

PAW PAW HOLLOW BAPTIST CHURCH

One of the oldest churches in Sevier County, Paw Paw Hollow Baptist Church was organized December 22, 1802. It was “an arm” of the Boyds Creek Baptist Church, and it first took the name of “Fork of the French Broad and Holston River Baptist Church” because it was located between the two rivers in Knox County.

There were only 23 members when the church was organized, but at the end of 1990, there were 306 members. The church moved to Sevier County in March of 1820 and became known as the Paw Paw Hollow Baptist Church.

The church received numerical strength February 4, 1880 when the Palestine Baptist Church disbanded and its 69 members united with the Paw Paw Hollow church.

The name, “Paw Paw Hollow,” was taken from the location of the church in Paw Paw Hollow, a place teeming with Paw Paw bushes in the beautiful hollow. As time exercised its peculiar influence on pronunciation, many people began calling the congregation the “Paw Paw Holler” church and many still use that name. In fact, the church bore two signs for a long period of time. One identified the church as Paw Paw Hollow and the other as Paw Paw Holler.

During her long history, the church has had 36 pastors. From the first, the Reverend Thomas Hill, to the present 1991 pastor, Reverend Ronnie White, Paw Paw Hollow has had good leadership.

The church now occupies the fourth building since 1820. Built in 1940-41, it is made of cinder block and timbers with brick veneer and is located in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains at the intersection of Douglas Dam Road (Hwy. 139), and Thorngrove Pike in Sevier County.

The building today looks much different inside and out from the time it was built. In the late 1950s, the old heating system was replaced by a new heating and cooling system and from 1972 through 1977; changes have been made in the appearance of the building. Two new Sunday School rooms and rest rooms were added and brick covers most of the cinder blocks. In 1983, a baptistry and another Sunday School room were added and in 1990, an open-air fellowship pavilion was built on the church grounds.

History and arithmetic tells us the church is 189 years old in 1991, but the congregation has managed to retain much of the originality in worship services with the sincere prayer that God will continue to give strength and courage to continue surviving hardships as she has in the past.

“Long has the church indured...long may it live.”

Written by Robert P. Lusk.