

# Ebenezer Church of Christ History

## They Called the Church Ebenezer

*By: Linda Murray*

On a wintry day in the 1830's, a small group of Christians met to establish a church that they named "Ebenezer", the rock...

Today, the red brick building where the congregation of Ebenezer Church of Christ meets sits high on a stately hill. It is surrounded by a cedar tree-lined creek on one side and the intersection of Cummins Ferry and Oregon Roads in the front. All this is quite a contrast to the little white clapboard church, which served the congregation until the present structure was completed in 1956 by the toil and perseverance of many of its members. Since many of the church records are lost, hidden, or sketchy in detail, how this particular group of Christians grew into one family is somewhat mysterious; however, one thing is certain: The longevity of Ebenezer Church can be attributed to the determination of its early founders and the love and devotion of their descendants and the present-day members. By scouring the two record books that we are lucky enough to have now in our possession, by researching old letters and notes written by early church members, and by interviewing some of our present members, we can get a better look at a part of our past history.

The group of believers, who came to be known later as Ebenezer Church of Christ, met first in 1830, 1832 or 1836, (the record book is hard to read). The earliest church record book that we possess states the following: "The congregation of the Church of Christ took place at David Jones', Mercer County, Ky on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 183?." Mr. And Mrs. Jones lived in a house that no longer stands on the Unity Pike farm on which Arthur Ransdell and his grandson Larry Peyton and their families used to live around the mid 1980's. The original 10 people in attendance were David Jones, Susannah Jones, W.H. Roach, James H. Cleveland, Susannah Cleveland, Samuel James, W.E. Burks, Elizabeth Burks, John W. Roach, and Amy Roach. Brother N. Wilson Burks, a minister of the later congregation, compiled a membership roster in March 1965, in which he stated that there was some lack of information regarding the original meeting date of the Ebenezer Church. He didn't say where he got his information, but he wrote, "We know this congregation was formed about twenty years later than the great Cane Ridge Revival, birthday of the Restoration Movement." He goes on to say that according to an old church record book (probably the same record book that we now possess) the charter to form the covenant took place in 1836; however, the handwriting is very faint, making it hard to determine is the date was 1830, 1832, or 1836.

We don't know how long the church met in the home of the Jones family before a permanent structure was built; however, old family stories tell about the brush top church that the members also met in. Before her death in 1994, Aunt Thelma Crossfield often referred to the brush top church down on Cummins Ferry Road. Mrs. Corinne League, when recently interviewed,

remembers the same stories about a brush top church that was built on the lower end of Cummins Ferry. No one knows where this was located, but in one of Mr. Lloyd Jones' letters, he refers to the brush arbor built close to the farm of Kie Fallis, which is located about one mile east of the present site of the Ebenezer Church. Andrew McRae wrote in a paper obtained from the Mercer County Historical Society and written for Mrs. Bonnie Cummins's class at Mercer County Elementary, that the slaves of Amy Roach, one of the original people who met to form the church, also built a brush arbor in the vicinity of the present church at the intersection of Cummins Ferry and Oregon Roads. The brush top churches were meant to serve as some protection from the elements during warm- weather protracted meetings, while members' homes served as the meeting place during cold weather. At this time, no one has any record of the date when the old clapboard building was built on the site of the present church.

One of the present congregation does remember that first building very well. Mrs. Corinne League recalls when the church had two doors, one for the women who sat on the left aisle and one for the men who sat on the right aisle, which was quite common for buildings in this area, according to Amalie Preston, local historian. The simple Greek revival style building had clear glass windows on the sides with two aisles dividing the seats into three sections. Candles in sconces on the walls provided the light, until the 1880's when a five or six kerosene lamp chandelier was added, greatly improving the lighting. Two cast-iron wood-burning stoves heated the old building. Miss Corinne use to go with her grandmother, Mrs. Robinson, to clean the church. By this time, the members had purchased two new coal stoves for the auditorium, and she remembers her grandmother carrying up coal for the meetings from the old coalhouse, which sat on the hill behind the church building.

Another renovation too place after the turn of the century. In the 1930's, the old benches built by Brother Alderson were replaced with seats bought from Harrodsburg Christian Church. The two separate doors were removed and replaced by one double-leafed door in the center. During the forties, two Sunday school rooms and a partial basement were build behind the west wall of the original building. A coal furnace was placed in the basement and a baptistry was built on the west side of the building. But the building was just that- a building. The people who made up the membership were even more interesting.

Membership into the church often came in large numbers, "large" meaning ten to fifteen people at a time. Several entries in the records indicate that meetings held at the church produced large numbers of new members, whether by baptism or letter of recommendation. On September 2, 1881 Brother B.F. Clay held a meeting in which eleven people were added to the church through immersion ( The Ebenezer Church Record Book). Perhaps many of these people were baptized in what people refer to as the Old Bob Dean pond on Oregon Road close to Winston Preston's house as was the custom for many years.

During the mid-twentieth century, the little congregation who met at the old clapboard church nestled behind the horseshoe gravel driveway decided that they needed a new building. On February 7, 1952, a business meeting took place at the church building. Mr. S. B. Jones was instrumental in arranging the meeting for the new enterprise in which trustees were named: Paul Preston, James McMurry, and Arthur Ransdell. The church purchased land from Mrs. Jimmie Preston on which to set the old church building. The movement of the building began on July 11,

1952, with Mr. A.W. Childers in charge of moving the building to a site further back on the plot in order that the new structure could be built. Soon after, Mr. Cecil Henry began work on the basement, which was completed approximately on December 15, 1952. The congregation met in the basement until 1956 when finally, the building was finished and the pews were installed in the new auditorium.

Men of the church had donated as much time and effort as they could to help build the church and cut the cost in doing so. Often as many as twenty men at a time, under the direction of Paul Preston, worked to build the walls of the auditorium. Some of the men even took their trucks and drove to Corbin, Kentucky, to haul back the brick for the church. Later, others went to Cincinnati to transport the material for the finish work. On a cold, snowy day in January 1962, ten years after the conception of the idea to build the new church building, the church note was paid in full and the bank note was burned in front of the church. Bro. N. Wilson Burks held the note as church members witnessed the occasion.

The church had been organized, the building had been built, and the rest of the work had been left for posterity to complete. The staunch red, brick meeting place and the congregation of Ebenezer Church of Christ very graciously accepts the challenge and the commission of those early founders who as Christians, had the vision to submit themselves to the teachings of the Bible and the work of the Lord.