

A Brief History of Rock Creek Baptist Church

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Beginnings

To begin the history of Rock Creek Baptist Church we must first give a brief history of our “mother” church. Canaan Baptist Church (the oldest Baptist Church in Jefferson County, the third oldest Baptist Church in Alabama), was organized in 1818. The church was accordingly constituted of eighteen members, eight males and ten females. Brother John Henry was their first pastor. He was pastor from 1818-1822.

Canaan Baptist (Bessemer) was originally located on the site of the 14th Street entrance to Cedar Hill Cemetery. This was a distance of about 10 miles to Rock Creek area. Some members of Canaan Baptist lived in the Rock Creek area. On April 1, 1820, these members petitioned Canaan to extend an arm to them and help them organize a church. These members, we can assume, saw a need for a church in their community, and from Rock Creek to Canaan Baptist would have been a great distance to travel in a buggy, or on a horse.

Brethren Henry, Moore, Hillhouse, Horn, and Fields were named a committee to look into the matter of organizing a church at Rock Creek. They reported that the doors of the church were opened and the following presented themselves for membership:

Joseph, Mary and Mary M. Brown, William and Patience Sanders, and Tamar Lee.

It is interesting to note that in 1994, Jean Holly Day and some other descendants erected a marker for William Sanders

That marker reads as follows:

William Sanders
b. June 1760 – D. March 1853
B. Cartert Co. N.C.
Father of Absalom Sanders
Son of Phillip and Sophia Sanders
Married Patience Benthall
C. 1782
Revolutionary War Soldier – N.C.

Those members of Canaan who became charter members of Rock Creek were:

Thomas and Winifred Young
James Lindsey
Nancy Waldrop
Christina Carpenter.

On May 25, 1820, Rock Creek Baptist Church was organized by Canaan Baptist Church and taken under its protection.

The original site of Rock Creek Baptist Church was on the hill to the west of Rock Creek on the Old Toadvine-Elyton Road. This is to the west of the new bridge that crosses Rock Creek on Taylor’s Ferry Road. I have read, and also been told, there are six unmarked graves at the original site of the church. According to Hosea Holcombe’s History of Baptists in Alabama, “Elder John Henry was the first pastor, but soon left.” Reverend Henry was pastor of Canaan, and several other churches, while he was pastor of Rock Creek Baptist Church. Hosea Holcombe also pastored this church, and others at the same time. He preached for Rock Creek generally from 1822-1828. Hosea Holcombe was called to preach at Rock Creek again in 1832. A glorious revival took place, and in just a few short months over 100 people were baptized.

Since Hosea Holcombe played such an important role in the beginnings of this church, we must honor him by telling of the Historical Marker on Highway 150 in Bessemer. It is inscribed as follows:

Hosea Holcombe 1780-1841. Alabama's
first church historian. In 1840 he
published his study, HISTORY OF RISE
AND PROGRESS OF THE BAPTIST IN ALABAMA.
Also, an evangelist and missionary. In
1818 moved to Alabama from Carolinas,
organizing five churches in vicinity.
President of Alabama Baptist Convention
1833-38. He was delegated to write church
history. Lack of cooperation led him to
travel over state to get material for book.
He died at Jonesboro home in 1841. Buried
in Sadler Cemetery 1 mile south.

Hosea Holcombe's last words were:

“Oh, I have done so little to promote
the cause of God. Could it be His will
to restore me, I should wish to live
longer that I might do more.”

A Slave Joins Rock Creek Baptist Church

Job was an African, who was brought to Charleston, S.C. in 1806, to become a slave. He accepted Christ as his Savior in 1812. He learned to read and write. He taught a Sabbath School for two summers in Abbeville District, S.C. He became a licensed preacher in 1818. Job is known to have been an acceptable preacher, and also very knowledgeable of the Bible.

In 1822, Mr. Edward Davis purchased Job and brought him to old Jonesboro, in Jefferson County, Alabama, to be his slave. Mr. Davis lived near Canaan Baptist Church in Bessemer. Mr. Davis and Job attended church at Canaan Baptist. In 1823 it is recorded by Hosea Holcombe, in his History of Baptist's in Alabama, that Job was received into Rock Creek Baptist Church. Job was a member of Rock Creek Baptist Church for four years. In 1827, he was among a group of members from Rock Creek Baptist Church that formed Roupe's Valley Baptist Church. Job reunited with Rock Creek Baptist Church. This was sometime between 1827 and 1833, because in 1833, Mr. Davis moved to Pickens County, Alabama. Job became a member of Pilgrim's Rest, under the care of Rev. Henry Petty in that County.

Job died on November 17, 1835 in Pickens County, Alabama. In less than 18 months his wife was also dead. Her last words were: "O tell me no more of this word's vain sore, etc." When she finished the verse, she closed her eyes on the world. Even though Job and his wife were in bondage, they still loved and honored God.

Hosea Holcombe, in his History of Baptist in Alabama said, "Few better preachers were to be found in Alabama in those days than Job. He lived the Christian and died the saint. He was generally loved and respected by all who knew him."

Other Known African American Members

1. Pryly - He petitioned a letter of dismissal in 1867.
2. Sarah Atwood - She petitioned a letter of dismissal in 1870.
3. Dick Atwood - He was excluded from the church in 1865 for long absence.
4. Amanda - She petitioned a letter of dismissal in 1867.
5. Mella - She petitioned a letter of dismissal in 1867.
6. Vance Williams - He petitioned a letter of dismissal in 1869.

A Period of Prosperity

In 1863 America's Civil War was raging. The Battle of Gettysburg had been fought, and 51,000 men were lost. The North suffered 23,000 casualties and the South had 28,000 casualties.

The Civil War years were prosperous years for the church. In 1863 at Rock Creek Baptist Church, the membership had skyrocketed to a record number of 137. The baptisms performed for the year 1863 were 37. Although this was not the highest number ever baptized, it is noteworthy because the following year (1864) only 1 baptism occurred. Only 3 years later in 1866, the membership was down to 39, with no baptisms. The pastor was paid \$101.00 in 1863. This is interesting, considering the pastor's salary for the previous year (1862) was \$52.00.

There are several Civil War veterans buried in the cemetery, so I am sure the congregation was greatly affected by the war. During those times of tragedy and despair I am sure the people would have desired and needed God more. The Civil War would have definitely been a time when people would have needed a refuge from the death and destruction that was occurring. H. G. Smith is recorded as being the pastor during this time. He was also one of the Delegates to the Canaan Baptist Association. He was a circuit preacher. His circuit included Mud Creek, Rock Creek, Village Creek and Mt. Pinson Baptist Churches. This was forty miles in length one way. He preached at Rock Creek generally for 15 years.

Contributions for Pastor in 1863

Calvary Williams	20.00
S. T. Huey	10.00
James Williams	10.00
Calvin Williams	10.00
A. G. Waldrop	10.00
Dr. L. Forrester	10.00
J. H. Waldrop	5.00
Findlay Adams	5.00
R. S. Waldrop	5.00
J. G. Huey	3.00
O. A. Franklin	2.00
Nancy Moore	1.00
Martha Franklin	1.00
Hamy Franklin	1.00
Thos. Reeves	5.00
J. R. Goodwin	3.00

\$101.00

A Period of Decline

It was 1911, and Rock Creek Baptist Church was experiencing her most difficult time ever. The congregation had started to believe in things that did not go along with the Baptist Doctrines. It seems as though the majority of the congregation were excluded from the church for having these beliefs. At this time the Association was also experiencing some difficulties. In 1915, the Minutes of the Association state:

Whereas a difference of opinion exists among the churches of the Mud Creek Missionary Baptist Association as to the plan of eliciting, combining and directing the energies of our denomination for the propagation of the gospel; and, Whereas, The issue to cooperate or not to cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention has been forced.

The church could not pull back together after this devastating time. After 1916, the church was not represented in the Mud Creek Baptist Association. Rock Creek was inactive for 42 years. The next time Rock Creek was represented in the Mud Creek Baptist Association was in 1958. The only time the church saw life was when funerals were conducted, and each May, when the annual Memorial Services were held. From this disruption another church was formed. A majority of the members that had been excluded from Rock Creek Baptist Church formed Rock Creek Church of God, in 1912.

In 1914 the annual Mud Creek Missionary Baptist Association meeting was held at Rock Creek Baptist Church. The following was copied from the minutes for the year 1914:

Resolved, That we, the Mud Creek Baptist Association, hereby express our profound thanks to the church at Rock Creek and the community in general for their kind hospitality shown us as Messengers and our visitors during our stay among them. the minutes were read and approved. Adjourned to meet with Liberty Church on Wednesday before the third Sunday in October, 1915, and took the parting hand.

Rev. G. B. Vines, Moderator
J. J. Waldrop, Clerk

This is the last time the annual meeting was held at Rock Creek Baptist Church.

The Reorganization of Rock Creek Baptist Church

Sunday, July 14, 1957, was another important day in the life of this historic old church. It has been the feeling for some time that this old church should be reorganized.

Bro. Paul Davis preached for the congregations here for a while in 1952. He was followed by Rev. Hugh Nicholson in 1953 and 1954. Then Rev. Horace McMickens began in earnest to revive this old church.

To this end, those interested had been meeting regularly for the past two years and discussing the matter fully, making it a matter of serious and earnest prayer. Also, they had consulted with leading pastors and brethren of other churches.

At a meeting of this congregation in June of 1957, a resolution was adopted inviting four neighboring churches to send representatives for the purpose of forming a council under whose direction the church would be reorganized.

Those four churches were namely: Liberty, Oak Grove, Smithville, and Union Hill.

The representatives from these churches were as follows:

Liberty Church – Rev. F. F. Wright, Bro. R. F. Hicks, and Bro. Erskine Vines.

Oak Grove Church – Rev. Charles C. Moore, Bro. W. B. Parsons, Bro. W. D. Raney, also Rev. A. L. Nichols, Moderator of the Mud Creek Association was included as a representative from his home church.

Smithville Church – Rev. Van Franklin, Bro. Will Hudson and Bro. Dorman E. Fields.

Union Hill Church – Bro. D. M. Waldrop (of the original Waldrop family of the old church)

This church was without a pastor at the time and hence, did not have a full representation.

When the council came together it was organized by electing a Moderator and a Clerk. Those elected were Rev. F. F. Wright, Moderator and Rev. Charles C. Moore as Clerk.

Rev. Van Franklin was designated to bring the devotional; Rev. A. L. Nichols was named to read the Church Covenant; Bro. W. B. Parsons was named to read the Articles of Faith.

Other visitors recognized were Bro. George H. Handley of Concord Church, Bro. N. C. Gilmore and Rev. M. P. Davis of West Side Baptist Church of Bessemer, Alabama. Rev. F. F. Wright then called the meeting to order and stated the purpose of the meeting was to reorganize the Rock Creek Baptist Church. The service was begun by singing “There is a Fountain” led by Rev. H. H. McMickens and a prayer was offered by Bro. R. F. Hicks.

The following letters from the indicated churches were read and presented to the council for acceptance:

Rev. Horace McMickens and Ann, his daughter, from West Side Church, Bessemer, Alabama.

Bro. A. S. Phillips from Shiloh Church in Sarahland, Alabama.

Bro. James D. Phillips from Concord Baptist Church, Rt. 5, Bessemer, Alabama.

Mrs. Alta Handley from Union Hill Baptist Church, Rt. 5, Bessemer, Alabama.

Mrs. Ethel Williams from Smithville Baptist Church, Rt. 5, Bessemer, Alabama.

When they had each affirmed that they accepted the Church Documents as read, Rev. A. L. Nichols moved the following resolutions:

“Whereas, it appears to us that there is a real need for a Baptist Church in this locality and after much prayer and seeking divine guidance and much consultation with our neighboring brethren and churches and after the calling of a council to the matter which council has voted there is a real need for such a church, it is resolved that we, Rev. H. H. McMickens, Bro. A. S. Phillips, Bro. James D. Phillips, Mrs. Alta Handley, and Mrs. Ethel Williams do now enter upon the organization under the direction of a council composed of the following members:

Rev. Van Franklin, Bro. Will Hudson, Bro. Dorman Fields, Rev. Charles C. Moore, Bro. W. B. Parsons, Rev. A. L. Nichols, Bro. Wilson Paney, Rev. F. F. Wright, Bro. R. F. Hicks, Bro. D. M. Waldrop representing their respective churches, this being done by the adoption of our Covenant and Articles of Faith.

The five members present were given the right hand of church fellowship while the congregation sang “Amazing Grace”.

The doors of the church were opened for the reception of members and Mrs. Kinnie Handley came forward and put herself under the watch care of the church until she could get her letter from the Concord Baptist Church, Rt. 6, Bessemer, Alabama.

The church then nominated and unanimously elected Rev. H. H. McMickens as Moderator and Mrs. Kinny Handley as Clerk.

The name of the church was then decided upon. Rev. H. H. McMickens in a motion clarified that it should be called Rock Creek Baptist Church instead of Old Rock Creek Baptist Church. The motion was seconded and it carried unanimously.

Since the time was growing late in the afternoon, and as the devotional should have come at the beginning instead of at the end of the service, Bro. Van Franklin moved that it be dispensed with. After it had been duly seconded, it was carried unanimously. Rev. A. L. Nichols then moved that the Council be dissolved. His was seconded and carried.

Rev. H. H. McMickens pronounced the benediction.

Rev. Charles C. Moore
Council Clerk

The following is from the Mud Creek Missionary Baptist Association minutes for 1958:

At the time the Rock Creek Baptist Church presented a petitionary letter for admission into our association. Motion and seconded to receive them into our association. The Moderator extended the Pastor and Messengers the right hand of fellowship and welcomed them into our Association.

After 42 years of not being represented in the Mud Creek Missionary Baptist Association, Rock Creek Baptist Church was finally coming back to life.

Pastors of Rock Creek Baptist Church

This is a list of the known pastors of Rock Creek Baptist Church. If I have omitted anyone, I apologize. I have tried to find out a little about each pastor. If there is no information listed, I was unable to find anything about that pastor.

Year	Pastor's Name and some interesting information	
1820	John Henry	Charter Member of Canaan Baptist Church and also their first pastor. He helped form the Cahaba Baptist Association.
1822-1827	Hosea Holcombe	Alabama's first church historian and President of Alabama Baptist Convention 1833-1838.
1828	J. M. Moore	Ordained by Rock Creek Baptist Church in 1824. He supplied them from 1828-1832.
1837	Jacob Tate	He became the first pastor of Liberty Baptist Church.
1839	Owen Franklin	In 1835 he began contributing to Rock Creek Baptist Church. This is found in the financial record book.
1844	Amos Lee	He is listed as a charter member of Liberty Baptist Church.
1846-1848	A. J. Waldrop	He was the Clerk of the Circuit Court and one time Moderator of Birmingham Baptist Association.
1851	Owen Franklin	(see above)
1852	A. J. Waldrop	(see above)
1854	Owen Franklin	(see above)
1855-1865	Henry G. Smith	Pastor during the Civil War era when Rock Creek Baptist Church was at its peak.
1866	W. T. Rogers	He also pastored Canaan Baptist Church.
1874	Elisha Waldrop	According to the financial record book he was paid \$31.00 for 1874. He was the first pastor of Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church (in Hueytown).
1875	Austin White	He was also pastor of Liberty Baptist Church. According to records at the Court House, he performed countless wedding ceremonies.
1878	J. Grimes	He was a former Moderator of the Canaan Baptist Association.

1879	J. I. Gilbert	He was a former Moderator of the Canaan Baptist Association.
1880-1884	B. M. Waldrop	
1886-1888	J. N. McFalls	He was the pastor of Sardis Baptist Church at one time, also.
1890	G. B. Vines	Pastor of this church, from this church. Also pastor of Sardis Baptist Church.
1891	G. H. Vines	He was also the pastor of Smithville at one time.
1892	G. B. Vines	(see above)
1893	E. L. Nicholson	He was a Moderator of the Canaan Baptist Association.
1894	G. H. Bean	(see above)
1896-1898	B. M. Waldrop	He was on a committee from the Mud Creek Baptist Association to see indigent members in 1895.
1899-1901	G. B. Vines	(see above)
1902	J. W. Franklin	He was also listed as the pastor of Smithville Baptist Church for this year.
1903-1904	A. White	(see above)
1905	C. O. Livengood	He was also pastor of Sardis Baptist Church for several years.
1906	G. B. Vines	(see above)
1907	M. C. Huey	
1908	A. White	(see above)
1909	W. L. Knight	He taught at Toadvine School and Mountain View School, which was on the top of Rock Creek Hill.
1910-1912	A. White	(see above)
1913	G. B. Vines	(see above)
1914	T. E. Pinegar	He preached the introductory sermon for the 1920 Mud Creek Missionary Baptist Association's annual meeting.
1916	M. C. Burton	He was a delegate to the Mud Creek Baptist Association, from Concord Baptist Church in 1904.

1917-1957	The church was inactive.
1958-1960	Horace McMickens He was instrumental in reviving Rock Creek Baptist Church in 1957.
1961-1962	Franklin Bailey He went on to become pastor of Williamsburg Baptist Church, Mulga Baptist Church, and Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in West Blockton.
1963	John Brown
1964-1967	Horace McMickens (see above)
1968-1970	W. R. Seymore He was instrumental in getting the road paved to the church and getting a clear deed to the church property.
1971	W. Crauswell
1972	W. R. Seymore (see above)
1973-1974	W. M. Griffice He was chairman of the deacons before becoming pastor.
1975	Thomas V. Chaffin
1976	Marvin Rainey He went on to become pastor of Adger Baptist Church.
1977	Vacant
1978-	J. D. Phillips He has been the pastor for 17 years. He helped revive the Church in 1957. He has been devoted to keeping the church open. He must be praised for his dedication to the Lord, and his willingness to do whatever needs to be done. These are qualities we can admire, and pattern our lives after. We, the congregation of Rock Creek Baptist Church, love and appreciate you.

Reverend W. L. Knight and Elder Austin White were both former pastors of Rock Creek Baptist Church. These obituaries were found in the minutes of the Mud Creek Missionary Baptist Association.

In Memory of Rev. W. L. Knight, Who Passed Away on July 4th, 1911

Resolved, That we, the Baptist Church at Mud Creek, through a committee appointed to draft appropriate resolutions, deeply deplore the death of our beloved pastor, Rev. W. L. Knight, and desire to place on record an expression of the respect and esteem in which he was held, and regret for the loss which they, his wife, his family, and his friends have suffered in his untimely death.

His life was short but exceptionally pure and righteous. Bro. Knight was born near Bessemer, Ala. in 1880. His parents were D. G. and M. E. Knight. He was converted about 20 years ago, and for more than ten years preached the gospel, which he believed, like Paul, to be the power of God unto salvation. Pure in his life a man of prayer and boldness in preaching the gospel, his ministry was effective.

In 1902 he became a student at Howard College as the beneficiary of the Mud Creek Association. Later he entered the State Normal College at Florence, Al., and was graduated from that institution in 1909. While a student, he preached to a great many churches throughout Alabama. After leaving school he was pastor of Concord, Rock Creek, Oak Grove and Mud Creek churches.

He was happily married February 5, 1911 to Miss Jennie Laird, who, with his parents and his brothers and sisters, mourn their loss.

He preached his last sermon at Mud Creek Church on the 23rd day of April, 1911, at 11 a.m., from the following text: Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The theme of his discourse was: "The mission of the Church."

At 2 p.m., July 5, 1911, Rev. A. White, pastor of Concord Baptist Church, the home church of the deceased, conducted the funeral service, assisted by Rev. M. K. Thornton. The Masons served as pallbearers and conducted the service at the grave in Concord cemetery.

Elder Austin White

Born May 5, 1844

Married Miss Melinda A. Snow, June 19, 1862. Was converted and joined the Methodist church.

Became convinced of the Scripturalness of the Missionary Baptist Church; united with same. Ordained to preach October 30, 1874.

Was Moderator of the Mud Creek Association for more than twenty-five years.

He was a preacher of great power and genuine worth.

Died May 5, 1914.

The Treasure At The End Of The Lane

Rock Creek Baptist Church is truly a treasure. This Church definitely has significant historical value for the community. Numerous people in the community can trace their roots directly back to this wonderful old Church and cemetery.

So many of the progressive churches in this area had their beginnings at Rock Creek Baptist Church. Rock Creek Church of God, Smithville Baptist Church, Mud Creek Baptist, Liberty Baptist Church, and Roupe's Valley Baptist Church (non longer in existence), all have charter members that came from Rock Creek Baptist Church.

There may be more churches in the area that can trace their beginnings back to Rock Creek Baptist Church. These were the only ones that I could trace at this time.

I hope this 175th Anniversary Celebration, has renewed the interest of people in this historic treasure. To me this Church is truly, "The Treasure At The End Of The Lane".

My interest was sparked, when I first laid eyes on this beautiful Church and cemetery. When we moved here eight years ago I began to find out anything I could about the origins of this Church. The information was slim, at first, then as the years have passed I have found more and more information.

My life has been blessed by attending Rock Creek Baptist Church. The congregation is like a part of my family. The facilities are old, but the Spirit of the Lord is definitely here. We are so proud to have this wonderful church to worship in. My prayer is that Rock Creek Baptist Church will be here for another 175 years.