



Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society

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January 2013

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Without a past, there is no future

Next meeting: The next meeting will be a regular business meeting at 10:00 am on January 12, 2013, in the meeting room of the Liberty Library. The subject of any program has not yet been announced.

AMITE COUNTY HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of December 1, 2012 meeting

Due to the annual open house, no business meeting was held. Approval of November minutes will be taken up in the January 12, 2013 meeting.

Future Meeting Schedule

January 12, 2013, 10:00 am — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

February 9, 2013, 10:00 am — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

March 9, 2013, 10:00 am — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

April 13, 2013, 10:00 am — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

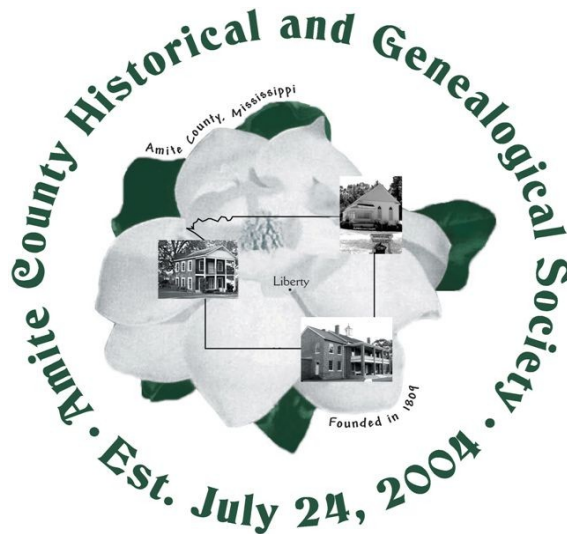
May 4?, 2013, 10:00 am — Heritage Day event. No business meeting will be held.

June 8, 2013, 10:00 am — Annual meeting with election of officers in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

July 13, 2013, 10:00 am — The practice has been to not hold a meeting in July. If one should be held it will be on this date.

August 10, 2013, 10:00 am — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

September 14, 2013, 10:00 am — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.



You may contact this editor at:

Wayne B. Anderson, Sr.
 1737 Bridgers Drive
 Raymond, MS 39154

Or by e-mail at sitemanager@achgs.org

BITS AND PIECES OF AMITE COUNTY HISTORY

EBENEZER CHURCH MEMORIES

These memories were written by Norma Jackson Whittington, daughter of Harry L Jackson and Rochie Kinabrew Jackson. Rochie Kinabrew's parents were Dr. William Bradford Kinabrew [Grandpa] and Sarah E. "Sallie" Perkins Kinabrew [Grandmama] , daughter of Lewis Perkins, Jr. and Jeanette Adeline Brown. Norma's husband was Jeff "Whit" Whittington. During the 1943-1944 school session, Norma and her daughters lived with her mother Rochie in Liberty, while her husband was at Sanatorium, and taught English in the Liberty High School.

Norma and her sister, Sadie Jackson Branch, recorded their family memories in the manuscript, As Sadie Saw It, the source of these stories. Contributed by Dr. Paul Jackson, Jr

Grandpapa had once had a notable apple orchard; in fact, he had named the place, not very imaginatively perhaps, Apple Blossom Farm. The apple trees had died out, however, and all that remained were a few "horse apples" scattered near various house sites. But there was still a considerable pear orchard, both the mild eating variety and the harder preserving pears, and I remember friends coming from miles away and hauling them away by wagon loads. Our favorite pear tree was an unusually large one which grew just outside the old family cemetery not far from the house. The cemetery dated back before Grandpapa's ownership of the place, and it was so vine-grown that we seldom ventured far within the iron railing to try to read the fallen stones. But near the fence there was one large white monument of much more recent date than the others. It had been put up by the state Baptists to mark the burial place of Richard Curtis, first Baptist preacher in Mississippi, but our interest stemmed from the fact that by climbing up on the monument we could easily reach the limbs of the pear tree - - and then we could sit on the top and eat our spoils, kicking our heels against the inscription. I don't suppose Rev. Curtis minded.

The family still attended Ebenezer, the church of which that same Richard Curtis had once been pastor. Although not the first Baptist church organized in the state, it was - - and is - - the oldest having had continuous services since its organization. It stood quite alone in the woods, the farms which had once been occupied and the road which had run nearby having been abandoned some time before. In a direct line across the pasture it was not far from Grandpapa's house, and in the winter when the leaves were gone a glimpse of the little white building could be seen through the trees. In the summer we often walked across the pasture, through the little stretch of woods, climbed the stile, went by the spring, and so up the slight rise to Sunday School. But in bad weather, or when Grandmama was going, we went in the buggy - - and it was amazing how many could crowd into that vehicle. Then we must drive a mile or so along the Big Road and take a sharp turn into the straggling private lane that led back about the same distance to the clearing where the little white frame one-room building waited through the week for its faithful members.

And they were - - and are - - faithful. Ebenezer Church was organized in 1806, and a reading of the minutes, which are still in existence, reveals names of families who came into that area not long after the American Revolution and many of which are still represented in the county. When I was a child, the "old cemetery" could still be seen, although even then large trees had grown up among the leaning or fallen stones and hardly a trace can now be found. We used to love to wander in the "new cemetery" (and the fact that Grandpapa's first wife, who died in 1873 was the first person buried in the ground shows how "new" it was) reading the dates and speculating on those buried there, especially when we found a child's or an infant's grave, of which there were many, including two baby sisters of Mama's. So small and so scattered were Baptist churches when Ebenezer was young that when the churches of the county formed the first Baptist Association it was named the Mississippi Association. Later the association was divided and others formed, but today a list of the state's associations shows such names as Adams County Association, Bolivar County Association, Pike County Association - - and looking a bit out of place, but pridefully pointing back to its undisputed priority, the Mississippi Baptist Association.

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In our childhood the little congregation could support only a part-time preacher, and in my mind the services were divided into the Sundays when the preacher preached and the Sundays when Grandpapa preached. He had been superintendent of the Sunday School for years and years, and since in education at least he was superior to the rest of the group, in the preacher's absence he usually gave a little talk. I vaguely associated Grandpapa with God anyhow, his white hair and beard making the identification natural, and as I knew he was the best man in the world and knew more than anybody else, it seemed only right that it should be Grandpapa's church. There were no Sunday School rooms, and the three classes (adults, young people, and children) met in different corners of the room. We children were given leaflets or cards bearing the scripture lesson and a brief discussion and a beautiful picture illustrating it. We loved the musical part of the service, when we sang with gusto such old favorites as "Shall We Gather at the River," "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb," and "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," led by Mr. Henry Jones, with "Miss" Liza Jones at the organ. No grand pipe organ this, but a little cottage organ that must be pumped by the organist's feet and which gave off a slightly wailing sound that I found charming.

Except for the revival meeting held annually in the summer the congregation was very small especially in bad weather, when the almost impassible roads provided a legitimate excuse for staying by a warm fire. I remember one such occasion which made our whole family feel dreadful. It had snowed during the night, not a heavy fall, but any snow in that locality was unusual, and as the ground was cold and wet and the skies still looked threatening, we had decided that in such bad weather no one would come and "they" would not have Sunday School. Much to our surprise - - and embarrassment - - however, about 11:30 in walked Miss Nettie Williams. Miss Nettie was a member of a family which had once been comfortably fixed, but by a combination of several generations of only daughters and no sons to work the farm and of those daughters' marrying shiftless men who did not work at anything, they had come down to real poverty. They were good people - - Grandmama, who although somewhat of a snob, usually judged people accurately for themselves and not their possessions, thought a great deal of old Mrs. Williams and her daughters, none the less because Miss Nettie was somewhat simple-minded. She was tall, gaunt, very homely, shabbily dressed, but even we children knew that Miss Nettie was good, and we seldom laughed at her. On this snowy Sunday certainly we felt no inclination to laugh. For while the weather had been too bad for us, who were the closest family to the church, to go to worship, Miss Nettie had walked in her not too sound shoes a good two miles further. She had stopped by only to warm herself and dry her feet, and while she sat there with her cotton dress pulled up to let her cracked men's brogans steam before the fire, she told us in all simplicity, with no hint of reproach or superior virtue, about her "service." For she had been the only one present that Sunday. "I was afraid to build a fire and have to leave it," she said, "and I waited a while, but no one else came. So I read the Scripture, and sang a song, and said a prayer. And I hope the Lord thought it was all right." We felt sure He did.

There are many memories connected with Ebenezer Church. We children especially loved the "protracted meetings," or revivals, when everyone in the community took off for a week of church going and visiting, and former members who had moved away made a point of coming back. Of these I thought Cousin Ella MacIntoch, in an organdy dress and a leghorn hat with her snappy black eyes and coal black hair, a vision of beauty, and I viewed with fascinated alarm another distant cousin, Judson Gunby, an enormously fat man with a bristling black beard that covered his entire front to the waist. Beards were not common then, and although it was natural enough for Grandpapa to have a decent white one, such exuberance was frightening.

The first day of the revival was always a full day's service, with preaching both morning and afternoon and - - of special interest to me - - dinner on the ground. The women of that section were famous as good cooks and they vied with each other as to who could bring the most lavish basket. Rough tables were set up, and the food spread out for all: potato salad, fried chicken, ham, cakes, pies - - all good country food. They made a kind of chicken pie I have never seen anywhere else, using young fryers, browning the pieces slightly, and then cooking them in a baking dish with strips of crisp pastry, butter, and milk. Another local favorite was what they called cheese pie - - elsewhere known as chess pie. It consisted of lavish amounts of butter, eggs, and sugar, cooked very slowly in crisp pastry, and Grandmama usually added lemon juice to hers to make it less rich. Either way it was good. We

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children would play games during the noon hour, roam the cemetery, and make trips to the spring at the foot of the hill.

The visiting preacher usually stayed at Grandmama's house for the week, and we could be sure of lots of other company - - but we were sure of that every Sunday. When people came so far to the morning service, it was too much to expect them to go home and come again at night, and Grandmama had many relatives among the churchgoers. We used to say that she sat near the front so she could make her way back up the aisle after the sermon speaking to all her nieces and nephews (and great nieces and nephews), adding "Won't you come home with us for dinner," to each greeting. And come they did. The big dining table and a smaller side table could accommodate twelve, but on Sundays there was always a second and sometimes a third setting, and we children of course were served last. This wasn't too bad, as we knew Grandmama would keep back enough to see that we got our favorite foods, but sometimes it did seem like a long wait - - especially when Cousin Addie MacIntosh was there. She was a favorite niece of Grandmama's and one of the sweetest souls that ever lived, but also one of the slowest. She talked slowly, and she ate slowly, and we used to peep through the window and watch her deliberately lay down her knife and fork, and gently and oh so slowly begin some remark, and we'd resign ourselves to a long wait.

Cousin Addie had married again after the death of the father of her children, and Grandmama felt that her second husband was not kind to her. He was loud, aggressive, quick-tempered and quick acting, and probably Cousin Addie's dilatoriness got on his nerves. The incident that condemned him utterly in Grandmama's mind was when one day he pushed back his plate, wiped his mouth, and glared across the table at Cousin Addie, who had barely made a start on her meal. "Well," he announced loudly. "I've eaten enough for a hog and I'm through. Seems to me everybody else ought to be through too." She never forgave him.

After we moved to Liberty we visited the old church less often, but one service I attended is unforgettable. It was in the early days of World War II. Camp Van Dorn, a large military center, was set up near Centreville, and the government requisitioned nearly the entire district or beat for artillery training ground. It was a traumatic experience for the residents. They were paid a fair price for their farms, and in many cases settled more advantageously elsewhere, but most of them had lived all their lives in this community, as had their fathers and grandfathers back several generations, and they felt uprooted and homeless. The point that agitated them most was what was to become of their church.

After conference, the deacons went as a delegation to the commanding officer of the camp and put their plea before him; could they be allowed to continue their services? I can picture the scene vividly. The colonel, so occupied with affairs of much more import to the nation, facing the three deacons, dressed in their slightly shabby best, respectful, but with a dignity of their own drawn from the intensity of their feelings. No, he told them regretfully, there was no way. Everyone must be moved out of the area, and there would be no access except to military personnel; indeed, as much of the land was to be used for target practice, it would be too dangerous. But he was impressed by these country men and offered the best solution he could. Ebenezer Church, he promised them, would not be torn down as all the other buildings in the area were to be. He would have a fence built around the property, with off limits signs posted, and he would guarantee them that neither church nor cemetery would be disturbed. At the end of the war the whole would be returned to the congregation; in the meantime they could remove what furnishings they would need to continue services elsewhere for the duration. They accepted of course - - they had no choice - - and made plans to move to a deacon's home just outside the camp limits. But on the Sunday before the removal order became effective Ebenezer Church held what might be the last service for years to come in the old building. Word spread, and people who had once belonged, or whose ancestors had belonged to the old church came from miles away.

I was staying in Liberty then and Mama and I drove down. It was a sad drive, every mile, every curve of the road so familiar from the many trips that we had made over the years, yet everything so strangely changed. "There's the old Neyland place," we said, or "The Dixon house is next," but there was only the house site bare and empty. At many places the fence still stood, and the walk, lined with flowers, led up from the road as of old, shrubs marked

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the outline of the house, but house and inhabitants were gone. It was an eerie drive, through a Deserted Village of our own. There was one spot where we had always looked across the fields and caught a glimpse of the house so dear to us, but here we resolutely looked ahead, for we knew that not only was the house gone but the top of hill lay leveled and bare for an artillery range.

The church was crowded, for many from other communities had come to pay their respects to Old Ebenezer, and the service, led by the elderly minister who had come out of retirement to take the charge when the congregation had found themselves unable to get a preacher, was simple, sincere, and dignified. There was an air of regretful seriousness about the people, but no breast-beating or wailing. They were doing what had to be done and looking forward to a better end. Actually, to my embarrassment, I found myself shedding more tears than anyone else. Perhaps it was what psychologists refer to as related trauma, but it had been a difficult time for me; What was in the Sanatorium, our future was most uncertain, Paul and Bobby were both in the Army, facing who knew what dangers, and the memories of past happy days and the emotional upheaval of the day added to my other griefs was simply too much. I cried as no one else did, and they must have understood, for everyone was very kind to me.

There is a heart-warming postscript to this story. "I give you my word as an officer and a gentleman," said the colonel, "that your church will be returned to you unharmed." And at the close of the war it was, and back came most of the little congregation to worship again where their fathers had. I don't know how he managed to enforce his commands, or even if the same man remained in charge of Camp Van Dorn for the duration of the war or if he passed the charge on to his successors, but the troops understood very well that this was forbidden territory. The doors and windows were boarded up and a tall steel fence built around the property, and he seems to have been very alert to any possible violation of his commands. At one time an officers' mess had built a recreation hall out of scrap lumber and invited him to an entertainment. The first thing his eyes lighted on as he entered the room was some church pews placed around the walls for seats, and he exploded, "Where," he demanded in icy tones, "did you get those church pews? If they came from Ebenezer Church I'll have your hide. I gave my word to those people, and no _____ bunch of _____ officers is going to make me break it!" They hurriedly assured him that the pews were legitimately come by and not from Ebenezer, but it took a visit to the church to convince him. "I gave my word," he said, and his word was good.

Share your genealogy and Amite County stories by sending to Frances Phares, PO Box 1639, Clinton, LA or phrances@att.net Your corrections and additional information solicited.

ACHGS Standing Committees and Chairpersons

Linda Honea Lea— Nominating Committee

Vera Prestridge — Little Red Schoolhouse

Dan Morgan — Amite County History

Nelson Dawson — Amite County Family History

Mary Pallon, Jennie Livingston, Bobby Haygood — Amite County Cemeteries

Linda Honea Lea — Hospitality

Gay Blalock — Special Events and Food

Greg Barron — Programs and Publicity

James Allen Causey — Tours and Amite County Landmarks

Any member interested in helping should contact the committee chairman or Pres. Greg Barron.

Annual Membership Contribution
Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society
PO Box 2
Liberty, MS 39645

Check or circle choice

\$15.00 – Individual \$25.00 – Family \$50.00 – Sponsor or Ancestor Memorial
 \$200.00 – Lifetime \$10.00 – Student (under 18) \$10.00 – Senior (over 65)

All contributions are tax-deductible.

Please make checks or money orders payable to **Amite Co. Historical and Genealogical Society**.

(Please print)

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Thank you for joining the Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society. Your contribution helps us continue to collect and preserve historic treasures from Amite County's past, as well as to promote family history. Membership also provides an opportunity to attend programs and participate in special events.

I am interested in helping with:

Archives Membership Programs Newsletter Other (specify):

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