

## JEFFERSON AVENUE (BROAD STREET) CHURCH OF CHRIST

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### ONE OF THE AREA'S OLDEST CHURCHES CELEBRATES 135



This is a 1940 photograph of the Broad Street building that housed the church of Christ in Cookeville for more than 50 years in the early 20th Century. The building is now owned by First Methodist Church.

Dixie College just one of legacies left by members of Jefferson Avenue (Broad Street) Church of Christ.

The Church of Christ at Jefferson Avenue, whose members were instrumental in the founding of Dixie College (now Tennessee Tech) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is observing its 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a Homecoming celebration Sunday, May 7.

Special events include worship service at 9 a.m., a special program featuring former associate minister Steve Baggett, a presentation on the history of the congregation and a catered meal.

Many former ministers and youth ministers are expected to attend, and the congregation invites all former members and others who may be interested to attend.

In order to adequately prepare for the meal, please call the church office by Monday, May 1, for a reservation at 931-526-4605.

Baggett, the minister of the Walnut Street Church of Christ in Dickson, and his wife Pam worked with the Jefferson Avenue church from 1981 to 1989. The anniversary celebration will also mark the beginning of a Gospel Meeting featuring Baggett through Wednesday, May 10 at 7 p.m. each day. Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ is located at 521 S. Jefferson Avenue in Cookeville.

The Church of Christ was first identified in Cookeville in January of 1871.

“The church was established in Cookeville’s turbulent post-Civil War period,” said Delores Wheatly, a member at Jefferson Avenue and chairperson of the committee organizing the anniversary festivities. “The Upper Cumberland of the 1860’s was a dangerous place including armed renegades of both sides. The church met in homes and began to grow, due in part to a historically strong local interest in going back to the bible.”

The original members of the church in Cookeville were John H. Dowell, Mrs. Diana Gabbert, Mrs. Henrietta P. Ford, MISS Mary Gabbert and Miss Leah Gabbert. These were locally prominent people active in civic affairs. These and many who followed have been especially dedicated to planting the Church of Christ in Cookeville. Some of their descendants still reside in the Upper Cumberland area.

The church shared a building with the Methodists for three years. This meeting house was located just off the southeast corner of the Courthouse Square on the street that would become Lowe Avenue and behind what would become Maddux Hardware.

In 1874, S. G. Slaughter built and donated a new meeting house one block north of the square on Washington Avenue and Freeze Street. This building was about 800 square feet in size. When this building was no longer needed by the church, it was used as a blacksmith shop.

A worship service in the 1800's typically consisted of scripture reading, singing, the Lord's Supper and prayer. A minister would visit once a month to preach a sermon. Part-time preaching prevailed for about forty years. Meeting times were flexible. Often, if a preacher was not available, the assembly would be at 3:00 PM. Evening services in the mid 1880's were frequently scheduled for 6:30 or 7:30 PM and referred to as "candlelight services." Meetings were most often in daylight hours to avoid traveling on foot or by horseback or wagon in the dark.

The church outgrew the building located at Washington Avenue and Freeze Street. Property on Broad Street was acquired from church members Jere and Parizetta Whitson for a new meeting house. The new location would be called the Broad Street Church of Christ.

The brick building on Broad Street near Dixie Avenue was completed in 1908. Evangelist T. B. Larimore held a gospel meeting lasting 16 weeks, preaching two services each day to dedicate the new building.

Indoor bathrooms were added to the Broad Street building between 1920 and 1922. The roof and steeple(s) were changed and the brick painted white resulting in the current appearance of the structure, which has used by Emanuel Baptist and is now owned by First Methodist Church.

Realizing that education was essential to the economic and cultural future of the Upper-Cumberland, Jere Whitson and a group of other church members founded the University of Dixie (commonly called Dixie College). Each founder identified in the charter of the University of Dixie was a member of the Broad Street Church of Christ. Cooperation of other local churches made Dixie College, now Tennessee Technological University possible.

The Broad Street church continued to grow until again limited by the capacity of the building. The elders determined that starting additional independent congregations around the city would encourage continued spread of the gospel. Congregations throughout the county were started or supported with financial help and with a man employed by the Broad Street church to travel the county holding meetings, starting and supporting smaller congregations.

During the 1940's and 1950's, the Broad Street church bought property, built buildings, and identified members willing to leave to start up new local congregations. The Jere Whitson Road, Willow Avenue and Collegese churches were among those supported.

The Broad Street church continued to help sister congregations through the decade 1950 to 1960 but realized more needs at home as the Broad Street church continued rapid growth. Chairs routinely filled the aisles even after groups of members "swarmed" to start new congregations. Overcrowding was exacerbated by deterioration of the Broad Street church building form 45 years of neglect while resources were focused on missions and on building meetinghouses for new congregations.

Early in 1962, the decision was made to build a new building on a new site.

Eleven area were purchased on South Jefferson Avenue.

December 16, 1964, the congregation moved to a new building on Jefferson Avenue. The church planned for continued growth, and evangelistic efforts assured that continued growth would be realized.

In mid-1987, a larger auditorium was added to the Jefferson Avenue building to seat 850 person. A two-story educational wing containing 9,200 additional square feet was constructed for Bible study. The church later expanded the auditorium with a balcony to seat an additional 300. More recently, a fellowship building has been added to promote family life activities.

The original auditorium on this site is now used for a Spanish language service. The congregation is reaching out to the growing Hispanic community, including support for preaching and teaching in Monterey and the Upper Cumberland region.

Some of the 25 missions supported include Soperton, GA, Warrenton, GA, and Farmville, VA, in the United States. Outside the USA, active mission involvement includes Caracas, Venezuela, Panama, Indonesia, India, Taiwan, Nicaragua, Jamaica, African Christina School, Manzini School of Preaching, Gospel Chariot Mission, Recife, Brazil, Scotland, Mante, Mexico, Eastern European Missions, and Healing Hands International.

Evangelistic and medical mission teams have frequented the San Blas Islands in Panama for thirty years. Through World Bible School, the Gospel has been taught around the world.



### **JEFFERSON AVENUE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

One of the area's oldest churches celebrates 140<sup>th</sup>

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**COOKEVILLE** – The Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ, whose members were instrumental in the founding of Dixie College (now Tennessee Tech), is observing its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Sunday, May 1.

The church was first started in Cookeville in January of 1871. The original members of the church in Cookeville were John H. Dowell, Mrs. Diana Gabbert, Mrs. Henrietta P. Ford, Miss Mary Gabbert and Miss Leah Gabbert. Josiah Kuykendall and his family shortly thereafter. Other well-known members from the past include Jere Whitson and Robert B. Capshaw. These early Christians were prominent people active in civic affairs.

The Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ has always been known for a love for education, mission works, care for the poor, and involvement in the community.

Realizing that education was essential to the economic future of the Upper Cumberland, Jere Whitson and a group of other church members founded Dixie College in 1913. Each founder of Dixie College was a member of the Broad Street Church of Christ (now known as Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ).

During the 1940s and 50s, the Broad Street church planted several congregations in the area: the Jere Whitson, Whitson Chapel, Willow Avenue, and Collegese churches, were among those established.

Due to the growing numbers and lack of space, the Broad Street church moved to a new building on Jefferson Avenue in 1964. The name of the church was later changed from Broad Street Church of Christ to Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ to reflect the change in location. The church continued to grow in their new location, and, in 1986, a larger auditorium was added. In addition, a two-story educational wing was constructed for Bible study.

The church is presently reaching out to the growing Hispanic community. Bo Perez, the Hispanic minister for the Iglesia de Cristo, reports 40-50 are in attendance in the Spanish services every Sunday.

The Jefferson Avenue church started the Community Action Center (CAC) in 2009 as a way to help people in need in the Upper Cumberland area. Open from 1-4 p.m. on Monday – Thursday the CAC gives food and clothing to those in need.

In 2010, the CAC fed and clothed over 11,000 people and gave away over 38,000 pounds of food. In addition, 56 Bible studies were set up. John Nichols, minister of outreach and involvement, said, “Our mission is to help the citizens of Cookeville see the glory of God by: promoting the self-reliance of people with low to moderate income through ministry and service, prompting the body of Christ to see people who are hurting and willing to do something about it.

\*Read more about the churches of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>