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HISTORICAL SKETCH

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— OF —

SALEM CHURCH

THE ORIGIN OF
"OLD" AND "NEW SALEM"

PREPARED BY
J. L. STRAIN
AND READ BEFORE ENOREE PRESBYTERY AT SALEM CHURCH



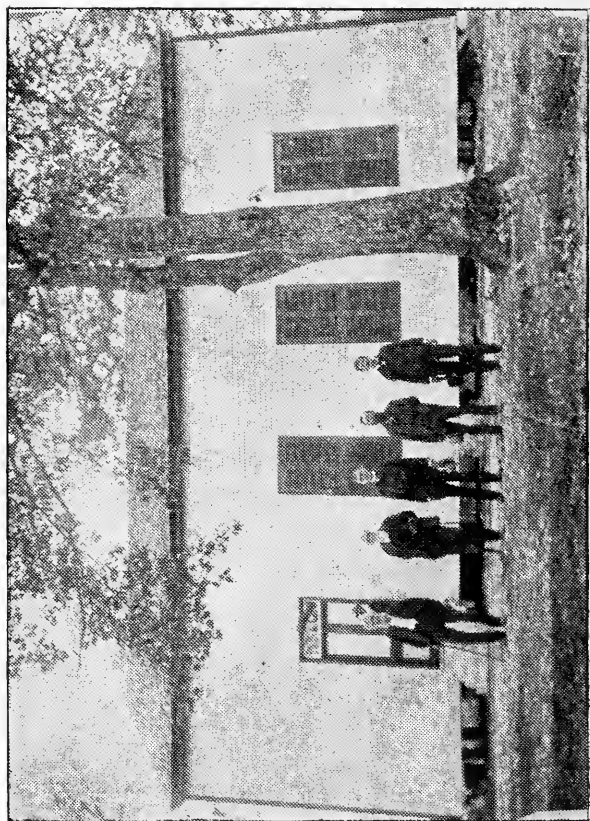
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SALFAM CHURCH

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HISTORICAL SKETCH OF SALEM CHURCH

The history of Salem church is a history of which this and all future generations may well be proud. Far, far back, before the beginning of the last century this country was comparatively a wilderness with only here, there and yonder an Anglo Saxon home. Savage Indians and wild beasts were plentiful. Broad river was the dividing line between the Cherokee and Catawba tribes of Indians.

Principally from Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, in about the year 1750, the tide of emigration set in and brought various colonies of sturdy Scotch-Irish settlers who found homes in Mecklenburg, (N. C.), York, Chester and Fairfield counties, of this State.

Many of them settled in Western York in the Bullock's creek valley, and the sections contiguous thereto along Broad river, and not a few settled on the western side of that stream. By blood consanguinity and marital relationship, they were more or less people with one interest. All having imbibed that spirit which more or less caused their ancestors to seek homes in the western world, where they could enjoy both civil and religious liberties.

Revs. Azel Roe and John Chose who were sent out by the Synods of New York and Pennsylvania as missionary evangelists about the year 1765, were really the first ministers who ever advocated, taught or published Presbyterianism in upper South Carolina, and to these servants of the most high God, we trace the origin of Salem church.

These pioneer ministers organized on the waters of Bullock's creek in York county two churches—one near the mouth where it empties into

Broad river, and the other near its head waters. These they called respectively Dan and Beersheba. Afterwards the congregation concluded to change the name of the former to "Bullock's Creek," which name it retains to this day. Of the history of these two divines and the work they did before, during and just after the Revolutionary war I would like to speak. It forms the warp and woof of Presbyterianism as it exists in both principal and policy today. Whether they or their friends ever realized the far-reaching results of their labors in upper South Carolina, we are unable to say. But we must not overlook the mustard seeds of history for tradition is that Bullock's Creek, Beersheba, Bethel and Bethesda (all in York county) were organized about the same time—during the years 1765 to 1769.

We must not forget the fact that to be a Presbyterian in those days was to be a "Whig," and the four B's—Bullock's Creek, Beersheba, Bethel and Bethesda, with their strongly interlaced congregations stood like grim sentinels upon the four corners of the territory now comprising York county. To the first of which the people of Salem were closely allied by the strongest ties of social, political and religious affinities. Salem at that time was part of Bullock's Creek congregation to which grand old mother it owes its paternity. These several churches were the Mizpahs where the patriots rallied for the struggle at Hanging Rock, the pursuit of the infamous Huck at Brattonsville, and to join the lion-hearted Williams at King's Mountain, and the brave Morgan at Cowpens, or to follow the Swamp Fox into the lagoons on the Pee Dee—all for that

boon, civil and religious liberty which we so highly prize today.

The history of Bullock's Creek is largely, if not entirely, the history of Salem. To divorce the two would be to separate the mother from the child. We can't well disassociate them, and allow either to retain its individuality. It would simply be a contradiction of terms. It's sufficiently understood that the Salem congregation was formed principally, if not entirely, from the Bullock's Creek congregation. Most, if not all the territory now embraced in the Salem congregation, belonged to or was part of the Bullock's Creek congregation. A ride or drive of ten, twelve or even twenty miles, was no barrier to the devout spirits which gave to Presbyterianism the impetus it attained in the early days of our republic, and which has ever marked the career of the true followers of John Calvin.

Of the early history of Salem as a church but little is positively known, further than about the year 1804 a group of Presbyterians, some of whom held their membership at Bullock's Creek, came together and with the assistance of Rev. Wm. C. Davis, organized a body of worshippers, which afterwards took the name of Salem church. For several years previously, this little group (for they were small, numerically) worshipped without a house, meeting at different homes in the neighborhood which were friendly to them and their work. This has always been considered the initial step in organizing the church which today we are called upon to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of.

Rev. Wm. C. Davis was the first pastor of Salem church. Although Rev. Joseph Alexander had preached here to the group of persons who composed its first membership, yet he never lived to see the first house erected in which they worshipped as an organized church.

Dr. Joseph Alexander was pastor of Bullock's Creek church from about year of 1769 to 1806—three years before his death. He preached to the Salem people as a body, but in private houses in this community as early as 1790. After the death of

Rev. Joseph Alexander, Rev. W. C. Davis was called to the pastorate of Salem. In fact, he (Davis) took up the work of Dr. Alexander and preached at Bullock's Creek as well as Salem.

Just here I will quote from a letter of Judge Sam W. Williams, now of Little Rock, Ark., who is a son of Rev. Aaron Williams, who was at one time pastor of Salem church. Judge Sam W. Williams was also a nephew of Rev. Wm. C. Davis, the first pastor of Salem. This letter was written from Little Rock, Ark., to Mrs. Martha E. Smarr under date of January 16th, 1899. He says:

"Dr. Alexander, who died in 1809, had grown so feeble that he resigned, and Rev. Wm. C. Davis was called as pastor, and about 1810 he organized Salem and they built a large frame church on the Union side of Broad river, on an elevation just back of the old Hamilton place, where a Mr. Estes lived in 1880. After crossing Broad river from the York side, we used to turn to the right nearly in front of Mrs Bankhead's, near the top of the hill, and cross a ravine by a path to go to this church which in my childhood's first recollection (about 1832) was called old Salem, while the newer building—newer in 1832—which stood to the left-hand side of the big road as we came up from the ferry, near, or at the top of the hill or ascent from the river, was called new Salem. Uncle Wm. C. Davis, shortly after organizing Salem, established the Independent Presbyterian church. His followers at Salem were strong enough to hold the church edifice and afterwards the old school people built the new building at the place I have indicated—to the left of the big road as we came up from the ferry."

It's not essential in this sketch for me to refer to this action of Rev. Wm. C. Davis, mentioned by Judge Williams, as declaring independence and establishing the Independent Presbyterian church. Suffice it to say; parenthetically: The doctrine he preached and for which he was deposed, was contrary to the standard of the Presbyterian church, to wit: That the active obedience of Christ

was not imputed to the believer, but only his passive obedience. Also that faith was previous to regeneration.

But all differences have now been amicably settled and the church is now a unit on the great principles and doctrines of Presbyterianism—especially a unit in the south. Further on in his letter Judge Williams says: "In 1817 my father, Aaron Williams, as a licentiate, was employed to preach at Bullock's Creeek, where the old sides were the strongest and held the old church, while the "Independents" built a new house near the Pinckneyville road, where they all worship now. The old house stood near the graveyard. In 1819 my father was called as pastor and ordained in August of that year.

Father, shortly after this, accepted a call from Salem for a part of his time, and he preached there until he resigned the pastorate of both in 1834. It was while father was preaching at Salem, I suppose, that the new Salem house was built. It was a good long, large, frame house with a large entrance at the end way from the river, and an aisle from it to a cross aisle that ran in front of the pulpit at right angles with the big road; there was a side door, a large one, at the end of this cross aisle.

In this house I was baptized by Rev. John B. Davis, 70 years ago, or more."

During the time (or part of the time) Rev. Aaron Williams preached at Salem he taught the Hopewell academy, later known as the Dr. Wright place where he then lived. In 1832 or 1833 Rev. Daniel Baker held a revival meeting in the new Salem building and there were many professions of religion made, among them Miss Harriet Newell Williams, a daughter of Rev. Aaron Williams, who died within a year afterwards and lies buried at Bullock's Creeek graveyard. After the resignation of Rev. Aaron Williams as pastor of Salem Rev. W. B. Davis, who was then serving Beersheba, was called for one-half of his time to Bullock's Creeek and he could only give each fifth Sabbath to Salem. In this way the church languished for the want of spiritual food—the preaching of

the gospel—until in 1837 or 1838 the church, (of which Robert Lusk was the only surviving elder), petitioned Presbytery to dissolve it, which was done November 2nd, 1838, and the members mostly, if not altogether, went back to Bullock's Creeek.

That the harmony of the church had been seriously disturbed by the erroneous doctrines of Rev. Wm. C. Davis, may well be taken for granted.

It caused hard or unfriendly feelings among neighbors and friends that were never settled or compromised. Soon after the dissolution of Salem church—November 2nd, 1838—the star of hope made its appearance above the horizon and shed its lustre upon the apparent ruins of the church and Robert Lusk, in April 1840, was sent with a petition to Bethel Presbytery to have the church reorganized. This was granted and Saturday, May 30, 1840, was the time set for that work to be done.

Rev. John B. Davis and Rev. James H. Saye were appointed a committee to effect the organization. Rev. Mr. Saye being providentially hindered from attending, Rev. John B. Davis proceeded to organize the church. At this meeting the following white persons presented certificates from other Presbyterian churches, to wit: Robert Lusk, Martha Lusk, Mary Martin, Martha Bankhead, Jane Smarr, Caroline Walker, Samuel Davidson, John G. Davidson, R. G. Davidson, Jane Davidson, Sarah E. Davidson, Elizabeth Plaxico, Esther S. Lewis, Ann Cain, Elizabeth Williams, Eliza Ann Williams, Theodore Williams, Nancy Hemphill, William Plaxico, Elizabeth Plaxico, Elizabeth Robinson, James Meek, Elizabeth Meek, Martha Leech, Mariah Leech, Martin Leech, Jr., Z. D. Hemphill, Elizabeth Greer, Mary E. Plaxico, and the blacks were: Nancy, Jonah, Anthony and Becca. Wm. Plaxico, Jno. G. Davidson, Robert G. Davidson and Robert Lusk, were elected ruling elders. Robert Lusk, elder at Bullock's Creeek, was installed a ruling elder at Salem and Messrs. Plaxico and the two Davidsons were ordained and installed ruling elders, also. The church being formally organized was placed under the care of Bethel Pres-

bytery May 31, 1840. On this same day the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered by Rev. John B. Davis.

The first meeting of the church session was held September 26th, 1840, and kept open until the next day—September 27th. Rev. Wm. B. Davis was chosen moderator and Robert Lusk was elected church clerk. Wm. Plaxico, Jr., Dr. Samuel Wright and his wife, Mrs. Elvira Wright, came before the session and upon giving satisfactory evidence of piety, were received into the church as members.

At the beginning of the session that morning, William Gillis, infant son of John G. Davidson, and Martha Elvira, infant daughter of William Plaxico, received the ordination of baptism, Rev. Wm. G. Davidson, officiating. I mention these facts to show who were the first members received into the church and the first infants to be baptized after the re-organization of the church in 1840.

Rev. Wm. Banks was the first minister called to the pastorate of the church, but in failing to get him, a call was made for Rev. A. H. Monroe, of Unionville, a licentiate of Harmony Presbytery. It was placed in his hands at an adjourned meeting of Presbytery held at Bethel, November 11th, 1840, and on the 8th of December following, Rev. Mr. Monroe entered upon the duty of supplying Salem in connection with Unionville church. He lived at Union and preached at Salem in 1841 and 1842. During his pastorate the following names were added to the church roll: Williamson Howell and Sophia Howell, his wife, Nancy Walker, Wright Walker, John Goudelock, Wm. Mitchell and wife, Violet, Rachel Carothers, Margaret Parker, Hannah McCulloch and John Murry.

On August 6th, 1841, the Church session with Mr. Monroe moderator, adopted the following resolution: "Resolved. That all persons wishing occasional communion shall come through the session, and after being examined by it and received, shall be entitled to commune as long as they evince to the world by a Godly walk and conversation that they are Christians." This was repealed by the ses-

sion August 4th, 1844, under the pastorate of Rev. Ferdinand Jacobs, who had succeeded Mr. Monroe. With the repeal of this resolution one was also adopted dispensing with the use of tokens and the new Hymn book approved by the general assembly was adopted by the church.

At the time Rev. Ferdinand Jacobs was called to the pastorate of Salem in 1843 he was teaching school at Yorkville.

In 1845 the session was composed of Robert Lusk, Robert G. Davidson and William Plaxico. The church got permission to employ Rev. Joseph Hillhouse as pastor for part of his time. He served until the close of 1847 when he was succeeded by Rev. Mr. Beard, who supplied the church once a month during 1848. Occasionally supplies were sent the church during 1849, during which year Rev. P. E. Bishop held the communion service in July, and in December the board of domestic missions was petitioned to assist Rev. Wm. Savage the ensuing year.

On October 26th, 1846, Elder Robert Lusk and his family, including several slaves owned by him, were dismissed by letter to join _____ church in Mississippi, whither they had gone. This, I neglected to mention in connection with Rev. Mr. Hillhouse's pastorate. The removal of Elder Lusk created a vacancy on the bench of elder and on the 25th day of June, 1847, Newton Plaxico and Dr. Samuel Wright, were elected elders. Dr. Wright declined to serve as he had such a large and extensive practice of medicine that he thought he could not discharge the duties of the office. Newton Plaxico accepted and was ordained and installed as ruling elder by Rev. James H. Saye, June 26th, 1847. John S. Plaxico (who was familiarly known as Old Steady), was elected and ordained elder by Rev. William Savage, September 27th, 1850.

It might be well, just here, to go back a little in order to correct any errors that may exist in the mind of any about the organization of this church—as to the time and condition under which it was effected. This error might arise from our using the terms, "Old Salem" and "New Salem."

when really new Salem, so called, was the parent church and "Old Salem" the offspring or out-growth of the Independent movement inaugurated by Rev. Wm. C. Davis and his followers. These terms, or rather names, apply to the houses of worship and not to the bodies of worshippers—to the church militant and not the church triumphant—to the church outwardly rather than inwardly.

The reason we call it "Old Salem" is because the followers of Rev. Wm. C. Davis, when he declared "Independence," were the stronger faction of the church (if that is the proper term or word to use in this connection), and they held the building, and so the other or minor part of the congregation had to build the new house. This gave rise to the terms "Old" and "New Salem."

During the late war, or more particularly during its closing days or weeks, while the Federals were going through our State spreading terror, desolation, devastation and doom over our Sunny Southland, and defenseless old men, women and children were being driven to strangers for a miserable shelter from the inclemency of the season, when all valuables and valuable records were being hidden out so as to escape the touch and torch of the chiefest incendiary of the age—the vandals of the nineteenth century—the records of Salem church suffered irreparable injury, and some of its most important history was forever lost beyond human power or control. Though they were not secured by the marauding armies of Sherman and Wheeler, yet the contending elements of nature effected their ruin.

January 1, 1854, Rev. A. A. James was called to the pastorate, supplying it one half his time. The session consisted of Colonel R. G. Davidson, M. S. Lynn and J. S. Plaxico. Rev. Mr. James preached here until January, 1859. When he commenced his ministry there they had been worshipping in a very dilapidated building. He urged them to build a new house, but they did not think they were able. The old church stood about seventy-five yards west of the present building, and Providence in-

terposed and in a severe wind storm brought down a large pine tree, completely demolishing the building. This occurred a few weeks after Rev. A. A. James commenced preaching there, (1854). The Independent Presbyterians were worshipping in the old church, about one-fourth of a mile north of where the present church stands, and they invited Rev. Mr. James to occupy their church, which he did. The feeling between the two denominations, or perhaps we should say, congregations, had been very bitter, and after preaching in their house and both congregations worshipping together and communing with each other, Rev. Mr. James ventured a proposal to them to which they agreed, and the result was the building of the present house of worship in 1854. They concluded they would not build in the grove on account of storms, but exchanged the site of the old Independent lot of land with Mr. Henry Thompson for the extension of their lot into the field where the present house stands, and they then planted shade trees around the building.

The pine tree which demolished the old church opened the way for a union between the two factions or churches. The Independents had but four ministers and but little prospects of any increase. At a meeting of the Presbytery in Unionville, Rev. A. A. James offered a resolution that a committee be appointed to meet with the Independents in their annual convention and propose a union of the two branches of the church. It was adopted, and Rev. A. A. James and J. Starr Moore, of the York church, were appointed. They met with the Independents at Olive church in York county, and were very cordially received, and steps were taken toward the union of the two branches. But the war coming on it was delayed for some time, but finally it was accomplished. The Independents had only four ministers at that time, viz.: Rev. Robert Y. Russell, Rev. W. Washington Carothers, Rev. J. Starkes Bailey and Rev. W. W. Ratchford. They had in charge fifteen churches, which were added to Bethel Presbytery. All praise to the

lofty pine tree and the Providence that directed the storm.

The present house of worship was built in 1854, and dedicated to the worship of Almighty God. Rev. Arnold W. Miller, D. D., (at that time pastor of Fishing Creek church, in Chester county, and afterwards pastor of the First Presbyterian church, Charlotte, N. C.), preached the dedicatory sermon from the text: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, Oh, Lord of hosts," Psalm lxxxiv, 1.

At a meeting of the church session held September 11, 1864, with Rev. Robt. Y. Russell, moderator, the following communication was received, and was ordered placed on the church records:

"Jackson Hospital, Richmond, Va.
To the Session of Salem Church,
Union District, S. C.:

This will certify that on the 25th day of June, that I examined Joseph M. Smith upon his Christian experience and was well satisfied that he had received a change of heart. I administered to him the sacrament of baptism and received him at his own request into the Presbyterian church, and it is at his own request that his name be enrolled upon the church book at Salem, Union District, S. C.

R. F. Payton.

East Chaplain, Jackson Hospital, a Presbyterian minister of the Synod of Georgia and Presbytery of Cherokee."

In 1878 the church was re-covered. Within a year it has been re-weather-boarded and painted inside and outside. The plastering on the inside was much damaged by the earthquake of August 31, 1886, but it has been repaired. To give a full history of the church, with its various ministers, elders, and other officers, together with its membership would carry this sketch far beyond the space we have for its publication. Deaths, removals and the vicissitudes of life have wrought many changes in all these.

"They have been scattered like roses in bloom.

Some by the bridle and some by the tomb."

Rev. W. H. White is at present supplying the church once a month. The elders now are, S. F. Estes, C. W. Whisonant, T. J. Estes and J. L. Strain. The deacons are, J. W. Brown, Jack Smarr and H. Terry Estes. The janitor, Leslie Blackwell. There are sixty-two members on the roll.

The Sabbath school was organized in 1886 and in evergreen.

The first person buried in the cemetery was Mr. William Davidson. He died June 25th, 1854, during the awful epidemic of flux. Rev. A. A. James preached his funeral, taking for his text, 'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves.' These words are inscribed on the family monument in the cemetery.

During the pastorate of Rev. A. A. James, and before as well as since, large congregations attended. The gallery was generally filled with negroes at each service. This was the case for several years after the war.

Mr. James tells a laughable incident which took place while he preached there. By some means a dog found its way into the gallery, crowded with negroes. It couldn't find its way down stairs again, but jumped upon the parapet and looked down upon the white congregation below. An old negro woman, seeing what was about to happen, caught it by the tail and pulled it back. Very few of the white people saw it and so Mr. James had their part of the fun to himself. He preached on just as if nothing had happened.

To Howe's History, Rev. A. A. James, Mrs. Martha E. Smarr and others, besides the sessional records, I am indebted for the invaluable help I got in making this sketch as full as it is.

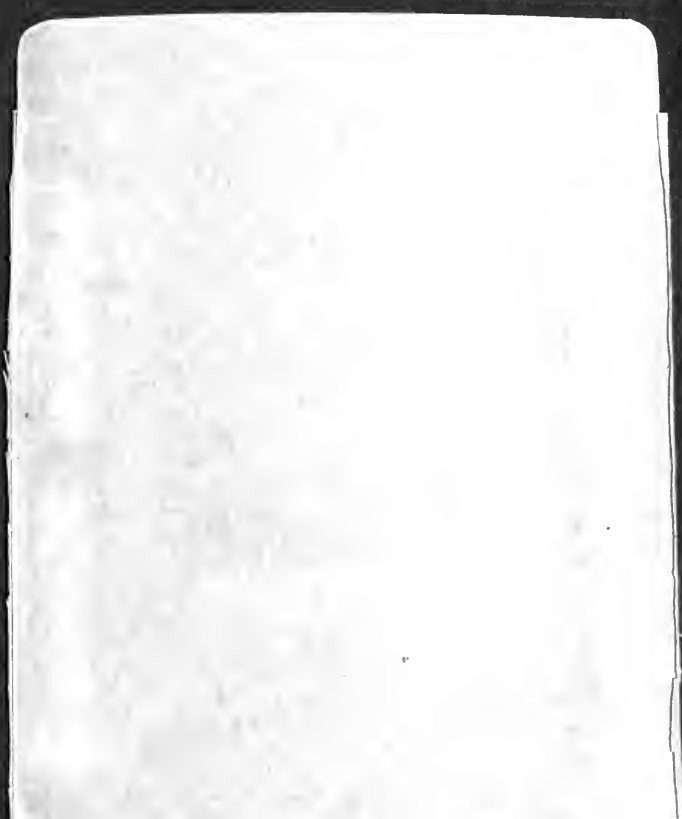


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