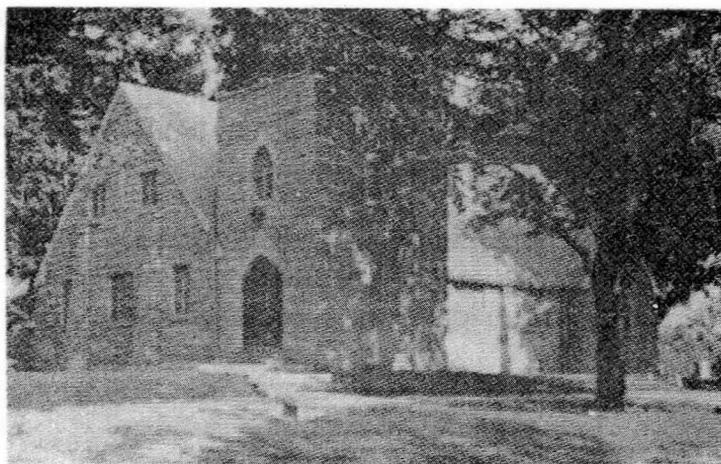


History of
BEAR CREEK
BAPTIST CHURCH



Written for
DEDICATION SERVICES
JULY 25, 1954
— By —
J. Ottis Beesley

following this date when our brother J.M. Swartout was called for one year. In 1902 our Brother Nicholson was first called and served three years. Bro. C.B. Jones was then called for one year and at the expiration was recalled and served until May 1908 when Re. J.G. Brengle was called and served for one year when Bro. Nicholson was recalled March 27, 1909 and continues with us at the present time.

Our other officers are J. Ottis Beesley Moderator, Ray B. Irwin Clerk. The trustees are Bros. John Beesley, Mike and Lett Herring. Deacons are John Beesley, Mike Herring, and Ray B. Irwin.

The church since its first organization has been progressive and has occupied an important field. She has ordained to the work of the gospel ministry William Spear, S.H. Thompson, Wallace W. Smith, James B. Thomas, and Charles Herring.

Many of the older members are nearing the end of lifes pilgrimage and soon will come their setting sun when their work will all be done. And the weary hearts at last be stilled but God is raising up to us young men and women, boys and girls that will no doubt carry on the work here under the benediction of God and the earnest cooperation of the brethren to greater usefulness and more glorious results.

To the past go more dead faces
Every Year
As those loved leave vacant places
Every Year
Every where the sad eyes meet us
In the evenings dusk they greet us
And to come to them entreat us
Every Year

But the truer life draws nigher
Every Year
And its Morning Star climbs higher
Every Year
Earths hold on us grows slighter
And the heavy burden lighter
And the dawn Immortal brighter
Every Year

History of Bear Creek Baptist Church

Written for Dedication Services

July 25, 1954

By J. Ottis Beesley



This occasion marks the 4th history of the Bear Creek Baptist Church that I have tried to prepare and in addition to a Homecoming report held here in October and a history prepared by my brother John, the history situation has been fully covered. All true, history is biography and the lives of men and women have bequeathed to us our noblest inheritance. Here may be seen how they lived, what manner of people they were, by what manner they grew, what were their thoughts, what were the objects for which they strove, how they succeeded and how they failed. In these fast moving days we live by deeds rather than years.

Since this attempt will probably be my last, we are going to go back farther than ever before to the entry of the land on which there has been but five transfers to the present time.

Grandsire Herring, an old Baptist preacher and truly a man of God had three sons, John Joel and William. Each of these built along Bear Creek, one of them in each of the three counties.

Bear Creek was probably named from the fact that John killed a black bear in the woods just north of our location now owned by Mr. Castor.

The original families came from North Carolina and Grandfather, known as "Uncle Jack", made two overland trips on foot to bring other members of the family via Pittsburgh along the Ohio River to Madison. There were several sisters also who married and settled nearby with their families. Both John and William had 12 children each.

There were a few friendly Indian cabins here and there. Then there were the Irwins, Christies, Carsons, and Bush among others. Fever and ague were so common that sickness of this nature proved quite a drawback to rapid development of the virgin country. One family of nine persons was known to have had seven members shaking at one time.

John Wyman, a fine type of high class Englishman invaded Beaver Swamp territory. He and his large family with the help of neighbors partially drained Beaver Swamp into as fine farm land as Indiana produces anywhere.

The Wymans were Methodists by faith and for many years held meetings among the adherents; but for the most part met at the home of Uncle Jess Talkington near Alert. By 1857 the denomination had grown enough to build a neat frame church one mile north of Bear Creek, which was known as Mt. Olivet.

Going back to our original story, the original entry was under date of October 17, 1831. The United States to John Herring, Sr., then he to John Alloway and Alloway to Bear Creek Baptist Church October 6, 1836. Andrew Jackson was the President.

Alloway sold his land to David Carson and David Carson to the trustees of Bear Creek Church April 2, 1866, for the consideration of \$1.00 and love of the church. I would have you remember that it is and has been this love for the church that has kept us alive for a century.

We are heirs of all the ages and by the work of our own geniuses in this respect we are the richest people on whom the sun has ever shone. We are builders for the youth of tomorrow just as our forefathers built for us today.

Baptist churches were quite common in southern Indiana and built of hewn logs with immense fireplaces in one end and a high pulpit in the other. Our first such house was a log structure 18 x 24. Very crude in construction, rail seats without backs, puncheon floors and windows without glass. This was located about ½ mile south on what was then the Bennett farm.

In 1823 the question of moving the location was taken up and on the first Saturday in May, 1831, it was transferred to a location ¾ of a mile southwest of Sardinia to the dwelling of John Chambers in which meetings were held until 1835. In 1839 a log house 24 feet square was built just a few feet southwest of the present location. It was followed by the brick building 35 x 50 feet in which the first meeting was held in what is known as the Bear Creek Baptist Church, April 1856.

This building was remodeled in 1887. The structure was set on flat stone foundation, taken from the bed of the stream and not too deep in the ground. This brick building was erected in 1854, razed July 26 to August 22, 1953.

Excavating for a basement began August 6 and 7 by Loran Wiley and the corner stone for the present structure was set in August of 1953.

The first pastor of the church was chosen from among the brethren. Elder John Bush served faithfully 12 years without pay. Pastor's salaries and janitor's fees began with the brick church. Brother Joel Herring was paid \$6.00 for lights and fuel for one year and the salary for the pastor to compensate him for his labor was \$22.00.

The longest pastorate was held by John Bush for 20 years. Albert Carter, 1861 to 1874. His salary was \$54.00. Alexander Connelly served next for 15 years followed by his nephew E.E. Connelly, T.A. Childs, John F. Blocher, E.C.J. Dickens, J.M.

Swarthout and C.B. Jones who preached his first sermon here and later rose to the height of his profession. Others were J.G. Brengle, Coulter, Albritten and others.

Brother John Nickolson was called in 1902 for one year and at the expiration of that period was recalled and served until 1908. To him perhaps more than any other belongs the honor of promoting the Shera addition to the Bear Creek Cemetery and his mortal remains lies buried within its confines. No finer burial grounds can be selected for its beauty, calmness, and serenity and the Ammerman addition has become a necessity a reality ready to be plotted.

The church has been progressive from its birth and has sent into the gospel ministry such able men as William E. Spear, S.H. Thompson, Wallace W. Smith, James B. Thomas and Charles Herring.

God has holy designs for mankind and obedience is an essential part of Christian life. Let us see to it that we advance the cross of Jesus Christ.

It will be impossible to name all the persons who have been connected with the erection of this beautiful temple as you see it today. Up to this point, with the exception of the laying of the stone, practically all the hours of labor have been donated by our members and friends. It would be impossible to appraise the financial value of such labor without which this church could not have been built.

The good women folk share equally with the men. Ray B. Irwin may rightfully called the Nehemiah who rebuilt the walls of the temple. He appropriated plans, thereby saving expensive architectural fees. Practically all woodwork used has been carved from old material and reconstructed into new form.

Many friends of yester years, whose loved ones rest in the silent city of our dead have contributed gifts of money for which we are truly thankful. We are rightfully proud of the beautiful scenery that adorns our baptistery and is the work of Raymond Herring, a grandson of our pioneer father. The Herring name will always be connected with Bear Creek History! – It was Dolly Herring Lucky the last funeral held in the old church and Arthur Herring the first in the new. Both were grandchildren of the late John Herring.

This is not a history of the past. Old faces and names will soon be gone and today we celebrate an achievement and victory due to the untiring effort not so much of Herrings, Irwins, Beesleys and Gants, but such new people as Robinsons, Admas, Schuylers, Mohrs and many more who count themselves not to have apprehended but still pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

May the next 100 years be as bright as the one just ended. God desires the salvation of all. Go teach, go tell, is a divine commandment.

HISTORY OF BEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH



By Norma Lou Irwin

1998

The church known as the Bear Creek Baptist Church of Jesus Christ, in Jennings County, Indiana, was organized on Saturday, the 27th day of July 1828. It was only a handful of people that gathered in the little place of prayer, the humble pioneer cabin of John Herring, Sr. where they met and adopted this constitution: "That is to say, "We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the infallible word of God and the only rule of faith and practice. We are believers in baptism by immersion, the ordinance of The Lord's Supper, laying-on-of-hands, washing of the saints' feet. Having given ourselves to the Lord and each other do agree to meet the first Saturday and Sunday in every month to look after the fellowship of the church and hereunto set our hands; John Herring, Dorcas Bush, Nancy Bush, Robert Bush, Francis Bush, John Bush, Jr., Eaurash Bush and Cader Herring."

From the early records we copy: "Met according to appointment on the 27th day of July, 1828, being present with us Brother John Bush and William T. Scott, and after deliberation and approbation by giving to each other the right hand of fellowship, having formed ourselves into a church, agree Brother John Bush, John Herring and Cader Herring prepare a letter to send to the Coffee Creek Association for to become members with them. A call by the church to Brother John Bush to attend them as their preacher, John Herring was chosen deacon, and Cader Herring, Clerk."

For a short time it appears that the church continued to meet at the cabin where they built a house of round logs about one half mile south of their location. The first house was very rude in construction; being in size 18 x 20 ft., without any glass in the window, puncheon floor, rails for seats, without backs of any kind. In this humble tenement they met for worship, the Savior by His Spirit, meeting with them; and the

church grew and prospered. At the Saturday meeting in April, 1833, to meet the wants and convenience of an increasing population, they moved to a schoolhouse about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile southwest of the present town of Sardinia, in Decatur County, Indiana. In 1834, the first trustees were elected and were John Herring, John Chambers, and William Stribbling. On the first of July, 1834, by request, the following members were permitted to withdraw from the church, in order to form a new church in Bartholomew County, Indiana: Jas. Smith, Willis Cook and wife, Elizabeth Padgett and Willey Rodgers.

At the schoolhouse and the dwelling house of brother John Chambers they held their meetings until the year of 1835. In this year they built a hewed log house 24 feet square, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile southwest from the schoolhouse. Although they never quite finished this new house they occupied it for about four years, when again it seemed necessary to select another location, which they did by obtaining and building upon their present lot; built in 1839 and used by the church until about 1855, when they built a 35' x 50' brick structure in which on the first Saturday in April, 1856, the first meeting was held. In the early days of this church the membership was scattered. This accounts for the failure to establish a central location for some years. Many will recall this building with its two large white front doors, its vine covered walls girded by five old maple trees (planted by John Beesley and Frank May shortly after they returned from the Chicago World's Fair and vines on the old church started by Mary Herring Beesley, Martha B. Gant, and J. Ottis Beesley). A large interior single room with a large wood burning stove on each side of the room; older folks may recall where they met for their Sunday School classes with Meg Beesley in the southwest corner with her class of beginners; Lett Herring, teaching a junior class; John Beesley, teaching the young folks over in the southeast corner; Martha Beesley Gant in the adult class in the northwest corner and J. Ottis Beesley as church school superintendent and song leader. The remarkable thing is that all these were grandchildren or great grandchildren of that pioneer couple, John and Dorcas Herring.

The contractors of this brick building were: William Harris, Albert Dickerson, William Bowen and William Tomlinson, who were master workmen. This building was remodeled in 1887; the structure set on flat stone foundation taken from the bed of the

stream and not too deep in the ground, erected 1854-55, razed July and August, 1952. With the advent of the brick church came preachers' salaries and janitors' fees; and Bro. Joel Herring furnished light and fuel for \$6 for one year and \$22 was given to compensate the pastor for his services. About this time the first expenses were collected, which was 57 1/2 cents for the printing of minutes for the Association. (The Sand Creek Association being organized on December 24, 1844, with Bear Creek being a member at this time and hosting it on the third Saturday in August, 1846.)

With increased opportunities came greater responsibilities and enlarged religious ideas, so that at the May meeting of 1854, amendments to the constitution were made as follows: "The church shall elect a moderator annually. 2nd. His duty is to keep order, state all questions fairly, take the vote, have the liberty of speaking and cast the deciding vote. 3rd. The clerk must keep a correct record of all business meetings. 4th. But one person is to speak at a time, and he must arise and address the moderator. 5th. All motions recorded to be acted upon, unless overruled by the church. 6th. All persons when speaking shall adhere strictly to the question in debate and shall not speak more than twice on the same subject without permission of the moderator. 7th. The church shall decide all questions by a majority vote, except the reception or expulsion of members which shall be unanimous. 8th. All private offences shall be dealt with according to the 18th chapter of Matthew, accompanied by public acknowledgement. This rule was enforced probably more than all other and numerous references are made in the church records to charges of profanity, drunkenness, dancing, etc., all of which were promptly dealt with according to the church discipline of the times.

In February, 1855, the church was called to part with the following brothers and sisters: John Chambers and wife, Mary, John Graham and wife, Willis Stribbling and wife, James Blankenship and wife, and Catherine Eli; who were given by the church to form Mount Pleasant church at Sardinia, Indiana. The first pastor of the church, being Eld. John Bush, one of the constituent members; serving her faithfully for a period of twelve years without pay. The second pastor Eld. Chesley Woodard who labored nine years earnestly and faithfully, then emigrated to the West. Her third pastor was Eld.

Orin Whitcomb who remained for a term of five years. Her fourth pastor was Orman Feagler, for a term of five years, whose first year salary was \$24, but raised at the end of that year to \$40; her fifth, Eld, Ira Gleason, for two years. During the troublesome time of '61 there was no regular pastor, but several ministers visited and preached. During the infancy of this church she was greatly strengthened and blessed by the visits and preaching of Elds. Jesse Vawter, Wm. T. Stott, Elza Sneed, John Vawter, Wm. Vawter and Caleb Moncrief. They were each greatly loved by us. They have been good men, making many sacrifices and have labored much for the good of others. Each of them was true and faithful as pastors. When the church had been in existence something over forty two years, she had had but six pastors. In 1870 her membership totaled 140 and many of her spiritual children were scattered over the surrounding counties taking with them letters and going into the far West to build up the cause and bless the people and had enlightened this community. In 1870, deacons were John Herring and James N. Challie and clerk, John W. Herring. Many other deacons have served the church spiritually since that time, such as, Ray B. Irwin, James Robison, Guy Neal, Paul Gant, William Irwin, William Mitchell, David McNulty, to name a few, with perhaps other who are not recorded. Trustees who have cared for the property of the church and who may not be recorded have been: William Irwin, Fred Schuyler, Fred Ammerman, Arlie Robbins, Carl Hern, Ernest Scroggins, and Omer Scott. Some names perhaps have been lost due to record being lost or destroyed by fire, or simply were not recorded.

G. N. Gartin was called to pastor for one year and in 1875, Rev. Alexander Connelly was chosen and served until 1887. From 1887 to 1891 Bro. T. A. Childs was pastor, when Bro Connelly was again called from 1891 to 1894, making in all 15 years. Next came Rev. E. E. Connelly who served two years and was followed by John F. Blocher for a little time. E. C. J. Dickens served three years, then Bro. J. W. Swarhout served one year. In 1902 Bro J. C. Nicholson was called and served three years. It was during this pastorate that the first steps were taken to obtain the Shera addition, a new addition to the present cemetery; as was, also, some repairing on the church building and the fencing of the church yard. The negotiations for the cemetery were not

closed until 1922. A second addition to the cemetery, known as the Ammerman addition, had been obtained and was ready to be plotted by 1954. In September, 1906, Bro. C. B. Jones was called and served two years. It was his first pastorate, and it was here that he preached his first sermon. In June, 1908, Rev. G. W. Brengle was called and served one year and until the March following when Bro. Nicholson was again recalled, and in the same year, 1910, Ray B. Irwin, was elected clerk and served continuously until 1960. The clerks, many whose entries have been made with goose-quill pens and are models of penmanship for the younger generation are: Cader Herring, John Bush, Willis Stribbling, Abner Comer, Louis Bush, William Herring, John Herring, Sr., Stephen Cadby, H. Harrison, George Goudie, J. W. Herring, Ovid Irwin, Martha Beesley Gant, John W. Beesley, Harry E. Irwin, Jeannette Beesley, and Ray B. Irwin. Since 1960, Beth Marsh Neal served as clerk for a period of approximately 2 years and five months, followed by Rebecca Ammerman serving from 1962 to 1973, followed by Ruth Harmon, 1973 to 1975. January, 1975, the present clerk, Norma Lou Adam Irwin, was elected.

The resignation of Pastor Nicholson was tendered in August, 1922, to become effective November, 1922. His entire pastorate covers a period of 18 years and, perhaps, he deserves the honor of promoting the Shera addition to the Bear Creek Cemetery and his mortal remains lies buried within its confines. No finer burial grounds can be selected for its beauty, calmness, and serenity. In January, 1923, H. R. Norwood supplied the pulpit until June, 1923, and was followed by Bro. S. A. Gordon, January 1924 to 1926, when on November 14, 1926, Bro. Donald Rieley was called and was succeeded by Rev. A. C. Vincent, D.D., who had just closed one year of a successful pastorate in 1928. Sixteen had been added to the church membership at that time any many noble men and women have lived under the influence of the church and have gone out into many fields of usefulness. The church has sent out into the ministry William E. Spear, S. H. Thompson, Wallace W. Smith, James B. Thomas, and Charles I. Herring. Charles Irwin Herring, a great grandson of John and Dorcas, graduated from Franklin College and the Union Divinity School in Chicago. In 1928 officers of the church included: J. Ottis Beesley, moderator, Ray B. Irwin, clerk; John

W. Beesley and Ray B. Irwin, deacons, with one vacancy; and Harlan J. Hulse, Ray B. Irwin, and J. Ottis Beesley, trustees. Those who have been deacons are; John Herring, John Chambers, Willis Stribbling, Robert Bush, John Herring, Jr., George Goudie, James Chaille, George Clark, John W. Herring, Ovid Irwin, Richard T. Stott, Henry May, Lett H. Herring, John W. Beesley, Mike Herring, and Ray B. Irwin.

Many families have contributed to the growth and development of Bear Creek Baptist Church. We cannot forget their many contributions; however, the Herring name will always be connected with Bear Creek history! It was Dolly Herring Lucky, the last funeral held in the old brick church and Arthur Herring, the first in the present building. From the earliest records of the John and Dorcas Herring family's efforts in organizing that church 170 years ago, note the following as told by J. Virgil Herring, a fifth generation descendent, at the 150th anniversary of the church in 1978: "Records of the Jeffersonville, IN Federal Land Sales indicate that John Herring, Sr., his sons and sons-in-law bought land from the U.S. Government from July 28, 1826 to January 31, 1837, in Geneva Township, Jennings County; in Rock Creek Township, Bartholomew County; and Jackson Township in Decatur County. The entry of the land has been but five transfers to the present time. Grandsire Herring, and old Baptist preacher and truly a man of God had three sons, John, Joel, and William. The families of the two sons, John and William, are most closely associated with the growth of Bear Creek Church. John married Sarah Harvey and they made their home about a mile up the Bartholomew-Decatur County line. A large stone at the entrance to the old cemetery across the road from the church marks their graves. They had 11 children and those members of the family remaining in the Bear Creek neighborhood were: John, Harvey, Dorcas, Mary H. Beesley, Albert and Michael. William married Rachel Baker and they established their home on the hill south of the church. They had 12 children; those remaining active in the church were Lett, Cynthia, Jane, Margaret Herring Beesley (Virgil's Aunt Meg), Albert, Chesley, and Baker."

Some conjecture exists as to how Bear Creek got its name. J. Ottis Beesley's history dated at the dedication of the present stone building, 1954, noted it was probably named from the fact that John killed a black bear in the woods just north of the church.

Referring to the original couple, John and Dorcas Herring in the spring of 1825, broke up their Smithfield, North Carolina home; packed their goods on three one-horse wagons, and made the long drive of some 600 miles across the Cumberland Mountains, crossing the Ohio River at Madison. John was a blacksmith by trade; he had married Dorcas Strickland, May 28, 1799, in Smithfield, Johnston County, NC and their daughter, Sally married Lewis Bush, the son of the first pastor, John Bush. They found a place on the farm in Geneva Township near the sit of Bear Creek Baptist Church. Brining eight children with them; mother and children, too young to walk, rode in one wagon while the father and older children walked. Three daughters, Sarah, Chelly, and Nancy and five sons: John, Kader, Joel, William, and Henry. John and the two older boys walked the 600 miles back to North Carolina in three weeks to collect the remainder of the proceeds of the sale of some 600 acres of property the preceding year.

The original entry of the land was under date of October 17, 1831. The United States to John Herring, Sr., then he to John Alloway and Alloway to Bear Creek Baptist Church October 6, 1836. Andrew Jackson was the President. Alloway sold his land to David Carson and David Carson to the trustees of Bear Creek Baptist Church April 2, 1866, for the consideration of \$1 and love of the church. It has been this love for the church that has kept us alive for 170 years.

There were a few friendly Indian cabins here and there. Then there were the names of Irwin, Carson, Bush, Beesley, Hulse, Gant, Marsh, Neal, Schuyler, Adam, Robison, Moir, Nugent, Hern, Schmoe, Shinolt, Tomlinson, Anderson, Ammerman, Robbins, Bowman, Hern, Rudicel, Flohr, plus many other. It would be impossible to name all the persons who have been connected with this church, friends and members. With the erection of the beautiful temple we have today, which with the exception of the laying of the stone, practically all the hours of labor were donated by our members and friends. It would be impossible to appraise the financial value of such labor without which this church could not have been built. The women folk shared equally with the men. Ray B. Irwin could be rightfully called the Nehemiah who rebuilt the walls of the temple. He appropriated plans, thereby saving expensive architectural fees. Practically all woodwork used was carved from old materials from the former building and

reconstructed into new form. This new structure is of Bedford stone veneer construction measuring 58 x 44 feet. The main floor contains the auditorium, thirty feet square, rostrum, baptistery, two class rooms, the entrance and the church parlor which can be opened into part of the auditorium. A class room is in the entrance tower and balcony above the parlor. Included in the full basement are modern restrooms, a dining room measuring 30 x 30 feet, recreation room, large kitchen, furnace and storage rooms. Oil heat and indirect lighting are two outstanding features. Though the plans were drawn up by Ray B. Irwin, and after the membership had visited several new churches, the labor was donated by the members and friends of the church. The total cost of materials was approximately \$15,000. The excavating for the basement began August 6 and 7 by Loran Wiley, husband of Pauline Herring and brother-in-law of J. Virgil Herring. The corner stone for the structure was set in August, 1953, after tearing down of the brick structure begun July 26, 1952. Dedication of the new building was July 25, 1954.

The church has been progressive from its birth and has sent many out into the world. We are rightfully proud of the beautiful scenery that adorns our baptistry and is the work of Raymond Herring, fourth generation, and a grandson of our pioneer father. Our pianist for many years, Elizabeth Bowman, fifth generation; Robert and Lewis Gant, sixth generation leaders in Sunday School and church, sons of Paul Gant, a trustee and deacon whose grandmother, Mary Herring Beesley was a granddaughter of John and Dorcas. William Irwin, a former trustee and deacon; his brother, Max, a former moderator, and their younger brother, Robert, a trustee, children of Ray B. Irwin.

Many pastors have followed since Rev. A. C. Vincent who had just closed one year of his ministry in 1928. Some are Joseph Nordenhaug, Carl Moman, Robert Kicklighter, Lloyd Batson, Arthur Hyde, Gordon Weekley, John Woods, Wilford Friday, Vance P. Smith, Eugene Stewart, Jerry Warmath, Dorsey Deaton, Tom Corts, Don Felty, Earl Goff, Brent Caldwell, Mike Sigmon, Mike Clingenpeel, James A. Weaver, Andrew Pratt, Rick Stevens, Jon Dainty, Kevin Huddleston, Dan Bizer, Richard Ritchie, and Bob Estes. Many pastors were young men attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY; and upon completion of their degree at the seminary, moved

on to many different fields of endeavors; some to pastor larger churches in many areas throughout the United States or to become presidents of colleges or as teachers. Most keep in touch with the church and are much loved by the church's congregation. We have been blessed by them throughout the years and pray they have benefited from having served us and the heavenly Father. If any name of a pastor has not been mentioned, it is an oversight or because records are not available.

On July 27, 1973, 59 members requested to withdraw from the church and formed a Non-denominational church in the community, led by the pastor, Earl Goff, who resigned February 25, 1973. Brent Caldwell was called as pastor of Bear Creek in April, 1973.

This is an attempt to update the history of the Bear Creek Baptist Church to the year of 1998, the 170th year. The preceding history has been gleaned from previous histories written by John Herring, 1870; J. Ottis Beesley, 1928; J. Ottis Beesley, 1954; and J. Virgil Herring, 1978, with recent history as gleaned from records kept by clerks since 1957-58, when church records were destroyed by fire. These records cannot be improved upon as all writers are deceased. Many are deceased and rest in the silent city of our dead and their recordings must be retained as our history. In March, 1941, my family came to this area, having been displaced by the U.S. Government's Jefferson County Proving Grounds. In 1943, I became a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church and in 1957 married Robert J. Irwin. I have taught many Sunday School classes since 1946, clerk, in 1975, and a deacon of Bear Creek in 1995.

The church is presently pastored by a retired minister, Rev. Bob Estes. Present officers are Lewis D. Gant, moderator and Sunday school superintendent; Norma Lou Irwin, Clerk; Orville Shafer, Joseph Polanka, Robert Gant and Norma Lou Irwin, Deacons; Robert Irwin, Lewis D. Gant Charles Chapman, Robert Cardinal, and Paul Fear, trustees. Though times have changed with many people busy with the activities of the world, our congregation has not grown, and, as we age, we continue to place our hopes and faith in our Savior's will that our church will continue to be a lighthouse on the corner for all who will come and worship Him.

As we look back over the 170 years from the founding of that crude church in those pioneer days, our hearts are filled with thankfulness for those dedicated men, women, and children who, having given themselves to the Lord, gave inspired leadership and had such a sense of mission that we enjoy this privilege today of worshipping and fellowshiping together. God has truly and wonderfully blest us!

HISTORY OF PASTORS

Several have served our pulpit over the past 175 years. We would like to recognize them here. We have attempted to list them in chronological order and hope to add complete dates of service in the future.

John Bush 1828 – 1840	John F. Blocher 1896 - 1897
Chesley Woodard 1840 – 1849	E.C.J. Dickens 1897 – 1900
Orin Whitcomb 1849 – 1854	J.W. Swarhout 1900 – 1901
Orman Feagler 1854 – 1859	J.C. Nicholson 1902 – 1905
Ira Gleason 1859 – 1861	C.B. Jones 1906 – 1908
Jesse Vawter William T. Stott Elza Sneed John Vawter William Vawter Caleb Moncrief (interim pastors) 1861 – 1875	G.W. Brengle 1908 – 1909 J.C. Nicholson 1910 – 1922 H.R. Norwood 1923
G.N. Gartin 1875 - 1876	S.A. Gordon 1924 – 1926
Alexander Connelly 1876 – 1887	Donald Rieley 1926 – 1927
T.A. Childs 1887 – 1891	A.C. Vincent 1927 – 1928
Alexander Connelly 1891 – 1894	William Spear
E.E. Connelly 1894 – 1896	S.H. Thompson
	Wallace Smith

Bear Creek Baptist Church

3945 W 1000 N

WESTPORT, INDIANA

(812)-591-3472

www.bearcreekbaptistchurch.org

This booklet has been prepared for distribution at the celebration of Bear Creek Baptist Church's 175th Anniversary.

The purpose behind this is to compile history of Bear Creek Baptist Church. In gathering information for this, we found a few versions that have similar information, but are not identical. In order to preserve the original document we chose to include each version as it was written by the author.

Many are aware that a substantial amount of Bear Creek's records were destroyed in a fire in the late 1950s. Due to this tragedy, there is a period of history lost. If anyone has historical information to submit, please feel free to let us know and we will do our best to include it in future updates.

Pastor: Robert Estes

Deacons:

Robert Gant

Norma Lou Irwin

Joseph Polanka

Orville Shafer

Trustees:

Charles Chapman

Paul Fear

Lewis Gant

Robert Irwin

Moderator: Lewis Gant

Clerk: Norma Lou Irwin

History of Bear Creek Baptist Church



We are unsure who wrote the following portion of history, although the article was property of Dorcas "Dolly" Herring Lucky. This typewritten document was received by Alma Gant on October 19, 1985 from Mary Helen Booth, who was Dolly's daughter.

Today we meet to celebrate an event that has become a historical item only, to all of those present. Four score and five years ago, the church that we know as the Bear Creek Baptist Church was organized, it being the last Saturday of July or the 27th day of July 1828.

It was only a handful gathered into the little place of prayer, and this place was the humble pioneer cottage of John Herring Sr. where they met and adopted this Constitution; that is to say:

"We believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the infallible word of God and the only rule of faith and practise. We believe in believers baptism by immersion. The ordinance of the Lords Supper. Laying on of hands. Washing of the Saints feet, having given ourselves to the Lord and each other do agree to meet the first Saturday and Sunday in every month to look after the fellowship of the church and here unto set our hands: John Herring, Dorcas Herring, John Bush, Nancy Bush, Francis Bush, Robert Bush, Nancy Bush, John Bush Jr., Leursh Bush, and Cader Herring."

From the records we copy as follows:

"Met according to appointment on the 27 of July 1828. Being present with us, Bro. John Bush and Bro. William T. Stott, and after deliberation and approbation by giving to each other the right hand of fellowship, having formed ourselves into a church agree that Bro. John Bush, Bro. John Herring, and Bro. Cader Herring prepare a letter for to send to the Coffee Creek Ass'n. for to become members with them. A call by the church to Bro. John Bush to attend them as their preacher. Bro. Bush agrees to serve us. Bro. John Herring chosen as deacon, Bro. Cader Herring as clerk. First Saturday in July 1828."

For a short time it appears that the church continued to meet in the cabin where they organized and in neighboring homes but the year following the organization, a house of round logs was built about on half mile south of our present location or on the Bennett farm as it is now commonly known. The first house was very rude in construction, 18 x 24 feet, rail seats without backs, puncheon floors, and windows

With increased opportunities came greater responsibilities and enlarged religious ideas; so that at the May meeting of 1834 amendments to the Constitution were made as follows:

- 1st. The Church shall elect a Moderator annually.
- 2nd. His duty is to keep order, state all questions fairly, take the vote, have the liberty of speaking and give the casting vote.
- 3rd. The Clerk to keep a correct record of all business meetings.
- 4th. But one person, to speak at a time and he to arise and address the Moderator.
- 5th. All motions seconded to be acted on unless overruled by the church.
- 6th. All persons when speaking shall adhere strictly to the question in debate and shall not speak more than twice on the same subject without permission from the Moderator.
- 7th. The Church shall decide all questions by a majority vote except the reception or exclusion of members which shall be unanimous. Offences were classified as public or private and Rule
- 8th. Provided that all private offences should be dealt with according to the 18th chapter of Matthew accompanied by public acknowledgement. This rule was enforced probably more than all others and numerous references are made in the church records to charges of profanity, drunkenness, dancing etc. all of which were promptly dealt with according to the church discipline of the times.

The church has had for its pastors since organization, 1st Elder John Bush from 1828 to 1840, 12 years. 2nd. Elder Chesley Woodard from 1840 to 1840 when he emigrated to the West. Her third pastor was Elder Orin Whitcomb. He remained pastor for a period of five years followed by Bro. Elza Snead. Then came Orman Feagler for five years and whose salary the first year was \$24 but which was raised at the end of the year \$16 making a total of \$40 the highest salary yet received by an pastor up to this time. Elder Gleason served from 1855 to 59. During the troublesome times of '61 there was no regular pastor but several ministers visited and preached for the church and in 1861 Rev. Albert Carter was chosen pastor and served until he resigned in 1874. His salary was \$53 for the first year. G.N. Gartin was called for one year and in 1875 Elder Alexander Connelly was chosen and served until 1887. From 1887 to 1891 Bro. T.A. Childs served a second time from 1891 to 95 making in all 15 years of service. Bro. Carter served 13 years continuously. To the time of Bro. Connelly's resignation, the church had been in existence 67 years and had claimed the services of nine pastors. Each of these were good men, true and faithful who made many sacrifices for the good of others, and who with the exception of Bro. Childs have all gone before, there to appear before the great tribunal where all must stand there to give an account for their stewardship. The value of the services they rendered for this church and community will never be fully known till in the last day we behold it in the light of eternity. When Rev. Connelly resigned on account of old age and failing health his nephew E.E. Connelly was chosen to fill his place and served two years and was followed by John F. Blocher for a lifetime. E.C.J. Dickens served for three months,

without glass but in this humble tenement God's presence was often manifested through the presence of the Holy Spirit and the church grew and prospered.

At the Saturday meeting in April 1833, the question of moving the meeting place was taken up and in the first Saturday in May, 1835 to meet the wants and convenience of an increasing population, they met in a schoolhouse three fourths of a mile Southwest of the present village of Sardinia. At this house and the dwelling of Bro. John Chambers, near by, they continued to hold meetings until 1835. In this year they built a hewed log house about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the school house, in which they continued to worship until 1839, although the house was never completed.

In the early days of this church, her membership was much scattered covering a region of country 12 miles long from East to West. This accounts for the failure to establish a central location for some years, but in 1839 another log house 24 feet square was built just a few feet South West of the present location and was used until about 1855 when our present brick 35 x 50 was built in which on the first Saturday in April 1856 the first meeting was held in what is now known as the Bear Creek Baptist Church. The contractors were William Harris and Albert Dickerson. William Bowen and Tomlinson were master workman. As to plans and specifications we know nothing, nor have we any record as to the compensation received but this we do know that with the remodeling of the church in 1887 the old structure bore evidence that they did their work well.

In 1834 the first trustees were elected and were John Herring, John Chambers and William C. Stribling. About this time the first church expenses were collected which was 37 $\frac{1}{2}$ cents for the printing of minutes, we then being a part of the Coffee Creek Ass'n.

It will be noticed that the first pastor of the church Elder John Bush, was chosen from among its constituent members and served her faithfully for a period of 12 years, without compensation. With the advent of the brick church came preachers salaries and janitors fees and Bro. Joel Herring furnished light and fuel for \$6 for one year and \$22.22 was given by free will offering to compensate the pastor for his labors.

As was previously stated the membership of the church was scattered and people came to services for miles around. As early as 1834 new settlements were being made that felt the need of a place to worship more convenient to them. About the same year and during the time the church was meeting near Sardinia, the question arose as to the changing of the name Bear Creek to Mt. Pleasant but failed to carry and the old name was retained. However, the parent vine began to send out branches and July 1st, 1834 five members were granted letters of dismission for constitution and founded a new church in Bartholomew Co. and again in Feb. 1835 ten members were dismissed for the same reason and founded the church at Sardinia which took the proposed Bear Creek name of Mt. Pleasant.