

A Brief History of the Church of Christ in Cowan, Tennessee

By James R. Miller

(Written for the 100th Year Celebration on Sunday, December 2, 1984)



It is with regret that the assimilation of the following material is dealing with a subject that is so dear to us all, that is the history of the Cowan Church of Christ, with so little documentation and materials pertinent to this past history. We need not apologize for those who have gone before us in leaving so few records of the past; it is far more important for us to appreciate and dedicate our lives to the legacy that they have passed on to us. Therefore, without further ado we will proceed to try to give those concerned at least an outline of that that has proceeded us.

I would like to acknowledge the work that others have done in the making of this modest record possible. To Mr. C.R. Besheres, Jane Bynum, Billy Bynum, Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Hawkins, and others for their legwork, trips, etc.; their memories and recounts of past events. Mr. Coleman Bratton who kept a record of the congregation in his little green book – The Christian Church 1905.

It is reported that the church had its first meeting in Cowan about the year 1875. The congregation met in the Odum House on what is now Tennessee Avenue in the building that once was the picture show house, of which the former Gunn Store now occupies part of said building. One of the early preachers for the congregation was Calob Sewell.

Where the germ-seed for this congregation came from is lost in history. Did they originally meet in the homes of members and from whence came they?

We do know that on May 25, 1881 that L.F. Sartain gave land “for the love of the cause of Christ and the brotherhood worshipping at Cowan” a parcel of land for the use of the church. The frame structure of the church on Miller Street (Dixie Highway) was constructed in 1880.

The year 1922 was a peculiar period of time for the church.

On the 17th of February elders G.L. Powers, Alfred Manson and G.M. Thorogood conveyed the church property back to the Sartain heirs – Mrs. John H. Lanier and Miss Daisy Sartain. On May 5th the land was conveyed back to the elders: G.L. Powers, Alfred Manson and G.M. Thorogood. There have been several ideas expressed as to what had transpired, but there is, so far, no documentation on these events.

A clue possibly is the next deed for more property joining the other. In this deed we have a religious philosophy stated in the first paragraph of the deed that beyond monetary considerations the “desire to

encourage and build up the church...that will in all work and worship use only that which is ordered and required in the New Testament, rejecting all inventions of men, such as the use of the organ and other instruments of music in the connection with the worship, and of any society other than the Church of Christ in carrying out the work of God." The deed is dated November 12, 1923.

While on the subject of real estate, I must report another transaction that took place on the 20th of April, 1928. On this date a parcel of land was transferred from Ben Mosley and wide to the Cowan Church of Christ for a cemetery. It is (was) situated near the junction of the former Andrew Wilkinson, Roy Cowan and Ben Mosley properties. Efforts are being made to locate this parcel of land and to see if any former members of the church are buried there.

A few excerpts from Mr. Coleman Bratton's notes of 1905 are worthy of our consideration. He was the Secretary-Treasurer at that time. Elders were: H.E. Boyers, J.N. Williams, J.D. Roger, W.D. Ross and John Davis. Deacons were: F.T. Gibson, Arch Collins, F.T. Leebrick, John N. Hubbell, T.A. Melt and A.L. Austin. December 1905 showed \$4.70 cash on hand and Bro. Floyd the preacher, received \$4.70 on April 8, 1906. Reading Bro. Bratton's list of members from 1905 through 1914, without date notations, there were several moves out of town by members, death and those who quit the congregation. There is no record of what transpired afterward in the little green book.

Sometime in the Year 1920, Bro. G.M. Thorogood moved to Cowan. The congregation was not meeting at this time. Through Bro. Thorogood's efforts, the building was repaired and efforts to re-organize the church and its work were begun.

Bro. Thorogood served as superintendent and treasurer from Nov. 1921 to Dec. 1940. Some of his notations: collections for 1923 were \$1021.26 for 40 members who averaged \$.06 per day contribution; 1925, 50 members averaged \$28.85 per year or \$.08 per day; 1930, 60 members average, contribution was \$28.33 per member for the year and \$.07 per day.

A partial list of preachers or evangelists who worked with the church are as follows: Bros. Floyd, 1905; Mason 1921; Brewer, 1922; Gardner, 1922; Lipscomb, 1922; Holder, 1928, Jernigan, 1929; Lowery, 1930-33; and Woody, 1938. In 1923, Bro. Joe T. Clark came to the church as preacher. Except for three years, 1930-1933, Bro Clark labored with the Cowan congregation until his death in 1948.

A new era was ushered in with the coming of the year 1950. The elders at this time were J.W. Hill, J.B. Hawkins, T.B. Greer, W.H. Taylor, and G.M. Thorogood. Bro. C.B. Warren was appointed to this body in 1951. Mr. O.B. Pyle drew up plans for a new building and work was begun on August 30, 1950. The building committee consisted of Bro. Charles Lancaster, J.F. Terry, G.M. Thorogood and C.B. Warren. Supervising and purchasing committee consisted of J.B. Hawkins and Charles Lancaster. The building was completed and the first meeting held on May 27, 1951.

A sad day arrived on Jan. 24, 1974, when fire destroyed most of the auditorium of the church. Of course, there were other damages which resulted in the congregation having to use the gymnasium of Cowan Public School for worship services. Good tidings were in the making, for on the 25th of March 1974, Mrs. J.B. Hawkins (sis. Elsie) and Mr. J.B. Hawkins (Bro. Jack) conveyed 1.8 acres of land for the new building to be built on the property. J.F. Merritt, Jr., Billy Bynum and C.B. Warren were the elders and Trustees who received the transfer. An exchange of certain real estate with Glenn Clark Hodges provided for the present property location. A building committee consisting of: Andrew Garner, C.R. Besheres, James Patterson, J.B. Hawkins, Willard Garner, Charles "Chick" Syler, C.B. Warren and R.J. Bonner, were appointed. C.R. Besheres was the superintendent of construction. John Overby was the contractor. The first service was held January 27, 1975 in the new building.



We would be amiss if we did not do honor to those who labored with this congregation after the passing of Bro. Joe Clark. The following served as preachers for this congregation with dates indicated: Charles Lancaster, Oct. 1948-Oct. 1954; Jack Hackworth, Nov. 1954-Aug. 1956; Richard Bonner, Sept. 1956-Aug. 1977; and presently, David Bowman from Aug. 1977. It is remarkable that this congregation was not without a minister throughout this time period. Presently serving as elders are the following: Billy Bynum, J.D. Jackson, Billy Keith and J.F. Merritt, Jr. Serving as deacons: D.J. Brock, Jerry Crownover, Willard Garner, Hank Keith, James Patterson, Joe Ray, Mike Sparks and Tippy Tipps.

This brief history would not be complete without mentioning and giving thanks to our Lord for the young men who have gone out from this congregation to labor in the Lord's vineyard. Our prayers go with them and their families where ever their work takes them. We wish for them health, success and satisfaction in this great endeavor. We call attention to the following: Bill Merritt, George Merritt, Ronnie Ray, Houston Bynum, Gary Gass, Bob Moss and Mark Bonner. Godspeed!

In closing, I think it appropriate that we give thanks to those that have gone before us. That they made sacrifices and stood solid when others cast stones and ridiculed them, we can indeed appreciate from this distance. Let us rededicate our lives for the next century. We can truly be thankful for their great and good gift for the furtherance of the Lord's work. In the words of the Great Apostle's benediction we close - "May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Ghost be with us all". Amen.

James R. Miller
Nov. 29, 1984

