

Red Bank Baptist Church History



Before the "Church on the Hill"

It is widely known that Red Bank Baptist began in 1911 as Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, commonly called "The Church on the Hill." However, events as early as 1849 led up to the little Church on the Hill becoming a place for organization and ultimate worship. In a history of Red Bank written by Mr. Walter Wood, we find many interesting facts which cause us to give thanks once again for the founders not only of the churches in our community, but of the community itself. First of all, we must give some credit to our good friends, the Methodists. The following information is taken from Mr. Wood's history:

"The first settlers of the Red Bank community were predominantly Protestant, and principally of the Methodist and Cumberland Presbyterian faiths. Wherever they went, first thought was to erect a house where they could worship the Lord and educate their children. Someone could always be depended on to donate a plot of ground for church and school purposes and then the men would gather together and erect a building. The first mention of a church in Red Bank is reflected in the records in the Register's office in Hamilton County, where in Book 8, page 326, is recorded a deed from Alfred M. Rogers and William K. Gray, donating to the named trustees of the Hicks' Chapel Methodist Church, a three-acre tract of land in the 'dry valley,' in the Third District of Hamilton County, to be used for church and school house, with the provision in the event that the property ceased to be used for that purpose it would revert to the donors."

Red Bank Cemetery

There is no record of the organization of the Hicks' Chapel Methodist church. It is known, however, that it was a log building and that it stood just around the turn of the road leading to Read's Lake, just off of what was then known as the Moccasin Gap Road but now known as the Morrison Springs Road. A short distance to the east of the old meeting house was established the graveyard, as it was called then. Between the place where the old log church was located and the location of the "Church on the Hill" which was later to become the community meeting house, is the Red Bank Cemetery, which was then called only "the graveyard." Here today you may see the graves of many of the first settlers and their descendants.

No record of the cost of building the old meeting house was kept but, as it was built of logs, we can well believe that the cost was small and that it was built by the united labors of those that worshipped in it.

Pleasant Hill Church

The church was built in 1849. Eleven years went by and then the gathering clouds of the Civil War began to disturb the peaceful lives of the members of this church. Some of the members

went into the army of the Confederacy; others went the other way and joined the forces of the Union. Some never returned to the "old meeting house."

Then came peace. The war had ceased, and the returning soldiers came home to take up again the duties of civil life. By 1870, the old meeting house had become untenable through the passing of time and lack of care. People living in and near Red Bank decided to create a Union Church building, where all denominations would feel free to hold services. Alfred Rogers, a member of the Methodist Church and one of the donors of the site for the old meeting house, donated an acre of ground for that purpose.

Before the deed was given, and thirteen years before it was acknowledged and recorded, a subscription list was circulated and money was raised to build the church. It was to be a one room building with a seating capacity of about 150.

It is interesting to note that the donations for the building amounted to \$575.50 and that the cost of building this building, which was to be called "Pleasant Hill Academy," was \$575.60. A detailed list of the cost of the building follows:

Shingles \$ 40.00
Lumber 160.00
Carpentry work 242.00
Nails 22.70
Glass and putty 22.30
Sash 20.00
Lumber 6.40
Stove drum, and pipe 26.00
Hauling 8.50
Lumber for door and blackboard 2.75
Paint and oil .45
One lock, screws, hinges 2.90
O. S. Green's 600 feet of sheeting 6.00
O. S. Green's lumber bill 10.00 5
Pounds nails .35 2
Bolts for door .80
11/2 Bushels lime .45
Extra work 4.00
Total: \$575.60

Harmony Among Churches

Perfect harmony prevailed among the different denominations, and all worked together in a spirit of cooperation. The preacher from each denomination would conduct services at least once each month. Toward the last of the Union services, the Methodist preacher would occupy the pulpit of the church twice a month, the Cumberland Presbyterian and the Baptist preachers each once a month. Each Sunday, the congregation would be composed of practically the same people. The members of the choir were of different denominations, but the hymns were the same and the sermons were directed to all of the people.

One outstanding evidence of the harmony prevailing among the different denominations was a Union revival meeting that was held ending the second Sunday in May 1921. The three preachers participating were Reverend George N. Wiggins, Cumberland Presbyterian; Reverend Joe A. Maples, Baptist, and Reverend W. Earl Hotalen, Methodist. The meeting was very successful; a number of the converts accompanied the three preachers to Read's Lake and were baptized by immersion.

On Sunday, May 8, 1921, the converts of the three churches stood together before the chancel rail of the church and were later admitted into the respective churches of their choice, according

to the rites of that organization. The man's name might have been placed on either the Methodist or the Baptist roll and his wife's on the Cumberland Presbyterian. Later when the Methodist and Baptist congregations withdrew, the memberships would be transferred.

Red Bank, Tennessee

The community grew. In 1917, an electric car line was built to serve the people of Red Bank. The community began a rapid increase in population and the different denominations began discussing among themselves the advisability of forming separate organizations. The Methodists were the first to withdraw on October 14, 1923.

The story of how Red Bank got its name is an interesting one for historical records. This information was taken from an old diary belonging to J. C. Martin.

Until about 1881, the community was known as Pleasant Hill. At that time a post office was established here with George S. Hartman as postmaster. Mr. Hartman was notified that since there was another post office in Tennessee called Pleasant Hill, another name would have to be selected.

While considering this situation with his wife, Susan Ann, they looked out across the road from the office and noticed the very prominent red banks of the ditches. They decided that "Red Bank" would be a good name for the community and submitted this for approval. It was approved, and Red Bank became the legal name. Despite later efforts to change the name, it has remained. The name of the church remained Pleasant Hill until some time later, when it also was changed to Red Bank.

Red Bank Baptist Church

Red Bank Baptist Church (then known as Pleasant Hill Baptist Church) was organized on March 25, 1911, with seven members. Rev. A. P. Gallaher, who was pastor at the time of the organization of the church, was succeeded by Rev. J. I Morgan, 1912-13; Rev. C. H. King, 1913-16; Rev. G. ' King, 1916-17; and Rev. A. T. Hayes, 1917-19.

From a history of our church written by Mrs. William Crerar on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the church on this new site, we took the following:

"With only seven members it is needless to say this newly-organized church had quite a struggle to make any visible progress, but from the reports received from the older members of this church, much progress was made spiritually. In 1912, the church was taken into the Ocoee Baptist Association, reporting a gain in membership that year of seven by letter and seven by baptism, making a total of twenty-one members at the close of the church year."

People came to church then in two-horse wagons or in buggies, and many of them walked for miles to the services. Kerosene lamps were used to light the building for evening services, and those who had walked for miles for the morning service would return by foot at night."

Building on Ashland Terrace

In 1923, a lot was donated for the erection of a new church by Mr. J. H. Reynolds. This lot was located at the intersection of Redding Road and Ashland Terrace. With only 148 members at the time, the new building appeared to be an impossible task. At the close of the church year in 1923, the Finance Committee reported only \$600.00 in the Building Fund. The following Building Committee was appointed for the new church building:

G. M. Tuck, Chairman

T. C. Bright, General supervisor of building

Rev. J. A. Maples, Pastor
J. F. Atchley

Many of the members donated their time in building the church. Many of the men, after working on their jobs all day, would come directly to the church and work as late as they could, with their wives or children bringing their supper to them.

On May 3, 1925, the Baptists and Cumberland Presbyterians had their last combined services at the "Church on the Hill." The following figures are taken from the records of the Red Bank Cumberland Presbyterian Church:

May 3, 1925 - Sunday School attendance record

Attendance/Collections:

Primary Department 40/ \$.86

Junior Department 44/ .57

Fidelis Class 11/ .47

Beacon Light Class 20/ .42

Young Men's Class 17/ .75

Ladies' Bible Class 17/ 1.17

Men's Bible Class 35/ 2.65

Officers and Teachers 14

198/ \$6.89



A Dream of Several Years Realized

Rev. Joe A. Maples, who was pastor from 1919-26, was pastor when finally, on May 10, 1925, the building was complete enough to have services. There were 240 in Sunday School that day. Cumberland Presbyterian Church dismissed their morning worship services to visit with us.

The final details of the interior decorating and the installation of pews were not completed until July 1925. Dedication services were held July 12, 1925, with Dr. O. E. Bryan, secretary and treasurer of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, delivering the dedicatory sermon.

The Reverend J. C. Pitt and Rev. W. M. Griffitt served as pastors from 1926-28 and 1928-32 respectively, and Dr. C. M. Pickler followed in 1932.

In 1933, the first Vacation Bible School was held in our church with Dr. Pickler serving as principal. There were 134 enrolled, nineteen of these being leaders, and there was a daily average attendance of 106. The entire expense for this school was only \$19.38. Actually, the expense to the church amounted to only \$7.28, as \$12.10 was turned in through offerings and donations.

The depression of the thirties had its effect on the paying of the building debt, but the church was growing in numbers and, according to a newspaper clipping, the entire indebtedness was paid in 1937:

"When Red Bank Baptist Church opens its doors Sunday for regular services, it will be free of debt for the first time since its organization in 1911. Notes which the members have struggled to

pay were all burned, one by one, in services last Sunday as the Rev. C. I. Pickier, pastor, delivered a dedicatory prayer."



A Growing Congregation

When the original building was erected in 1925, it was thought there would always be enough space regardless of the growth of the community. However, by the time the indebtedness was paid in 1937, the congregation had already outgrown the building. In that same year another Building Committee was appointed for the erection of a new Sunday School wing:

Joe H. Smith, chairman
C. M. Huff
G. C. Yates
J. F. Atchley
C. L. Henry

The committee decided to build two stories of an educational wing, which was connected to the original sanctuary at the northwest corner. By 1941 this portion of the educational wing was outgrown; a third story was added to the building and the basement was finished for additional classrooms.

The Reverend Horace L. Smith became pastor in 1943 and remained until October, 1947. Brother Smith's entire ministry was at a time when we were in the midst of a world war. He met the needs of this church during a very crucial time.

Dr. Ralph E. Norton, who started his pastorate in February, 1948, recognized the need for more room in our first sanctuary. Another Building Committee was appointed:

W. A. Shearer, chairman
Joe H. Smith
J. F. Atchley
W. E. Haithcoat
C. M. Huff
W. H. Tittle Jr.

The balcony was then built, seating nearly 100 more for church services and housing four large adult classes. This was completed in 1949, at a cost of \$19,500, and was the only time in the church history that the money was already in the Building Fund.

Red Bank Baptist's Silver Anniversary: Still "Growing" Strong

In 1950 another Building Committee was appointed, consisting of:

Basil Welch, chairman
C. M. Huff
Cecil Roberts
Glenn Barnes
W. L. Baker
R. H. Troughton
C. K. Davis
S. D. Ford
Chester Frost

Construction was begun during 1950 on a second three-story educational wing. It was built on the southwest side of the original sanctuary, at a cost of approximately \$142,000. Formal opening of the new educational building was held on November 4, 1951. On that day the facilities for the first fulltime Kindergarten and Day Nursery, which opened that fall, were displayed for the first time.

May 7, 1950, stands out as one of the highlights in the church's history. On that Sunday, the church celebrated the Silver Anniversary of its services in the first sanctuary, especially honoring the charter members and those who had joined Red Bank Baptist Church on the first Sunday in the new building.