

Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church A Brief History

Matt Jordan, Pastor
Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church

Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church was organized Saturday, July 29, 1882. According to the original church records, a small band of eight believers united themselves together as the Primitive Church of Christ at Rocky Mount, as follows: Clarissa Ridgeway, Sarah Ridgeway, Lorenzo Thompson, Mary Thompson, Prudence Willis, Jessey Young, Martha Young, and James W. Putnam, with Elders Champion Farris and Claburn Whitworth forming the Presbytery. On Sunday, the following day, the church received Cain Waldrip, his wife Annie Waldrip, Sally Waldrip, Elder Champion Farris, and Manurvey Farris into their membership. The congregation originally met in a log house located just southeast of the present-day Grassy School. The name was chosen because of the rocky and hilly surroundings. At that time, the log meetinghouse was also used as the local school. Within a short time after the church was organized, the woods surrounding the log building caught fire and destroyed the meetinghouse. The congregation built a new frame building where the church is presently located, but it was later destroyed by fire also. In 1921, the church built another frame building 32 feet by 46 feet, in which it met for nearly 30 years. In 1951, the present stone building was completed and dedicated. A separate lunchroom building was erected in 1968 and has served the church and community in many ways. In 1995, an addition to the stone building provided much-needed additional space, a foyer, and new restrooms. Over the years, the church has experienced various struggles and hardships, seasons of growth and seasons of decline, but has continued to uphold the principles upon which it was originally established. The church remains faithful in resisting the influence of the prevailing tendencies of modern Christianity, still striving to maintain the simplicity of the New Testament Church.

Since its constitution, Rocky Mount Church has been wonderfully blessed with dedicated and godly men serving as pastors and deacons. The church has been served by the following Elders as pastors: Champion Farris, J.W. Putnam, B.H. Harris, Claburn Whitworth, Moses Sparks, Andy Whitworth, Tom Flanagan, H.P. Copeland, A.B. Hall, Artis McWhorter, James Dennis, Ricky Harcrow, Harlan Smith, Coy Brothers, Mitchell Phillips, and presently, Matt Jordan, who has served the church since 2001. A number of faithful men have served as deacons: J.M. Solley, Jessey Young, T.J. Smith, S.M. White, G.W. Eubanks, J.C.B. Jordan, W.C. Bohannon, Charley Hammock, M.M. Perkins, Ed Hawk, C.A. Wright, H.N. Jordan, T. Harvey Wright, J. Beamon Hawk, B.J. Miller, Garnett Cox, Colman Pearman, O.B. Norris, and C.E. White. The current deacons of the church are: Jack Jordan, Willard Evans, Gene Guger, Earl Jordan, Dan Hawk, Terrell McNeil, and Tracy Kelly.

Over the years, the congregation at Rocky Mount has been made up of men and women, boys and girls from all walks of life. The church has seen seasons of rejoicing and seasons of distress. Between 1885 and 1886, a division in the church resulted in the exclusion of some of the charter members. The excluded group formed Bethel Primitive Baptist Church and met near town around the intersection of Hwy 69 and 4th Street NE. By 1902 however, most of the Bethel congregation had returned and fellowship was restored. Brother M.K. Taylor was a licensed minister in the congregation during this time and served as associate pastor as late as 1887. He also served as associate pastor of Shiloh Church in Brown's Valley. Brother Taylor soon left the Primitive Baptists and became more commonly known as Rev. M.K. Taylor. He served as pastor of Shoal Creek Missionary Baptist Church and later became the first pastor of Arab First

Baptist Church. It was also at this time that Elder Moses Sparks was called as pastor of Rocky Mount. Elder Sparks would serve the Church for the next 50 years and under his leadership the congregation grew steadily through the late '30's. Elder H.P. Copeland followed Elder Sparks as pastor and the church saw overflowing congregations on a regular basis. The present building was completed in 1951 and the congregation continued to grow through the early '60s to near 200 members. Elder Copeland and his wife died in a tragic car wreck in September of 1964. In the following years, the membership began to decline but the church continued to be blessed with diligent servants and faithful believers along the way. While the size of the congregation is smaller than it once was, in recent years the church has experienced some healthy growth, especially among the younger generations, which has brought new life and a sense of renewal to its members. Presently, the church membership is 72, and the average attendance on Sunday morning is between 65 and 70.

Often, the question is asked, "Why do you call yourselves 'Primitive' Baptist; what does that mean?" In the late 1700's and early 1800's, the Baptist family began to divide over new doctrines and new practices that were being introduced. A defining moment in Baptist history occurred in 1832, when a resolution called the Black Rock Address was written. In this resolution, brethren representing Baptist congregations from several parts of the country addressed these departures and errors that were beginning to draw people away from the original faith. One of the main departures had to do with the methods being introduced to support and direct evangelistic efforts. The Baptists had long held the Biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit directed and God provided in the matter of when and where evangelists should go. This new practice set up groups of men, board of directors, and the like, to determine where preachers went and how much support they should receive. Evangelism itself was never an issue; only the method that churches followed. Other departures included the introduction of instrumental music, church auxiliaries and various social functions, and new teachings regarding the purpose of the gospel itself. Those congregations willing to maintain the original Baptist faith and practice began to be called 'primitive' or 'old school'. Those who followed after these departures were called 'missionary' or 'new school'. While the division took place at various times in different parts of the country, by the mid-1800's, the vast majority of Baptist Churches carried some kind of 'label' or were a part of a local Association or National Convention that would have easily identified the doctrine and practice of any particular congregation. The name sometimes misleads people unfamiliar with Primitive Baptists, as though the church may not have running water or electricity. But when the name 'primitive' first began to be used, it simply meant 'original'. And so, the name 'primitive' continues to be used today and continues to identify congregations throughout the country and in other parts of the world as those who strive to maintain the doctrine and practice of the church as it was originally established by Jesus and the Apostles.

Rocky Mount Church is very zealous in what it believes is the purpose of the church here in the world – to be the pillar and ground of the truth and a haven of rest for the children of God. In trying to fulfill this purpose, the church maintains a strict separation between the worship service and social activities. The worship service follows the simple pattern of the New Testament: a capella congregational singing, prayer, and the preaching of the gospel. The church meets regularly for congregational Bible study and three times a year for communion and washing the saints' feet. The congregation firmly believes that, while the Church is in the world, it is not of the world. Therefore, worldly activities are seen as having no place within the Church. The congregation seeks the Scriptural pattern in all that it does, so families worship and study together. A strong emphasis is placed on parents and their role as the primary teachers, along with the pastor/teacher, so that there is a healthy family atmosphere in the congregation without separating into various age groups.

Some have called Primitive Baptists 'Calvinists': following the teachings of the great reformer, John Calvin. Many things that Calvin taught are also believed by Primitive Baptists, but there are also significant differences. Baptists were never a part of Roman Catholicism and the doctrines held by Primitive Baptists were taught long before Calvin came on the scene, all the way back to Jesus and the Apostles. While the doctrine of the Church can be traced to ancient times, those who faithfully assemble together at Rocky Mount believe the message of God's sovereign grace is just as relevant as it ever has been. And while the practice of the Church may seem out-dated for modern Christianity, there is a beauty and a deep sense of peace in the simplicity of the worship service that can be found nowhere else on earth. In the midst of today's fast-paced world and drive-thru culture, it is indeed quite

refreshing.

Compiled from various sources; submitted by Elder Matt Jordan, pastor

This year, Rocky Mount Church will celebrate 125 years of serving the Lord in this community. The congregation gives honor and glory to God for having the privilege of being a light in the community for so long. The Church is planning a special meeting in recognition of this Anniversary and invites everyone to join them in this time of thanksgiving and worship. Lord willing, the meeting will be held the 5th weekend in September beginning Friday evening, September 28th. Supper will be served at 6:00 p.m. and the worship service will begin at 7:00 p.m. The meeting will continue with a Saturday morning worship service at 10:30, followed by lunch at noon. Elder Ricky Harcrow, one of the former pastors of Rocky Mount, is the invited preacher for these two services. After lunch on Saturday, there will be a time of fellowship with a presentation and discussion on the history of the Church. The meeting will continue with Sunday morning worship service beginning at 10:30 and lunch at noon.

Rocky Mount Church is located at 2237 Guntersville Road (old Hwy.69) in the Grassy Community. Sunday morning worship service begins at 10:30; Wednesday evening Bible Study is at 6:30. The Church also meets on the 3rd Sunday evening at 5:30. The Church mailing address is P.O. Box 288, Arab, AL, 35016, and the website can be found at www.marchtozion.com/rockymount

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