



A History of Mt. Sylvania

Missionary Baptist Church

by Michael D. Thompson



A History of Mt. Sylvania Missionary Baptist Church

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to the Mt. Sylvania Community of
Titus County, Texas**

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Preface

This history was written with a desire to be accurate in telling the story of one of the Lord's churches that has important historical significance. Every attempt has been made to listen carefully to those with first hand information. The available church records, Hopewell minute books, US Census records and other printed records were examined carefully to find as many records as possible to document the people of faith who have worshipped in this community over the past one hundred and twenty five years.

The purpose of this book is first and foremost to honor God and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed his blood on Calvary to save sinners. No attempt is being made here to idolize the people whose story is recorded. They were all just sinners saved by the marvelous mercy and grace of God. It is assumed that some unsaved sinner's story may also be contained in this history, as men cannot know the heart of another man. The purpose of this book is not to judge, but only to record the faith of the faithful.

This book is presented with the prayer that all who read it, will examine their church life and make the commitments which God's Word calls upon all men to make. If you do not know the Lord as your personal Savior, please understand that there are many loving members of Mt. Sylvia Missionary Baptist Church who would love to share the love of Jesus with you.

Acknowledgments

As the author of this little book, I would like to acknowledge all the help and cooperation that many in the Mt. Sylvia church family have extended to me. The freedom that you gave me to access your personal stories and facts was beyond belief. It has been such a joy to listen to your stories and help to track down the parts of the stories that matched with the available documentation. Each person who came out to the history brainstorming meeting and took phone calls and visits, a thank you comes from the bottom of my heart. To my proofreaders, Corey Homer, Judy Thompson and Pearl Swafford, I am thankful. Your input and encouragement were very valuable to me. For Brian Irwin, my grandson, who continues to show such an interest in the elders and in history, I must offer a prayer of a blessing and of thanksgiving to our great God Almighty who is faithful to every generation.

Michael D. Thompson, Pastor

The Early Years

A history of Mount Sylvia Missionary Baptist Church rightly begins with the ministry of Jesus Christ, which started shortly after his baptism, with the calling out of disciples along the Sea of Galilee, some 2000 years ago. Baptists have historically believed that modern Bible believing Baptist churches are the direct descendants of the churches which Jesus and his disciples established. Long before the day of Pentecost, Jesus was sending his disciples out to every village of Israel preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Before the day of Pentecost, there was a fully functioning church numbering about 120 souls, meeting in Jerusalem and transacting an election of a replacement apostle. As Saul began persecuting the churches, he is described as going from town to town with letters authorizing him to arrest those early Baptist folk.

In those early days, they were not called “Baptist,” but were practicing the historic Baptist faith. A Baptist church, following the Biblical order, is by definition, a group of scripturally baptized believers who are covenanted together to carry out the work that Jesus left his church to do. The work, simply stated, is to make disciples throughout the world, to baptize those disciples and to teach them to observe all the things that Jesus taught his disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). In that great tradition, in the early 1880s, a circuit-riding preacher rode his horse into the Mt. Sylvia community and began to preach.

This preacher was William Harry Coldicutt. In the year 1844 in Wilshire County, England, during the reign of Queen Victoria, he was born. At an early age he set out for the frontier of the United States. He arrived by sea in Detroit, Michigan, and soon made his way to northwest Louisiana. According to an early Coldicutt Bible record in the possession of his great granddaughter, Jan Homer, he found his young bride in the rural area of Claiborne Parish. She was the daughter of W. B. Stevenson who was born in Arkansas around 1810. Francis Abigail was born “near Terryville” March 30, 1845. William and Frances married “near Montgomery.” They remained in Louisiana until after the birth of their oldest daughter, Mary Lilian. “It is recorded that he received U. S. Citizenship papers at Mt. Pleasant on June 29, 1878, at the age of 34. Many of our congregation are direct descendants; Raymond Brownlee and his family, Thomas McKelvey and his family, and the closest relative, Tennie Cox, and her family.” Corey, Kaci and Molly Homer, the

grandchildren of Jan and Odis Homer, make the seventh generation of the descendants of Bro. Coldicutt and his wife, Francis, to be members of Mt. Sylvia Church.

Some might say Grandpa Coldicutt never received any fame, but God called him to preach His Gospel. He lived between Argo and Cookville and rode a horse to Mt. Sylvia School and preached once a month. His daughters told of taking turns riding the horse to church with their daddy in the early 1880's. It is recorded that William Harry Coldicutt was the moderator of the Hopewell Association meeting in Mt. Pleasant in the year 1882. So we have concluded that Mt. Sylvia Church is just a little over 100 years old. And personally, I conclude that William Harry Coldicutt is very famous to those of us meeting here today.

Thanks to the work of the historical committee commissioned in 1982, on the occasion of the dedication of their new facility, much good research has been done and a previously sketchy documentation was fleshed out. The committee consisted of Helen Reese, Will McKelvey, Tennie Cox and Verna and Thomas McKelvey. As a result of their work, Mrs. Verna McKelvey wrote a six page history that was edited and presented by her daughter, Suzanne Skidmore. The above quotations are quoted from the second paragraph of that important work. In the regular business meeting of the church in November, 2006, Easter Sunday, 2007, was declared the day to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the founding of Mt. Sylvia Missionary Baptist Church.

A theme verse for this history could be 2 Chronicles 20:20.

(20) And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

A theme verse for the rest of the story could be Psa 146:9

(9) The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

and Psa 68:5

(5) A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows,
[is] God in his holy habitation.

The early history of the area is full of tales of the widows and fatherless. Bro. Coldicutt died at the age of 53 in the winter of 1897. The 1900 US Census for Titus County

shows all of his children married except the youngest daughter, May, who was 11. His widow and May were living between two of the Huckaby brothers, farmers living somewhere east of Mt. Sylvia, probably nearer to Argo or Liberty Hill. Rufus was the oldest at 30 years old. Rufus had in his household, his wife Emma, his 20 year old sister, Della, and 3 children ranging in age from 6 to 2. John, the other Huckaby brother, was 27 and within the year in which the census was taken, had married Effie, May Coldicutt's older sister, who was only 16.

By the time of the 1910 census Francis Coldicutt, still listed as a widow, was listed in the household of the famous doctor, Thomas Riddle. Dr. Riddle, age 52, had 3 sons by his previous marriage, still living at home. The oldest one was 20 and the youngest was 8. A few years prior, May Coldicutt had become Dr. Riddle's young bride and by 1910 had given birth to two children. Only one had survived. She was 5 months old and her name was Gracie.

This same census record also shows one of her older daughters, Sarah Elizabeth, as already a widow at age 30. Most historic documents carry her name as Bessie. The young Bessie Coldicutt was a continuing presence in the early development of Mt. Sylvia. She had married her husband prior to the birth of their first son, William Luther, in August 1888. Her husband, William J. Brownlee, was part of a clan of Mississippi boys who arrived in Titus County from Tippah County, Mississippi.

Bessie was one of three girls who told of taking turns riding on the horse with their father to Mt. Sylvia for Sunday preaching. If this preaching started in 1882 as has come to be accepted, Bessie was 12. Bessie's older sister, Mary Lilian would have been 14 and Minnie Ann would have been 10. Effie, her baby sister, would have been only 2 years old. Effie was born after the census taker came by in 1880 as she is not listed on the 1880 Census.

There was also a son in the family in 1880. His name was Joe. His granddaughter, Mary Mayfield, was in attendance when the 1982 history was presented to the church and was interviewed in 2006 for the writing of this history. William Howard Coldicutt, another son, was born August 30, 1886, but he died at the age of 9 on July 17, 1895.

May Coldicutt was the youngest of the Coldicutt children born in 1889. The 1982 history of the church identifies her as "Mrs. May Riddle Jones, who will be 87 years old in February, 1976." She is quoted as saying, "her father, Bro. W. H. Coldicutt, organized the

church. They first had services under some oak trees in the summer time. Also, they had church in the school building, and that W. P. McLean gave the land for the school; (and church).” She also says that, her Brother-in-law, “Tom Hammonds, taught her here in 1912, and she was 12 years of age, and they had church.”

According to the abstract in the possession of Tex Lilly before his death on February 16, 2007, John Robert Brownlee and his wife, Elvira, purchased the property, where, Kathrine Lewis’ home is now located, in 1882. Kathrine Lewis is the daughter of Tex Lilly. Russell Traylor in his *History of Titus County*, page 287, recounts the arrival in Titus County of James Rountree. According to the 1860 US Census of Tippah County, Mississippi, James Rountree and J. R. Brownlee were next door neighbors in Mississippi.

James Sylvester Rountree came to Titus County from Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1878, and bought 800 acres of land a distance west of what is now Argo in Titus County, Texas; then he brought his family to Titus County and settled on this land in 1879. There is a cemetery located about a mile south and west of Argo known as the Rountree Cemetery. James S. Rountree built his home about 200 or 300 yards north and west of this cemetery, and he also had a country store. A post office opened in this store in 1885, and he was the postmaster for a short period of time, and then his son, George, was postmaster about 2 years. His wife was Martha Allen. He was born in 1825 and died in 1886, and his wife was born in 1824 and died 1897. Both are buried in the Rountree Cemetery.

The close relationship of James Rountree and John Brownlee in Mississippi and their arrival at this early date and establishing themselves just 4 miles apart leads us to understand how Bro. W. H. Coldicutt found this place to preach, probably as early as 1882. It was probably along the road winding by Rountree’s store, that Bro. Coldicutt made his way from his farm, about a mile southwest of Cookville, to Mt. Sylvia. Russell’s history also includes the fact that Coldicutt was a dealer of sewing machines in addition to farming and preaching.

It has been speculated whether Bro. Coldicutt came to Texas preaching or whether he was the product of those who were working hard in the ministry here in Titus County. In an article written by an early resident of Cookville and included in the Russell history, on page 122, the story is told of the preaching of Solomon Hays Price and D. C. (Dave) Myers.

And J. S. Sutherland, Postmaster and Justice of the Peace in his small store; and B. B. Garrett lived 1 mile South of town and had a grocery store; large family, one son an attorney in Fort Worth. It was

his pond that my brother and I stuck our feet in the mud and were baptized. Then D. C. (Dave) Myers, Northeast of town, and Sol Price, South toward Snow Hill, both farmers, preached forceful sermons in the Baptist church from the Scriptures and from the heart, without notes and without pay.

This was written by Reuben R. R. Cook, the son of Andrew Barney Cook. Reuben Cook was living in El Paso, Texas in December 26, 1963, when he wrote this account. Another article in the Russell history, page 331, calls Sol Price the “Dean of East Texas Preachers.” Another account, on page 167, in Traylor’s book reads, “Some of the stalwarts of the early Baptist churches were Bro. Sol Price, Bro. Peter Rogers and Parson Coley. I do not know why he was called Parson and the others ‘Brother’.” All of these men are listed as either the moderator or preachers at early annual meetings of the Hopewell Baptist Association, which held its first annual session in 1880. Bro. W. H. Coldicutt was the moderator in 1882.

Going back to John Robert Brownlee’s family, it seems they resided in the immediate area of the Mt. Sylvia meeting house that was used for both school and church purposes. His oldest son, William, is the young man who married Bessie, one of the middle daughters of Bro. W. H. Coldicutt. John and his wife had 5 sons and 2 daughters ranging in age from 14 down to 2 when they arrived in Titus County in 1880. Martha Della was born the year they arrived, and by 1886 John Robert Brownlee and his wife, Elvira, had three more girls. They were all in the general area of Mt. Sylvia, until a bad sickness hit the area and all of the Brownlees, with the exception of Bessie and her children, picked up and moved to Comanche County, TX. Two of the daughters married Brownlee men from Camp County in the late 1890s. They each had a small child and were living in the community when tragedy touched this family. The death of four of his children (three sons and one daughter) in three days is described in this transcript of John Robert's obituary published May 22, 1925, *De Leon (TX) Free Press*

John R. Brownlee Long Time Citizen Passed To Reward
John Robert BROWNLEE, better known as "Uncle John" passed out of his earthly tabernacle of clay and into the life eternal on Wednesday, May 13th, 1925, at 10:00 a.m. His death followed an illness lasting over a period of two years, however, he had been thought much better the past two months. The end came Wednesday following a stroke of

paralysis on Tuesday. The scores of relatives and friends did all possible for him in his last hours, but his earthly life ceased and "his works do follow him."

Uncle John was born in North Carolina on July 4th, 1843, being therefore 84 years, 10 months and nine days of age. His good wife preceded him to the glory world, having died May 10, 1907. To them were born fourteen children, only six of whom survive. They had the sad misfortune to lose four grown children in a period three days, of congestion, while they lived in east Texas. Some of the remaining children dying have been adults but some died in infancy. Their east Texas home was at Mt. Pleasant.

Uncle John moved from North Carolina to Mississippi when quite young. It was here he was married and started life. Forty-one years ago he came to Mt. Pleasant, and twenty-two years ago to De Leon. He was a Confederate soldier and was wounded at the battle of Shiloh. He became a member of the Methodist church when young and lived a great majority of his life in this faith. Rev. S. KIRKPATRICK of the De Leon Methodist church conducted the funeral service.

Being of that old-time stock, Uncle John never adopted the fads and fancies of modern life. He made the unusual request that his body be carried to the cemetery in a wagon, just as the hundreds and thousands who have gone before. His request was granted by his loved ones and friends.

Surviving children are: Miss Pearl BROWNLEE, who lived with her father to his death; Romer BROWNLEE, De Leon; George BROWNLEE, Rotan; Mrs. S.F. BROWNLEE, De Leon; Mrs. A.W. BROWNLEE, De Leon; Mrs. M.B. BIBBY, De Leon.

Bessie Coldicutt Brownlee with her other sons and a grandson sold their interest in a 20 acre tract, known as the Brownlee home place, to her son-in-law, Richard Cox, in the early 1940s. Bro. Peter Rogers performed the wedding for Richard and Tennie Cox. He was not the pastor of Mt. Sylvia at the time. They were married on a hillside near Gladewater Church where they located Bro. Rogers, October 20, 1923, the day they decided to be married. Tennie was Bessie's youngest daughter. The fact that Bessie was in possession of this property, free and clear of indebtedness, gives evidence that she and her children were next door to the meeting house from the earliest history of the Mt. Sylvia Community until her death in 1943. There is also a story of a tornado that struck her house. Her son, Lee, who was also living there, escaped injury because he went into another part of the house to unplug the phone. Richard and Tennie Cox provided for Bessie's welfare in her senior years.

Richard Cox's memorial in the 1994 memorial service read, "In memory of Richard Cox. Papa, as he was called by Randy and Ronny. Yes, as Randy recently mentioned, he admonished his family to serve the Lord."

Other families that were around before 1900 include the Holcombs, Allens and Cargiles. Grover Holcomb is listed on, not the first contribution list, but a subsequent one and is on official church rolls until he and his wife Dora were granted letters to move their membership on June 14, 1959. R. B. Cargile and L. M Cargile, listed on the list below, were also on the 1900 Census of the area along with W. T. and B. B. Hammond. Hattie Allen, the first name on the oldest official church roll was living in a rented house next door to Rufus Crooks in 1910. She was a sister-in-law to P. H. Rogers' wife.

Mrs. Eula Aaron Hammonds who lived in the community until 1903 tells us that she does not remember when a church was organized but she remembers that a Methodist Circuit Rider came by and preached occasionally and the Baptist had preaching sometimes too. She says the women of the community met and organized a Sunday School about 1900.

There are no official records of the church before 1912, but Mr. Charley Driggers can remember going to Mt. Sylvia Church in 1905. The oldest living member in 1982, Joe McKelvey, remembers attending church 97 years ago in 1910 when P. H. Rogers was the pastor. (*History of Mt. Sylvia*, 1982)