

ALDER BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH

Loss of records by fire destroyed precious history of the first years of Alder Branch Baptist Church but William D. Atchley, who lived his entire life in the community, wrote a historical sketch in 1911 to be read on Homecoming Sunday, May 14, 1911, which helps fill in spaces of history:

Providence Baptist Church sent a group of members to establish a preaching station, which remained under guidance of Providence Church until 1836. The new preaching station met in the home of Thomas Atchley Sr. until the first house of worship was built near the 'tag alders,' trees that grew along a branch near the church.

Probably after 1836 when Alder Branch became independent of the mother church, a house of worship was erected on the P. W. Sarrett farm. It was 30 or 40 feet in size, constructed of logs with no overhead ceiling. Services were called off in event of rain or bad weather.

J. J. Burnette wrote in 1919 that Elijah Rogers was the first pastor that he and Augustine Bowers were joint "founders of the church." Elijah Rogers pastored the church for about 32 years.

Reverend Rogers carried a New Testament in an inside coat pocket and while getting ready for a Saturday appointment, he found a pack of cards behind the barn where some of his boys had been playing. He put the cards in his coat pocket and went to church. Much to the surprise of the audience, when he put his hand in the pocket for his Testament, he pulled out the cards instead. Turning his embarrassment into opportunity, he proceeded to lecture on the sins of card playing.

Alder Branch joined the Tennessee Association of Baptists in 1897 when the church also became a part of the Sevier County Association, which was a new organization.

Problems over missions eventually caused a split in which the Reverend Samuel Pate and Absolem Abbot withdrew to organize a church at Union Grove called the Primitive or Hard Shell Baptist Church. Dissenters opposed missions, education, and other practices, except footwashing. Finally, the Hard Shell church disbanded. Elijah Rogers continued to lead the church to growth and prosperity.

Another split over the selection of a pastor, caused 15 members to withdraw to form a church called Sulphur Springs Baptist Church but the church failed and some of the dissenters rejoined Alder Branch, others Boyd's Creek. It is believed that Alder Branch had influence in beginning the Gist Creek Baptist church in 1869.

After 28 years, Alder Branch built a new frame church building on the

farm of W. O. Atchley near the C. A. Kyker home. The church had grown from about 20 members to 100 in 1858. Under direction of pastor William Wills, a Sunday School began. The church worshiped in the 1958 building until Pastor Noah Corum decided a new building was necessary but for the third time, some members withdrew to begin a Powder Springs Baptist Church which soon failed and members returned to Alder Branch.

Members decided to build the new church house during the pastorate of D. J. Manly, beginning September 2, 1881.

The oldest book of minutes begins at this point in history. According to records, the church met once a month on Saturday and Sunday. Reverend W. A. Masterson led the church to meet twice a month until fulltime services began November 4, 1934. The Reverend James A. Clark was the first full time pastor and Alder Branch was the only rural full time church in Sevier County at that time.

The Reverend Jesse Baker, president of Mossy Creek Baptist Church (forerunner of Carson-Newman), pastored from 1889 to 1892, leading the church to accept giving of means to support Christian education. On one occasion, an offering of \$3.40 went to Mossy Creek College for support of a student.

W. D. Atchley's historical sketch of Alder Branch Baptist Church concludes with these words: Brethren, let us be faithful to Him who gave His blood for the church and let us transmit it to future generations, pure and spotless. worthy to be called the bride, the Lamb's wife."

The pastor is Reverend Mike Rutherford. 1989.
Information provided by Anthony D. Roberts.