



## *Prairie Grove Southern Baptist Church*



*Drew County Arkansas*  
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According to the Centennial History of the Bartholomew Baptist Association of Arkansas: 1850-1950 by E.H. Acuff, Prairie Grove Southern Baptist Church was admitted to the Bartholomew Baptist Association at its Oct. 2, 1869 session, held at the First Baptist Church of Hamburg.

In this same document, Prairie Grove was listed with Rev. W.H.H. Wood as pastor and the leader in Baptisms with thirty-four in 1891. In 1904, Prairie Grove was again listed as a baptismal leader by having the second largest number of baptisms with forty-three and Rev. G.A.D. Moore as pastor. Then in 1905, the meeting itself was held at Prairie Grove, and Rev. G.A.D. Moore was noted as giving the annual missionary message from I Corinthians 12:28. Later in 1915, Rev. Z.T. Wood called the meeting, which was also held at Prairie Grove, to order.

According to the minutes of the 74th Annual Session of the Bartholomew Regular Baptist Association at Crossett Baptist Church on October 1st and 2nd, 1924, the address of Prairie Grove was Rt. 2, Mist. In my life time, it has been Rt. 2, Hamburg; Rt. 4, Hamburg; and Prairie Road, Hamburg. Prior to any of these, the Prairie Grove Community had its own post office, which was called Scipio. A suggestion has been made that this may have been named this Greek name because a Prairie Grove town and post office already existed in northwest Arkansas. My grandfather said the school was sometimes referred to as Scipio, too. In this same report, the messengers to the association meeting were listed as Y.H. Lloyd, J.A.S. Tully, and D.B. Lee. Also, Prairie Grove was noted

as having 104 members. (Presently, the church has 115 resident and nonresident members, and sixty resident members.) The Sunday School superintendent was Pearl Lloyd, and it said that the Sunday Schools were held on Saturdays. The church services were noted as being on the first Sundays of the month. The B.Y.P.U. leaders listed were Y.H. Lloyd and D.B. Lee, who was also the treasurer, and J.A.S. Tulley was the clerk. The pastor was Rev. S.W. Moore, who lived at Pugh and also served as a pastor at Ladelle.

Another interesting fact was that the church pledged ten gallons of fruit to the Baptist orphanage in Monticello that year. Also, it stated that the church building at that time was built in 1907 and could seat 250 in its one-room building. (Before my grandparents' home burned, they possessed a picture of Simpson (Sim) Moore standing in the door of this second church building, which was a long rectangular structure.)

Another Bartholomew note I found in the Drew County Archives stated that the association meeting was held for one session at Prairie Grove in 1959 with Q.E.D. Mathis as moderator and Darrel Black as clerk. The sermon was delivered by Rev. E.C. Cloud. The 1961 Bartholomew Association Minutes of the 105th annual meeting was held at Second Baptist in Monticello on Oct 12, 1961. Prairie Grove's messengers were Mr. and Mrs. Dan Wolfe, Ms. Patty Jean Wolfe, and Mrs. Wilson Wigley. The meeting notes stated that Rev. S.D. Wesson was called as pastor on Aug 13, 1961. Officers were listed as follows: Sunday School Superintendent, Dan Wolfe; treasurer, Mrs. Reece Murphy; and clerk, Linda J. Wolfe. Also, it mentioned that the church had one member who had died that year: Mrs. Richard Carpenter.

Also, in 1969 the church hosted the association meeting to celebrate its one hundredth birthday. According to Dan Wolfe, my grandfather, the early members of the church were ones who had moved into this area from the Midway and Old Troy Communities in Drew County, or the Mount Olive Community and the Riley Communities in Ashley County. Also, he said that his mother, Mary Avaline (Molly) Lee Wolfe could remember that first time she went to Prairie Grove about 1884 after having moved here from near the present site of U.A.M.

Also, according to him, the early records of the church were lost after the death of his Uncle Donald Bedwell Lee, who had been the church clerk and a deacon. The records were shuffled around from one place to another in the confusion, and no one remembered who took them from the home. As a result, there are no records until the late thirties or forties, except for the ones with the Bartholomew Association.

According to my grandfather, the church has had three buildings, and the present one has been in existence since the late 1930's or early 1940's. Uncle James Dock Wolfe remembered hearing stories that the timbers for the oldest church, or perhaps the second building, were hewn from timber gotten down in the swamp (area around Bayou Bartholomew near Jerome and Boydell) and hauled to the Prairie in wagons by a group of men, which included Ashley (Ash) Wigley [reportedly the first white baby born in Ashley County]. My uncle also remembered the old timers coming to church with their shoes draped around their necks to keep from getting their feet dirty. When I mentioned this to a group of ladies at church, Geneva Bowden Clampit laughed and said, "It wasn't just the old folks who did this. I remember us teenagers wearing or carrying ours, too. Just before we got there, we would dust off our feet and put on the shoes so that we had clean shoes for the service."

Up until 1959 when Rev. Rolla Nixon was pastor, there was only one large sanctuary. At that time, Sunday School rooms were added on the south side of the church. Also, there was no baptistery until 1996. In addition, the Sunday School rooms have been renovated to serve both as classrooms and a fellowship hall, and two Sunday School rooms have been added to the front of the building, along with a foyer. In 1998-99, a steeple and a porch wide enough for unloading passengers during rainy weather were added.

According to Wolfe and other elderly people that are now gone, the land for the church was given by Henry Burk, who owned all the land from the Bowden loop on the west to all the way east of the present church where the old Pierce Judkins place on Haw Creek was. Strangely enough, no deed is listed in the courthouse for the church or the cemetery, located northeast of the church building. What land Henry Burk did not own in the immediate area seems to have been owned by his brother Matt Burk. Henry Burk's son, Henry, later became a sheriff in Drew County.

The Prairie Grove Cemetery was started when W. Elmer Curry, the son of C.W. and S.E. Curry, was buried there on August 18, 1895. Supposedly, my great-grandfather, Philip Zadock Wolfe, could remember being at the funeral on a very rainy day because the water's seeping into the grave made an impression on him that he repeated to his son on several occasions.

In the 1930's and 40's, area churches held singing conventions. Minnie Lee Wolfe and other young people, such as Rev. Jack Ferguson, received their musical training there. In a memoir by Earl Willis, who was the Superintendent of Schools at Drew Central for many years, he mentions attending one of these conventions in the 30's. Lonnie Pace, who lived

between Prairie Grove and Pleasant Grove before moving to the Green Hill Community, was one of the main instructors. He taught his singers to sight read by shaped notes. It was he who taught my Uncle Benjamin Franklin Wolfe and his wife Aunt Edna Louise Bowden Wolfe . They later became a well-known singing duo and sang for revivals and funerals as either song leader or a musical team. In fact, Uncle Frank later became the song leader for the Second Baptist Church in Monticello in the early 1950's. These week-long singing conventions were held each year for several seasons at Prairie Grove Church.

The spring and summer revivals were also common occurrences at the church. A minister, song leader, and sometimes, even an organist (later a pianist) were hired and boarded among the community members. Most of the time these revivals were either one or two weeks long, and the services were held twice a day. The farmers tried to have the revival before spring planting and after the crops were "laid by" for the summer. This way the wagons could be filled with church members going to and from the revivals. Dan and Lizzie Lagrone Wolfe, my grandparents, both remembered their house being filled with guests, as well as their going to other people's houses for prayer meetings, which have sometimes been referred to as "protracted meetings." In the 50's and 60's, they were still having services twice a day, but as more and more people began to do public work, the morning service became extinct. I can even remember carrying play clothes to the morning services as a child just in case someone invited me home to play. That way, I would still have clean church clothes for the evening service. (Of course, all girls wore dresses to church then.) In fact, one of the Prairie's claims to fame is that during one such summer revival in the 1950's when Frank Higginbotham was the pastor, he invited his friend, Dixon Rial, to be the evangelist. Today Higginbotham is the owner and creator of TCBY (This Can't Be Yogurt). Back then, no one had even heard of yogurt, and today, most people are unaware that the multi-millionaire, Higginbotham, was once a full-time pastor.

Dan Wolfe came from a family of twelve children, eleven who lived. He remembered being at a revival one night and falling asleep in a back pew. Because there were so many siblings, his parents did not notice his absence and left him sleeping peacefully in the church. When he woke up, he was scared to death because all the oil lamps, or lanterns, had been blown or turned out, and he jumped up and ran towards home. Since he was barefooted, he said he could still remember how his feet felt in the sandy creek bottom as he crossed it and the sensation that his hair was standing up on his head. When he arrived home out of breath, the family's wagon was just pulling into the stomp, and no one had even missed him.

In the old days, lanterns were hung in the church for light, and windows were left open for ventilation. sometimes, the doors were knocked ajar by goats and hogs from one Sunday to the next. On one such occasion, W.E. "Windy" Thurman, Cecil Thurman, my father, and Erastus "Rat" Hill, mischievous teenagers, came along in time to catch some poor, unsuspecting goats, owned by Allen Murphy, in the sanctuary. Deciding to teach the creatures a lesson, the boys got some sticks and went inside to give the goats a whipping, but the last laugh was had by the goats. As many as two at a time went through the windows and glass shattered as it clattered to the wooden floor. In fear of punishment, the scared boys quickly "high-tailed" it to keep from being caught themselves for breaking the windows.

Today Prairie Grove is 130 years old and has been the home church of at least three men who later became preachers: Rev. Ronnie Carpenter, Rev. Hunter Carpenter, and its present pastor, Rev. Jack Ferguson. Bro. Jack and his wife, Ruth Bowden Ferguson both grew up in this church, where both served as teachers, as well as Bro. Jack's being the song leader until he surrendered to preach. After preaching in many other churches, he returned to Prairie Grove after he retired. Rev. Hunter Carpenter also served as pastor once. There may be others whom I have not intentionally omitted, but I am unaware of these. Also, Prairie Grove is the parent church of Ladelle Baptist Church, which was formed in 1913 when enough people had populated Ladelle's vicinity due to the Ashley, Drew, and Northern Railroad's coming through the middle of an area once populated by mostly Deal and Johnson families. However, after the coming of A.D. & N., the town Ladelle sprang up along its tracks, and a church was founded.

The church is located about seventeen miles southeast of Monticello on Midway Route, which turns into Prairie Road. Presently, Prairie Grove services average around thirty on Sunday mornings and twenty for the evening hour. Even though the numbers are small, Bro. Jack delivers two resounding Biblical messages each week, and all are welcome to visit any time.

Addendum: Recently, a new pastor has been called to pastor the church. (2002)

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