



## A HISTORY OF THE LITTLE RIVER BAPTIST CHURCH

An Essay  
Author and Date Unknown

On September 2, 1769, seven years before the United States declared its independence from England, a deed was recorded transferring a lot from William West to Benjamin Hutchison, John Smarr, John Shipley, and William Berkley. The lot mentioned in the deed was located about one mile northwest of our meeting place today, and it contained a one-room log building which was being used as a school house. The deed provided the building would be used "as a public meeting house for the Worship of Almighty God, the Baptist profession to have the Preference in every Respect to Preach in the said House." It would also continue to be used as a school. The purchase price was one shilling, or 12 cents in today's money. The date of that deed is generally accepted as the date of the founding of Little River Baptist Church.

Three years later, on June 22, 1772, John Lewis and Joseph Hutchison, Trustees of the Little River Baptist Church, purchased a part of the lot on which we are now assembled. The one-acre lot was bought from Samuel Wyckoff for the sum of 20 shillings. The deed stated that the land was to be used to erect a Meeting House for the Denomination of Anabaptists. Sometime during the following six years the church was built. We know this because on September 2, 1778, another deed was recorded transferring the Wyckoff farm to Pierce Bayley "...except for the lot whereon The Baptist Meeting House stands." It is certainly possible that 200 years ago worship services were being held where we are gathered today.

The circumstances are unknown, but the record indicates that the third Little River Church building was constructed here in 1814. It was a brick structure which would stand for 76 years. That particular building contained a special balcony for its colored members.

In 1888, it was determined that the walls of the church were unsafe, so a new building was begun. The fourth Little River Church building was completed and dedicated on the 5th of July, 1890. Most of us are familiar with that building because it was in use until December 11, 1971, when it was destroyed by fire.

Let us consider for a moment how the living Church which we know as Little River came into being. Rev. Westwood Hutchison described the way it happened in his address at the 160th Anniversary of the Church on the 1st of September 1929. One of the leading

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Baptist missionaries in the middle of the eighteenth century was Elder John Garrard who followed a route for the Lord from England to Philadelphia to Mill Creek (near what is today Martinsburg, West Virginia) to Loudoun County. One of his converts was John Thomas, who founded the Ketoctin Baptist Church in 1751. Elder Garrard also converted David and Joseph Thomas, two brothers, who organized the Little River Baptist Church in 1769, consisting of 15 members with Richard Major being ordained as Pastor. It is said that within two years the Church had 272 members and covered a territory from Upperville to Manassas.

The Church was destined to see good times and bad as the years passed away, but no matter what the conditions it lived on as a distinct body. In 1851, doctrinal differences among its members resulted in the withdrawal of some who founded the Mt. Zion Old School Baptist Church located about a mile from here on Route 50. The split was the local reflection of the Campbellite movement which divided Baptists throughout the South, particularly over the question of election and evangelism.

Many stories have been told about the Little River Church. We lack hard evidence to test them all, but a good many are probably true. Some say the Church building was used as a field hospital during the Civil War. Crude grave markers in the woods north of the Church are said to cover the remains of unknown soldiers. Perhaps it is true. In any case, we are not inclined to disturb their rest to satisfy our curiosity.

One fact stands clear to all of us and is what really matters. That fact is that for over 200 years an assembly of Baptist believers has worshiped the Master on this site. Those members have shared a Common Faith in the Lord which has sustained them through wars, fires, floods, and all other adversities. It is with that same single conviction of Faith that we note the completion of this, the fifth, House of Worship of the Little River Baptist Church. We pray that God will continue to be with us, guide us, and sustain us as individuals and as a fellowship in the Body of Jesus Christ.