



# WALTON RELATIONS & HISTORY

Volume 9, Issue 6

Walton County Heritage Association

May 2018

## More WPA Church Histories

By Sam Carnley

In last month's WCHA Newsletter article we brought you examples of the work of the WPA in its project of surveying local county histories of governments and churches during the Great Depression of the 1930s. As mentioned in that article, these documents are available on the Florida Memory website of the State Library and Archives of Florida found at URL:

<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/321166>.

In this month's article we continue with WPA Church Histories; focusing on five churches, three of which have histories presented in the Walton County Heritage Book. They are Mt. Pleasant African Methodist Episcopal Church, Clear Springs Baptist Church, New Harmony Baptist Church, Cluster Springs Baptist Church and New Bethel African Methodist Church.

### Mt. Pleasant A. M. E. Church

The WPA survey of this church is very brief. It consists of 3 short, hand-written paragraphs giving only the most basic information on the formation of the church. Dating from 1906, this church's location is described as 6 miles east on Road #47, 2 miles south, 2 miles east, Route 2, Laurel Hill, Flowersville, Walton County.

(Cont'd page 2)

## Upcoming Reunions

**Spence:** The 48th Spence Reunion was held Saturday, May 21, 2016, at the DeFuniak Springs Community Center, 361 North 10th Street. For date and place of 2018 reunion call Irmalee Spence Bass at 850-892-6103.

**Cosson:** 2nd Saturday in June at the Harry Cosson house in Alaqua. For more information, contact Harry Cosson.

**Evans/Lindsey/Brown:** 1st Saturday in June at the Euchee Valley Community Center. For more info contact Carolyn Brown.

**Gaskin School:** The last known reunion was held 16 July 2016 in DeFuniak Springs. For more info. contact Glenda Simms Arrant at 850-834-2452 or Cheryl Sims Alberson at 850-834-3206.

**Mitchem:** The last reported reunion was on 19 June 2010 at Ponce De Leon Springs. For more info. contact Ella Smith.

**Nelson:** 2nd Saturday, June, Sportsman's Club, DFS, contact Marie Rhodes for more info.

**For a complete listing see the Reunions page at the following link:**

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/genealogy.htm>

### Walton County Heritage Museum

Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:00 – 4:00 PM  
1140 Circle Drive, De Funiak Springs, FL 32435  
850-951-2127

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/>

## **More WPA Church Histories**

By Sam Carnley

(Cont'd from page 1)

Situated a few miles south-west of Paxton, this community will be familiar to those of us acquainted with the north part of the county.

It was constituted in 1906 and services were held in the Masonic Hall a mile east of the then present site. In 1920, a new church was built and dedicated. It was an unpainted, rectangular frame building featuring a steeple and bell.

The first settled pastor was Rev. Henry McCall, 1906-1907, whose education was unknown. The then present pastor was Rev. A. F. Porter, 1906-?, Route #2, Box 22, Laurel Hill, Florida, and his education was common school.

This church is neither mentioned, at least by the above name, in the Walton County Heritage Book, nor is its history included therein. The WPA document on the church does not give the date it was surveyed. Other county churches seem to have been surveyed in the 1938-39 timeframe which is probably about when it was done for this church.

### **Clear Springs Baptist Church**

The WPA survey of this church is also brief, consisting of a single type-written paragraph covering less than a half page.

The church is located about two miles north of the Flowersville church presented above. The Walton County Heritage Book makes two references to Clear Springs Community, one of which mentions the Baptist Church specifically. Histories presented on the community are very brief and deal with schools and the church, in particular, a short history attributed to Margaret Wooten:

#### *Clear Springs*

Located in the northwest corner of the county Clear Springs lies about one mile from the Alabama state line. From 1911 to 1937 the children in the lower grades went to Clear Springs School. In 1922 the Clear Springs Baptist Church was built. The name was given to the community because of the cool, clear water that gushed out of the ground forming a small streamlet that found its waters mingling with Pond Creek Which flowed from the 600 acre Lake Jackson in Alabama.

Although the church stands in front of the Clear Springs Community Cemetery, it is evident from historical records that the cemetery predated the church. Proof of this comes from the headstone of Malvie Busbee whose burial date was 3 January 1904, which appears to be the earliest of the 732 identified burials listed for the cemetery on the Find A Grave website at [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).

Mrs. Wooten's establishment date of 1922 for the church differs with that of the WPA. According to its half-page document on the church, it was 1 mile southwest on Highway #33 [now Highway 85], [of] Florala, Alabama, 1/2 mile from the Alabama line. The church was constituted in 1935, although it functioned as a mission from 1922 until that date under the sponsorship of the First Baptist Church of Florala. The erection date of the church was 1922, which Mrs. Wooten seems to have confused with its establishment date. The structure was described as a white, square wood-frame building. That fits

the description of the present-day building, but it is unknown if it is the same one described in the WPA document.

According to the WPA, it was a quarter-time church, meeting on third Sundays. Its membership was 95 and active organizations were Sunday School and Baptist Training Union. Its first settled pastor was Rev. V. D. Harraman from 1935 to 1936 and his education was unknown. The then present pastor was Rev. A. L. Horton, as of 1939. He resided in Florala and received his education from Howard College of Birmingham, Alabama.

Church records dating from 1935 consisted of organizational records, business reports, election of officers, register of members, baptisms, deaths, and receipts and disbursements. The records were in the custody of the clerk, A. W. Fountain of Route 1, Florala, Alabama. Also included were Sunday School Records dating from 1931, listing pupils, officers teachers, attendance and receipts and disbursements.

This writer is personally acquainted with both the church and the cemetery. I have attended the funerals of numerous relatives held there, including that of my mother who passed away in 2007. She was buried in the cemetery next to my father who passed away in 1960. Also buried there are my father's parents, John and Emily Busbee Carnley, as well as many other relatives.

### **New Harmony Baptist Church**

The WCH book includes a brief mention of New Harmony community also attributed to Margaret Wooten in which she tells that the local school served both educational and religious needs. She identified Stella as predecessor to the New Harmony community. In her words, "The Stella School was the center of education on week days, then religious services were held there on Sundays, and singing schools were held during school vacations. Local historians say the area was named after the singers . . . who sang in harmony."

The author of the WPA version of this church history was Mrs. Verbie D. Smith, to whom readers were introduced in last month's newsletter article on WPA church histories. She identified Mt. Gilead School which doubled as a church in Stella as the predecessor of New Harmony Church. Describing it as situated in Stella, she gave its location as Road # 153 [now highway 1087], 9 miles [actually about 5 miles by 1936 map, Figure 1] north of Mossy Head. The church was organized in the Mt. Gilead schoolhouse in 1913 and continued in the same building until the church lapsed in 1917. It was reorganized in 1922 as New Harmony and moved five miles [actual distance per 1936 map was two miles, see Figure 1] north to the New Harmony Schoolhouse, where it again lapsed in 1936. Reorganized in 1938 at the New Harmony Schoolhouse, it remained there as of 1939 when the WPA conducted its survey. The New Harmony Schoolhouse was built in 1922 for community school and church use. It was described as a white painted, square frame building with a bungalow roof.

Affiliated associations were the Southern Baptist Convention of Nashville, Tennessee at the national level, the Florida Baptist Convention, Jacksonville, Florida at the state level and District Graves Association of DeFuniak Springs at the local level.

Rev. J. W. Cutts with an unknown education was the first settled pastor during 1913-15. The pastor at the time of the WPA survey was Rev. E. E. Ernest of DeFuniak Springs. He had a grammar school education from Gardner, Hardee County, Florida, [which is located on U.S. Route 17 about 11 miles (18 km) north of Arcadia.]

Records were kept in a "Conventional Record Book," dated 1913 showing record of business transactions, reports, election of officers, membership register, baptisms, deaths, receipts and disbursements. Separate Sunday School records were kept in a composition book dated Sept. 11, 1938 showing list of pupils, officers, teachers, attendance, and receipts and disbursements. Record conditions were good except for those of 1917-1922 and 1936-1938 which were missing due to the church being lapsed. All the records were in the custody of the clerk, Mrs. L. P. Adams of Stella Route, Florala, Alabama.

Persons providing information for the survey were Rev. E. E. Ernest, Pastor, Mrs. L. P. Adams, clerk, and Mr. J. H. Poole, Deacon.

A new wood-frame church was built on the present site of this church about a half mile from the old New Harmony Schoolhouse sometime between the time of the WPA survey and the early to mid-1940s. This writer has slight knowledge of that church because I remember my grandfather, Walter Kirkland preaching there once when I was very young. As shown on current road maps, it was located on the west side of highway 1583 a few hundred yards north of the intersection with highway 2A. Since it had not been built as of the 1939 WPA survey, it does not appear on the 1936 road map. I was born in 1943 at Granddaddy Kirkland's home about a quarter mile almost directly east of the church. Back then, road #153 as it appeared on the 1936 map was unpaved.

On the side of the road opposite the church a narrow little lane running east between farm field fences led a short distance to the home of the Ben Thorn family. It then turned left in their front yard and ran north a few hundred feet and then back to the right and continued east a few more hundred feet to my grandparent's front yard gate. Like the churches in this article the house was a square or rectangular wood-frame structure with a [tin] bungalow roof. Unlike several of the churches, it was not painted white, or any other color besides that Mother Nature applies to decades-old rough sawn pine board walls long exposed to the elements. The old house and part of the lane leading to it are now gone, with all traces of them obliterated by ever expanding farm fields.

At some point, the old wooden church was replaced by a new brick one. It lasted until about 1959 or 60 when a nocturnal tornado devastated it beyond resurrection, requiring the building of a new one which remains today. As with the Clear Springs Baptist Church, I have had occasion to visit this one - for a wedding and a funeral, and I have relatives buried in its cemetery as well.

For several years after it had served that part of its role as a place of worship, the old New Harmony Schoolhouse continued as a public school. It was where my mother's younger brothers and sisters attended for a time and before I was of school age, I once spent a day with them in the classroom. I vaguely recall it was a white-painted rectangular building and that doors at both end of the classroom stood open all day for ventilation. I had brought a home-made sausage and biscuit left over from breakfast to have for lunch. The desks were of the heavy wooden type that served as a desk for the student behind and a seat for the one in front and I had been placed in one that was vacant. I laid my biscuit on the desk and between bites I placed it back on the paper it had been wrapped in. But before I could finish it, a boy going around with a trash can grabbed it and threw it in the trash.

I seem to recall that the school sat on the west bank of a little branch, which I would guess from consulting a current county road map was Spring Branch, a tributary of Turkey Creek. On one occasion I was among a car-load of children a parent took to the branch to play in the knee-deep stream in front of the old schoolhouse which by that time I believe had been permanently closed.

It is possible that I have a family connection with the predecessor of the old New Harmony Schoolhouse the WPA identified as Mt. Gilead at Stella. My great grandfather, Rev. George M.

Carnley, a Congregationalist minister, pastored at an unidentified church in Stella from 1907 to 1913. Unfortunately, the records from which this information came did not reveal the name of the church.

### **Cluster Springs Baptist Church**

The WPA record for this church consists of a half page typed sheet and is absent the multiple pages of supplemental information prepared for several other churches. The date the survey was completed is not shown, and it is possible the work on this church was unfinished due to lack of time or available personnel to complete it.

The church, constituted in 1845, is 14 miles northwest, Highway #40 [now 331], [of] DeFuniak Springs, Walton County. It began as a community church and school in a log building, later razed, and a frame building erected in 1900. It was demolished and the then present white, square, frame building was erected in 1922, and dedicated on Sept. 3 of that year. It was a quarter-time church with meetings on the 2nd Sunday. With a membership of 34, its earliest known pastor was Rev. Wilson Kearce, 1878-83, education unknown. The then present pastor was Rev. P. M. Woodall, since 1937, of DeFuniak Springs, education not given.

Church Records date from 1932, with those from 1845-1932 having been destroyed. Records show business transacted, reports, election of officers, register of members, baptisms, deaths, receipts and disbursements. These records were in the custody of the clerk, Henry Hall, Route #2, DeFuniak Springs.

Sunday School Records were in a composition book dating from March 1939, and included memberships, officers, attendance, reports, receipts and disbursements. Records were in the custody of the secretary, Grady Pope, of Route #2, DeFuniak Springs.

Although this writer has never been inside this church, I did attend the grave-side funeral held there of my grandmother, Addie E. Kirkland in 1983. Her husband and my grandfather, Walter Kirkland is also buried there as is their youngest daughter, Patricia Ann, who died 4 days after she was born in 1947.

### **New Bethel**

As with other churches previously mentioned, the survey of this church is short and lacking in much detail. The denomination is not given, but based on other information in the survey, it was African Methodist Episcopal. The WCH book lists only one Bethel A. M. E. church whose postal address is given as 424 S. Norwood Road, DeFuniak Springs, Fl. The WPA location of this church was Argyle and lacking more specific information, it is unknown whether or not the two might be the same.

Constituted in 1902, services were first held in the local schoolhouse until 1903 when a new church was erected. It burned in 1927 and services were again held in the school until the then present church was built in 1928. It was an unpainted, rectangular frame building with a belfry, and was dedicated in 1928.

The first settled pastor was Rev. J. A. Clayton, who served from 1902 to 1903, and his education was unknown. The then present pastor was Rev. E. C. Jones, since 1938, whose address was Route #3, Box 72, De Funiak Springs, Florida. He received his education at Edward Waters College, Jacksonville, Florida.

Edward Waters College was the clue to the denomination of this church. It began as Brown Theological Institute, established by William G. Steward, the first A. M. E. pastor in the State of Florida. Founded in 1866 as a private college, its purpose was to educate former slaves. After weathering financial setbacks, a fire, and other growing pains, it emerged as Edward Waters Junior College in 1955 and finally as a four year college in 1979. It is affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida organization. (down loaded from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Waters\\_College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Waters_College), by Sam Carnley, 5/15/2018)

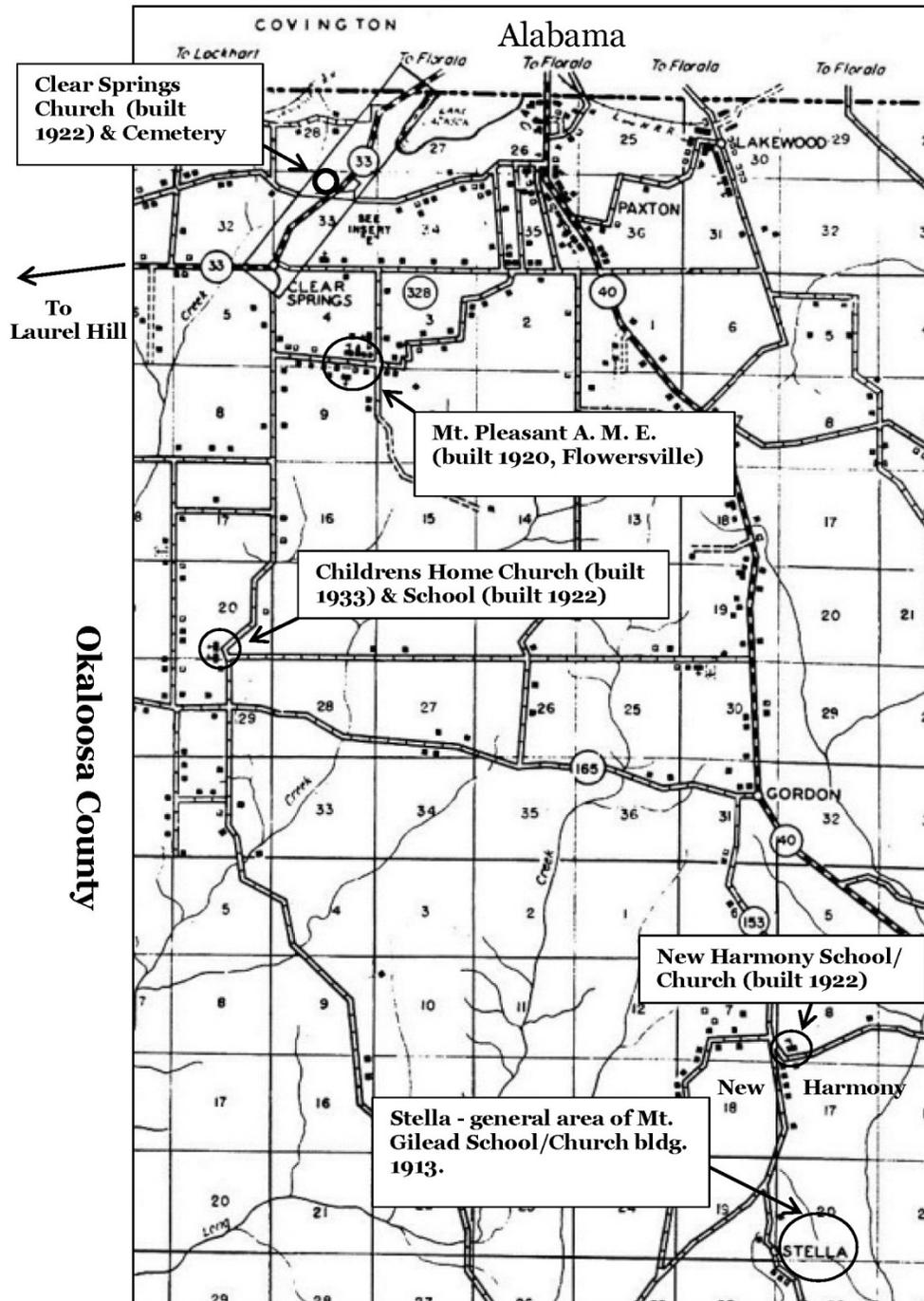
### Editor's Note

In researching the WPA documents for this and previous articles, this writer noted a curious pattern regarding the years a number of these churches were built, especially those intended for both religious and educational use, primarily in the north part of the county. Even those not specifically identified for that dual purpose were routinely used as such, apparently without the controversy of the kind seen today regarding the separation of church and state.

As the table below shows, 6 churches were built from 1920 to 1922. What happened during that period to precipitate the brief flurry of church/school building activity in that part of the county remains an unanswered question. One possibility is the proliferation of lumber mills which produced an abundance of cheap long leaf pine lumber in the area during that time. Jackson Lumber Co. in Lockhart Alabama was then one of the largest such mills in the country and it produced millions of board feet of lumber annually which it sold all over the U. S. and in some European countries. There were also lumber mills at Paxton and Lake Wood, all competing to sell their product at the best possible price, which was probably sufficiently low to put it in reach of the least affluent of these rural communities, most of which were within 10 miles or less of the lumber mills.

Small, portable independently owned saw mills also operated throughout that part of the county them, remaining in the same location only as long as it took to harvest the last remaining stands of pines missed by the larger operators. The mountains of sawdust they left were a commonly sight in the woods or along the roads when I was a child and were the only evidence of where they had been. They may have sold the lumber they produced at bargain prices to the locals for use in putting up these buildings.

Name	Year Built	Purpose
Childrens Home	1922	Community/church/school
Clear Springs	1922	Church
Mt. Pleasant A. M. E. (Flowersville)	1920	Church
New Harmony	1922	Church/school
Cluster Springs	1922	Church
Gordon Chapel	1920	Community/church/school



**Figure 1.** Map -WPA Church Histories. (Excerpted from Map of Walton County, 1936, "Florida State Road Dept., Tallahassee, FL: FDOT, 1936," downloaded from *Maps ETC*, on the web at <http://etc.usf.edu/maps> [map #f2461] and edited and annotated by Sam Carnley, 5/14/2018.

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 its editor at [wsamuelcarnley@gmail.com](mailto:wsamuelcarnley@gmail.com) or phone at 850-209-3778.



# Walton County Heritage Association

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**2018**

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