

HISTORY OF FLINT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH by Louise Pettus

May 1, 1992 marks the 200th anniversary of Flint Hill Baptist Church, the mother church of Baptists in York County, S. C. and Mecklenburg County, N. C. In 1792 the Reverend John Rooker (1755-1840), his wife, Anna Hawkins Rooker, and eleven friends, most of them from Warren County, N. C., joined to found Sugar Creek Baptist Church of Christ. The name Flint Hill was later used because of a huge 6-foot outcropping of flint rock that is located in front of the main entrance of the church. The land was, until 1840, leased from the Catawba Indians.

The other founders besides the Rookers were John Dinkins, John Smith, James Spears, Ally Spears, William Pettus, Juba the servant of M. Harris, Margaret Dinkins, Celia Weathers, Mary Smith, Alice Weathers, and Mary Cooper.

Reverend Rooker, a Revolutionary War veteran, had joined the church in 1782 and the next year begun to preach in Warren county, N. C. Most of the Baptists in North Carolina were "Separates" or "New Lights," theological descendants of New England Congregationalists. Rooker was not of this group. He wrote a book, *An Essay on the Sovereignty of God*, published in Charleston in 1839, in which he identified himself as an "Arminian" and further stated his belief in "the sovereignty of the Triune God, His everlasting covenant of redemption for his elect in Christ Jesus, the depravity of fallen man, his recovery through grace by effectual calling, and final perseverance unto eternal glory and endless felicity." The only known copy of his book is in the Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

By 1837 Reverend Rooker was infirm and Rev. James Thomas came to assist him. One Sunday in 1837 no pastor came to the church so the people went to the home of Rooker. There he preached what is believed to have been his last sermon. It was titled, "Finally, Brethren Farewell." In all, Reverend Rooker served Flint Hill for 48 years. He outlived all of the other original members except for his widow, Anna. The church carried out his instructions as written in his will, that he be buried ". . . in the northwest corner of the Baptist Sugar Creek graveyard."

From the beginning Flint Hill offered more than just services on Sunday. Beginning in 1793, the church made efforts to extend its ministry to the Catawba Indians. A school was established for the Indians across Sugar Creek on the Lancaster County side. A converted Pamunkey Indian, Robert Mursh, served for many years as assistant pastor of Flint Hill and as a missionary to the Catawbas. The effort to convert the Catawbas was abandoned in the 1820s.

The first church building was log and replaced by a larger log building in 1811. In 1828 a frame building encompassed the log building. The church grew and by 1855 it was necessary to erect a larger building. The new frame structure was 40 feet by 60 feet. It served until the present building was completed in 1908. A parsonage, renovation of the sanctuary, erection of a marker for Rev. John Rooker, and an education building were added in later years.

The church is unusual in that it has preserved membership records and church minutes that span its entire history. The original records were copied by W. P. A. workers in the 1930s and typescripts made. The originals are now kept with other historical records at the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

The large, well-kept cemetery is a point of pride. Buried there are veterans of all

wars now approaching 200 in number. More than half of these were Civil War veterans. In 1891 the Flint Hill Memorial Association, originally called the Jefferson Davis Memorial Association, began the custom of meeting the third Sunday of each May for a special ceremony and decorating the graves of the veterans.