for dropping the names of Negro members who wished to unite in forming a church of their own.

The following are some of the pastorates of Liberty Baptist Church and those serving from August 1868 to June 1906 also served Bethesda Baptist, Church:

Rev. James D. Coleman	August 1868 to 1878
R. H. Buckner	Supply Pastor
Rev. A. B. Dunaway	April 1879 to March 1886
Rev. A. G. Loving	November 1887 to May 1889
H. J. Ramsey	Supply Pastor
Rev. C. W. Trainham	July 1890 to December 1893
Dr. J. W. McCown	May 1894 to July 1895
Rev. James T. Eubank	November 1895 to December 1903
Rev. James Long	January 1904 to 1919
Rev. S. B. Overton	January 1920 to November 1923
Rev. Clyde Parker	Supply Pastor
Rev. Amos Clary	June 1925 to 1938
Rev. J. R. Noffsinger	January 1939 to August 1940

Dr. Ryland Sanford was pastor during the last few months of Liberty's existence. The in June, 1941, the church became a part of the military reservation now known as Fort A P Hill.

Bethesda Baptist Church

In May of 1847, a meeting was held at the Rappahannock Academy, formerly Old Mount Episcopal Church, for the purpose of organizing the minority who had withdrawn from Liberty Church. The withdrawal was in support of a resolution prohibiting the manufacture and sale of ardent spirits for ordinary uses by members of the church. Members violating this prohibition were subject to exclusion.

In the minority by only one vote, these brethren met at this Old Mount Church site (the first church built in Caroline) to organize a Baptist church to be called Bethesda Baptist Church of Caroline County.

The Rev. Lawrence Battaile was unanimously called as their first pastor.

In July 1847, the male members were authorized to secure subscriptions for a church building and a site of several acres was purchased from Addison L. Holloway. The bricks for the building were made on Mr. Holloway's land and the church compensated him for this privilege. The church, located on Route 614 about three miles nearer Rappahannock Academy than was Liberty Church, was dedicated in November 1848.

In October 1853, an invitation from Liberty was extended to Bethesda to assist them in a meeting in progress, and the invitation was accepted. Thus the two churches entered into a desirable cooperation, which endured through the years.

Pastor of the church included:

Rev. Andrew Broaddus, Jr.	January 1853 to December 1858
Rev. James D. Coleman	March 1859 to November 1878
Rev. A. B. Dunaway	April 1879 to March 1886
Also pastor of Bethel, Liberty and Round Oak	
Rev. A. G. Loving	November 1887 to May 1889
Also pastor to Liberty and Round Oak	
Rev. C. W. Trainham	July 1890 to December 1893
Also pastor to Liberty and Round Oak	
Dr. J. W. McCowan	1894-1895
Rev. J. T. Eubank	1895-1903
Rev. James C Long	1904-1905
Rev. B. C. Jones	1906-1910
Rev. Norman Luck	Oct 1910 to Jan 1935
Rev. F. J. Parker	June 1936 to 1941

In 1941 this church and grounds became a part of Fort A P Hill and the building was removed in 1950.

UPPER ZION BAPTIST CHURCH

In 1771 Lewis Craig of Spotsylvania came to Caroline County and preached within the bounds of Upper Zion. Up until that time only local residents had been involved in the preaching of the Baptist faith, primarily within the confines of St. Mary's Parish; and there had been no cause for alarm.

Craig was the first "outsider" to come into the county and John Waller, also from Spotsylvania, who preached with considerable success in the same community, followed him some time later.

In 1768 Craig and four others had arrested and confined in the Fredericksburg jail for preaching in Spotsylvania County. Strangely enough, John Waller was a member of the Grand Jury that indicted Lewis Craig.

Craig's ministry was short-lived, for he was imprisoned along with Waller, James Ware and James Pittman in 1773; but he helped to plant the seed that started Tuckahoe Church, later known as Upper Zion. This church was constituted in 1774 – the third oldest church in the county. Carmel (1772) and Reeds (1773) being the first of the Baptist faith.

John Shackelford, a native of Caroline, became the first pastor and remained so for 18 years, when he moved to Kentucky. He was imprisoned in Essex County for his religious activities there, and how he escaped imprisonment in Caroline remains a mystery.

The first Tuckahoe Church was a frame building located about four miles east of the last brick building, which was known as Upper Zion having taken that name in 1819. A second building was located just a mile or so north of this last location. The last building was erected in 1852 and the bricks were burned in nearby field. Mr. James Carneal had charge of the brickwork and did most of the work with his own hands. The building was dedicated in 1852.

Great religious revivals swept the State of Virginia 1788 and this church felt the force of this spiritual awakening. During 1811 and 1812 more than 100 were added to the Church; and by 1842 the membership had reached 356.

In 1871, an effort was made to assist worthy students for the ministry at Richmond College by asking for provisions and money. The sum of \$7.50 or eight bushels of cornmeal were subscribed.

The 150th anniversary of the Church was observed on July 6, 1924.

Pastors included: John Shackelford, John Sorrell, Andrew Broaddus, II, Robert V. Cole, George W. Trice, W.A. Baynham, A. J. Ramsey, Andrew Broaddus, III, R. L. Gay, E. W. Dowley, John Pollard, J. M. MacMavaway, R. E. Villines and L. H. Ritter – 17 in all. The longest pastorate was held by Reverend Dr. W. A. Baynham who served for 33 years.

When the 25th anniversary of the pastorate of Reverend Dr. L. M. Ritter was observed on October 20, 1940, there was no hint of the dissolution of the Church. Four months later, in February 1941, an announcement was made that the military reservation was to be acquired in Caroline County.

The church became a part of Fort A P Hill that year; the building was removed by German POW labor about 1945.

(NOTE: The first Baptist preacher to minister within the bounds of Upper Zion, according to the book, "Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia" by Lewis Peyton Little, was John Corbley, a rector of the Established Church. After his sermon, he was appointed the next Sunday to preach against the Baptists. His discourse made "not much impression" and afterwards when Waller & Craig were imprisoned, he offered to give Bond.)

ZOAR BAPTIST CHURCH

Zoar Baptist Church was organized on June 29, 1902. A group of 32 members, most of who had been members of Liberty and who had been granted letters of dismissal, met at Lent in Caroline County on that date. Previous to that date a chapel had been built near Lent, largely through the efforts of Mr. S. B. Hearn, a member of Liberty. He had contributed liberally and had given the ground on which the building was erected. A flourishing Sunday School had been conducted in that vicinity for several years.

The preamble and resolutions stated as the reason for the new organization that the members lived "at too great distance from the churches to which we belonged, to attend with our families the stated worship and Sunday School to be efficient, and believing we can be more efficient as church members and do more for the advancement of the cause of our Devine Master by laboring nearer our homes".

"Whereas we have erected a neat and comfortable chapel in our midst suitable for the public worship of God, therefore be it resolved that we organize a regular Baptist Church to be known as Zoar, and covenant together as follows: ---". The 30 names follow but records are incomplete and important omissions occur.

Reverend Ray Staples of Richmond College was the stated supply pastor for several months in the fall of 1902. Later Zoar became a part of the field composed of Bethel, Bethesda, and Liberty Churches; and Reverend James Long became the pastor of the field and lived in Bowling Green. He remained for a little over two years, resigning in June of 1906.

A Sunday School was conducted for about nine months of the year, generally closing for the winter months. Mr. S. B. Hearn was the superintendent for many years.

The Church sent delegates to the Hermon Association for the first 30 years and was also generally represented at the Sunday School Convention. During the 75 Million campaign in 1919, the church subscribed and paid a good part of its five-year subscription.

In 1921 the church invited the Hermon Association to meet with them but the invitation was declined on the belief the undertaking would be too much of a burden for so small a membership.

Following are supply and regular pastors of the church:

Rev. Ray Staples-a few months in 1902, Rev. James Long-January 1904 to June 1906, Rev. J. T. Eubanks-April 1907 to 1913, Rev. R. E. Villines-April 1914 to March 1915, Rev. R. P Rixey-August 1915, Rev. C. W. Stark-a few months in 1915, Rev. S. B. Overton-1916 to 1918, Rev. Dr. L. M. Ritter-April 1920 to December 1923.

At Various intervals during the next ten years, the pulpit was supplied by Rev. Hunter H. Newman, Rev. Amos Clary and others. No record appears after October 7, 1934.

Only 16 members could be found in May of 1941 when an effort was made to have a called meeting. Great changes had taken place in the community during the years. Through the efforts of Mrs. C. A. Christie, Sr., a meeting was held on May 21 1941 for the purpose of electing additional trustees to dispose of the church property which was to be acquired by the government for Fort A P Hill.

Though small in size, Zoar influenced the community and played its part in establishing the Baptist faith in Caroline County.

Liberty Baptist Church
Picture taken January 12, 1937
By Selma L Farmer



Bethesda Baptist Church
Picture taken January 11, 1937
By: Selma L. Farmer

Unknown date of picture. It was furnished by:
The Baptist Historical Society
At: Richmond University



ZOAR BAPTIST CHURCH

Upper Zion Baptist Church

Picture taken February 9, 1937

By Selma L. Farmer

