

*ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST  
CHURCH TESTIMONY*

*1871 - 1988*



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***1871 - 1988***

***By  
Jerry D. Bingham***

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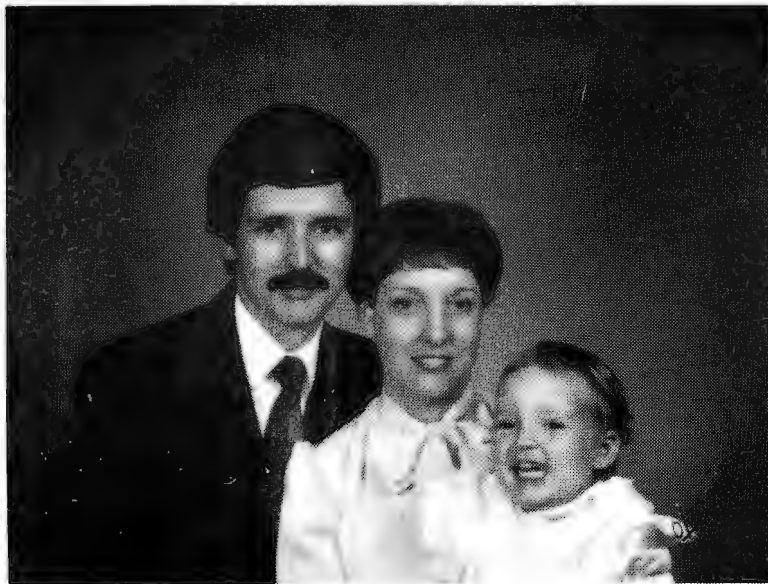
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-\*- DEDICATION -\*-

To my wife, Carol West Bingham,  
who encourages with love and affection all my  
efforts as pastor of Rock Branch Baptist Church.  
Carol's numerous contributions to my ministry and family  
will be eternally remembered.

-\*- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS -\*-

Special appreciation to Miss Juanita West, professor,  
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to numerous lay persons who have contributed data. So as I write,  
I am surrounded with a great host of witnesses. To each I am  
debtor.



Jerry, Carol, and Kara Bingham

-\*- PASTOR AND FAMILY -\*-

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## C H A P T E R   I

### -\*- INTRODUCTION -\*-

The Testimony of Rock Branch Baptist Church, established over a period of 117 years, consisted of: Rock Branch Baptist Church's pioneering the community, establishing a church, taking a doctoral position in the community, functioning as an autonomous government within the community, fulfilling the Great Commission, and calling Rock Branch Baptist Church officers. All of these events materialized while working out of the Rock Branch Baptist Church physical plant. Many things come and go, but when other things have departed, the testimony of Rock Branch Baptist Church moves on through history to do God's will.

## C H A P T E R   I I

-\*- ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH'S PIONEERING THE COMMUNITY -\*-

Rock Branch Baptist Church's pioneering of the community began forty one years after the United States obtained the lands of Newton County from the Choctaw Indians. The Rock Branch community, along with Newton County, settled with white people as early as the year 1833, when the community settled with valuable citizens from Georgia.<sup>1</sup> Some of the people who settled in the northeastern part of the county were the Reynolds, McMullans, Clearmans, Mathesis, Castles, Gilberts, Lairds, HARRISES, Jones, and Thames. Near Union the Brelands, Hubbards, Smiths, Boyds, Lewis, Gordons, Isham Daniel, an old North Carolina merchant and postmaster at Union; Claiborne Mann, a large land and slave owner who married, as his second wife, the mother of Honorable A. G. Mayers, a judge; and the Hunters.<sup>2</sup> These faithful pioneers felt the need to hear the gospel preached because they were reared with the privilege of the gospel. Ministers were always encouraged to stop by the community and feed the people's hungry souls with God's precious Holy Word. To aid in this endeavor, a building was erected for the public's convenience, though it was primitive in construction and doubled as a school as well as a place for worship.<sup>3</sup>



## CHAPTER III

## - \*- ROCK BRANCH COMMUNITY ESTABLISHING A CHURCH -\*-

Rock Branch Baptist Church was established in an economy that was beginning to rebound from the tragic results of the Civil War. The area was in the path that General Sherman had cut as he passed through the South going eastward seven years prior to Rock Branch Baptist Church's establishment. After entering Newton County, east of Conehatta, General Sherman passed through the Rock Branch Baptist Church area in February, 1864 on the road that now extends past Beulah Baptist Church to Meridian.<sup>4</sup>

During the year Rock Branch Baptist Church was established, most of the state was under heavy taxation and no representation. The respective cotton crops for 1871 were 4,347,000, with a price of eighteen cents per pound. In 1872 cotton crops were 2,974,351, with a price of seventeen cents per pound. Most of the planters were in debt and were locking in corn and home supplies before prices changed.<sup>5</sup> Around this same time, the county pioneered the introduction of the latest agricultural development, commercial fertilizer, for use on general field crops.<sup>6</sup>

Rock Branch Baptist Church was established as a church in December 30, 1871, approximately two miles southeast of downtown Union, as the crow flies. From the original pages of the now yellowed, ragged, and laced together minute book, the testimony of Rock Branch Baptist Church's beginning is found: (Written in the speech, punctuation and spelling of the original document.)

December 30, 1871 - State of Mississippi Newton County

We whose names are hereunto subscribed being regularly ordained ministers of the gospel of Christ of the order and denomination of regular Baptist so hereby certify that we did this day at the request of sundry brethren and sisters of the same faith and order convened at this place of worship county and state above named to take into consideration the propriety of constituting said brethren and Sisters into church relations. Thus convened a sermon was preached by Brother Nathan L. Clark after which the letters recommendatory of the applicants for constitution were called for when the following brethren and sisters presented letters in order Viz Francis S. Smith deacon and wife Eliza Smith, John B. Abney deacon and Wife Lucy M. C. Abney, John Leverett and wife Martha Leverett, John I. Cleaveland and wife Sallie E. Cleaveland, John W. Butler and wife Elizebeth E. Butler, all certified to the satisfaction of ministers and members present in all 10 in member who upon examination were found sound in faith and it appearing to our minds that these brethren and Sisters were orderly and orthodox and members sufficient to keep house for God and otherwise in a destitute condition it was hence expedient that they be organized into a regular church, do all things and enjoy all privileges that the church of Christ may do and enjoy under the name and style of Rock Branch regular Baptist church on the abstract of faith of the Mt. Pisgah Association.

Nathan L. Clark,  
Oliver F. Breland,  
James M. Moore, 7

Once the church was established, property was secured to carry out its functions. On March 28, 1872, the trustees of Rock Branch Baptist Church purchased from F. S. and Eliza Smith, for an unknown amount, approximately two acres of land for the purpose of a Baptist church, school house, and burying ground. The building uses were designated for singing societies and for preaching by other evangelical denominations when it did not conflict with the Baptist services. According to the Deed of Trust, the trustees were John B. Abney, I. H. Cleveland, and W.

A. Taylor, because they had the desire to promote the religious, moral, and educational interest in the neighborhood and community. The Deed of trust also stated that no denomination should have the right to constitute or organize a church except the Baptist church.<sup>2</sup> In August of 1891, the church passed a motion to forbid the holding of an election or political meeting of any kind in the church.<sup>3</sup>

## C H A P T E R I V

ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH TAKES A DOCTORAL  
POSITION IN THE COMMUNITY

From the very beginning, Rock Branch Baptist Church took a doctoral position in the community by drawing up nine statements of their faith called Abstract of Faith: (As taken from the original document.)

- 1st We believe in one Triune God the Father the son and the holy Ghost the same in essence equal in power and glory.
- 2nd We believe that the scriptures of the Old and new Testament were given by the inspiration of God and are the only rules of faith and practice.
- 3rd We believe in the fall of Adam from his original rectitude and in him all his posterity in consequence of which we inherit a fallen and depraved nature consequently scriptural doctrine of the total depravity of human nature and of mans inability to restore himself into the favor of God.
- 4th We believe that God hath loved his people with an everlasting love; that he chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, that he calleth them with an holy and effectual calling and being justified alone through the righteousness of Christ imputed to them are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.
- 5th We believe there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, we by the satisfaction he made to the law and Justice in becoming an offering for sin, hath by his most precious blood become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.
- 6th We believe that the Gospel is God appointed means of calling Sinners to the knowledge of the truth that he has commanded it to be preached to every

creature and requires all men to repent believe and obey.

- 7th We believe that the Gospel is made effectual by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and that the Sinner, in order to be saved must be born again.
- 8th We believe that good works are the fruits of faith and follow after justification and are evidences of a gracious State and all believers are bound to obey every command of God from a principle of love.
- 9th We believe in the resurrection of the dead, a general judgement, and that the happings of the righteous, and the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.<sup>10</sup>

While establishing a doctrinal position in the community, the church also adopted a Gospel Order. In this congregational adoption, the church amended eight orders: (As taken from the original document.)

- 1st We believe that a visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful persons, who have given themselves to the Lord and to one another in brotherly covenant, to keep up a Godly discipline agreeable to the rules of the New Testament.
- 2nd We believe that Jesus Christ is the only head and law giver of his Church, that the government is with the body, the church, and is equally the right and privileges of every member thereof.
- 3rd We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are gospel ordinances, appointed by Jesus Christ, and are to be continued in his church till his Second coming.
- 4th We believe that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are properly and ministered only by ministers called of God, and set apart to the work by the imposition of hands by a presbytery of regular baptist ministers.
- 5th We believe that immersion only is baptism, and that believers are the only proper subjects.

- 6th We beleivs that none but regularly baptized church members have a right to partake of the Lord's Supper.
- 7th We beleive that it is the duty and privilege of all beleivers to make a public profefsion of their faith, to submit to the and invances of the gospel, and give themselves as members to the visible church.
- 8th We beleive it to be the duty of every church to expel from her communion every member that is immoral in conduct or that holds doctrines contrary to the Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

The church could not begin to take a doctoral position in a community, much less in a world, in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ without having a Church Covenant. Recognizing such a need, one was written at their first organizational meeting. Eleven commitments were made to the Lord and the church body. (As taken from the original document.)

- 1st Having in a judgment of charity and discretion towards ourselves and one another first giving ourselves to the Lord, and we do agree to give ourselves to one another by the will of God in a visible congregational church State.
- 2nd We mutually agree to love one another in obedience to the commands of Christ. John 13 ch. 35 v.
- 3rd We agree to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. Eph. 4th ch. 3rd v.
- 4th To Sympathize with each other in adversity and prosperity. Rom. 12th ch. 15 v.
- 5th To communicate to each other's necessity as circumstances may point out. Gal. 6 ch. 10 v. Heb. 13, 14.
- 6th To watch over one another and bear with each other's infirmities and admonish one another in faithfulness and christian tenderness. Heb 12 ch. 15v. Rom. 15:1

- 7th To confess our faults to and pray for one another.  
James 5 ch. 16 v.
- 8th To assemble ourselves together regularly for  
religious worship. Heb. 10 ch. 25 v.
- 9th To have no respect of persons in church affairs,  
as use partiality on account of any difference in  
external condition. Rom 12 c. 16 v. Tim. 5 c. 21  
v.
- 10th To Strive together for the faith of the gospel and  
earnestly contend for it not suffering any human  
inventions or unwarranted practice to be imposed  
on us. Phill 10 c. 27 v Jude 3 v.
- 11th That we will endeavor to be examples to each  
other of a holy walk and a God by conversation in  
Christ. 2nd Peter 3 ch. 11 v.<sup>12</sup>

## C H A P T E R    V

-\* - ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH FUNCTIONS -\* -  
AS AN AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Though Rock Branch Baptist Church established its position in the community, it functioned as an autonomous government. The first business meeting known as a "conference" was held on Saturday, December 30, 1871. Rev. N. L. Clarke was chosen as Moderator Protem and J. M. Moore as Clerk Protem. The decision to name the newly organized church Rock Branch was the first order of conference. The second order of the conference, which was the choice of a pastor for the year of 1872, resulted in the calling of James M. Moore. The decision to meet on the first Sunday and Saturday before each month was the third order of the conference. The fourth order of conference selected F. S. Smith and J. B. Abney to officiate as deacons and also selected Mr. Abney to act as church clerk. The fifth and last action of the conference was to hold communion quarterly beginning with the first month in the year. As December 31, 1871 would be their first Sabbath service, it was agreed to hold communion then. On the first Sunday, at the conclusion of services, the doors of the church were opened to receive members; Sister Martha L. Cleveland was received by letter as the church's first member.<sup>13</sup> The church became autonomous in its conference meetings by drafting the Rules of Decorum. The church established eight rules to govern itself by: (As taken from the original document.)



- 1st The church when in conference shall have a Moderator and Clerk. The Pastor shall be moderator and the clerk shall be chosen from the membership of the church. Should either be absent a protem shall be made to fill the place.
- 2nd It shall be the duty of the moderator to preside over the conference, conduct the business and decide and keep order and of the clerk to make and keep a true record of the business necessary to be recorded.
- 3rd The brethren when in conference shall observe order nor shall any brother leave his place in conference with out leave from the Moderator.
- 4th All business shall be brought before the conference by move and second and all motions made and seconded shall claim the attention of the moderator and be put to vote unless withdrawn by the mover.
- 5th The right of discussion shall be allowed on all subjects before the conference, but one brother shall be allowed to speak at a time and when about to speak shall arise from his seat and address himself to the moderator with the term brother, shall use courteous language nor shall he depart from the subject in debate no brother shall speak more than twice on the same subject with out leave from the conference.
- 6th Voting shall be by a yes and nay unless rising shall be called for.
- 7th All the questions before the conference shall be decided by a majority vote except the reception of members and their dismissal by letter in which the vote must be unanimous. In case of a tie the moderator shall give the casting vote.
- 8th It shall be the duty of the members of this church to attend the conference meetings and any brother failing to do so it shall be his duty at the next conference to make known the reason of his absence and any brother failing to attend for three successive meetings without the cause to have violated his christian obligation and it shall be the duty of the church to deal with him as an offender. 14

The conference meetings were held on the first Saturday before each month until 1953. In June, 1953 the church voted to hold a regular business session after each second Sunday of the month at the conclusion of the morning service.<sup>15</sup> A year later in 1954, one of the members, Champ Luke, made a motion to change the business meeting (conference) date from the second Sunday to Wednesday night after the second Sunday.<sup>16</sup> The congregation unanimously approved Mr. Luke's motion; and at this writing, the business sessions are still held at that time. Readings of the treasure's and secretary's report in the monthly conference meetings are not mentioned until 1955 when a motion was carried to have the Treasure's report read quarterly and the Secretary's report read monthly to keep the congregation informed.<sup>17</sup>

Membership into the church was made possible by special provisions made by an Order of Business during conference meetings. Six formulated orders helped carry out the meetings in an orderly fashion as well as provided an opportunity for new comers to join the church: (As from the original document.)

- 1st Conference shall be called to order by the moderator and visiting brethren invited to seat with this church.
- 2nd The door of the church shall be opened for the reception of members according to the gospel and our order.
- 3rd Calls for reference and unfinished business from previous conferences.
- 4th Call for the peace and fellowship of the church.
- 5th Call for general business such as granting letters of dismission and request and electing delegates

to the Association and any other business of a general nature.

6th Call the roll and mark absentees. these rules may be altered at any regular conference meeting by a majority of the members present provided notice of said amendment be given at least one regular meeting before.<sup>18</sup>

The morality and good standard within the church was a must during the establishing years of Rock Branch Baptist Church. A high regard for church discipline, unlike today, was carried out during each conference meeting at a time called church reference. During this time of the conference meeting, the known immorality of members came before the church for disciplinary action. In November 1874, a man was excluded from the church after the church disciplinary committee found him guilty of the unchristian conduct of falsehood and leaving the county without paying his debts.<sup>19</sup> Another disciplinary action in March 1877 resulted in forgiving a man for the unchristian conduct of dancing.<sup>20</sup> Forgiveness was also granted to another man brought before the church after he acknowledged the sin of betting and promised to quit.<sup>21</sup> Many people today would be found in contempt if they were brought before the church for the same charges as that of a man brought on August 10, 1878. This man was forgiven by the church after he confessed to breaking the Sabbath by working.<sup>22</sup> Once, in 1885 the church fellowship was withdrawn from a man after the committee found him guilty of disorderly and unchristian conduct and of using profane language.<sup>23</sup> One of the largest undertakings of the church, during a reference, was dealing with a marriage case. In the summer of 1887, the church called for peace in the

church and found it was not in peace because a young member was charged with violating her marriage vow and quitting her husband without cause. The marriage was reconciled a month later after three members from the sister churches were called in to serve as a council. The council enrolled consisted of three members from Decatur Baptist Church, three members from Pinkney Church, and two members from the Beulah Baptist Church. After the council met with the young couple, the couple agreed to forgive each other and bear with one another in the church while living in peace in the community with neighbors.<sup>24</sup> During a reference period in 1888, the church forgave a man for fighting though the committee handling the case could not persuade him to confess to the matter before the church.<sup>25</sup> In 1891, another morality case, resulted in withdrawing church fellowship from two men guilty of public intoxication.<sup>26</sup> The church did not withdraw fellowship from a lady until 1909. The first lady withdrawn from the church fellowship came about because of the individual's departing from the faith.<sup>27</sup>

According to Mrs. Orie Smith, "At the end of the first year, the church had 24 members and continued to grow until the membership was above 170."<sup>28</sup> Rock Branch's membership has fluctuated, along with most of the other rural churches, because of the changing times. At present the church has 58 resident members and 28 nonresident members, making a total of 86 members.

## C H A P T E R   V I

-\* ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH FULFILLING -\*  
THE GREAT COMMISSION

Rock Branch Baptist Church began fulfilling the Great Commission by holding divine worship services during the week. The ending and beginning of the week was spent meditating upon God's Word in church. Originally the services were held for two days, Saturday and Sunday. Sunday School was only held during the summer in 1922.<sup>29</sup> Later in time, the church tradition changed to having services only on Sunday. As the Lord blessed the church in several ways, the church realized the need for a full time ministry. On February 12, 1958, the church voted to go full time in church work after the motion was made by Nuell Butts and seconded by Champ Luke.<sup>30</sup>

It was customary for Rock Branch Baptist Church, as it was in other local churches, to have annual Hymn singing. As early as 1936, Rock Branch is recorded as having such meetings. A singing was held each year on the third Sunday in June. On April 18, 1936 the singing date was changed to the second Sunday in June.<sup>31</sup> The following year, while pastor, M. A. Davis was away at the Southern Baptist Convention, the church went into conference and voted to discontinue the annual singing.<sup>32</sup> Singing took on a new importance within the church by forming a church choir. On November 11, 1959, the church recognized the church choir as an official church organization.<sup>33</sup> Instrumental music was also

recognized as a contribution to the worship service and not only for Sunday School. Mrs. Orie Smith stated, "In 1912, the church voted to use the organ in the services. It had been bought for the Sunday School only."<sup>34</sup> Enjoying organ music in the worship service brought on a desire to add piano music to the service. On July 20, 1935, the pastor, Rev. M. A Davis, was given approval to appoint a committee to pursue the purchasing of a piano.<sup>35</sup> It took until October 17, 1936 to raise enough money to pay off the balance of the piano.<sup>36</sup> On September 30, 1952, the instrumental music equipment was improved with the purchase of a new piano for \$595.00. During this time, Rev. H. E. Nelson was pastor and J. A. Cleveland was Church Clerk.<sup>37</sup> As piano models improved and existing instruments became worn, the church began another piano fund in March, 1985 for the purchase of a new piano.<sup>38</sup> Two years later, on February 11, 1987, the church approved the purchase of a Baldwin 243 Hamilton studio type piano for \$2,650.00 with a \$400.00 trade in on the old piano.<sup>39</sup> The song books wore out and had to be replaced almost as fast as the instruments. The first song book mentioned being used in the church was the Evangel. On August 17, 1912, the church passed a motion by Rev. W. H. Rainer to adopted the new Evangel as a song book for the church.<sup>40</sup> When additional song books were needed in 1933, the church appointed a committee of women to raise money to order the song books. This song book committee is believed to be the first female committee of the church and included: Edith Cleveland, Lola Cleveland, Irma Mad Vivenette, Myrtle Cleveland, Odessa Nicholson, and Bessie

Nicholson.<sup>41</sup> An additional dozen song books was ordered from time to time in the 1960's.<sup>42</sup> The latest up-dating of song books was in 1984 when the church agreed to pay over \$200.00 to purchase 40 new Baptist Hymnals plus a piano edition.<sup>43</sup>

The church, from the very beginning, observed the church ordinances instructed by Christ to be carried out until He returns. As early as 1887 the church conference minutes stated that the deacons were granted liberty to use church funds to purchase wine for communion purposes. It is believed that this wine used by the church was a nonalcoholic beverage and is a scriptural expression relating to the cup used by Christ.<sup>44</sup> When supplies were not purchased for the observance of the Lord's Supper, some of the church members made the needed supplies. When Mrs. Kelly Henry Cook Cleveland, Mrs. Irene Loper's mother, was a member of Rock Branch Baptist Church, she prepared the bread. She sectioned the unleavened bread in bite size squares by imprinting the dough with a knife before cooking it. Once baked the bread was prepared for the pastor to break up into bite size pieces to be placed in trays for distribution. Mr. Kelly Cleveland, Mrs. Irene Loper's father, made the grape juice from his home vineyard to be used as the wine. A single cup of wine passed from member to member as they partook of the Lord's Supper.<sup>45</sup>

The first Ordinance of Baptism was observed after Rock Branch's first and very spiritual protracted meeting (revival). Eight professions of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ were made during the five day meeting. The baptism service was held on

August 7, 1872, with the following candidates: Lee W. Smith, Tabitha I. Smith, Martha A. O. l Abney, Mildred L. I. Abney, Ibra H. Cleaveland, Piety Cleaveland, Emma C. A. Reanes, and Sarah E. James.<sup>46</sup> The baptisms were held in local ponds. During Rev G. O. Parker's pastorate some ingenuity was used. Mrs. Irene Loper remembers being baptized in 1923 in Rock Branch below the hill just West of the church near the bridge. To this day, during normal summer weather, the creek branch is just a small stream of water. For this reason, prior to the date of baptism, some of the men would dam up the creek until it collected enough water for a baptism pool. The following day the dam would be knocked down and Rock Branch would once again be back to normal.<sup>47</sup>

Foot washing was added later as one of Rock Branch's ordinances though there is no written record as to whether it was ever practiced. On April 2, 1876, a conference motion was made to meet together as a church at least once a year at an appointed time to wash one another's feet. Authenticity for an additional church ordinance was based on John 14:13. This motion was carried over to a later date and adopted as a resolution on July 8, 1876, after a motion made by H. W. Laird.<sup>48</sup>

Protractor meetings were and are held annually by Rock Branch Baptist Church to herald the gospel of Jesus Christ. Recognizing the urgency to win the lost World to Christ, each protractor meeting is held for five days. Originally, the protractor meetings were held in the month of July.<sup>49</sup> People were so inspired from the protractor meetings that babies would be



left asleep in the church and parents would arrive home only to turn around and go right back and find the child still asleep.<sup>50</sup> Today, the term protractor has been modernized, like most things, and is now called a revival meeting. The revival dates are adjusted to make the most impact upon the community and church as church leaders follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Carrying out the Great Commission, unfortunately, is dependent to some degree on finances. Many times in the early ministry of the church, the pastor might have receive as little as \$5.25 as a love offering. One has to remember that in those days \$5.25 was a lot of money because of the dollar value. Most of the members and the community were in the same shape financially and times were hard. Some may have contributed ten cents and others fifty cents when the hat was passed. Collection plates in the early 1920's were a rarity in the country churches.<sup>51</sup> Mr. C. M. Cleveland in June 1936, donated to the church two wood turned offering plates to take the place of passing the hat.<sup>52</sup> In the past, members of Rock Branch felt the need to contribute so strongly financially to the cause of Christ that all eggs laid on Sunday were sold by the women with the proceeds given to the church.<sup>53</sup> Like many people today, a small number of church people felt the real need to comply with the scripture to support the church financially. In the past as well as today, a large portion of the receipts taken up each Sunday came from only a small number of members attending Sunday School. The monthly expenditures in the present day for the church runs

around a thousand dollars while the average Sunday School attendance is twenty. As long as anyone can remember, the offering plates have only been passed in the morning worship service each Sunday. Other funds are collected through offerings given in envelopes taken up during Sunday School each Sunday.

Rock Branch Baptist Church has been mission minded since its establishment. A petition letter for Mt. Pisgah Association membership was delivered at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Newton, Mississippi, on Saturday before the third Lord's day in September 1872. The delegates elected to deliver the petition letter from Rock Branch were F. S. Smith and John I. Cleveland with John B. Abney as alternate delegate.<sup>54</sup> Rock Branch, with a membership of twenty four, became a member of the Mt. Pisgah Association in September 1872.<sup>55</sup> In 1873, the church attended their first association meeting on Saturday before the third Lord's day in September, in Neshoba County, Mississippi, at the County Line Baptist Church.<sup>56</sup> The church hosted its first association meeting in September 1888.<sup>57</sup> Around 1922, Rock Branch called for its letter from Mt. Pisgah Association and joined the Newton County Baptist Association.<sup>58</sup>

The church began establishing a Biblical mission philosophy in the community as early as 1886. Rock Branch Baptist Church has always had a warm compassionate heart for the needs of others and this compassion can be seen from a brief review of its mission past. The General Association meeting, held in Decatur on October 16, 1886, became Rock Branch's first recorded mission gift

recipient. Rock Branch messengers, M. J. Taylor and J. B. Abney, delivered \$15.10 for missionary purposes.<sup>59</sup> In 1903, a collection of \$5.40 was taken for the orphan children in Jackson, Mississippi.<sup>60</sup> According to the church minutes, the church continued this annual event as late as 1935. During 1935, supplies for the Baptist Orphan Home were gathered by an appointed committee: H. L. Laird, Mrs. E. A. Cleveland, W. L. Heflin, and Mary Ellen Cleveland.<sup>61</sup> On September 17, 1938, the church reached out into the county with their mission mindedness and gave \$1.70 to Clarke College for the ministerial cottage at Newton.<sup>62</sup> After recognizing Clarke Memorial College's need for additional support, the church voted in June 1950 to send \$52.00 quarterly, to go toward a building fund.<sup>63</sup> In 1955, the church as a mission project, gave gifts to the Meridian Mental State Hospital patients as a way of assisting in the institution's health care.<sup>64</sup> Armed service members of Rock Branch were ministered to by sending each a copy of the "Baptist Record" after Holcomb Nicholson brought the idea before the church.<sup>65</sup> In 1945, the church agreed to budget its finances so that every member could receive a copy of the "Baptist Record."<sup>66</sup> Rock Branch, when possible, believed in supporting the Baptist Student Union (BSU) at East Central Junior College, now East Central Community College, with a quarterly gift of \$25.00.<sup>67</sup> In 1955, Rock Branch paid Henry Luke's BSU Week expenses to Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in North Carolina.<sup>68</sup> When neighboring churches were in need of support, Rock Branch responded with a mission

heart. An offering was taken on the fourth Sunday in January 1974, to go toward helping rebuild Mt. Nebo Baptist Church after it was destroyed by fire.<sup>69</sup> When the Pinkney Baptist Church parsonage was destroyed by fire in 1978, the church collected an offering of \$50.00 and gave it to that church's pastor.<sup>70</sup> Following the flooding in different areas in Jackson in 1979, the church sent an offering to aid flood victims.<sup>71</sup> In 1985, the church began an annual mission project of handing out fruit baskets to the shut-ins and sacks of fruit and candy to church children during Christmas.<sup>72</sup>

Feeling the need for missions on the home front, the ladies in 1959 organized a Women's Missionary Society now known as Woman's Missionary Union (WMU).<sup>73</sup> If it had not been for many of the dedicated women in the churches through out the land, and especially this church, there would not be mission emphases locally. To some degree, many church doors would not be open if it were not for the dedicated women in them. Many small churches, like Rock Branch, have discontinued or quit having an effective Royal Ambassador program for boys since it was taken from the WMU and placed under the control of the Brotherhood Department of the Southern Baptist Convention.

In an effort to reach young boys and girls in the community with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to emphasize the importance of missions, the church has held Vacation Bible School. The holding of Vacation Bible School is mentioned as far back as 1953 in the recorded minutes of the church.<sup>74</sup> Each summer

the church takes a week for Vacation Bible School in which activities such as Bible drills, scripture learning, mission emphasizes, and craft projects are enjoyed by all.

## C H A P T E R   V I I

## -\* - ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH OFFICERS -\* -

The sacred position behind the pulpit at Rock Branch has been filled by many men called by God to herald the Gospel of Jesus Christ during its continuing ministry. The first to fill this important position was Rev. Nathan L. Clarke who organized the church in 1871. He was born February 7, 1812, and moved to Newton County in the fall of 1847 after accepting a pastorate position in Decatur, Mississippi. In times, he would ride 350 miles per month on horse back to preach while holding the pastorate of the church at Decatur and working as missionary in the Mt. Pisgah Association. Rock Branch Baptist Church was one of the hundreds of churches this pioneer preacher organized.<sup>75</sup>

Usually, at the end of each year, the church called a pastor for the following year. Rev. J. M. Moore, the second pastor, was the first to be chosen by a congregational vote on September 28, 1872.<sup>76</sup> One month after Rev. Moore resigned on November 1, 1873, the church called Rev. L. B. Fancher on December 6, 1873. During this time the church met on the third Lord's day and Saturday of each month.<sup>77</sup> Rev. Fancher served until December 1875.<sup>78</sup> Other pastors to serve Rock Branch Baptist Church were as follows: James M. Moore from December 1875 to December 19, 1896;<sup>79</sup> R. K. Cleveland from 1897 to April 1905;<sup>80</sup> G. W. Breeland from April 1905 to December 1905;<sup>81</sup> L. B. Fancher from January 1906 to December 1906;<sup>82</sup> W. H. Rainer from January 1908 to January 18,

1913;<sup>93</sup> R. W. Bryant from January 1913 to October 17, 1914;<sup>94</sup> A. B. Culpepper from January 16, 1915 to December 1916;<sup>95</sup> R. L. Breeland from January 1917 to December 1920;<sup>96</sup> J. W. Rooker from January 1921 to November 15, 1921;<sup>97</sup> G. O. Parker from January 1922 to December 27, 1934;<sup>98</sup> M. A. Davis from February 16, 1935 to December 17, 1938;<sup>99</sup> R. L. Allen from January 14, 1939 to April 15, 1939;<sup>100</sup> H. H. Bethune from May 20, 1939 to August 16, 1942;<sup>101</sup> J. L. Boyd from February 21, 1943 to July 21, 1946;<sup>102</sup> W. F. Evans from August 1946 to October 1949;<sup>103</sup> L. B. Simmons from September 1949 to July 1951;<sup>104</sup> Byran Scruggs from July 1951 to March 9, 1952;<sup>105</sup> Hoyte E. Nelson from April 13, 1952 to April 15, 1954;<sup>106</sup> Gilter E. Jolly from June 1954 to November 17, 1954;<sup>107</sup> W. R. Prince from December 15, 1954 to April 1955;<sup>108</sup> Floyd Beason from April 13, 1955 to March 1957;<sup>109</sup> Clint Taylor from March 27, 1957 to August 1957;<sup>110</sup> Loyd Thorton from October 1957 to March 1959;<sup>111</sup> Bill Hamerick from March 25, 1959 to August 12, 1959;<sup>112</sup> Ben Earnest from October 18, 1959 to January 28, 1962;<sup>113</sup> James Hart from February 14, 1962 to May 1964;<sup>114</sup> Robert Rayland from June 1964 to October 1967;<sup>115</sup> Daniel Springfield from October 17, 1965 to January 1967;<sup>116</sup> Fred Toomey from January 29, 1967 to February 28, 1968;<sup>117</sup> Bob Hill from March 13, 1968 to March 1969;<sup>118</sup> Tony Moss from March 2, 1969 to October 1969;<sup>119</sup> Tommy Purvis from November 16, 1969 to January 1971;<sup>120</sup> Henry Cupstid from March 14, 1971 to March 1975;<sup>121</sup> Mike Thompson from June 1, 1975 to May 1977;<sup>122</sup> James McNally from May 1977 to July 5, 1978;<sup>123</sup> Barry McCard from July 16, 1978 to May 1980;<sup>124</sup> Paul

Crocker from September 1980 to August 1983;<sup>116</sup> Jim Twilbeck from January 11, 1984 to May 1985;<sup>116</sup> Thomas Fox from October 6, 1985 to August 1986;<sup>117</sup> David Grumback from October 15, 1986 to October 1987;<sup>118</sup> and Jerry Bingham from December 13, 1988 to present.<sup>119</sup> Out of the 43 pastors that have heralded the gospel from Rock Branch's pulpit, only two returned for a second pastorate and that was Rev. J. M. Moore and Rev. L. B. Fancher.

God has used Rock Branch, like thousands of other churches through out the world, to call local men to carry out His plan of redeeming the world. Rock Branch has licensed and ordained many preachers to the gospel ministry. In 1872 Rock Branch licensed its first preacher, James M. Kelly.<sup>120</sup> Others that have been licensed by the church are Ruben Cleveland on July 19, 1890;<sup>121</sup> and W. T. Collins on August 14, 1897.<sup>122</sup> Not long after these men were licensed into the gospel ministry they were called by churches and their ordinations were requested. On July 18, 1874, Rock Branch ordained James M. Kelly into the gospel ministry.<sup>123</sup> On May 18, 1901, the church ordained W. T. Collins.<sup>124</sup>

Following the teachings of Christ, Rock Branch Baptist Church ordained deacons to help carry out the ministry along with the pastor. Many dedicated men have played a vital link in the ministry chain as they served their flock and church to which they were ordained. The first written record of anyone's holding a deacon position in the church is found in the first minutes of the church conference. Viz Francis S. Smith and John B. Abney were asked to serve as Rock Branch's first deacons. The following



leadership has molded Rock Branch Baptist Church into the church and ministry it is today: H. W. Laird ordained July 18, 1874;<sup>125</sup> W. B. F. Adams and B. Miller ordained July 8, 1882;<sup>126</sup> J. B. Cleveland and S. S. James ordained May 29, 1892;<sup>127</sup> F. S. Smith ordained May 18, 1912;<sup>128</sup> A. J. Viverette resigned for an unknown reason as deacon on September 14, 1935;<sup>129</sup> Arch Laird and E. A. Cleveland ordained November 17, 1934;<sup>130</sup> Champ Luke, Jack Viverette, and Advin Broning ordained third Sunday in January 1949;<sup>131</sup> Jeff Viverette reinstated November 1951;<sup>132</sup> Jack Laird ordained February 22, 1953;<sup>133</sup> Nuell Butts ordained August 12, 1955;<sup>134</sup> Holcomb Nicholson ordained November 15, 1959;<sup>135</sup> Raymond Wilson ordained 1962;<sup>136</sup> Jerry Nicholson ordained 1977;<sup>137</sup> and Reginald L. Sessions ordained September 14, 1980.<sup>138</sup> Billy Vance, having been ordained by another church as deacon, moved his membership to Rock Branch and became an active deacon on May 11, 1983.<sup>139</sup> Other deacons moving into the membership of the church and asked to serve as active deacons were Covert Henry on August 22, 1984;<sup>140</sup> and James Nicholson on September 17, 1986.<sup>141</sup>

If it had not been for the hard work and dedication of the Church Clerks, the testimony of Rock Branch would have been impossible to trace. Rock Branch's first Church Clerk, J. B. Abney, served from December 30, 1871, to January 1892.<sup>142</sup> The following Church Clerks have opened up the past for the generations of the future: R. K. Cleveland from January 1892 to February 16, 1895;<sup>143</sup> W. F. Nicholson from April 20, 1895 to October 19, 1929;<sup>144</sup> J. B. Cleveland from July 31, 1932 to May

13, 1953;<sup>145</sup> Jack Laird from May 13, 1953 to September 14, 1960;<sup>146</sup> Henry Luke from October 19, 1960 to May 17, 1961;<sup>147</sup> Jack Laird from May 31, 1961 to September 11, 1963;<sup>148</sup> Dorothy Nicholson from October 2, 1963 to September 14, 1966;<sup>149</sup> Peggy Savell from October 19, 1966 to October 7, 1987;<sup>150</sup> and James H. Nicholson from October 7, 1987 to present.<sup>151</sup> It has taken these nine Church Clerks to record 117 years of Rock Branch's history.

## CHAPTER VIII

## -\* ROCK BRANCH BAPTIST CHURCH PHYSICAL PLANT -\*

The physical plant making up this God called institution began as a two room structure. It served as a school house during the week and a place of worship on weekends. The exact date of construction of this primitive structure is not documented in the church conference minutes. School was of such importance to the people that the church passed a motion prohibiting any meet in the church that would prevent the present term of school from being taught in the church house.<sup>152</sup> The school met in the mornings to allow students to help their parents on the farm in the afternoons. Katie McLock taught the upper grades and Daisy Smith taught the lower grades.<sup>153</sup>

Because of the wear and tear on the building by the daily use of the school children and because of the building's deteriorated condition, a new two room structure was built.<sup>154</sup>





Rock Branch Baptist Church and School in 1924

Mrs. Ruth Ross (First cousin to Holcomb and James Nicholson) provided only existing photograph known while structure was a combination school and church. BACK ROW (Left to Right): Lola Cleveland, Lessie Taylor, Sara Cleveland, Earline McMullen, Thelma Heflin, Blanche Heflin, Luther Smith, Odessa Nicholson, Annie Smith, Grace Cleveland, Bessie Nicholson, Durward Viverette, and J. B. Cleveland. SECOND FROM BACK ROW: Helen McMullen, Irma Maud Viverette, Grover Cleveland, Terry Laird, Ollie Cleveland, Lavada Ezell, Wildon Cleveland, Ruth Nicholson, Ila Myrtle Cleveland, Milton Cleveland, Edith Cleveland, and Russell Heflin. SECOND FROM FRONT ROW: Myrtel Cleveland, Mary Ellen Cleveland, Dorthy Eshee, Roberta Heflin, Nelie Wilson Smith (Teacher), Frances Laird, Earline Ezell, and Cebra Viverette. FRONT ROW (Left to Right): Ray Cleveland, Frank Nicholson, Shelby Heflin, Jack Laird, Bill Nicholson, Shelby Nicholson, Onree Heflin, and Frances Cleveland.

A New Church Building Committee, made up of H. W. Laird, L. S. James, and J. B. Abney, reported to the church on December 12, 1885, that work done on the new building was good and recommended the work to be accepted.<sup>158</sup> It is assumed that 1885 was when the second multi-purpose structure called Rock Branch School and Rock Branch Baptist Church was constructed or more than likely started construction. This conclusion is made due to the fact that a five man committee was appointed on November 19, 1887 to secure the means to supply the church house with seats.<sup>159</sup> Twenty-eight years later on June 14, 1913, a committee received permission to proceed with arrangements to build a third new church for worship. This committee of five consisted of F. S. Smith, Isaac McMan, Jeff Viverett, J. B. Cleveland, and W. F. Nicholson with pastor R. W. Bryant.<sup>160</sup> On April 20, 1919, six years later, Rev. J. L. Hues from Philadelphia, Mississippi, preached the dedication service for this newly awaited church building. He dedicated Rock Branch Baptist Church's new building to the Lord by preaching on the "Perseverance of the Saints." Mrs. Ola May Cleveland opened the dedication service with the reading of an essay she had written. Rev. R. L. Breland served as pastor during this great event.<sup>161</sup> On October 19, 1929, H. L. Laird, the highest bidder, helped the church dispose of the old 1885 building for \$50.00.<sup>162</sup>

In 1953, feeling the need for modernization, the church appointed a Building Program Committee. The eight men making up this committee to take on such a challenge included Albert

Viverette, H. L. Laird, Bobby Nicholson, Ronald Fulton, Weldon Cleveland, L. B. Smith, Jack Laird, and chairman, Champ Luke.<sup>163</sup> On October 1953, the church rejected a motion brought before the church by the committee that had been made in an earlier committee meeting. Before the meeting adjourned, the church agreed to turn the front of the church's interior layout to face the West, rather than its presently South position.<sup>164</sup> This arrangement located the front entrance of the church on the West side rather than the South and allowed the pulpit to be on the East side rather than the North end of the church. In March 1954, after a period of eleven months of working and debating over renovation plans with the church, the renovation committee received approval to borrow money to take on the project.<sup>165</sup> Most members rejoiced over such improvements, but some hated to see these changes take place because the existing church reminded them of treasured memories of the past. Both groups, after renovation was completed, worshiped in a new sanctuary environment whether it was in Rock Branch or another church.

The most frequent and largest maintenance expenses of the building has been the upkeep of the roof and the upkeep of the exterior of the church. Approximately every 28 years, the roof has had to be replaced. The church, in the past, has solicited funds from the church community and has taken the proceeds from a designated Sunday offering to finance these maintenance expenses.<sup>166</sup> The exterior of the church, every six years since 1962, has required painting at a great expense. In 1979, the

church accepted a bid to have the outside of the church painted for \$1,700.00.<sup>167</sup> In 1983, Rock Branch eliminated the burden and expense of an exterior paint job every couple of years by covering the exterior of the church with vinyl siding. Like all easy and modern convinces there are price tags and this easy maintenance price tag cost the church \$4,500.00.<sup>168</sup>

Over the 117 years of existence, the church has gone through many changes to modernize the facilities. In 1949, the use of hurricane lamps in the church came to an end when the lamps were replaced with clean electric light bulbs. Modern butane gas space heaters replaced the unattractive wood heater. The wood heater stood in the center of the church and had an extra long flue pipe that extended through the ceiling. The butane gas tank and space heaters were installed at a cost of \$415.00.<sup>169</sup> In 1988, the church was told that the propane gas space heaters and the church's location outside the city limits made it a high risk for insurance coverage. In order for the church to purchase insurance coverage, all propane gas space heaters were disconnected from the propane tank and all the heating is now supplied by the 1977 central system.<sup>170</sup> In the fall of 1977, the ceilings were insulated and were lowered with 2 x 4 drop ceiling tiles to accommodate the central system duct work for heating and cooling the church.<sup>171</sup> Rock Branch in August 1980, enclosed the conventional foundation of the church to make it weather proof and to make it more attractive. During this same time period one of the saddest improvements of the church, like so many other

country churches, had to be made by installing locks on the church doors.<sup>172</sup> Later in September 1980, provisions were made to enhance the beauty of the interior of the church by covering all the Sunday School Room walls with panelling.<sup>173</sup> In June 1986, another modern technological development entered the church. The installation of a sound system improved the congregation's hearing during the worship service and made preaching easier on the vocal cords of the pastor.<sup>174</sup>



New Pews With Cushioned Seats and Backs

The seating comfort of the 1919 straight back wood pews were improved in April 1988 at a cost of \$5,678.00 with new pews that have cushioned seats and back.<sup>175</sup> The church, on this project as many of the other projects in the past, saved until the entire financial funds were available before making the improvement. In



1979, the church became a complete contemporary church by having a men's and a women's bathroom installed inside the church.<sup>176</sup> The floors of the church were carpeted in 1981, as a result of a fund started by the Woman's Missionary Union.<sup>177</sup> To provide a more comfortable chair for the Sunday School rooms, sixteen metal folding chairs were donated to the church in 1982, in memory of Champ Luke and Lucille Henry.<sup>178</sup> In March 1983, the church allowed Holcomb Nicholson to donate a complete set of low maintenance aluminum windows to the church in memory of his wife, Rozell Nicholson and daughter, Glenda Nicholson Hegwood, after a tragic automobile accident. The beauty of their lives and of their ministry in the church lives on through their eternal enhancement of the beauty of the church.<sup>179</sup> In 1985, the church received some money from the Mississippi State Highway Department for its purchasing of 0.11 acres of land to improve Mississippi State Highway No. 494. The church voted to use this money to enhance the beauty of the auditorium by covering the walls with panelling.<sup>180</sup> When a substantial amount of money remained from the purchase of the new pews, the church congregation decided to purchase a steeple when financial contributions made it possible.<sup>181</sup> God blessed the church quickly and on Saturday morning, May 7, 1988, Rev. Jerry Bingham, James Nicholson, Mike Henry, and the crane operator installed the steeple on the roof of the church. The white fiberglass steeple with the cross on top reminds every traveler on Mississippi Highway No. 494 of the presence of God and His church. Rock Branch Baptist Church became

a candidate for a post card picture with the addition of the steeple. Many people from the community have expressed how beautiful the church is since the \$2,965.00 steeple addition.<sup>1e2</sup>



Church With New Fiberglass Steeple

Then in July of this year the pastor built shelves in a Sunday School room and made a pastor's study in the church. The back of one of the original church pews was used to build the shelf/desk for his computer. Other shelves were added at his expense for the beginning of his theological library. A project that will be almost completed at the printing of this book will be the church sign. Funds carried over from the steeple project were designated during the business meeting of May 11, 1988, to go toward building a double faced church sign to be placed near the highway. The pastor at the present time is wood carving a church

sign by the means of a router. Each side of the sign is made from a single seat bottom plank of one of the original 1919 pews. One quarter inch raised five inch high "Rock Branch" letters are carved on a one quarter inch raised ribbon that runs the length of the board. Below the ribbon, one inch raised two and one half inch high "Baptist Church" letters are carved. In the top corners of the signs the establishing raised letter "1872" year date is carved. Plans are to hang the wood sign under a small roofed structure for weather protection after completion.

The second building making up Rock Branch Baptist Church's physical plant is the parsonage which is on the same grounds as the church. The church did not furnish the pastor a residence on the church field until 1960 when the church rented a house.<sup>183</sup> Six years later, in May 1966, funds were secured from Sunday night offerings to have a house moved to the church site.<sup>184</sup> Rock Branch purchased a seven room house and located the house East of the church on Mississippi Highway No. 494. In September 1975, as one of the fringe benefits for the pastor, the church began paying the parsonage utility bills.<sup>185</sup> In 1980, two additions were made to the parsonage by constructing a single carport and an utility room.<sup>186</sup> A year later, in 1981, the church added a porch to the west side of the parsonage.<sup>187</sup> The church in 1984, changed the parsonage party telephone line to a private telephone line and listed the telephone number in the telephone directory as Rock Branch Baptist Church.<sup>188</sup> A blessing came in disguise in 1985 when during a thunderstorm, an oak tree blew down into the

living room of the parsonage, doing great damage.<sup>189</sup> This tragic accident, by an act of God, resulted in the house being improved. Some of the walls were covered with panelling, the floors covered with carpet and vinyl flooring, and ceilings sheetrocked.<sup>190</sup>



Parsonage During 1988 Renovation

In 1987, the church had the parsonage attic insulated for energy efficiency to keep lower utility bills.<sup>191</sup> The parsonage stays cool in the summer with two window air conditioning units that were added in 1987 to keep the pastor's family comfortable.<sup>192</sup> This summer (1988) the porch on the west side of the parsonage including the roof had to be torn down due to its deteriorated condition. A new roof was built and a concrete slab measuring eight feet wide by twelve feet long replace the old wood porch. During the same time a concrete floor was poured in the utility

room and under the carport. All the creosote pole post supporting the carport roof were removed and replaced with two inch diameter steel pipe. The Rev. Jerry Bingham and James Nicholson constructed the porch roof. The following men of the church helped pour the concrete for the carport, utility room, and porch: Rev. Jerry Bingham, James Nicholson, Covert Henry, R. L. Sessions, Carl Woodard, Holcomb Nicholson, and G. W. Stevens. The two month project was completed in July and cost the church general fund \$650.00.<sup>193</sup> During this time the carport and utility room exterior received its first coat of paint since its construction in 1980. The pastor and his wife donated the paint along with his labor to paint the carport and utility room.<sup>194</sup>

Provisions for cemetery plots were made in 1871 during the establishing of Rock Branch Baptist Church. Rock Branch enclosed the cemetery, which holds the remains of the church's loved ones and founding pioneers, with a fence in 1926. In the southeast corner of the cemetery, according to Mr. Holcomb Nicholson, a slave is buried.<sup>195</sup> The exact location of the grave site is unknown. The committee appointed to collect funds to fence the cemetery were: Jeff Viverett, J. F. Harper, Arch Laird, W. F. Nicholson, Maud Laird, and Callie Cleveland.<sup>196</sup> The oldest marked grave belongs to one of the founding fathers of the church, B. F. Abney, who died on March 2, 1872. In 1961, the church leveled and sodded the cemetery to make it more attractive and functional.<sup>197</sup> To prevent further damage to tombs from trees, the church voted to have some of the cemetery trees removed in 1965.<sup>198</sup> During

this same time, Vadie Fulton donated a track of land east of the cemetery to the church to enlarge the cemetery.<sup>199</sup> Homer Cleveland, in 1974, disposed of the original fence and made way for a new chain link cemetery fence.<sup>200</sup> A policy had to be set in August 1980, to charge people who lived outside of the community a single burial plot fee of \$60.00, since these people did not help defray the cemetery cost of mowing the grass and upkeep.<sup>201</sup> At the present time the cemetery grass is mowed every two weeks at a cost of \$60.00 per cutting and takes approximately four to five hours to mow.<sup>202</sup>



Rock Branch's Cemetery

Many things have come and gone over the past 117 years of Rock Branch Baptist Church's testimony. The church, through its congregation and in its community, has had both good and bad experiences, yet the church moved on through history. As the

church advances into time, and the past has departed, God's will has remained in the center of its purpose and function. The Lord has committed himself to only one human institution - the church. He has promised to return for only one group - those redeemed by His blood - His church. The life invested in the work of the Rock Branch Baptist Church for Christ's sake will have its reward.

## -\* FOOTNOTES -\*

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103. Ibid., meeting of 14 February 1962.
104. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 17 October 1965.
105. Interview with Frances Luke, 25 March 1988.
106. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 29 January 1967.
107. Ibid., meeting of 11 February 1968.
108. Ibid., meeting of 2 February 1969.
109. Ibid., meeting of 16 November 1969.
110. Ibid., meeting of 14 March 1971.
111. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 25 January 1975.
112. Ibid., meeting of 4 May 1977.
113. Ibid., meeting of 28 July 1978.
114. Ibid., meeting of 13 August 1980.
115. Ibid., meeting of 7 September 1983.
116. Ibid., meeting of 11 January 1984.
117. Ibid., meeting of 6 October 1985.
118. Ibid., meeting of 15 October 1986.
119. Ibid., meeting of 2 December 1987.

120. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 3 February 1872.
121. Ibid., meeting of 19 July 1890.
122. Ibid., meeting of 14 August 1897.
123. Ibid., meeting of 18 July 1874.
124. Ibid., meeting of 18 May 1901.
125. Ibid., meeting of 18 July 1874.
126. Ibid., meeting of 8 July 1882.
127. Ibid., meeting of 29 May 1892.
128. Ibid., meeting of 18 May 1912.
129. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 14 September 1935.
130. Ibid., meeting of 17 November 1934.
131. Ibid., meeting of January 1949.
132. Ibid., meeting of November 1951.
133. Ibid., meeting of 22 February 1953.
134. Ibid., meeting of 12 August 1955.
135. Ibid., meeting of 15 November 1959.
136. Ibid., meeting of 14 November 1962.
137. Union (Mississippi), meeting of July 1977.
138. Ibid., meeting of 16 April 1980.
139. Ibid., meeting of 11 May 1983.
140. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 22 August 1984.
141. Ibid., meeting of 31 September 1986.
142. Union (Mississippi), meeting of January 1892.
143. Ibid., meeting of January 1892.
144. Ibid., meeting of 20 April 1895.
145. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 13 May 1953.

146. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 14 September 1960.
147. Ibid., meeting of 17 May 1961.
148. Ibid., meeting of 11 September 1963.
149. Ibid., meeting of 14 September 1966.
150. Ibid., meeting of 19 October 1966.
151. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 7 October 1987.
152. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 17 October 1908.
153. Interview with Holcomb Nicholson, 5 February 1988.
154. Interview with Doris Orvin Smith, 2 February 1988.
155. Interview with Doris Orvin Smith, 2 February 1988.
156. Interview with Doris Orvin Smith, 2 February 1988.
157. Interview with Doris Orvin Smith, 2 February 1988.
158. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 12 December 1885.
159. Ibid., meeting of 19 November 1887.
160. Ibid., meeting of 14 June 1913.
161. Ibid., meeting of 20 April 1919.
162. Ibid., meeting of 19 October 1929.
163. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 13 May 1953.
164. Ibid., meeting of 11 October 1953.
165. Ibid., meeting of 14 March 1954.
166. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 8 July 1964.
167. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 20 June 1979.
168. Interview with Covert Henry, Church Treasurer of Rock Branch Baptist Church, Union, Mississippi, 23 March 1988.
169. Union (Mississippi), meeting of December 1952.
170. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 13 January 1988.
171. Interview with Frances Luke, 25 March 1988.

172. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 13 August 1980.
173. Ibid., meeting of 17 September 1980.
174. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 19 June 1986.
175. Ibid., meeting of 15 January 1988.
176. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 12 September 1979.
177. Ibid., meeting of 16 September 1981.
178. Ibid., meeting of 17 February 1982.
179. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 23 March 1983.
180. Ibid., meeting of 26 May 1985.
181. Union, (Mississippi) meeting of April 13, 1988.
182. Union, (Mississippi), meeting of May 11, 1988.
183. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 4 May 1960.
184. Union (Mississippi), meeting of May 1966.
185. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 24 September 1975.
186. Ibid., meeting of 15 October 1980.
187. Ibid., meeting of 17 June 1981.
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189. Ibid., meeting of 7 April 1985.
190. Ibid., meeting of 7 May 1985.
191. Ibid., meeting of 12 March 1986.
192. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 15 April 1987.
193. Union, (Mississippi), meeting of June 15, 1988.
194. Ibid., meeting of 13 July 1988.
195. Interview with Holcomb Nicholson, 5 February 1988.
196. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 14 August 1926.
197. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 16 November 1960.

198. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 15 December 1965.

199. Interview with Frances Luke, 25 March 1988.

200. Union (Mississippi), meeting of 2 October 1974.

201. Ibid., meeting of 13 August 1980.

202. Interview with Covert Henry, 25 March 1988.



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COPY

E.S.SMITH )  
to ) Deed  
J.B.ABNEY, et al )

COPY  
E.S.SMITH  
to

This deed of conveyance made and entered into this 28th day of March 1872 by Eliza Smith & her husband F. S. Smith, of the first part, & John B. Abney, J. H. Cleaveland & W. A. Taylor, Trustees, of the second part, all of the County of Newton & State of Mississippi, Witnesseth: that for & in consideration of the desire on the part of the first party to promote the religious, moral and educational interest, in the neighborhood & community in the settlement where the premises hereinafter described is located hath granted, sold & conveyed unto the said second party & their successors as trustees the following described premises & for the purposes hereafter expressed, to-wit:

Beginning at the NE corner of Section 17, Township 8, Range 12 running South one hundred & twenty yards, thence west Eighty-one yards, thence North, one hundred & twenty yards, thence beginning point, containing two acres or there about to have & to hold said premises to their own use & benefit for the purpose of a Baptist Church & for a school house & for Singing Societies & for other evangelical denominations to preach in when it will not conflict with the Church, & it is understood that the above described land can be used for a burying ground, if any person desires to use it as such, but it is further & distinctly understood that no denomination shall have the right to constitute or organize a Church except the Baptist Church which is now constituted & it is further understood that the said premises cease to be used for the before mentioned objects then & in that event the same is to revert back to the donor or whoever then may be the lawful owner of the subdivision of land out of which the same has been conveyed as herein defined.

In testimony whereof the said party of the first part have hereunto set their hand & seals, day & year first above written.

her  
Eliza X Smith (Seal)  
mark  
F. S. Smith (Seal)

State of Mississippi )  
Newton County )

I, Eugene Carleton, Chancery Clerk, in & for said county certify that the foregoing Deed was filed for record in my office, June 3rd, 1872 & was duly recorded Aug. 20th, 1872 on pages 255 & 256 Record of Deed marked F of my said office.

Given under my hand & seal of office, this Aug. 20th, 1872.

/s/ Eugene Carleton, Clerk

State of Mississippi )  
Newton County )

I, Eugene Carleton, Chancery Clerk, in & for said County, certify that, the foregoing Deed was filed for re-record 31st Dec. 1877 & re-recorded Jan. 28th, 1878.

/s/ Eugene Carleton, Clerk

State of Mississippi  
County of Newton

Certificate of  
certified copy

I, W. H. Webb, Clerk of the Chancery Court of the said County and State,  
do certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct copy of a  
Deed as the same appears on file and/or of Record in Deed Book No. 1  
at page 379 of the Records of my Office.

Witness my hand and seal of said Court, this the 11th day of August, 1969.

By /s/ Dot Taylor, D.C.

W. H. Webb, Clerk