

# Jellico Creek Baptist Church

Founded in 1808 in Whitley County



By REBECCA CONN

Community churches are the backbone of any small town society. They are places where we worship, watch our children get married, return to for “Homecoming,” and sometimes places where we walk that final mile with a loved one who is being laid to rest. The hometown church is most simply defined as an extension of family and the rural areas of Kentucky are blessed with many of these churches. Jellico Creek Baptist Church is a prime example.

Just 16 years after Kentucky was beginning its statehood, the Jellico Creek community was forming a church. This is a solid example of what hardworking, God-loving people can and will do when given the opportunity to come together for the common good. The church petitioned for organization on July 26, 1808 and was formally organized under the arm of the Cumberland River Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church of Barbourville, KY) in November of 1814. Elders John Catching, Peter Engle, William M. England, Spencer

Foley and Luke Williams were present for the organization service. To put this time frame more into perspective, it precedes the birth of both Abraham Lincoln (Union) and Jefferson Davis (Confederate States), the two “Presidents” in office during the “War Between the States.”

Long before an actual church building was erected, services were held in private homes. The first consistent meeting place was in a log home built on the Perkins Farm. In 1837, William and Rebecca Perkins donated land for the construction of an actual church building, which stood until 1904. A “new” church was erected on the very same spot in 1907, and is still in use today.

The earliest records of membership date back to 1846 and reflect 32 members. Unfortunately, during the Civil War, Confederate soldiers marched through the area taking horses and other valuable items. It was during one of these raids that important church documents were lost – either to theft or destruction. Although it is sad that a complete record of the church no longer exists, it still speaks of

the rich and colorful history that surrounds Jellico Creek Baptist Church.

To some degree, the church is still a step back into time. It is, after all, the oldest church in the South Union Mount Zion Baptist Association, and knowing it has a 200-year history is part of the atmosphere. However, as a more obvious link to the past, the church itself is surrounded by three large cemeteries containing graves of Indians, slaves, Civil War soldiers and church members. This type of church property burial is a symbol of years gone by and is yet another example of the traditions surrounding Jellico Creek Baptist.

On a more current note, this church is still very active today. Since 1984, it has continued to upgrade its building facility and most recently added a bus ministry in 2004. On July 26, 2008, its 200 year anniversary, the church met to begin a two-day celebration of “Homecoming.” Over 375 people were in attendance, and hearts swelled with pride as the bell rang out 200 times on that day celebrating the past, the present and the future of Jellico Creek Baptist Church.