

The History of Sandy Baptist Church 1922 - 2011

The history of this church has not been easy to record due to many missing records. The beginning congregation at Long's Chapel has scant surviving records and the congregation that organized in 1946 has several years of missing records. The 1946 group considered itself to be part of the prior congregation from the pre-war years before the church stopped meeting. Memories of several church members have been used in this piece, and have been recorded in an abbreviated form. Special thanks go to: Mrs. Lois Anderson, Thomas Anderson, Mrs. Marcella Cain, Barry and Violet Caylor, Mrs. Rachel Cunningham, Gregory Hall for his book The Gathered Words along with helpful conversations with him, Douglas Walker, and especially Mrs. Letha Barber Walker. Also Church records and deed records of Fannin County, and the History of First Baptist Church, Bonham were used for reference. Compiled by Marilyn Hanes, April 2011.

Sandy Baptist Church is the third church to bear the name Sandy. The first church to bear the name Sandy Creek Missionary Baptist Church was formed in 1853 with the help of Rev. J.R. Briscoe. Rev. Briscoe was a blacksmith by trade and also a preacher of the gospel. The reverend made frequent trips to the large plantations along the river, usually spending several days tending to the smithing needs of owners such as Gideon and John Smith and their brother-in-law Allen Agnew. On one of his trips to the plantations he was shown the huge old growth cedars along the river country. The reverend was greatly impressed with the trees and told his hosts that if they would fell the trees he would hew the logs and they would build a Baptist church. They did build the church and located it near the banks of Sandy Creek. At the present time that site is surrounded by Sandy Creek Ranch. Rev. Briscoe served as pastor the first two years after it was formed. He was formerly pastor of what became First Baptist Church in Bonham, and was at the time this church was formed a missionary for the Sister Grove Association that First Church Bonham helped to organize. This early church was not long lived as it began to fade by 1868 and apparently failed completely well before 1905 as Dr. Cunningham bought the deserted building and disposed of it in 1905. The second pastor was Rev. Samuel J. Wright who deeded land for "a graveyard" to the community in 1862 and it is located near the site of the old church and was first called Sandy Creek Cemetery but is known now simply as Sandy Cemetery. He named the two Smiths and Allen Agnew who were deacons of the church to be the trustees of the cemetery. Rev. Wright served as pastor to the new church during 1858 and into the Civil War years. He served the church until his death in 1868. He was also a teacher in the area of Sandy.

Many local families with loved ones buried at Sandy Cemetery, that began as Sandy Creek Cemetery have felt the need to continue the work of maintaining the cemetery that was given into the hands of the long ago deacons of that early church.

Moving forward in time to the year 1922, and just a small distance down the same road as the first church location, we find people coming together again to worship in the Sandy area. Quite possibly some were descendants of the original church membership. On 25 July 1922 under the leadership of Rev. Allen W. Weaver a Baptist minister, the group of twenty six souls formed a fellowship together at what was known as Long's Chapel, where Sandy Baptist Church is now located. Fifteen were or became Baptists that day and 12 were of other persuasions. The one surviving record reflects that eleven people were baptized that day and 2 joined by letter with one counted under Experience date. One by letter in Oct, 1922 is also recorded. The old 1922 record is titled Sandy Baptist. It was thought that the first congregation was called Long's Chapel, however the community bore that name alone it appears. People of different denominations attended this fellowship as there were no other churches close by. Perhaps the community name changed from Long's Chapel to Sandy when Bro. Weaver gathered his flock and started Sandy Church. This first group met in a one room building located on Judge H.A. Cunningham's land situated across the road from the present church campus. It was a one room building, rectangular in shape without porches. Lanterns hung from the ceiling for light to augment light from the windows. When there was no preacher available, the group would meet for Training Union or Sunday School on their own. *Traditionally* this building was set aside for use as a meeting house and would revert to the land owner if not used by an active congregation. This varied group met as a Union fellowship after Bro. Weaver left in 1923 after two years as pastor as he moved to Louisiana where his young daughter died. The reverend lived in the Duplex area and walked to the little meeting house on Sundays or rode a horse if one was available to him. A long time resident of the area noted that "the reverend cut across fields to shorten his journey and if the weather was wet he would have his shoes tied together and slung over his shoulder". The distance from home to church was several miles. Bro. Weaver had family ties in the Mulberry and Sandy areas. His granddaughter has been a member for many years and is still active in the church. This group heard the gospel from Baptist, Methodist, and Christian preachers for several years. In 1935 the church was being served by Harry W. Boulton, a Baptist preacher who lived north of Ravenna. He was a farmer along with his ministerial duties and was very talented in woodworking. He was a man of *short* stature. When the church needed a pulpit Brother Boulton built one that fitted *his* height. With two or three changes over the years to increase the height for taller preachers, and widening of the top surface to accommodate larger Bibles and microphones, that first pulpit is still in service in our church today. Brother Boulton also

walked from home to church once a month to preach, however he was considered to be their pastor. Perhaps it was a matter of finances during those hard times. Some young couples went to his home for their weddings . One couple reported that the preacher stood in front of sacks of peanut seed stacked along his living room wall to perform their ceremony in 1935. All but one membership ledger of that mostly Baptist group are lost to us and lists only Baptist members. It is not known how long Reverend Boulton served The church but the members likely did not meet together past 1943 as they did not meet during the World War II years. As small as it was this church lost a brave young man to the war. Bob Walker had been baptized in 1943. He went to war and never made it back to his earthly home. He was a wonderful young man and died in the prime of his life. Such a loss is hard on all who knew and loved the young men lost to Hitler's tyranny. The land the old church was on sold in 1937 to the Caylor family. After the building was no longer used as a church building " it was sold in 1949 for \$50 and moved south of Mulberry where it was made into a barn".

Bro. Fred Thomas held summer revivals in the little church in the 1940 era and baptized several of the members . He felt the need to lead the people back together as a Baptist Church. " A community meeting was called" and several members of the former Baptist fellowship "met together in the school house because it had lights and the church building didn't". They elected the first trustees and a name for the church. Chester A. Barber, Thad Beaty, and George Walker were named to be the trustees. Both Mr. Barber and Mr. Walker served as deacons for many years until their deaths. Mr. Barber served 57 yrs. and Mr. Walker served 54 yrs as true and faithful deacons. In 1983 the church honored Mr. Barber with a gold pocket watch for his long years of dedication as Deacon and devoted worker in the church. Their first service in the Sandy Creek Common School District # 94 building was held on April 20, 1946. The land this building stood on was sold to BISD in 1925 by Samuel P. Walker and wife Carrie Walker for the sum of \$40.00. S.P. Walker was the father of Deacon George Walker and the great grand father of Blanton Hanes a present day Deacon. Barry Caylor and Loyd Venable (inactive) are the other 2011 Deacons. When Bonham Independent School District and Sandy Creek # 94 consolidated their schools, the church acquired the school property for \$1.00 . The deed in 1948 read Sandy Creek Missionary Baptist Church, reason unknown, however the church functioned under the name Sandy Baptist Church. Due to many years of lost records it is unclear when and how the name became simply Sandy Baptist Church. Sandy Baptist Church joined Fannin Baptist Association in 1953-54. For many years we were fortunate to have seminary students as pastors. Our little church has seen former student pastors enter into foreign and home mission work, as Sandy has always had a heart for missions. Many young preachers have honed their pastoral skills at Sandy.

After acquiring the school building and land the congregation began to save their resources to some day remodel the school into a church. The day came in 1954 when the first remodeling took place in the old building. The south entrance was moved to the west side to allow for a vestibule, sanctuary, and 4 class rooms. The dedication service was held on 22 August 1954. As needs increased and fortunes improved the church has seen many more changes. In the 1960's we obtained a house to serve as a parsonage for the many seminary students that served the church for so many years. The parsonage became a house of many uses; it served as extra class rooms as needed, also some VBS functions took place there. One Halloween, it served as a spook house. The 70's brought more construction with the building of the fellowship hall, kitchen and restroom. Heat and air conditioning was added to replace water coolers. The refurbishing of the sanctuary with paneling and blown ceiling was done by Ronnie Barnett, Paul Cunningham and Chester Barber. Carpet, drapes, and seat cushions were also added along with new lighting and a ceiling fan in the sanctuary. In the 1980's work continued by the men of the church. Our first baptistry was built in 1988 by Tom Williams, Leon, Leroy and Eddie Haggard and was dedicated to Mr. Paul Cunningham who was a faithful long time member and deacon of the church. Mr. Cunningham died that same year. A beautiful stained glass window was made by Lisa Williams Dasso to grace the baptistry. Sound system and lighting upgrades followed. In the 1990's a concrete porch and handicapped ramp were added to the "school building" part of the church along with a covered front entry. Ceiling fans were added in the sanctuary and the fellowship hall. Sidewalks got us out of the mud. In 1999 the fellowship hall was redone and enlarged with the addition of 2 classrooms, 2 restrooms and utility closet. The new part was connected to the "school building" at that time. Mr. James Hicks and his sons supervised the men of the church in building the new addition and Mr. Bob Sanford did the electrical wiring for us. A gravel parking lot was enlarged to accomodate more cars. The remaining structures from the school days were all removed at the time the addition was built. In 2002 a beautiful steeple was added. This year we have leveled the sanctuary added new under penning, and a new covered porch was added to the back of the church. Plans are again underway to refurbish the interior of our much used and much loved old "school building church". Records indicate the building was most likely built in 1925 (possibly to enlarge or replace a smaller building) for the school children of the area called Sandy #94. The land deed dated 1925 for 1.5 acres from Samuel P. Walker who was an ancestor of several present day church families shows that it was for school use and that one acre prior to this sale was designated for school purposes. Several present day members attended the school here. Most of the huge ancient Oak trees remain on the grounds that shaded those children long ago.

Sandy Baptist participates in the Second Sunday Singing that involves several churches

of differing denominations in the north part of the county. This group gathers on Sunday night on the second Sunday of the month in rotation to each church. It has been a joy to join with four neighboring churches for Union Easter Sunrise Services on Easter mornings. These churches are Ravenna Baptist, Mulberry Methodist, Union Baptist, and formerly Ravenna Christian Church. We have a quarterly fellowship for our members and guests, neighbors, friends and family. We have a wonderful pot luck meal and fellowship together. We have friends of all denominations attend and all are welcome to come.

One of our members is involved in starting a prison ministry for women at the facilities in Bonham. The church supports her efforts to this end.

Our congregation continues to occupy the much used and loved old building that first saw to the education of the community children in the "3R's"; followed by the teaching of the "Good News" of the gospel. Those ancient Oaks that shaded the children now shade various gatherings of church family and friends. VBS children and family gatherings have made good use of their shade. In the 1950's before the first remodel and before cooling of any sort was available, the church moved the piano to the porch and they held revivals outside under the big trees. Most of the young folks have grown up and moved away, but some are drifting back now (2011) and happily are rejoining our fellowship and taking active rolls in the church. It is a peaceful and beautiful place where we come to meet our Lord on Sundays and Wednesdays. Where we can comfort the grieving with a meal and caring in their time of need; and where we can rejoice together in the happy times. The outreach fellowship for the neighbors and friends is a time to draw the community together to thank our Lord for good friends, food, freedom and fellowship in His house. THIS IS GOD'S HOUSE . . . we are a part of His church. We meet for Sunday School at 9:45 and worship at 11:00 am each Sunday morning. Evening service is at 6:00 pm. Wednesday night Prayer Meeting and Bible Study is at 6:30 pm. Mrs. Joyce Hamby is hostess and teacher for the Ladies Bible Study on Thursdays at 7:00pm.

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