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Baptist Builders - 9/29/80

## LOUISIANA'S EARLY CHURCHES

By L. S. Walker, D. D.

There has been much speculation as to just when the first Baptists arrived in what is now the State of Louisiana. There is some question among church historians as to who they were.

Some respected historians say that John Coulter and his family may have been the first Baptists to settle in Louisiana in April, 1797. There are others who feel confident that there were Baptist settlers in the Florida Parishes and southwest Mississippi as early as 1760. While this is believed to be true by many creditable historians, it has never been proven.

John Coulter settled in the Ouachita District in 1797. He later moved to Wilkinson County, Mississippi, where he remained until his death. He was an active and influential minister in the Florida Parishes as well as in southwest Mississippi in the early days of the old Mississippi Baptist Association.

Coulter was born in Pennsylvania. He fought in the revolutionary war. He later migrated to South Carolina from whence he came to Louisiana and later Mississippi. He settled in Wilkinson County, Mississippi in 1806, the same year the old Mississippi Baptist Association was organized at Salem Church near Natchez in 1806. He was a member of Bethel Baptist Church. Salem Church was constituted in 1791; Bayou Pierre Church in 1798; New Hope in 1800; Bethel in 1800; New Providence in 1805; and Ebenezer in 1806.

Eld. John Coulter was elected treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Association when it met at Bethel Church in 1807. He served as treasurer 'till 1812.

There is no record of a Baptist Church as such in what is now Louisiana until the old Half-Moon Bluff Church was consti-

tuted in a settlement along the Boguechitto River in the remote northeastern corner of the Florida Parishes on October 12, 1812. A few days later the new church petitioned the Mississippi Baptist Association for fellowship at its 7th annual session meeting at Zion Hill Baptist Church in Amite County, Mississippi, October 17, 1812. Joseph Lewis, a charter member and first pastor, and Nathan Morris were messengers from Half-Moon Bluff.

Dr. Glen Lee Green, esteemed historian, writes that "The Baptist Association of Mississippi chose David Cooper and Thomas Mercer to help in the organization of the church which adopted the name of Half-Moon Bluff."

Old Half-Moon Bluff Church on Bogue Chitto River later moved to another location and changed its name to Hay's Creek where it stands today by the side of a much traveled highway just a few miles north of Franklinton in Washington Parish.

Left to its own resources, the members of Half-Moon Bluff soon erected a house of worship. It has been described as being a rustic log structure of modest proportions and starkly simple in its appointments. It was typical of the first meeting house on the frontier, with a dirt floor, a mud chimney, and puncheon benches. This building was used by the community as a school house and after its extinction (or, probably its re-location), it survived for a time as a saddlery.

Some of the pastors from her early days to more recent times include Joseph Lewis, Thomas Corchern, E. H. Garner, W. F. Magehee, W. A. Murry, J. R. Burch, J. J. Linton, T. V. Fortenberry, J. C. Smith, J. E. Bilbo, E. C. Lea, T. H. Bankston, W. J. Fortenberry, Wade Smith, A Brother Daton, C. C. Cantrell, Bill Minden, Hartman Sullivan, Royce Dowdy, Aubrey Veuleman, Paul Aultman, Louis Sewell, Richard Bracken, Robert Powell, D. P. Worshem, Travis Cowart, Norman Simmons and others.

\_(To be continued in coming issues)

10/23/80

## LOUISIANA'S EARLY CHURCHES

By L. S. Walker, D. D.

(Installment number 2. Continued from last issue)

In our first installment on the History of Louisiana's Early Churches, we pointed out briefly that Half-Moon Bluff Church on Bogue Chitto River in Washington Parish, constituted October 12, 1812, was the first Baptist church established in Louisiana.

The second Baptist church constituted in Louisiana was the Calvary Church on Bayou Chicot near Opelousas, organized November 13, 1812, only about one month after the founding of the Half-Moon Bluff Church near Franklinton.

The third Baptist Church organized in the State of Louisiana was Mount Nebo on January 31, 1813, in what is now Tangipahoa Parish. Mount Nebo, like old Half-Moon Bluff, worked with the old Mississippi Baptist Association for some time. These first three churches, Half-Moon Bluff, Calvary and Mount Nebo, are all much alive in the service of the Lord today. They are, however, no longer identified with the work of old-line Association or Missionary Baptists. They departed our Associational fellowship long ago to cooperate with another group of Baptists.

The fourth Baptist church constituted in Louisiana was Peniel Church in Washington Parish in 1813. Peniel Church was desolved some years later.

Hepzibah Church, east of Clinton, organized October 13, 1813, was the fifth church established in Louisiana. Hepzibah petitioned the Mississippi Baptist Association at their annual session held at Shiloh Church in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. Her messengers were Brethren Thomas Jackson and Lewis Yarborough.

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Other early churches in Louisiana include Sharon Baptist Church located about 12 miles from St. Francisville, in 1817; and the St. Francisville Church in St. Francisville in 1818. Buelah Baptist Church near Chaneyville was founded in 1816.

The first Baptist church established in New Orleans was constituted August 23, 1818.

One Louisiana Baptist historian notes the organization of the Louisiana Baptist Association made up of churches west of Mississippi River in a meeting at Buelah Church near Channeyville October 31, 1830. This old Association died out many years ago.

The first New Orleans church, like most of the earliest Louisiana Baptist Churches, cooperated in the work of the old Mississippi Baptist Association. Interestingly, historians have noted that the church's first worship services were held in a building on world famous Canal Street, and conducted baptismal services in the Mississippi River at the foot of Canal Street.

The first (Negro) African Baptist Church in New Orleans was constituted on Burgandy Street on October 31, 1826, by two white ministers. They were Elders William Rondeau and Elisha Andrews.

Other early Louisiana churches included Bayou Sale Baptist Church, organized in 1820. It was desolved in 1830.

Zion Hill Church was organized in an area west of the Mississippi River, historians say, in 1824; the Amiable Baptist Church constituted in 1828 in Rapides Parish; Occupy Baptist Church was constituted in 1833; old Buelah Baptist Church in Tangipahoa Parish was organized with ten charter members August 27, 1833.

Hebron Baptist Church in Livingston Parish about seven miles from Denham Springs was founded in April 1835. Some historians differ on the date of Hebron's organization.

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Enon Baptist Church in Washington Parish was constituted December 31, 1838, according to early Baptist historians. The first Baptist church in Baton Rouge was founded also in 1838.

There is not much by way of authentic history to be found on old Canaan Baptist Church west of Franklinton in Washington Parish, but it is believed by many that Canaan was organized sometime in 1839. It is also thought that the West Pearl River Baptist Association was organized at Canaan Church in 1871. Canaan Church is still one of Louisiana's great rural churches. Dr. Jasper E. Fail is presently the pastor at Canaan. Many of our most noble men and women, including many ministers of the gospel, found the Lord, and grew up in Canaan Church.

Dr. Glen Lee Greene, in his history writings, says that the First Baptist Church on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans was founded with ten charter members on December 28, 1843. This seems to have been the second attempt to organize an all-white Baptist church in New Orleans.

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LOUISIANA<sup>'S</sup> EARLY CHURCHES

By L. S. Walker, D. D.

(Installment number 3 - Continued from last issue)

1853) A

At least 26 of the earliest churches established in Louisiana first cooperated in the old Mississippi Baptist Association from 1812 to 1853. For the most part the pioneer ministers who were most prominent in establishing the first churches in Louisiana were also the ones who had led in constituting the first churches in Mississippi in the old Natchez District before territorial days. The Salem Baptist Church was organized in the Stampley Community on the south fork of Cole's Creek in Pickering County (later re-named Jefferson County) about 18 miles from Natchez in 1791. The Mississippi Baptist Association (now Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi) was organized at Salem Church in September, 1806 with five churches.

1795)

As noted in a former article, John Coulter, a native of Pennsylvania who had for some time lived in the New Berry District of South Carolina, migrated with his family to the Ouachita District of Louisiana in 1797 was probably the first man to preach the gospel in Louisiana.

Disappointed somewhat over unfortunate land holdings in that area, he moved to Wilkerson County, Mississippi, where he became a very prominent landowner with extensive holdings, and owner of many slaves. While he did much preaching in the Florida Parishes in Louisiana, it is believed he lived in Wilkerson County, Mississippi until his death about 1820.

Coulter united with the Bethel Baptist Church near Woodville, Mississippi, At the 1807 (second) annual session of

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the Mississippi Baptist Association. He was elected treasurer of the Association. He filled this position until 1812.

Eld. John Coulter was said to have been a gifted man of high principles. Thus John Coulter made a worthy contribution to the Baptists of Mississippi as well as Louisiana. It was said that "When a particular kind of witnessing was imperative, he took a stand for the cherished Baptist principles of liberty and separation of church and state."

Bailey E. Chaney, some historians say, was definitely one of the trailblazer preachers of Louisiana before statehood. In 1798 Eld. Bailey E. Chaney visited the American settlement near Baton Rouge and preached. Being arrested by Spanish authorities under Roman Catholic dominion, he obtained his release, it was told, by agreeing to leave the area. He returned to Mississippi, and was believed to have been the first man to preach a sermon under the American flag in Natchez in 1798.

From South Carolina, Bailey E. Chaney was the son of William Chaney, the first deacon of Salem Church. Bailey's wife Elizabeth was the daughter of William Ratliff. Both the Chaney and the Ratliff families lived in the Natchez District as early as 1792. Patriot, planter, frontier politician, and preacher, Bailey E. Chaney was a licensed minister, but there seems to be no evidence that he was ever ordained, or that he ever pastored a church. Chaney served in the Territorial Legislature of Mississippi in 1809, in 1813 and 1814 while living in Franklin County on a farm owning nine slaves. In spite of several diversions to his preaching ministry, he was a zealous witness for Jesus Christ, thus leaving his imprint clearly niched in the history of the Baptists of Louisiana and Mississippi.

Historians ascribe the honor of "breaking new ground" for the Baptists in north Louisiana to Jacob Hickman. One prominent Baptist historian has said: "Baptist church did not originate

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in the northern part of the state as a result of the extension of missionary activities of Louisiana Association; on the contrary, as in southern Louisiana, they were started principally through independent labors of individual Baptists, and most of the early ones affiliated first with Louisiana Association. Although what is known of his life is sketchy, and the date of his ordination uncertain, Jacob Hickman apparently was the first Baptist minister to settle in North Louisiana. According to the testimony of residents who knew him personally, he came to what is now Morehouse Parish about 1810 or shortly thereafter. Hickman was a wealthy planter who owned much land on Bayou Bartholomew near Point Pleasant, on the outskirts of the present Bastrop, some twelve or fifteen miles northwest of the John Coulter and William Thomas settlements. A church was established in Hickman's community at an early date, but the details of the organization are obscure."

David Cocper and Thomas Mercer are names among those who laid the foundations of the Baptist work in Louisiana as well as in Mississippi. It was these two pioneer ministers who were dispatched by the churches of the Mississippi Baptist Association to answer the "Macedonian Call" of a group of Baptists along Bogue Chitto River to assist in organizing the first Baptist Church in Louisiana which took the name of Half-Moon Bluff on Octoner 12, 1812. Dr. David Cooper of Woodville, in Wilkerson County, Mississippi, was a practicing physician as well as an ordained Baptist minister. Eld. Thomas Mercer lived in Amite County, Mississippi. Dr. David Cooper was elected Moderator of the Mississippi Association ten times from 1808 to 1824. Eld. Thomas Mercer was Moderator of the old Association in 1811.

Other Pioneer preachers in Louisiana included Moses Hadley, Lawrence Scarborough, Nathan Morris, Joseph Lewis, Joseph Willis and others.

We hope our readers have read with profit and pleasure these somewhat sketchy bits of our history. The Lord willing, maybe we can share a bit more at some future time.