

CANE CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH: A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

By Edward Johnson

Cane Creek Church was founded in August of 1789 when nine settlers came together as trustees to buy an acre of land for a meeting house. It is the oldest Baptist church in Orange County and one of just a handful of churches to have been in continuous existence for over 200 years.

The original meeting house was a rough and drafty log building about 25 feet wide by 35 feet long with a dirt floor and crude wooden benches.

Cane Creek's first pastor was Thomas Cate, a local resident who received his religious training at the Haw River Baptist Church near Bynum. This church had been established as an arm of North Carolina's original "Separate" Baptist Church located at Sandy Creek in Guilford County.

Students of religious history credit Sandy Creek's pastor, Shubal Stearns, with being the founder, in 1755, of a church, and later an Association, that led directly to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Although the Cane Creek Meeting House was built in 1789 by a Baptist, the congregation did not affiliate with a Baptist Association until 1807. The delay may well have been caused by early doctrinal differences between the dynamic outreaching Separate Baptists and the more Calvinistic Particular Baptists to the east. In this year Cane Creek cast its lot with the Sandy Creek Association.

Early Church records were destroyed by fire. The earliest surviving Sandy Creek records indicate a congregation of 45 individuals at Cane Creek in 1816. A rough estimate would divide these into 15 men, 20 women, and 10 African-American slaves.

After Thomas Cate, the next pastor whose identity is known was Stephen Pleasant. He had formerly preached at a Church in Caswell County but had been dismissed by his congregation when he objected to their anti-mission feelings. Pleasant remained as pastor at Cane Creek until 1839.

While in Orange County Pleasant formed the Beulah Association, and Cane Creek left Sandy Creek to become a member. For its entire stay in the Beulah Association (1837-1870), Cane Creek was its largest church with a membership of over 200. When the Mt. Zion Association was formed in 1870, Cane Creek became a charter member and has remained ever since.

Beginning with J. C. Wilson (preached 1852-1856) all of Cane Creek's pastors have received formal theological training, most at Wake Forest. Besides Cate and Pleasant, other prominent Cane Creek pastors include George Purefoy (preached 1839-52), author of many tracts, articles, and books, and described as one of the best educated North Carolinians of his time; F. M. Jordan who, after his stay at Cane Creek, went on to preach in some of North Carolina's larger cities such as Greensboro and Raleigh leaving a legacy as a builder of fine new church buildings; and J. F. McDuffie, who led the congregation in the construction and operation of Rock Spring Academy during his stay at Cane Creek (1896-1907). This Academy continued in existence until tax supported public schools were constructed across the county.

The Church was originally located on a hillside within 400 feet of Cane Creek. Tradition has it that the original rough log meeting house was replaced at that spot by a larger and more comfortable building.

In 1852, the congregation bought the present tract on Orange Grove Road and built its third church building. This served until the late 1880's when a much larger building was erected. This old wooden Church was attended by many of the older members of the congregation. The present church was built in 1949-50 and an education wing was added shortly thereafter.

Over the years, Cane Creek has been the mother Church for many other Baptist churches. Among these are Antioch, Mars Hill, Cross Roads, Moore's Chapel in Saxapahaw, Hickory Grove, and the Church at Mebane.

In its 200-plus years over 2000 people have been listed on the rolls of Cane Creek Church. A church history is now being written which will tell their story, list their names where known, and weave the threads of local history into the fabric of life as it was lived in Orange County, in the Southern Baptist Church, and in the nation.