

## MORRISON'S CREEK CHURCH AND SCHOOL

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'Writer's Corner'

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A little more about the Roaring River Community of Jackson County.

The Church of Christ building was located several miles up Morrison's Creek, and is the place I first attended church – in 1944 and in my mother's arms. Most of the Roaring River folks and the Morrison's Creek folks attended the Church of Christ and were referred to as "Campbellites" – considered a derisive term by those of us who followed



the no-creed, Bible only, restoration teachings of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone. Since we wanted to be "just Christians" and not take the name of any man, attaching the name of even Campbell, a giant in the movement, was unacceptable to us.

(Pictured: Morrison's Creek Church of Christ. Photo by Audrey J. Lambert).

The church was perhaps the most important institution impacting daily life on Roaring River. No politician, nor educational institution, nor any man, however rich or famous, was as influential as was the church. Remember, in these days there was no Social Security for retirement, no insurance to serve as a safety net in times of sickness or disaster and no social services to provide care for the poor and elderly. All of this work was left to the church. When a fire destroyed a house or barn the other members of the church saw to it that the house or barn was built back and properly furnished. When sickness came, the good ladies of the church arranged schedules to sit up with the sick and feed the family, while the men assumed the duties which would otherwise be going wanting on the farm. When death came, the body was prepared for burial by the good brothers and sisters of the church and food was brought to the house where an around the clock watch was kept by "sitting up with" the body until burial. If one became too old to work or widowed, the church picked up where the ability of the family to provide care was exhausted.

The Primitive Baptist Church held sway on Spring Creek and up Overton Hill at Dotson's Branch. They were often referred to as "foot washing" Baptist, since they held a foot washing ceremony early in May each year. Two benches would be turned back to back

and men would wash the feet of men and women. I am told it was a highly symbolic and moving worship service.

A local story that my daddy used to tell me when I was a child was of an old man who was particularly strict with his crop of wayward boys. As a method of revenge, they rubbed the inside of the black socks he had laid out for wearing to the foot washing, with lamp black. When he removed his sock to allow some other good brother to express an act of Christian charity and humility, it was he who was humiliated when he presented a foot as black as coal. The names of the alleged participants changed from year to year as did the tellers of the story, but the story lived on for decades.

We always referred to one who was prominent in the fellowship of the Primitive Baptists and Free Will Baptists as “he is a big Baptist.” I don’t know why, since that type of term “Big Baptist” was never applied to any other denominational group. I don’t remember even a single reference to a “big Presbyterian” or a “big Methodist. In the community, there was a sprinkling of both Cumberland Presbyterians, out in the Burristown (or Tick) area, and Methodist; but it seemed to me the Methodists were generally a town religion.

The Church of Christ building, or “meeting house” as it was most often called in that day and time to denote that there was nothing sacred or special about the building itself, was built on a piece of ground next to the farm of my great grandfather, William Francis “Billy” Gentry. We called him “Pappy” but he was known in the community as “Little Billy.” Pappy was a little short man and was old and hard of hearing by the time I can first remember him. He wore “braces” or suspenders and used a hearing aid which required a long twisted wire from his ear to his shirt pocket, where a large battery and sound pickup was housed. The device often made high pitched sounds that made any dog within several hundred feet howl as if its tail were being twisted. When “Pappy” listened to his old wooden Zenith radio (which I still have) he preferred to use an ear trumpet – an instrument which I found fascinating and which I was quite sure I could play, if only I could figure a way to be alone with it for an appropriate amount of time.

Pappy was a kind and gentle man and a devoted Christian. I can remember very early in my life seeing him walking up the road from the house where he lived, about 100 yards from the church building, carrying a split oak egg basket on his arm. In that basket was the communion loaf, which he baked himself, and the fruit of the vine. (We often referred to it as “the wine” but it generally was not fermented as drinking alcoholic beverages was viewed as blatantly un-Christ-like by our brotherhood (both then and now.) The land for the building had been given by Pappy’s father – my great great grandfather – Henderson Brown Gentry, and his wife, Louvernia Loftis Gentry, to be used for a church and school. As a result, the Morrison’s Creek School met there Monday through Friday and it became the church meeting house on Sunday. I can still remember the long cards on the wall behind and above the speakers stand (we didn’t call it a pulpit or a lectern) with both the printed and the cursive version (which we called writing, as opposed to printing) of each letter of the alphabet displayed for the use of the scholars during the week.

Although several of my cousins went to school in the old hip roof building, I never did since we moved to Carthage just before I started the first grade. My mother, being prejudiced as mothers are apt to be, thought I deserved better. I suspect I am the poorer for having missed the experience. Some times the very things we want to escape in life leave within us a void that will never be filled once that opportunity has come and gone. We often face things in life which we wish we were not forced to face and yet, they become the richest of experiences. For me, military service was like that.

I had a wife at home and had finished my college education and had wangled a good job with General Motors, all of which I was leaving behind to become a Private at \$98 per month; little more than indentured servitude. I was convinced no good could come of this, that I would learn nor gain anything from that I was about to face. As I look back however, I find within those years and those experiences some of the most profound and proud moments of my life, and I would not trade the experience for anything.

God is funny like that in his providence, often giving us what we need rather than what he want, as a good father most often will.

The trick is to understand that from this experience one can learn to become a greater part of The Maker and His Son. And form this alone we find blessings.

May you have a blessed day.

\*Read more stories by Robert "Bob" Rogers Chaffin at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>