

History of the Williamstown Particular Baptist Church

Written and Compiled by: Betty Barnes

The Williamstown Particular Baptist Church was formed on the fourth Saturday of November 1826, with seven constituting members "uniting into a church for the glory of God and the support of each other." They immediately drew up ten Articles of Faith and fourteen Rules of Decorum, just like the ones of their 1822 predecessors, the Mt. Nebo Church of Christ.

The "seminary" in Williamstown was the meeting place for the first 1-1/2 years, as they met one weekend each month under the leadership of the first moderator, William Conrad. In June 1818, they agreed "to build a house" under the supervision of the trustees, Esau Boyers and Robert Childers Jr. In August 1828, with a membership of thirty-three, they bought from William Arnold a half an acre of land on the north side of Licking Road, beginning at the mouth of Licking Street, now named Mill Street, for \$100. (Deed Book K, page 69). In June 1829, the first service was held "in their meeting house", which was the terminology always used for the church building. During the colder months of November through March, they continued to meet in the homes of members until a "tin plate stove" was purchased in the fall of 1836. In the spring of 1834, the meeting house was improved with "seasoned planks, laid over the joists, and a stair to the upper floor", for \$78.

As early as 1831 there was an awareness in Williamstown of the new Sunday School system, which was unsuccessfully advocated by William Reed at a business meeting. As early as 1827, the church showed an enlightened attitude of near-blindness toward differences in color and sex, by admitting "Lucy, a woman of Color" to full fellowship, by letter from the Mill Creek Church. As early as 1834, the records show that both female and male members voted, spoke up about their concerns in business sessions, and made their own individual financial contributions.

Starting 1826, the minutes, for years, followed a standard format of "Then the Williamstown Particular Baptist Church met at. . . . After praise and prayer Brother Conrad took his seat as Moderator. Then references called for Then by motion and second adjourned the meeting."

Although the main concerns of the church were with the preaching of their doctrine and with the lives of their members, they occasionally had business concerning the meeting house. In March 1848 they ordered a new fence, with "the back string of the yard fence a common fence eight rails high staked and ridged with heavy riders." By 1861, their meeting house needed "recovering" and they paid \$51.65 for this work. Any mention of money was very unusual in these Minutes and there was apparently no treasurer, no bank account, no budget.

In July 1891, after sixty-three years at the same site, the church suddenly voted to "build a church house in some convenient place at or near Dry Ridge" and "to investigate the court records as to our church deed". In August \$2,550 was said to be pledged for the "new house", which was then finished in June 1892, ready for the July meeting there.

By July 1892, some of the Williamstown members, distressed with the situation, decided to remain loyal to the location which was the burial place of their ancestors and/or friends, and

which had been a church home for them and/or their ancestors/predecessors for sixty-four years, and which seemed a convenient place for them to gather. This congregation was small, totalling (from those named mentioned in the records of those years) approximately twenty people, from the families of Barnes, Billiter, Boyce, Brewer, Carter, Childers, Clark, Courtney, Dills, Hedge, Isaacs, Roberts, Stephens. They secured a well-known, local Moderator, Wesley Billiter, and met quietly in the old meeting house for four years.

By 1896, they felt enough assurance in their continuability to decide to build a new meeting house on the same site. This self-sufficient group planned to build with their own hands, using the lumber sawed from their own logs by the Barnes sawmill. The scanty financial records show that Thompson Barnes once was sent \$10.39 owed for the construction of the house. \$8.56 was spent for buying paint for it, plus some amount for "lamps". After a winter of work on this plain new house, it was ready for services in May 1897. Tradition states that they used no musical instruments and that they sang only one hymn, usually "Amazing Grace" at each service.

Perseverance and loyalty to an old tradition kept this old Williamstown Church alive for nineteen more years, until after a 96-year span of Minutes, the Minutes ceased in 1918. Trustees and family members continued to care for the house and lot for many years. After the deaths of the last members, the church building, with its burial plot of early Williamstown settlers, was annexed to the adjacent Williamstown Cemetery. Although the old church building had to be torn down, the City gives care to the plot of marked and unmarked graves. Only four former members: Esau Boyers, Mary Boyers, Eliza Buskirk and Jemima Anglin have marked graves on this lot. The other twenty-three marked tombstones are for people who were not listed as church members. Although the lot looks empty now, tradition states that in 1880 a family member made two five-mile trips to the lot searching for an empty space for Jemima Anglin, who had particularly wished to be buried there. On the second trip, although the space was nearly covered with fieldstone markers, a spot was found for her, the next-to-the-last person buried there among the many unknown Williamstown settlers.