

The Lost Jewel of Powell Valley, Tennessee

I want to tell you a true story of fortitude, determination, perseverance and most of all, a testament to our God and His promise.

Sitting upon a hill in beautiful Powell's Valley, Tennessee; a part of Yoakum Station, off the beaten path stands a church named Davis Creek Primitive Baptist Church. On October 1, 1797 by petition of sixteen faithful pioneers and servants of God, who desired a place where they could worship in their own way. Tennessee was still in its infancy, just over sixteen months young.

Fast forward 219 years.....While visiting friends and attending church services on New Year's Day in Ewing, Virginia, we decided to stay in the area for a few days. My wife being born just east of Davis Creek Church, gives us deep attachment to the area and the church. Elder James Blaine Marsee (my wife's grandfather) had joined the church in 1903 and was ordained into the ministry in 1933. Her ancestry dates back to the beginning of the church in 1797.

After church in Ewing, Virginia, we traveled back to Powell Valley to visit the old homestead and onto Davis Creek Church. As we approached the old building, we could see the Bell Tower that has pointed towards the heavens since the church was built, in the 1850's; the first church being a log cabin.

Our excitement grew more intense the closer we came. It had been over twenty- seven years since we had seen the church and finally, there we stood. The excitement we had felt dropped away. Our hearts sank. The years and elements had not been good to the old church structure. Many issues concerning the exterior of the building were prominent. We gathered our thoughts, sighed, took a deep breath and looked at each other and said, "We have to restore this old building." Taking pictures as we surveyed the outside, we left so many thoughts rushing through our minds. Overnight, while at the hotel, we made a commitment to each other: if the church membership would let us, we would work towards restoring the church building to let it serve many generations to come. The next day we returned home to West Tennessee.

Once home, Lil posted to a family member, asking if they were interested in helping restore the church? She was told her cousin, Rex Marsee, has been wanting to do something to help the church and save the structure. At this point, we made contact with the deacon and one sister, who were still active members. We discovered later, out of the hundreds of members, they were the only two left. Preparations of our proposed plan, for the restoration, was presented at the next meeting time in March, 2017.

I guess I should give a little self- background. As I said earlier, my wife, Lillian Jernigan has ties to this church since birth. I am an ordained Elder in the Primitive Baptist Church. At this time, I was pastoring three other churches in the Dickson, Tennessee area. Our intentions and efforts were going to be done from afar, over three-hundred miles away.

Contact was made with the Historical Society, then local State Representative Jerry Sexton and Senator Frank Niceley. They all agreed we needed to preserve this church building, given its history and significance to the area and state as a whole.

March 2, 2017 we traveled to meet with the church membership on Saturday, March 4, 2017. On Sunday, March 5, after services we presented our ideas to the members and moderator in their conference meeting. The plan was to proceed in doing the necessary items to have the church placed on the Tennessee Historical Society list, replace the roof and repair the bell tower. The siding was critical as well, in needing to be replaced. It was weathered and worn, leaving it to fall- off of the building. The interior had been covered over with paneling and was in need of maintenance over all. We began to gather documents in preparation for the historical application. It was then, we realized the minutes from October 1, 1797 to 1907 had been taken from the church and no one knew where. In addition, the church property had been compromised and a fence established, severing one plus acres of their land.

We made another trip to Davis Creek PBC on April 1, 2017. At that time, we discovered there were many issues needing to be addressed to accomplish the restoration and become reality. It would need to begin with raising funds and ensuring the work was completed. A pamphlet was designed to enlighten the reader to the history, needs and goals being set to accomplish this overwhelming task. A friend, who was in the printing business donated 500 copies of the pamphlet to help start the process. We built a Facebook page and began sharing the church's needs. Social media, word of mouth and pamphlets were our first building blocks.

The first need was a new roof. The elements had caused many leaks that could no longer be repaired. The siding is original to the building. Being made of wood; time, weather and Sun have all caused the siding to shrink, crack, separate and give way to leaks. Both the roof and siding were causing water damage and some health issues inside as well.

As I said earlier, our plans were to work from afar. Then, in late May, our house sold, making it necessary to move. After many days of stressful house hunting, our efforts were failing. In June, Lil received a message from a lady in New Tazewell, Tn. She believed she had found my wife's grandmother's old family bible. Indeed it was. We made the trip back to pick it up. Unbeknownst to us, Lil's cousin, Rex, had arrangements for us to look at a few homes in the area. This was not in our plans to move here, as my

churches were west of Nashville. Long story made short, by God's grace and blessings, here we are! We bought a home and moved our membership to Davis Creek PBC on July 2, 2017.

Once we moved, we began to actively push forward with plans for the restoration project. We formed a group of people who by relation and families are associated with Davis Creek PBC. A fundraiser was planned to be held on the 220th Anniversary, October 1, 2017. We dubbed the event "Raise the Roof." This event brought in enough money to replace the roof, add down spouting, guttering and a lightning rod. As an added benefit, we were able to secure the bell tower. Now, the 'Bell rings again!' Recently, a group, facilitated by Ray Grubb, replaced the back wall, insulating and adding Tyvek new siding and paint. This was a terrific help for the preachers, as cold air was coming in at the pulpit.

This past year 2019, we received a commitment from Campers On Mission to do all of the required labor to finish the restoration. To enable the volunteers to accomplish this huge task, we need to provide all the materials by the Spring of 2020. Much restoration is needed, not only on the outside but the interior as well. Paneling and the drop ceiling has to be removed, repairs made and then painted. The siding, insulation, Tyvek and paint will be needed to finish the outside of the church building. Clayton Mobile Homes will possibly donate a used mobile home to allow us to add a fellowship hall. This will be necessary to relocate the restrooms. Previously, The National Historical Registration denied us due to the current restrooms being added to the front of the building along with the change of the interior. New windows (6) will be replaced. New wiring with period light fixtures are being sought. In addition to make it easier for the handicap or elderly to access the restrooms, we will add a breezeway to the fellowship hall, where the restrooms and kitchen area will be located, in addition a ramp will attach to the breezeway. Hopefully, this will not take away from the historical value.

Many friends of this restoration have volunteered to help and many have sent money. We have done a membership book, listing all the members since the constitution was formed to the current time. This sells for \$25 plus shipping. We also build replicas of Davis Creek Church, selling for \$75 each plus shipping. All monies go to the restoration of the church building.

To donate money or materials:

Please make checks payable to.....Davis Creek Building Fund

1937 Old Hwy 63, Speedwell, TN 37870

For material donations.....Contact Elder Rick Jernigan, 423-489-0697

Lillian Jernigan, 423-489-0857