

BETH-SHILOH CHURCH & REV. W. C. DAVIS

In 1828 about five miles northeast of York on what was once called the "Great Road from Yorkville to Charlotte," and is now called Highway 49, Beth-Shiloh Church was organized.

There was no building to start with, just a "stand," or wooden platform on which the minister would stand, was erected in a grove of trees.

The church-goers of the community had previously attended Bethel Presbyterian Church about 7 miles distant. The new congregation persuaded the Rev. William Cummins Davis to visit them about once a month, if the weather permitted. After a year of preaching in the grove, Davis persuaded the people to construct a church. The walls were hewn logs.

Reverend Davis was then 67 years of age and nearing the end of a long and colorful career. He had been ordained in 1789 and from the beginning was considered a trouble-maker by the Presbyterian church.

In the 1790s Davis insisted upon his congregations singing Watts' Psalms and hymns accompanied by musical instruments. His conservative congregations resisted. By 1803 he was in York District as missionary to the Catawba Indians. Davis had no more success with the Catawbas than earlier Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists had.

In 1805 Davis began ministering to the Bulloch Creek congregation in York District. For at least two years he had been condemning slavery from the pulpit. Davis preached that slave-holding was a sin and for the masters to withhold religious instruction was the "unforgiveable sin."

Davis was called to Philadelphia by the Presbyterian church and was officially reprimanded for his transgressions against accepted practices of worship. Davis replied to the church officials: "Against government I have never preached. . . . Against slavery I will always preach!"

Davis was tried for heresy in 1811. He resigned from the Presbyterian Church and established his own church, the Independent Presbyterian Church. Bullocks Creek remained loyal to Davis and by 1835 Davis had 11 churches, all of whom were opposed to slavery. Six of the 11 were in York District. Two were in Union County, SC, two in Lincoln County, NC and one was in Lowndes County, Mississippi. The last was ministered by Silas Feemster, Davis's son-in-law.

When Davis died in September 1831, the membership of the Independent Presbyterian Church was about 1,000. In 1831 and 1832



York District was the center of a Great Revival (the last Great Revival had been in 1802).

Many people were converted but at the same time the migration to the west (Mississippi and Alabama, especially) was in full swing so that the membership of Carolina churches did not appear to increase. Families by the names of Jamison, Kolb, Robinson, Love, Randall and Davis left York District and transferred their membership to Salem Church in Lowndes County, Mississippi.

After Davis's death, his son-in-law, Rev. Silas J. Feemster served as pastor of Beth-Shiloh for five years before removing to Mississippi. Feemster was succeeded by Rev. George W. Davis, a nephew of William Cummins Davis. He stayed at Beth-Shiloh for 10 years and then went west.

In December 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, the Independent Presbyterians dissolved and united with the Bethel Presbyterian, Synod of South Carolina. That is, the Carolina Presbyterians united. In Mississippi, the Independents of Salem Church merged with Congregationalists.

Thirteen young men who were members of Salem Church were scheduled to be drafted in the Confederate army. All escaped to Ohio; several attended Wheaton College, a Congregationalist school and all returned to Mississippi after the war but the Ku Klux Klan soon scattered them to neighboring states.