

The History of the Baxter Methodist Church
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The prelude to the organization of the Baxter Methodist Church extended over a period of at least six years, 1896-1902. In 1896 the Rev. George Washington Nunally of the Methodist Episcopal Church became the pastor of the Bloomington Circuit. None of the seven churches on the circuit at that time were located in what is now the town of Baxter, although a number of them were within a few miles of the town. Gentry's Chapel, for example, was located only one mile south of town on the west side of the Sparta Road. The village itself was known as Mine Lick, and the post office was called Ai. The origin of both names is unknown.

Although the Rev. G. W. Nunally had no regular appointment in the village at that time, he would frequently preach in and around Mine Lick, and by the beginning of the century conditions seemed favorable for the organization of a church. Under the leadership of Bishop Vincent, Presiding Elder T. J. Strickland, and Pastor G. W. Nunally organization was planned.

The year between the Annual Conference held in the fall of 1901 and the one held in the fall of 1902 is a very important one in the history of Baxter Methodist Church and of the town of Baxter. In the Conference journal of the Central Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1901, the appointment of G. W. Nunally reads Cookeville-Bloomington, Post Office Ai. In the Conference journal of 1902, the appointment reads Baxter-Bloomington. We must conclude that during this period two things happened. First, the name of the town was changed from Mine Lick with post office Ai to Baxter. The town was named for Jere Baxter of Nashville, president of the Tennessee Central Railroad. Secondly, the conference records indicate that during this year a church was organized with the Rev. G. W. Nunally as pastor, and this church was called Baxter Methodist Episcopal Church.

Upon organization of the church, plans were started immediately for a new frame church building. This building was erected during the years 1903 and 1904. The location of this church was on the west side of the Sparta to Carthage road about two hundred yards north of the present site. It was located on the property now [1956] belonging to Mr. Ernest Austin.

By the year 1922, Baxter Seminary was becoming a vital institution of the Methodist Episcopal Church in this area, and it was becoming the center of both educational and religious activity. The pastors of the church often served as directors of religious education at the Seminary. Revival meetings were held in the auditorium of the school. And during the pastorate of the Rev. S. E. Taylor, 1922-25, the frame building was abandoned as a church. Worship services were held in the chapel at Baxter Seminary, and lumber from the old building was used in the construction of a gymnasium at the school. Other assets derived from that property were applied later to the building of a new church.

All activities of the church continued to be conducted at the Seminary until 1929. At that time the congregation moved to its present location. Plans for the present church were begun in 1928 while Rev. E. M. Nunally, son of the first pastor, was Presiding Elder. Under his leadership and that of the pastor, Rev. Walter A. Sharp, the church was completed in 1929.

The following men have served as pastors of Baxter Methodist Church. They served in the order named. G. W. Nunally, J. A. Harris, H. P. Keathley, E. M. Nunally, G. W. Nunally, F. S. Ditto, C. E. Austin, H. P. Keathley, J. B. Dickens, D.J. Proctor, J. D. Harris, C. H. Corkran, S. E. Taylor, C. W. Clayton, W. A. Sharp, W. J. Fesmire, J. C. Sandusky, H. P. Keathley, Gueary Reed, G. C. McIlwain, C. A. Stephens, and F. B. Hembree.

Presiding elders and district superintendents have been W. P. Banks, T. J. Strickland, J. D. Harris, J. A. Harris, J. F. Blankenhorn, B. W. Blessing, H. P. Keathley, E. M. Nunally, C. B. Cook, E. U. Robinson, and S. D. Organ.

At the time of organization, Baxter was one of seven churches on the Baxter-Bloomington Circuit. The total membership for the circuit was less than three hundred, and the total budget for the circuit was two hundred and sixteen dollars. The membership of Baxter Methodist Church is now [1956] three hundred, and the current budget is five thousand dollars.

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