

The Moving Years

Bro. H. L. McNish became pastor in 1939 and the church experienced exciting growth over the next few years. John Raymond Brownlee was saved at a revival meeting at Gladewater Church and was baptized by them. However, at Mt. Sylvia the baptismal waters were stirring after each summer's meeting. Mt. Sylvia was baptizing at a spot known as Wagon Bed, in Stinkin' Creek. This was south of where Luther and Mamie had raised their children and where Jan Cox and Tex Lilly were both born. In 1942, Nig moved his letter from Gladewater, in the meeting where Syble Brownlee and Marie Brown made professions of faith. They were baptized following those meetings. Mr. and Mrs. Roger Graham, Odetha Hays, Fay Hodge and Inez Willson also joined by letter during revival meeting. James Holcomb was baptized in 1943 and Archie Lilly, Charlotte McKelvey, and Tom and Verna McKelvey were added to the church in the 1944 meeting.

The story is told that shortly after Nig and Syble were married August 2, 1941, Bro. H. L. McNish was holding a revival meeting (he was not the pastor at that time) and staying in their home. Bro. McNish requested that Nig draw him a bath in a washtub so that he could take a bath. Nig replied that he was welcome to visit Wagon Bed, and bathe as he did. That seems to have been the end of the conversation. It seems, from this story that Wagon Bed was not only the community swimming hole (which is commonly reported) and the baptistery, but Nig Brownlee's bath.

The earliest surviving church roll seems to have been compiled in 1942. An electronically scanned copy of that two page roll is included as Appendix A at the end of this history.

Bro. McNish served as moderator of the Hopewell Association from 1940 to 1944. He was pastor of Mt. Sylvia until 1943 when Bro. Don Rogers came to pastor. Bro. Rogers was the son of Bro. Peter H. Rogers. Thus, it could be said that Bro. Don Rogers was also a native son of Mt. Sylvia. He pastored about two years. He is most noted for his long service as the pastor of Damascus Missionary Baptist Church, just northwest of Mt. Pleasant.

The follow few paragraphs are also quoted from the 1982 history. They describe the moving of the church to its new location.

By 1945 almost everyone had a car, but the roads were very poor and travel in wet weather was almost impossible. There were no electric lines to the church and due to a shortage of materials brought on by

WW II, the R.E.A. could not build new lines. The church decided to move their building to a more central location near electricity. A committee was appointed and they secured an agreement with J. W. Phillips (whose wife is a member today [1982]) to swap the presently owned 1/2 acre for the two acres. That doesn't sound like a very good trade, but when we consider that the new location was only across the road from Luther Brownlee's country store, a thriving center of activity, we were very fortunate indeed. Also this 1/2 acre of land was once owned by George M. Phillips, a deacon, long remembered for repeating in every prayer, "God bless Old Mt. Sylvania."

The building was moved to the present location in the spring of 1946. What prosperity: no more gasoline lanterns to pump and kerosene lamps to clean and luxuries like electric fans. In 1950 a building fund was started and in 1953 the old building was sold and services were held in the Midway School until the building still housing our Sunday School was completed. The new building was debt free in 1955 and dedication services were held with I. E. Driggers preaching the sermon. ... We are very proud to have his daughter, Helen Reese and her family still attending and I believe Marcie Edwards would be the fifth generation of that family to attend Mt. Sylvania.

The church roll indicates that Tom and Verna McKelvey joined the church by letter, August 20, 1944. Tom had been raised, with Tennie Brownlee, by Grandma Bessie. His mother had died while Tom was still young. His father, Grover McKelvey, was a member at Gladewater church. All three of their children, Ray, Pete and Suzanne, all made professions of faith and were baptized in the 1950's.

The contribution of Verna in the preservation of the history in 1982 has already been noted, but Verna was a valuable member of the church until her passing in 1990. Her work with the young people of the church is remembered by her students, and it is also remembered that she taught the adult Sunday school class. The story is related that she would divide her class into two groups and ask them Bible questions. The team who got the most questions right would get to choose a fellowship activity. Pearl Swafford reported that on one occasion she was grouped with the McKelvey boys and Larry Reese. It seems that they had chosen Pearl to be on their team because she knew all the answers. The question that won the contest for them was, "What woman in the Bible is spelled with six letters?" The answer was Hannah. Pearl and the boys won and the boys selected a coon hunt for their activity. Big sister, Syble Brownlee, who was already married, was recruited to be the sponsor, and it was a memorable occasion, at least for Pearl.

Verna McKelvey was remembered in the 1994 memorial as follows: “Verna left behind a Christian legacy which will forever live in our hearts. She was a pillar of Mt. Sylvia Baptist Church.

In 1947 Bro. H. T. Bell was the pastor. No one in 2007 could remember anything about Bro. Bell, but Jan Homer remembered that Bro. J. B. Pruitt was preaching in the revival meeting when she got saved. The church roll records the date of September 17, 1947, when eight people were baptized and two were received by letter. Those baptized with Jan Homer were Helen Domino, James Gerron, W. W. Graham, Junior Holcomb, Tex Lilly and Bud McKelvey. Irene Deaton and Nadine Gerron were the two who united with the church by letter.