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History of Bethel Baptist Church

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History of Bethel Baptist Church
Westside Road, Statesboro, GA
Organized September 29, 1901
Based on the record provided by Roy Smith and updated by the late Herman Nessmith. Courtesy of Paul Nessmith.

Under the leadership of B. D. Nessmith, B. I. Swinson, and perhaps others, four acres of land was purchased from Columbus C. Deal.

According to the records in the office of the Clerk of Superior Court on July 18, 1901, this four acres of land was deeded to B. I. Swinson, B. D. Nessmith, Henry R. Hodges, and their successors. They were appointed trustees of the land for church purposes. The land was purchased for a sum of $28. These records were obtained from Book 14, page 272 of Superior Court Records.

The land is described as follows: All that tract of land lying and being in the 1320th Georgia Militia District of Bulloch County, Georgia, and bounded as follows:

On the South by lands of Ancil Alderman, and on the West by lands of John Campbell. The said tract containing four acres and being in the form of a square.

According to records, four men contributed $7 each to purchase this church site. The men were: B. I. Swinson, Wyley Nessmith, B. D. Nessmith, and W. W. Nessmith.

On September 29, 1901, a group of Baptists met at the home of B. D. Nessmith with the purpose of organizing a church.

The following is a copy of the original record of the organizational service:
Bethel Church was organized September 29, 1901.
Reverend W. M. Hursey preached the 11 O'clock sermon. The text was taken from Chapter 13 verse 19 of the Book of Luke. Brother B. F. Hogan was made clerk. The Council Meeting was held at the home of B. D. Nessmith.

The following is a list of representative churches and members representing the churches at the constituting organization:
Friendship Church
Clito Church  
A. T. McCorkle, Dennis Lanier, Charles Herrington, and Re. B. F. Hogan.

Statesboro Church  
Mathew Miller

Corinth Church  
Rev. W. K. Hursey and P. C. Hagan

Sardis Church  
Daniel Lastinger and G. B. Johnson

Salem Church  
John B. Southerling

Emmitt Grove Church  
John M. Hendrix

Metter Church  
L. P. Mills

After being organized, the church went into conference. Reverend W. M. Hursey was elected moderator, and B. I. Swinson was elected Clerk.

The church was named Bethel. The name was suggested by B. D. Nessmith and was taken from Genesis 28:19.

The meeting day was to be the Saturday before the third Sunday in each month.

Reverend B. F. Hogan was called as pastor, and he accepted.

W. M. Hursey, Moderator  
B. I. Swinson, Church Clerk

The roll call of members from Friendship Church is as follows:


From Blitch Church were James F. Nessmith and Susan Nesssmith.

Recorded September 29, 1901.

B. I. Swinson, Clerk

According to this record, there are twenty five persons named who were present at the organization and eighteen others who composed the constituting membership of the church. This made a total of 43 present at that service and a representation of nine churches.

The afore mentioned constituting members arranged to hold their preaching services in a building belonging to B. D. Nessmith until a church could be built on their property.

There is no written record available concerning the building of the church; but it seems that most of the labor and timber was donated.

The trees were cut and carried to the nearest sawmill. These mills were owned and operated by R. E. (Rob) Brannen and D. E. Bird.

When the construction was ready to begin, the trustees employed William campbell to over see and have charge of the work. He was paid a salary, but practically all the other labor was donated. The church was not completed until sometime during 1902.

There is no information available concerning the church's early growth.

Our next available records after the organizational meeting are dated June 16, 1909. It is believed that records of the eight years between September 1901 and June 1909 were lost in a fire that destroyed the home of B. D. Nessmith.


This makes a total of 25 different men serving as pastor, including the two recent ones.

Continued services have been held at Bethel Church since its organization.

One of the greatest visible blessings bestowed on this church was the Sunday School Annex that was given to the church by L. J. Swinson in remembrance of his dear wife, Mrs. Ida.

They had no bodily heirs to inherit the earthly blessings they had accumulated. It was their life's accumulation of blessings be used to promote the Lord's work and his teachings here on earth.

Mrs. Ida passed on to her reward on July 2, 1948. Mr. Lindsey believed that he did not have long to stay here, and he began to make plans concerning the use and disposition of their possessions.

Rev. E. L. Harrison, our pastor at that time, visited Brother Swinson and suggested that he use a portion of their substance to build and equip Sunday School rooms at Bethel Church.

This suggestion met with Brother Swinson's approval. And so it was that Mr. Lindsey donated the Sunday School Annex in honor of his beloved wife.
Mr. Lindsey lived to see the Sunday School Annex completed and to attend Sunday School afterward.

On November 25, 1948, Mr. Lindsey passed on to his reward. It was his desire to have his estate handled through Bethel Church with the net proceeds going to the Georgia Baptist Orphans Home, and that Bethel Church should receive credit for the contribution.

Paul Nessmith, church treasurer, was named Executor of Mr. Lindsey's estate in his last will and testament. His requests were all executed.

The Sunday School Annex was dedicated on Sunday, June 26, 1949. Mr. Ira C. Prosser of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, had charge of this service. Ira was reared in this community, and he was a member of this church until he moved away.

This dedication service was a very special occasion and a great joy to Bethel Church and the community. We are sincerely grateful to these beloved Christians, who 75 years ago, had the faith and courage to sacrifice the time and effort, and all other requirements which made Bethel Church possible.

Bethel Church's membership has declined through the years due to deaths and economic conditions of the farming community. Although the present membership is small, Bethel Church continues to be a stabilizing force and a blessing to the people in this community.

We hope that this church will continue to be a place of Divine worship throughout the ages.

By Herman Nessmith