

UNION VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

On the second Saturday of October 1872, several families who lived in the Union Valley Community met for the purpose of organizing a church. From the results of that meeting came Union Valley Baptist Church of Christ (later known as Union Valley Missionary Baptist Church). Among the charter members were such names as Johnson, Manis, Cowan, Holt, and Hicks. They voted to have preaching on the second Saturday and Sunday in each month.

The church was a charter member of Little River and Chilhowee Associations, and later became a member of the Sevier County Association, the exact dates are not known. The first record of a messenger being sent to the Tennessee Baptist Convention was in 1873 and delegates were sent each year to the State Convention and also the County Associational meetings. The first woman elected to serve as a delegate was in 1932.

It was thought that the first meetings were held in a log schoolhouse located at the corner of Union Valley and Union Valley Church Roads. The first church building was erected on the present church site. It was a small one-room building with double doors in the front. There were iron rods placed overhead to support the walls. Years later, the late Reverend Sidney Clark was a pastor. A story has been told that he was praying that any hindrance in the church be removed when one of the iron rods fell and hit one of the members on the head, a revival meeting started and many souls were saved. Later, probably as a result of the fallen rod, the sides of the church collapsed and services were moved back to the log schoolhouse until a new church could be erected.

In 1929, the men of the church cut logs and dragged them to a sawmill to get the lumber for a new church building. The pastor at this time was the late Reverend Gird Henry from the Beech Springs Community. He worked along with the members to build the church, which is currently being used.

In 1950, under the leadership of Reverend Henry C. Ruth, the church membership grew and there was a need for additional room. The members began digging a basement under the existing building. This was done by hand and the dirt was removed by carrying it out in five-gallon buckets. The rooms were finished "for the people had a mind to work."

Through the years, the Lord has blessed. A parsonage was built in 1958. A new educational building has been added to include a fellowship hall, a well-stocked library, a pastor's study, and a baptistery.

As the church grew so did the organizations within the church. Details are sketchy, but there is an early mention of "Sabbath School" later called Sunday School. There was a BYPU in the late thirties and Training Union was established in the fifties, which later was changed to Church Training. The women have always worked very hard

in the church and began having monthly “Class” meetings in the late fifties. The meetings were later called Baptist Women.

A mention of some of the pastors over the years has been made, however there are many, many others, too numerous to include, who have made a great impact on the church. The founding fathers saw a need for a church in the community and each generation has carried on. It still stands as a testimony to the words of Jesus, “Upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

By Elsie Gibson.