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HISTORY OF SMITHS GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

1812-1972

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History of Smiths Grove Baptist Church

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On the corner of Main and Fifth Street in Smiths Grove, Kentucky, stands a brick church house of old architecture. The date 1898 is fused into a large stained-glass window on the front of the building.

The church organization dates from 1812; so that in 1972 it is 160 years old. The church has never been disbanded, nor ceased to function in that period of years.

The organization took place on February 22, 1812, in a great grove of trees owned by a Mr. Smith. Hence the source name of both the town and the church. The original site of the first church is thought to be about 1 1/2 miles from the center of the present town on the land known as the Dr. Simmons Farm. This location is established by oral history only.

An old history written by Jacob Locke, a pioneer Baptist preacher, tells of organizing Baptist Churches in counties adjacent to Warren and says of Smiths Grove, "The church of Smiths Grove was organized February 22, 1812 Bro Locke as moderator. This body enjoyed prosperity from her organization until Cambelism made her advent into their midst, which was the year 1829, immediately previous to the trouble. They enjoyed a great revival in which there were baptized 218 converts, at this time the membership was about 326. This is a large and influential body located in, what will be, the finest section in Warren Co. Edd Turner was the first pastor and they say he served for 30 years following him Samuel Greathouse, Cornelius Deweese, Zacharius Emerson, Jessee Moon, J. Bertrum Garrett, N.G. Terry, W.H. Williams and W.E. Taylor. She now numbers 160, with prospects for a great and good future."

This first church burned and all the records of the period from 1812 to 1849 were lost in the fire. It is known that during this 37 years the church meetings and worship were carried on with customary regularity.

The existing records of this church, consist of: #2 dated 1849-1885, now housed in the Baptist Seminary; #3, #4, #5, #6 are located in the Smiths Grove church; as is the #7, the volume being presently used. Byron Curtis is the present clerk.

It is known that a church was built at a cost of \$249.66 - its location unknown. This building burned in 1857. Another church was built later at a cost of \$917.00; this location also is not known. After the third building was destroyed by fire another was built near the school and close to the Masonic Lodge in Smiths Grove. There were other moves following these, but no dates or locations are known.

Within this era the church affiliated with two different associations - Green River and Liberty. Representatives from this congregation always attended the association meetings and took money gifts of from 50¢ to \$2.50.

The Civil War having started and the Rebels having come to Bowling Green in 1861, the congregation "thought best for all to wait", so there were no known meetings from September until March of that year. There were a number of the colored brethren who "worshipped with their masters". In 1868 a call was issued for any of these who wanted to continue in the church to say so. None came. The call was extended and 18 came. There is no doubt but that the descendents of the blacks of 1868 are keeping and worshiping in the 100 years old church at Stoney Point, two miles from Smiths Grove.

In 1871 the Baptist and Cumberland Presbyterians erected a church building for shared useage in Smiths Grove Station. The financing was accomplished by subscription. An agreement was reached that if and when the Presbyterians could move into Smiths Grove they would do so. They bought a plat of land from Urias Rasdall, the great-grandfather of the present members, Lorenzo and Carl Rasdall. This location was near the site of the present church.

In 1872 the Baptist bought from the Presbyterians their half interest in the structure at Smiths Grove Station for the sum of \$1200.00. The old record states that they were a long time making the deal and at the last meeting one of the Presbyterian brethren said "Sell'em, I'd rather worship in a barn than here with these old Baptists". Actually the two congregations got along well - the Presbyterians often met in the Baptist Church house before their own building was finished.

The first Sunday School at the Smiths Grove church was organized in 1889, and according to the records "straight Baptist literature" was used. In 1890, the first organ was bought - a pipe and pumper. The next organ, an electric one, was bought while Brother Mitchell was pastor.

The Woman's Missionary Society was organized in 1891. The women met with keen opposition from the deacons. But they felt that God was with them, for they had spent one entire afternoon asking God in prayer to give them a sign if they were in the wrong. God was willing, for the society has been functioning for 81 years, has never disbanded and still meets at the original meeting time.

In 1917 the B.Y.P.U. (Baptist Young Peoples Union) was organized - the first president was Owen Green, and Hazely Cooke was the first treasurer. The deacons, again showing disapproval, would absent themselves whenever a woman was on the program.

The church in 1919 joined the canvassing for a \$75,000,000.00

fund. This was when the missions were sore pressed for money. The Smiths Grove church pledged \$20,000.00 and collected \$12,550.00. Five years was allowed to complete the pledge payment.

In all 160 years one minister has been ordained from this congregation - in 1891 - Raleigh Wright. His home was on "Smoky Row", now highway 68. He became "one of the denomination's best". Brother Wright was the evangelist at the Smiths Grove church in 1919, at which time there were 18 converts.

The church claims two missionaries: Brother Harold Matthews, a farmer pastor, who went to a field in the Philippines, and Jennie Rossetter Musel whose field was Kenya Africa. Both families are home on furlough at the present time. Jennie is a hometown girl, and she and her family have been living in Smiths Grove during their leave.

In 1891 the Warren Association was organized at the Oak Forest Church at Hays. W.H. Cooke was the first moderator. There were 7 churches affiliated - Smiths Grove being one of them.

The church grew in many ways and at one time was considered the strongest church in the Warren Association. At the meetings of various denominational nature, the best ministers in the state were sent to the Smiths Grove Church.

The contract for the first parsonage was let in 1895, in the amount of \$1,050.00. This was built on the same site as the present parsonage. This first structure was struck by lightning and burned.

The present church structure was built in 1898 at the cost of \$7,000.00 and the bricks from the old church. At the time of building the congregation numbered 166. The church was dedicated in 1901. The dedication sermon was preached by Brother William Lasisford, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Bowling Green, Kentucky.. The sum of \$5,875.00 has already been paid on the debt, and \$2,125.00 was made up on dedication day.

In 1900 the first wedding was held in the church joining in marriage Mr. M.R. Radsdall and Miss E. Motley. The next was Brother Benton and Miss Myrtle Cooke. Brother Benton told Mr. Radsdall that he "tried to be first, but that gal of his just wouldn't hurry".

Men from the congregation fought in World War I, and 40 of the members were in World War II. James D. Hunt was the only casualty.

One of the needs of the church for many years had been a Sunday School area. A committee composed of L. Carl Radsdall; Chairman; Tom Madison; D.F. Rossetter and Harold Matthews, pastor, let a contract to Warner Hendrick and Bob Lockheart in the amount of \$13,000.00 for a 14 room Sunday School annex. Thomas

Reed Madison was chairman of the planning Board. Soon it was seen that other things had to be added, so that the final cost was \$16,000.00.

Work began in 1955 with the pastor, Harold Matthews turning the first shovel of dirt at the ground breaking ceremony.

The dedication was not until 1957 when R.B. Hooks was pastor. "That was a happy day - a good sermon, a good dinner, and best of all a good fire when the notes went up in smoke and the congregation was debt free".

In 1964 the third parsonage was built when Matt Tomlin was pastor. After the first parsonage was struck by lightning and burned, the second one had been built on the same site and so was the brick one built at this time. Carroll Bevarly was building chairman. Jimmy Jackson took the contract at the cost of \$12,200.00.

Don Wilson followed Brother Tomlin as pastor. He preached his first sermon in February of 1969. In his pastorate the sanctuary was redecorated. Lovely lights were given by Harold Lisle, a Smiths Grove native, in honor and memory of his father, a deacon of the early church. Two cooling units were installed. A baby grand piano was installed at a cost of \$1,600.00 and plans were made for the future laying of wall-to-wall carpeting.

Billy Craddock followed Don Wilson as pastor. His first sermon in the church was preached Feb. 6, 1972.

A committee with Mrs. Bevarly as chairman purchased and had laid the new carpeting about this time at a cost of \$2,200.00. So, literally, Brother Craddock had the red carpet rolled out for him.

On July 16, 1972, the church voted to build a sizable annex to the parsonage that would increase both the appearance and the comfort to the pastor and his family.

Thus far this history has concerned itself with facts concerning building, finances, affiliations etc.

The Baptist have been noted for their discipline. The early church particularly had specified things that members could engage in and that they could not.

The chief activities banned were the playing of cards of any kind - "even the children's playing of artheres". It was considered that there was no special harm in the card playing, but that the playing led to other things - "for we know - as the twig is bent, the tree grows".

In the early days there was scarcely a monthly meeting without a trial. Some were excluded, others held over the real trial way. From the records - "Two friends were long at outs.

Finally the church had them to agree to come into the business meeting and try to forgive each other. So they came and met in the altar with tear-filled eyes, agreed to forgive and forget, and each happily went his way. One of them went to Oak Forest and joined, and the other never came back again".

Strond drink was not to be embibed unless prescribed by a doctor. Dancing and fiddling were two much used activities.

In 1923 after a Christmas party sponsored by the young people of the town, the Baptist church thought it best to draw up Resolutions and present them to the church urging her to be "more particular who is elected to teach her children" and included qualities of the said teachers. Brother Lee Cooke was appointed by Smiths Grove Baptist to present this Resolution to the Warren Association where they were received and placed among its records. This Resolution can be found on page 210 of volume #3 of the Smiths Grove records.

The church has had "ups and downs" financially. Pastors have been paid as little as \$60.00 per year. One pastor was being paid \$40.00 and some trouble arose. He was told that they could pay him \$4.00 more. He preached the next Sunday and resigned - his text of that sermon was "Wounded in the House of a Friend". There was no budget, no envelope system and nothing as a guide, but "give as the Spirit gives".

The records tell of a time when the Treasurer called for \$100.00 to meet an emergency need. He asked what could be done. Someone called out "Pass the hat". That was done, and when the hat came in there was not the needed \$100.00, but \$660.00. "Smiths Grove has always paid in a pinch".

Greatest of all in the past 160 years is the knowledge that the Lord dwells in their midst. Some of the greatest revivals have been held within the walls of Smiths Grove Baptist Church.

Much could be told of the men and women who have been so faithfully working for their church all through these 160 years - a generation passes, another takes its place, God's work and blessings are given His church.

These past pastors have served in the 160 years of the Smiths Grove Church:

Edd Turner
 Samuel Greathouse
 Cornelius Deweese
 Zacharius Emerson
 Jesse Moon
 J. Bertram Garrett
 W.H. Williams
 W.G. Terry
 W.E. Taylor

1886 - A.W. Richardson
1888 - A.U. Boone
1891 - J.B. Shelton
1894 - B.A. Copass
1896 - J.B. Benton
1901 - W.W. Payne
1904 - W.M. Stallings (resigned)
Pastorless 1 year
1912 - W.M. Stallings (recalled)
1921 - J.L. Adkins
1926 - OLP. Bush
1932 - J.E. Hampton
1934 - W.W. Shrader
1937 - C.L. Skinner
1940 - Ben Mitchell
1945 - Carl Goodson
1947 - C.P. Colvin
1947 - G.G. Graber
1951 - H.T. Brown
19-- - J.C. Hedrick
1954 - Harold Matthews
1956 - R.B. Hooks, Jr.
1962 - Adrian Lampkin
1964 - Matt. Tomlin
1969 - Don Wilson
1972 - Billy Craddock

The present membership of the church is: resident 274;
non-resident 84.

Brother W.M. Stallings served as pastor for 12 years - the longest term since Edd Turner who served for 30 years. T.J. Hudson served 35 years as clerk; and Mrs. W.H. Cooke 23 years. U.R. Rasdal served as Treasure for 15 years. Mrs. Ethel Hardy as organist for 20 years.

The present church officers are:

Pastor - Billy Craddock
Clerk - Byron Curtis
Sunday School Superintendent - Albert Rich
Treasurer - Lorenzo Rasdall
Woman's Missionary Union - Mrs. GERAL Brown
Training Union - Charles Brewer