

BLUE BRANCH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

This Negro Presbyterian Church was founded by Reverend Baker Russell immediately after The War Between the States, and became the mother of many of the Negro churches in the area, whether they are Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist or A.M.E. Zionist.

Prior to the war, Reverend Baker Russell was a slave of Reverend R. Y. Russell of the Blairsville Community who was Pastor of Bullocks Creek Presbyterian Church from 1829 to 1866. "Baker", as he was called, attended the Bullocks Creek church along with other slaves of the community and was converted under the preaching of Reverend Russell. It is said that Reverend Russell conducted morning devotions for his slaves and gave special tutoring to Baker. After the war and when the newly-freed slaves withdrew from the white congregation, Reverend R. Y. Russell helped his friend, Baker, to establish a church for the Negro congregation and ordained Reverend Baker Russell to serve as Pastor of the church.

The 1880 census of York County gives us an insight into the life of Rev. Baker Russell. He was born in 1819 in Virginia of Virginia parentage; he could read but could not write. His wife was "Glory" who was born in 1834 in South Carolina of South Carolina parentage. Living within his household were Willie Williams, age nineteen, and another fifteen year old boy--both were listed as "indentured servants" to Baker Russell. Also was one Alice Minter, age fifteen, who was listed as a "domestic servant".

Reverend Baker Russell's grave is not marked in the cemetery but a marker at his wife's tells of the devotion she shared with her husband: *"She was a constant member of the Presbyterian Church for over 30 years"*. She was fifty-four years of age when she died on August 23, 1887.

The following was found in the 1849 journal of Rev. R. Y. Russell under the title of *A Sabbath At Home*:

The Saturday preceding had been a cold and cloudy day. The snow had fallen to the depth of some four or five inches. From the inclemency of the weather I deferred my visit and passed the day at home. During the night the clouds had cleared and the Sabbath morning sun rose in unclouded brightness, pouring forth his light and warmth on the pure sheet of snow which hung on the forest, mantled the hills, and spread away over the level fields and lowlands of the surrounding country. At the accustomed signal the children and the servants had gathered around the family altar, the solemn introductory *"Let us worship God"*, had quieted into reverential stillness, the household circle. The reading of the Holy Oracles which enable us to make us wise unto salvation, followed by a song of praise, constituted an appropriate preparatory to an humble and earnest approach to the throne of Grace, where confession of sins, supplication for pardon through the Redeemer's merits, and the offering of thanks for the abundant goodness and unspeakable mercy of God, are wont to be presented. Agreeably to the rule, *"The claim of God first and those of nature afterwards"*, the morning repast succeeded, and after the removal of the table, I took up a favorite book and began to read in silence. I observed the children, now one, and then another, go to the table on which a number of books were lying and take from it, one a Bible, another a Testament, and another a hymn book or two, and retire. After sometime the voice of singing began in one of the negro cabins, and I found that the children with their books, had gathered together there to read the Scriptures and sing the praises of God. While the delightful melody soothed and melted my heart, I thought with myself, preadventure, the divine truth, read and sung in that humble cabin, may, through the power of Divine Grace, be made