

WEARS VALLEY FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Wears Valley Baptist Church history began in the early 1800's soon after two early settlers from North Carolina discovered a beautiful cove near the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains.

As early as 1810 Wears Cove Baptist Church, membership of 57, lettered to the Tennessee Association of Baptists and continued as a member of the Association until becoming one of 21 churches organizing the Chilhowee Association. The Reverend James Saults was representative to the Association for Wears Cove in 1885 when the membership was 80, and the Reverend Mark Roberts was pastor.

In 1886, Wears Cove Baptist Church became one of the organizing churches of the Sevier County Baptist Association. When the new association first printed organizational dates of member churches, Wears Valley's date of organization was recorded as 1837. Although the original minutes of organization are not available, it seems safe to assume that the church had agreed for the clerk to submit 1837 as the correct organization date.

Although we have evidence of earlier activity in the Tennessee Association, the 1837 date has become recorded and confirmed in the historical records of our present Tennessee Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention.

There have been several names through the years: Wears Cove Baptist, Wears Valley Missionary Baptist, The Church With the Purple Doors (when the doors were painted purple), but in 1967 after several other Baptist churches had organized in the valley, the name was officially changed to Wears Valley First Baptist Church.

The first church building was a crude structure built of logs with no windows. Richard Crowson and Reuben Hatcher built it for the Methodists, but the Baptists also worshiped there. Shortly thereafter, the Baptists built their first church about a quarter of a mile up the cove from the Methodist Church. In the 1870s, this church blew down and again, the Baptists were allowed use of the Methodist building.

In 1886, both groups built new buildings. The Reverend J. D. Lawson preached the dedication sermons for both churches on Christmas Day, 1886. In 1956, Sunday School room's construction began. The new brick structure was designed to connect on to a new sanctuary later.

Laying of the cornerstone for the present sanctuary took place April 18, 1971. Reverend William Cope preached the dedication sermon and the beautiful modern marble building was dedicated with a note-burning ceremony August 26, 1973, pastor Richard Allen delivering the sermon.

Wears Valley has grown from 57 members to 230 in the 1980s. from a one dollar mission gift in 1886 to a mission offering of \$9,926. Property is valued at \$350,000.

First full time pastor, Reverend O. C. Craig, was called as pastor March 17, 1946, at first as half time but becoming full-time with a \$35 per week salary. He moved into the rented parsonage until the church bought the I. A. S purling property for a parsonage September 2, 1951. In 1973, a brick parsonage was built, but it was destroyed by fire in 1985. During 1986, a new, larger, and more modern pastorium was built on a larger lot where the pastor, Reverend Roy Gose, resides.

Wears Valley First Baptist Church is constituted on a framework of 18 Articles of Faith, advocated by the Southern Baptist Convention. There is also a church covenant making known the covenant relationship of a member to the body of the church.

Some of the 42 pastors serving the church are the Reverends J. Adams, Richard Evans, Eli Roberts, Mark Roberts, J. N. Clabough, S. G. Houser, J. J. Abbott, P. L. Bryan, W. E. Conner, J. W. Trentham, W. W. Baily, Samuel Atchley, Ernest Parrott, J. D. Lyle, William E. Parham, Ralph Clevenger, Marion Brock, Richard F. Allen, Drake Kimbrell, and Roy Gose, who became pastor in 1982.

Throughout the years, there have been many dedicated Christians who have worked to glorify God and build up His Kingdom through the Wears Valley First Baptist Church. May God's richest blessings always be received by the membership and may they, in turn, always be found in God's will.

Information from "*150th Homecoming Celebration.*"