

Church, located in Washington Parish, was likewise received into the same association.

Ezra Courtney, together with Howard Wall, had worked with untiring zeal in Eastern Louisiana and at the close of 1818, at the organization of the first Louisiana Baptist Association, we find that there were five Baptists churches, exclusive of New Orleans, in all this section of the state.

These churches, however, even at this early date, were not without internal trials. The Half Moon Bluff Church, in 1815, made a request that the association would advise as to what would be their duty respecting Robert Smith, who made a confession of his disorderly conduct, and shows marks of repentance sufficient to satisfy them as to the propriety of receiving him as a private member, but have doubts of whether he should be restored to his public gift without the advice of the association. The Mississippi Association was a real mother to these five churches. This small beginning formed the nucleus of the great Baptist work in later days in the Florida parishes.

#### THE OPELOUSAS CENTER

Many Americans had located on the west bank of the Mississippi, and some had even penetrated into the interior and occupied the beautiful Teche and the rich prairies of the Opelousas. Others turned north and found homes upon these wonderfully fertile bayous which thread the valley of the lower Red River. Rev. Joseph Willis, a licensed preacher, was induced, in 1804, to pay these settlers a visit. "In November of this year," says Paxton, "he preached the first sermon ever preached in the state west of the Mississippi River by other than Catholic priests. This was at Vermillion (Lafayette), about forty miles southwest of Baton Rouge. At night he preached at Placumine Brule. This was during a visit in which he preached but three or four times, and that at the peril of his life." (Paxton, 140.)

Joseph Willis was probably born in North Carolina in 1758, or 1762. His eldest son was likewise born in that state. Willis seems to have come to Mississippi about 1798.

Benedict (*History of the Baptists*, 778) says he spent a large fortune in his endeavors to plant the gospel in Louisiana. While in the state, on the visit mentioned above, he selected a place to locate. He returned to Mississippi, made his arrangements, and located the next year permanently in Louisiana. The place where he settled was Bayou Chicot, in St. Landry Parish. He labored with good success, but not being an ordained minister he could not baptize and organize a church. The result was that a Methodist minister came into the territory and organized a Methodist church, and entered into the labors of Willis.

He felt that it was necessary that he should be ordained to the ministry. After much delay and some severe trials the Mississippi Association, in 1812, appointed Moses Hadley and Lawrence Scarborough to go to the Opelousas and ordain him and constitute a church. "They proceeded at once to the discharge of their duty. On their arrival at Bayou Chicot, in the parish of St. Landry, which was one of the places where Mr. Willis preached, they found five brethren and one sister, whom they constituted into a church called Calvary." (Paxton, 143.) The date of the organization of this church was November 13, 1812. Paxton says it was the "first in the state"; but in this he is evidently mistaken, for that honor belongs to the Half Moon Bluff Church. The centennial of these two churches was observed in 1912 with fitting ceremonies. The following record is made of this notable event:

We call attention to this, the centennial year of the history of Louisiana Baptists. In the early years of the nineteenth century, missionaries from other States entered this territory. The first Baptist church organized in this State was the Half Moon Bluff Baptist Church in Washington Parish in 1812. This church had a brief life, and recently the brethren celebrated its birth over its grave near Franklinton. The first Baptist church organized west of the Mississippi river, and the oldest living Baptist church in the State, is the Calvary Baptist Church at Bayou Chicot, St. Landry Parish. It was organized November 13th, 1812, and has had a continuous history up to this good hour. It was this church, with a few others that went out from it that organized the Louisiana Association in the heart of which this Convention was organized. The centennial of this old church was celebrated last week at the session of the Louisiana Association. We gathered on this historic spot and thanked God for the preservation of this church and for the pioneer servants of Jesus Christ who laid the foundation for our Baptist cause in Louisiana. (Minutes Louisiana State Convention, 1912, pp. 77, 78.)



## FIRST FERRIES AND TOLL BRIDGES

The problem of crossing the Bogue Chitto between Washington and St. Tammany, after the establishment of the Great National Road, was solved first by the ferry method based on a franchise granted exclusively to Richard S. Chappel, January 13th, 1821. The landing was at Strawberry Bluffs, previously referred to, and which is just below the fork of Bogue Chitto and Pearl Rivers, near the present community of Isabel. The State retained as a consideration for its bounty the free transportation of all jurors and voters going to or returning from their respective duties, as well as the transportation of militia-men during service in either parish, together with the arms and military stores of the State. Jacksonville Springs near by, is on the road of the original settler, Brasfield, and on Brasfield Creek. Later a ferry was built and operated on the Bogue Chitto River near the settlement of Mt. Herman on the Abner Bickham place, which is today the location of the old Magee cemetery on Marcus Magee's place. This ferry was in the later 1820's.

The first toll bridge seems to have been established by a franchise to George Smith on March 25th, 1844. From which time on, toll bridges seemed to supplant the ferry system between the parishes.

The first railroad plan projected towards Washington Parish, seems to have been directed from Mandeville under a charter establishing in 1837 what was known as the Mandeville and Pool's Bluff Railroad Company. The scheme was never carried out. It may be interesting to know that Pool's Bluff is now a southern suburban part of Bogalusa.

## CHURCHES AND RELIGION

Under the head of churches, the two principal denominations in this section are the Baptist and the Methodist faiths. While we know that the pioneer settlers had their little religious meetings after the first few actual months of residence, still the first recorded organization of a church is also the first recorded organization of any Protestant Church within the boundaries of the entire State of Louisiana. Of this fact, Washington Parish is most proud. This was a little Baptist Church, and its building erected sometime prior to 1812 on the banks of the Bogue Chitto River. The first date of its organization, or the date of the building of its little log temple, is unknown, but Bethel Church was ad-

mitted into membership in the old Mississippi Baptist Association on October 12th, 1812. The Centennial of this church was celebrated by the Washington Parish Baptist Association in 1912, which meeting was called to order with a gavel made from an oak standing more than the known hundred years on this spot. At this time, the old pipe-clay floor was the only remaining relic, and lies as a monument to the religious faith of our fathers. This church was originally Half-Moon Bluff. It will be remembered that the religion of the country until its acquisition by the United States, was Roman Catholic and no other was tolerated. Reason tells us that this intolerant attitude is responsible for no organized churches of the Protestants until Uncle Sam had had a little time to "Americanize" the State. In 1810 there were just two Methodist circuits in the entire State, no Presbyterian minister at all outside of New Orleans, and no Baptist preacher, except those who visited at rare intervals from the State of Mississippi. It was from Mississippi that the first Baptists came, and the first Protestant preacher within the bounds of the State of Louisiana was the Baptist preacher Bailey E. Chaney who came first in 1799, was arrested and released. But no church was organized. But Ezra Courtney was preaching in the Florida Parishes as early as 1804, and until 1855. He preached at every community or settlement within this section. He became the first resident pastor, moving from Amite County, Mississippi, to East Feliciana in 1814. In 1811, October 19, a petition was presented to the Mississippi State Association convened at New Hope, Adams County, by a number of brethren desiring to be organized into a church. This was granted, and a year later this church was organized on October 12th, five days later being received into the Association. Hay's Creek Church, out of this organization, was a little later organized (within the same parish) with which Ezra Courtney was associated. In 1813, the Mississippi Association admitted two other churches, one was Mt. Nebo on Tangipahoa River, and the other was Peniel. Then in 1818, the Sharon Church was also received. There were only six Baptist churches at this time in Louisiana, and four were within the then boundaries of our parish, and three within the present limits, as one is now in Tangipahoa. The fifth church was located in St. Landry Parish, at Bayou Chicot, just a month after Half Moon Bluff; the sixth being Hepzibah Church in East Feliciana in 1814. The Louisiana Association was organized October 31st, 1818, and modeled after the Mississippi Association, but the