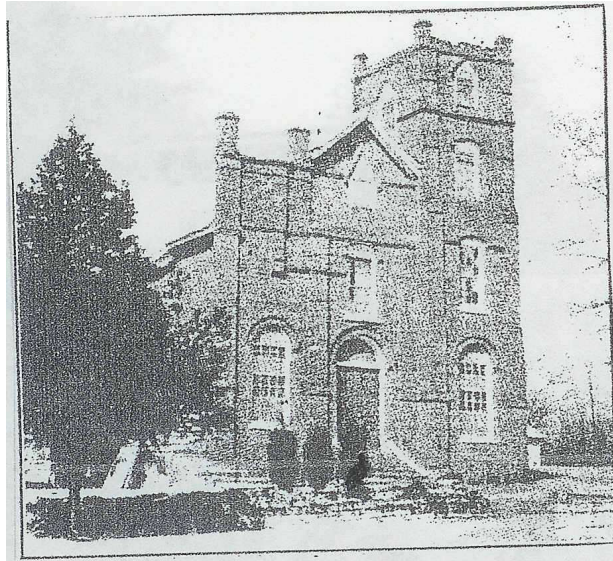


SPRINGFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH ORGANIZED 1868
WASHINGTON (WILKES COUNTY) GEORGIA



REV. LEWIS WILLIAMS, FOUNDING PASTOR

YEARS OF SERVICE 1868-1906

Springfield Baptist Church

A Prelude to the Organization of Springfield

The white Baptist Church in Washington, Georgia allowed slaves to attend services with their masters since it was the practice throughout the area where slavery was practiced. Many of the slaves became members of the church of their masters. Minutes *from* the First Baptist show that in 1819 ten members *from* the Mill Creek Baptist Church had joined together to organize First Baptist Church *for* there was no Baptist Church in Washington. Among them was Julia, the Negro servant *of* Mr. William A Shepherd. The minutes yielded the following information also: in March 1828 there was agreement that weekly meetings *for* the Negroes would be held at night with some of the white members attending; in May 1830 Brother William Hoxley, a Negro was ordained a deacon to serve the Negro members. He was a free Negro who owned a small house where the old RR Johnson store was located; On August 18, 1832, Julia, one of the first members passed; on June 25, 1837 the church licensed the first preacher Brother Billy Leonard to preach to the Negroes in Wilkes County; on October 22, 1837 , the Negro members decided to hold prayer meeting every Monday evening at candle lighting time. This was changed in September 1855 to every Sabbath evening; on June 1866 the colored brethren requested the use of the galleries *for* meetings of the Colored Female Charitable Society; in 1860 there were 90 white members and 217 members of First Baptist.

Ex-Slaves Continue Membership at First Baptist

After 1865, many Black Baptists throughout the south withdrew their membership *from* white churches to *form* their own. (McBeth, 1987). Being cognizant of this the white church in Washington, Georgia, on May 23, 1867, offered the newly freed members help in establishing their own church. These ex-slaves asked to remain as members of the First Baptist church until they could organize themselves and decide what they might actually do. Their wishes were granted and on October 17, 1867 the congregation voted that these members could handle their own business, but if the need arose they would bring matters to the attention of the whites *for* resolution. To help them Dr. Tupper, the pastor of the white church would serve as their pastor also; the church clerk would record their proceedings and they were offered the galleries *for* holding their services. Two black deacons were appointed to conduct the services, Jesse Chivers and George O'Neal.

Ex-Slaves Organize a Church of Their Own (1868)

After many meetings to discuss plans to establish a church of their own, a few members, thirteen of them, decided it was time to organize their own church with one of them as pastor. So, on July 17, 1868, Freedman Baptist Church (later called Springfield) was organized. It seems that these two names were used simultaneously until 1869. Letters of Organization were granted from the Greenwood Baptist church in Barnett, Georgia where Rev. Peter Johnson was the pastor. Among those present with letters from First Baptist church of Washington for the Organization were: Brother Jesse Chivers and his wife, Brother George O'Neal and his wife, Brother Dennis Cox, Brother Robert Butler and his wife, Brother Henry Hammons and his wife, Sister Harriet Hawkins, Brother Elisha Gilbert, Brother Mansfield Starks, Brother Willis Anderson and Rev. Lewis Williams and his wife, Rachel. **Rev. Williams was ordained by Rev. Johnson and was chosen to serve as pastor. Brother Andrew Lewis was elected to serve as Church Clerk.**

At first services were held under a brush arbor near where the present structure now stands and then later held in the log cabin that served as a school. Being the only Black Baptist Church in the area, it was not long before membership and attendance increased. One month after the Organization, a revival was held and Brother Humphrey Binns, Brother Harry Williams and Sister Sarah Watts were the first members taken in for baptism.

First Baptist Church Discusses Organization of Springfield

On February 28, 1869, the First Baptist Church called a meeting of a special committee to discuss the Organization of Springfield Colored Church. They concluded that after reviewing the documents that the church "had seemed to go through a form of Organization similar to, and commonly employed by, Baptist Churches. Therefore the members of First Baptist who had received letters from them to organize and join Springfield may be considered as dismissed from the church." The committee however, stated "hat they would not do justice to all facts in the case, or to their deep interest in the welfare of the colored brethren, they would not interfere with the sister church, but because of several features of history of the church which seem to give us little hope of its success and future usefulness..."

. Among the reasons for feeling that the church would not succeed were: first, "the brethren who organized Springfield Colored Church elected as their Pastor, one who had but a short while before been twice voted to be unworthy of receiving a license to preach on the grounds of his past moral delinquencies for which he had been excluded from this church".(In my searches, I was unable to find out what these charges were and I never heard this discussed by my grandmother.)

Second, "that body, Springfield Colored Church is almost entirely unacquainted with the management of church affairs for they have received no disposition to enlightened instruction; but on the contrary have seemed disposed to keep themselves in the dark, by shutting themselves off from those who might lead them as is the case of this organization.

Third, this committee deems it right while the apology from our Springfield Baptist Colored Church brethren be received it should be put on record, that their organization was made somewhat informally without any regard to or knowledge of the parent church, not ignorantly, but in the face of plain and repeated instruction on the subject from our pastor.

Fourth, while we distinctly disclaim again having any right to interfere with Springfield Colored church, the committee would recommend that our church hereby advise most affectionately the brethren of our sister church to whom we feel that we should speak rather as a parent to a child, that if they wish to prosper as a church of Christ, they should seek every means of obtaining as much light as possible. And as one method, they should erect this house of worship, if they build one, on some site of public access that they may have the benefit of the wholesome knit of public sentiment, as to the manner of conducting Divine Service, and that they ever beware of the fate that is pointed out in the gospel of the blind which are led by the blind-for the office which is the most responsible and arduous in the world, none are fit but the pious and enlightened."

It was passed that "the above be read to our colored brethren this afternoon and a copy of same forwarded to Springfield Colored Church." Brother Thomas W. Calloway was the Church Clerk.

Springfield Adheres to Advice Given to Purchase Land

The Springfield Baptist Church received the minutes from First Baptist Church and it seems that a working relationship was established and the advice about erecting a church "on some site of public access" was taken. According to an indenture in the Wilkes County Deed Book Number 14, Pages 40-41, on July 10, 1869, Thomas Williams, the administrator and executor of Freedman, also called Springfield Baptist Church purchased more or less one acre of land from Charlie Jones for the sum of twenty-one dollars. This land was sold and conveyed to the trustees and the successors of Freedman Baptist Church. The land is located to the south of where Freedman School (a log cabin) was situated. The trustees serving at that time were Brothers Thomas Williams, Elisha Gilbert, Robert Binns and Jessie Chivers. It seems that the white church attended some of the services, especially the annual observance of the Emancipation Proclamation Celebration held at Springfield and church anniversaries. An amicable relationship continues even today.

Some Black Members Remain at First Baptist

Even though a church for ex-slaves had been organized some of the Negroes chose to remain as members of the white church. *In* 1870 there were 100 whites and 234 Negroes. In 1880 there were only twenty-four Negro members remaining in the white church and in 1900 the last Negro member died.

Springfield Sees Exceptional Growth

As the membership grew, services were held in the log cabin schoolhouse and discussions began as to how to raise funds for the erection of a frame building. After funding was secured, a contract for the building of a wooden church was granted to Mr. Edward Bonner for the sum of \$700.00. Much of the work was overseen by Pastor Lewis Williams for he was a skilled carpenter.

Great crowds flocked to Springfield to listen to Rev. Williams preach and to hear the singing of the choir. Rev. Williams was very knowledgeable and spoke quite eloquently; the choir was organized by Brother William Bowen With the cooperation of Brother Mercer and Sister Sophie Scott(Sophie was a daughter of Rev. Williams), Brother and Sister George Shivers, Sister Miranda Williams, Sister Mattie Williams and others.

The ex-slaves and their descendants have long been known for singing and music in their lives. As slaves they were able to endure many hardships by lifting their voices in song. The singing was a major part of every service and people came from far and near to hear those "sweet singers of long ago." The singing of the choir and the eloquence of Rev. Williams made for very spirited services.

The choir held many concerts to help raise funds to build a brick edifice and to purchase an organ. For many years, Nellie Williams, the youngest daughter of Rev. Williams served as organist. In addition to being their director, Brother Bowen founded the first Sunday school in the County, He served as superintendent until 1875 at which time, Sister Sophie Scott was elected superintendent and she held the position for the next thirty years. Cecelia Stanglin, daughter of Nellie Williams Stanglin served as organist for the Sunday school for a number of years.

Once again, the members realized the need for a larger building for the crowds continued to increase. An addition was made to the original structure for the sum of \$500.00. This improvement increased the value of the building to \$1,200.00.

Springfield Joins First Shiloh Missionary Baptist Association

The church became a member of the First Shiloh Missionary Baptist Association that had been organized in 1864. This organization was comprised of a group of churches in the east central Georgia. By the mid-1870s it had grown so large in number that a large tent was required for satisfactory accommodations. Its boundaries had extended as far as Walton, Barrow and Clarke counties. When it became difficult for members to hear the proceedings, many churches began to pull out and to form other organizations. In 1875, the First Shiloh Missionary Baptist Association was hosted by Springfield Baptist Church. (Wagner,(1983).

When the First Shiloh Baptist Association decided to build a school in the early 1900s, they chose Washington as the location because of the support that had come forth from Springfield. The Association saw "a need to educate their youth and others who hungered to feast from the table of knowledge." The school, Shiloh Academy was built on Lexington Avenue where the home of the late Mrs. Marshall Evans now stands. The school consisted of two two-storied buildings; one was a girls' dormitory and the other housed administrative offices and classrooms. The boys who attended lived in an off-campus building.

A Brick Structure Erected (1883)

Under the energetic leadership of Rev. Williams, the foundation for a brick structure was laid on May 20, 1883. It took some time for the building to be completed at a cost of \$4,160.67. The Ladies' Benevolent Society gave \$500.00 for the addition of a vestibule, increasing the value of the church to \$4,660.67.

Freedman Baptist Church Officially Changes Name to Springfield

According to the Wilkes County Deed Book Number 8, Page 250, on December 18, 1889, the name of the church was changed, officially from Freedman Baptist Church to Springfield Baptist Church.

Daughter Churches

During these times of growth and development, some members of the church who traveled many miles to attend services, decided it was feasible to consider building in their own communities. These daughter churches were granted letters of dismissal from Springfield: Booker's Chapel, 1874; Cherry Grove, 1875; Gibson Grove, 1885; Young's Chapel, 1885; Twin Oak, 1886; Hilliard Station, 1896; and Mt. Carmel, 1901.

Celebration of Thirtieth Anniversary

On Sunday, July 17, 1898, the church celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. The sermon was preached by Rev. Thomas Andrews, the oldest ordained minister from the church. Mr. Jim M. Scott who had served as church clerk since 1870 read the church's history. This was a glorious celebration and the people rejoiced for God had answered their prayers; they had successfully organized a church and it continued to flourish. Their faith was renewed and strengthened.

Rev. Lewis Williams Passes

Rev. Williams served until his death on July 20, 1906, at age eighty-five. His funeral drew crowds from in and around the county and beyond. There was great sadness among his family and the members of the churches that he had helped organize and lead. There was much praise for this "puissant tribune" who had survived half a life of slavery and then devoted his years of freedom to helping to advance the cause of his people. His grave is at the rear of the church.

The Next Thirty Years-Many Changes 1906-1936

After the passing of Rev. Williams in 1906, Rev. George Butler, a son of Springfield became pastor. He served until 1907. Rev. Simmons from Stone Mountain, Georgia was called; he served until his death. Rev. Richardson served as interim pastor until Rev. Frank Paschall was called. He served only a short time and Rev. Richardson again served until another leader could be called.

Rev. C. J. Hardy, the uncompromising veteran of the gospel, was called to fill the position of pastor. Under his leadership the membership sharply increased. When the church was heavily damaged by a storm on June 16, 1916, he led the church in raising \$800.00 to repair the damages and to install electricity and otherwise beautify the church. He passed away at his home in Atlanta, Georgia on October 3, 1917.

Rev. C. S. Daniels was called to church on June 8, 1917. He came from the Land of Flowers in St. Augustine, Florida. He sang himself into the hearts of the people and was considered a great leader. He had desires to do more but his health failed him. He resigned two weeks before his death in July, 1919.

Rev. M. D. Frank from Brunswick, Georgia was called to lead. Early on he demonstrated his ability to improve the finances of the church. Within eight months more than \$2,500.00 was raised and this made it possible to build a five room parsonage. He resigned in 1921.

Rev. J. F. Franklin was called to serve and once again the membership grew tremendously.

On April 4, 1926, Rev. J.P. Turner of Atlanta, Georgia was called to serve. He organized a Junior Choir and built up a Sunday morning service that was second to none. Because of this influence and the assistance of Mrs. Sophie Williams Scott, the State Sunday School and B. Y. P.U. Convention was in Washington at Springfield on July 17, 1934. Baptists attended from all over the state and among them was Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr. and his son, the late and famous, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. Member, the late Emma Julia DuBose remembered that Dr. King was five years old at the time and he sang a solo "I Want to Be More and More Like Jesus." Rev. Turner resigned in 1935.

Rev. D. C. Bell served as interim pastor after the resignation of Rev. Turner. He secured the services of Rev. Pickette of Atlanta to conduct a very successful revival. Rev. Raiford was asked to-serve until a pastor could be called.