

∞ PLANT CITY CHURCH OF CHRIST ∞
ONE HUNDREDTH BIRTH YEAR
(1905-2005)

By
Hugh W. Davis

*Thus says the LORD, “Stand by the ways and see
and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is and
walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Jeremiah 6:16

315 N. Wilder Rd.
Plant City, Florida 33566

November 19, 2004

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FOREWORD ❧

The following record and commentary are written upon realization that this congregation stands on the threshold of its 100th birth year. The objective is two-fold: one, to establish a chronologically written, accurate-as-possible historical record in hope of its perpetuation; two, to stimulate memory, gratitude, and determination to stay committed to scriptural ideals.

In establishing this record, use is made of three scanty written pieces: (1), a brief, undated article written by Marceline Dicks in or after 1948; (2), a short report by Clayton Adams in 1967 consisting of a reprint of the Dicks article with a correction, a bit more data, and a most notable statement; (3), a few additional lines concerning the church in 1968 by Elwood Mobley. Initials M.D., C.A, or E.M. indicate quotations from these.

Other than these scanty written notes, I have depended on information drawn from longer-time members, principally brother Elwood Mobley. Some information confirms knowledge of which I was personally aware in the late 1940s and early '50s.

My original intent was to end the record at 1979 when I moved to Plant City, leaving it to others to proceed with that part of the history in which I have been involved; but, due to persistent requests, I have for the sake of completeness brought it up to the present in vital respects.

Notice, please, that in each of eight sections is a repeated reaching back and coming forward in time.

REMEMBER THE FOUNDERS ❧

The congregation of Plant City, Florida was established about 1905. The charter members were H.M. Mobley and wife, J.T. Bushong and wife, H.C. Hanor and wife, Tate Wheeler, James Yates and family, R.L. Berry and wife, and S.B. Smith. (M.D.)

These stalwarts, determining to worship and work together after the New Testament order, should be remembered with honor and gratitude for what the congregation enjoys today. The best way to do that is to “. . . continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” (Colossians 1:23)

The congregation retains at its core a wealth of members native to Plant City whose roots go back to the founders, and others nearly so. I recently watched a lad of tender years, well groomed with coat and tie, walk manfully to the front to carefully read the scriptures. I wondered how many realize this lad is a sixth generation of members reaching back through his family to his great-great-great-great grandfather as a founder of this congregation. Nearby sits another lad of whom the same is also true, only his lineage goes back through another family. One family is Mobley. The other is Smith.

These are transitory times, and the wealth of native members should convey a sense of stability to new members, but only to the degree of individual steadfastness observed. With long established relationships, there is the danger of being clannish and standoffish with new arrivals. This, however, is not the case with the Plant City congregation. Here one finds a readiness to receive the faithful in its fellowship, to absorb them fully and lovingly into the church family and to use each according to his or her knowledge and ability.

Two of the present elders do not have those deep family roots here, and neither do several of the deacons. A long-serving song leader sits back graciously; giving place to talented song leaders more recently come.

REMEMBER THE MEETING PLACES

Remembering places of worship is important only to the extent that we remember the sacrifices and labors of brethren providing them to expedite the worship of God. The church owned no regular meetinghouse for approximately seven years. The places, rented or borrowed, were as follows:

First, Alexander Street; second, North Drane Street; third, Wheeler Street. (M.D.) We know nothing concerning the nature of those places, but probably from the beginning there would have been considerable meeting in the homes of the founders, reminiscent of Priscilla and Aquila and the church that was in their house. (Romans 16:3-5)

The first regular meetinghouse was built on property fronting 809 Reynolds Street. *The lot was purchased in the name of S.B. Smith, then was deeded to J.T. Bushong, H.M. Mobley and H.C. Hanor in 1912 . . . The church building was started in 1912, and they met in it that same year. They have been working on it to make it a nicer place to worship ever since. (M.D.)*

The building had no bathroom, classrooms, or baptistry. Baptisms in those early years took place in Moores Lake, Mud Lake (now Walden Lake), or other nearby waters. A baptistry under the pulpit floor was not added until the late 1930's. Those were hard times with the Great Depression years of the late '20s and early '30s yet to be endured, leaving many families across the nation destitute and heavily in debt.

The church had many struggles and hardships, even unable to support a preacher at times. In 1928 they did a great amount of repair work, and in 1934 they added a new structure to the building which is . . . being used for classrooms. (M.D.) This consisted of a bathroom and three

classrooms. One of them was used occasionally for social eating, but “was soon terminated as wrong,” according to one person's memory. *The church was in debt until 1940 but was finally freed of this burden.* (M.D.)

About ten years later, approximately 1950 to 1953, the lot to the back fronting on Mahoney Street was purchased, and a nice masonry building with classroom wing was erected facing Mahoney Street.

In about 1992 adjoining property facing Mahoney Street was purchased to increase parking space. Serious consideration was given to major remodeling when a better church building with ample parking space became available at bargain cost. The church acted quickly to purchase the choice building and property located at the corner of South Frontage, I-4, and Wilder Road, but not before assurance from State highway personnel that no widening of highway plans would affect the property.

The bank reneged at the last minute on agreement for finance. Time was critical. Within a week the full amount was secured from the members on a promissory note basis. The men, with limited hired help, revamped and improved the interior. The congregation made the transition in 1992. The old property was sold, promissory notes were paid off, and the church was debt-free in 1995. But the same year the highway department, contrary to its word, took away church property so far back as to cut off the front part of the building. Over protest, the State did not pay sufficiently for rebuilding, which the elders thought best to do; hence, the present meetinghouse at 315 North Wilder Road and a new debt.

REMEMBER OUTREACH EFFORTS

The congregation was early on conscious of a responsibility to look beyond itself in sowing the seed of the kingdom, as exemplified by the saints in Thessalonica and Philippi. (I Thessalonians 1:6-8, Philippians 1:3-5)

In its early growth, the church had exchange meetings with local preachers with quite good success. They also sent several of their regular ministers to hold meetings at other places and also to help establish a congregation. Some of these places are Clay Sink, Belmont Heights, Gary, and Zephyrhills. (M.D.)

In writing of the church's struggles in its early years Dicks wrote, *The church was generous even during their own struggles and helped establish a colored congregation, with brother Marshall Keeble doing the preaching. They financed their meeting for them in 1935 also.*

Elwood Mobley remembers that sometime before 1940 an effort was made to establish a congregation with a few members in Mulberry. The preacher went to preach on Sunday afternoons, several from Plant City going for encouragement. A congregation was barely begun before it failed, but who knows the final effects? “My Word, sayeth the Lord, shall not return unto me void.” (Isaiah 55:11)

Brother Mobley says, "I can't remember a time when the church was not involved or planning to be involved in preaching the gospel elsewhere." In 1973 brother Mobley wrote, *We are helping support four preachers at this time. They are Rhymer H. Knight in Citrus Park, Florida; Don Taffy in Dundee, Florida; Jeff Harwood in Okeechobee, Florida; and Ralph Gentry in Fort Meade, Florida, where we have been helping Byron Connelly until he moved.*

Stir up your memories, Brethren. What about the many times of broadcasting the Sunday morning sermons directly from Mahoney Street? This was made possible by brother W.A. Smith, who established WPLA in 1949 with that very purpose in mind. This was generously free for some time and the cost later gladly borne by the church. What about the popular long-running Bible Talk question-and-answer program until about 1985 when a new owner rudely terminated it? What about sending brother Ogden with Bibles to Romania? What about the many different places and men where we have helped support the gospel in times past?

There must never be a lack of concern for spreading the seed of the kingdom. "The field is the world." We are presently sending partial support to Kerry Keenan in Canada and Gary Womack in San Antonio, Florida.

REMEMBER THE PREACHERS

Preachers have played a large part in the history of the congregation, some old, some young; some more able in the Word, some well known; some briefly, some much longer. Each should be remembered according to the measure of his faithfulness in preaching the whole counsel of God and his contribution to the spiritual soundness and strength of the congregation.

The first regular minister was G.B. Hoover . . . Other ministers who have served are: R.C. Crawford, 1923-?; Jas. Steed, 1928-29, who had to leave because of the financial obligations of the church; W. Levi Gentry, 1932-1940; Willard Willis, 1941. (M.D.)

Since 1947 the following preachers have served the congregation: Virgil Bradford, 1947-1951; Forrest McCann, 1951-September 1953; Roy Lanier, Jr., 1954-1957; Ross Saunders, 1957-1961; Morris Norman, 1961-1965; Clayton M. Adams, April 1967. (C.A.)

Clayton M. Adams resigned January 7th, 1968, with 60 days' notice. March 10th, 1968, Ralph Gentry of Lakeland, Florida began preaching for us on a temporary basis until June 1st, 1968, when Jerry D. Eubanks began preaching for us on a full-time basis. (E.M.)

Brother Eubanks labored with the congregation until 1978, followed by Gary Ogden in the same year. Brother Ogden is now completing his 26th year with this congregation.

REMEMBER THE ELDERS

Hebrews 13:7 is appropriate. "Remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the Word of God; and, considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith." (NASB)

In 1920 J.T. Bushong was appointed to be an elder. He served until 1936. (M.D.) There is no record of who served with him. In 1930 T.H. Holsberry, Charlie Abbott, and J.A. Binkley were appointed; and later brother A. Walker, date unknown, was selected. (M. D.) Elders in or after 1946 were T.H. Holsberry; W.A. Smith; Ray Smith, 1943; and H.L. Herring, 1946. (M.D.)

Elwood Mobley was appointed in 1962, serving with W.A. Smith, deceased in 1976. Ercelle Smith was appointed in 1973, serving until his decease in 2000. Serving with him: Elwood Mobley until 1976; Bill Womack, 1976-1998; Hugh Davis, 1981-1992; Elwood Mobley second term, 1992-1998. Present elders and time of appointment are Willie Williamson, appointed in 1992; Gary Ricketts, in 1998; and Ronnie Maxwell, in 1998.

The appearance of a name in this list of elders or the following list of deacons is not to be taken as absolute approval. Any unqualified man serving in either office is at fault and so is the congregation that selects and sustains him. (I Timothy 3:1-12, Titus 1:5-9)

Remember, please, the nature of an elder's work makes him an open target for accusation and that Paul said, "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." (I Timothy 5:19-20) Don't forget Paul prefaced this with, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they that labor in the word and doctrine." (I Timothy 5:17)

REMEMBER THE DEACONS 

How early deacons were appointed seems unknown. *In 1926 those serving as deacons were H.C. Hanor, H.M. Mobley, Oliver Barker, Homer Lewis, and Jas. L. Brown. Later S.B. Smith was appointed. (M.D.)* The scriptures say, ". . . those who serve well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." (I Timothy 3:13) Serving well they certainly have a good or high standing with the Lord (Matthew 20:26-27) and should also have with the church they serve as especially qualified servants, (I Timothy 8:3-13).

Past Deacons	
• Elwood Mobley, (1946-1962, 1985-1992)	• Jimmy Carr, (-1987)
• T.H. Holsberry, Jr., (-)	• Robert Brown, (-)
• Archie Peek, (-)	• Lacy Brown, (1974-87, 1992-1999)
• Clyde Morgan, (-1973)	• Carl Lane, (-)
• Aubrey Waller, (1954-1966)	• Wayne Ausburn, (-1989)
• Vernon Crawford, (1961-1965)	• Carl Black, (1985-)
• Ercelle Smith, (-1973)	• Mike Jergins, (-1996)
• Jimmy Perkins, (1964-1972)	• Willie Williamson, (-1992)
• Gerald Beaty, (1971-)	• Gary Ricketts, (1992-1998)
• Ronnie Maxwell, (1972-1998)	• Carl Sutherland, (1996 -2002)
• Lamar Lindsey, (1974-1991)	• Dudley Borders, (1996-1999)
• Harry Cline, (1974-)	• Loyal Davis, (1999-2002)
• Brad Heaton, (- 2003)	

What about those serving well in the past? Shall their service be forgotten? Regrettably, all do not serve well and some even depart the faith that is in Christ Jesus. However, for the sake of a record of the men appointed, as I have been able to assemble, the names of past deacons are submitted in as near chronological order as I can determine. Dates available are entered and space is provided for additional date entry.

Present deacons are Gerald Beaty, 1971; Carl Black, 1985; David Sistrunk, 1999; David Kinghorn, 1999; Scott Maxwell, 2000; Mike Williamson, 2000; Jeff Ogden, 2000; Pat Farmer, 2000; James Fuller, 2000; Mark Bingham, 2004, and Todd Sells, 2004.

REMEMBER ALL GODLY MEN AND WOMEN ❧

Men can be godly and of tremendous service in the cause of Christ without being an elder or deacon. Peter was an elder, but Paul was not. Where would this congregation be today were it not for godly men willing and able to serve nobly the best interest of the congregation? Take time to think of such men you have known from the past and now know, and remember them highly in love for their work's sake.

Godly women from the past should be remembered. Experience tells us there was prompting and encouragement of wives behind the men generally credited as founding fathers. Few men in my experience have the spiritual strength to hold fast and accomplish much with the drag of a worldly-minded woman. Neither has it been easy for women who have remained faithful in spite of uncooperative and sometimes resentful husbands.

Remember also those godly women who taught you as a child and perhaps your children after you. And don't forget those who, by good works and exemplary behavior, quietly left their imprint for good on this congregation.

I am sorely tempted to name some I have known but resist lest, failing to name others, it is perceived as intentional. God give us more Priscillas and Aquilas, Phobes, Dorcas, Lydias, more young Timothy's, more grandmothers and mothers like Lois and Eunice, more like Sarah, “. . . whose daughters ye are, as long as you do well.” (I Peter 3:1-6)

REMEMBER UNPLEASANT MEMORIES ❧

To think Satan would leave a congregation alone for one hundred years is foolishness gone to seed. There have been struggles of many kinds to grieve the hearts of the faithful. There was no doubt sorrow aplenty when a preacher and his family had to go for lack of money to support him, and Satan probably smiled. Better a preacher should go for lack of financial support than for lack of moral support in preaching the truth or for his failure to do so, which has happened in the past.

Hearts are heavy when we think of those giving way to the lust of the flesh, neglectful of duty, falling victim to false doctrine, et cetera, or completely abandoning the faith. There is no way to

measure congregational misery when withdrawal of fellowship was essential. It is especially unpleasant for those able to recall in the late '40s and early '50s when the insidious error of premillennialism infiltrated the congregation, infecting souls to the sorrow of the faithful. Fortunately, the error was fought off, but not without loss of members to the enemy.

And who can forget the heart-rending wedge of division driven in congregations across the nation by the forces of "institutionalism and sponsoring church arrangements" to secure funds and assume oversight of local congregational responsibilities? This congregation did not survive the pressure without loss.

Clayton Adams, now deceased, wrote in 1967, *The membership now stands at 75; the contributions averaging about \$300 per week. The congregation is conservative relative to the problems which confront the brotherhood. This congregation believes that it can do the work that God assigned it, that it does not need human institutions and sponsoring churches to help it in its mission. This accounts partially for the decrease in membership according to any records this writer can find. The contribution is higher than at any time in the history of the church.*

Consider well this statement concerning the congregation's stance, and remember that W.A. Smith and Elwood Mobley were elders at the time and deacons standing firm with them, Ercelle Smith, Clyde Morgan, Wayne Smith, Bill Simmons, and Jimmy Perkins.

Disregard for the autonomy and sufficiency of the local church, as stated by brother Adams, is a recurring historic disaster. It produced the papacy with centralization of power in Rome ending with a Catholic organization totally foreign to the New Testament. The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century ended up with denominational churches largely in disregard of the New Testament order.

Sadly, there have been some among us in the not-so-distant past who had that same disregard in establishment of the American Christian Missionary Society. This was conceived by brethren at Cincinnati, Ohio, on October 24, 1849. Local congregations were expected to contribute funds to the Society, rather than expend those funds themselves directly to preachers the congregation deemed worthy of support – the latter action being in accord with New Testament approved example.

With the Missionary Society being devised of human wisdom and, in practice, denying the sufficiency of the Lord's churches and functioning to do their own work, opposition was inevitable. Following much disputation, open division developed and resulted in the establishment of just another denomination (with all the trappings), i.e. the Christian Church.

Remember this bit of history when anyone suggests subverting the congregation to any organizational arrangement or action unknown to the New Testament, whether it is in respect to human institution or other churches. History has a way of repeating itself and the only safeguard for the congregation is to be well taught and ready at all times to defend its autonomy and sufficiency according to the Scriptures.

The word of God is our only safeguard against error, regardless of the form in which it comes, but “to be forewarned is to be forearmed;” hence, the many forewarnings of Christ in person and throughout the New Testament. Memories of the past are, indeed, sometimes unpleasant, but yet have much needed lessons not to be forgotten.

So, then, my brethren, teach, teach, teach the word of God with forewarnings, for this is the only way to keep this 100-year-old congregation going in “...the old paths where is the good way.” (Jeremiah 6:16)

AFTERWORD

What final disposition may be made of what I have written I do not know, but it will be in form available to those desiring a copy. Disregard and strip away my personal observations, if you wish, and there will remain a factual historical document of this congregation of the Lord’s people to this point in time. I leave it to others, hopefully, to perpetuate a continuing written record.

Hugh W. Davis

November 19, 2004