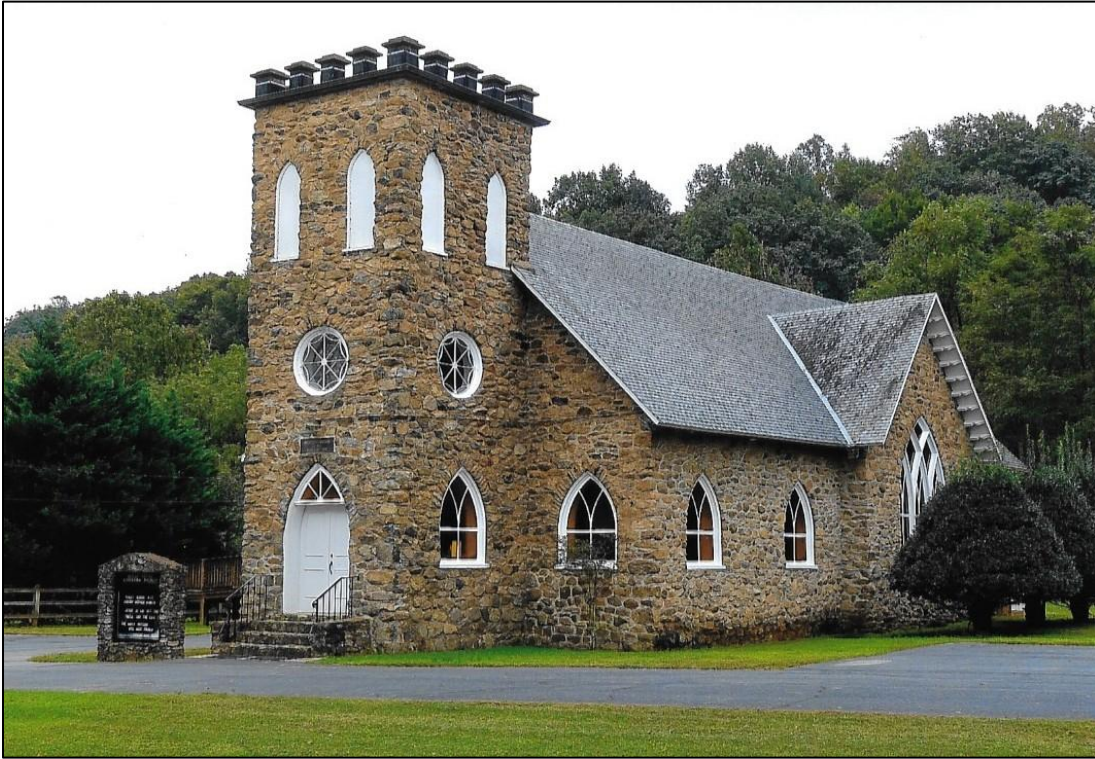


Beech Grove Christian Church

150 years of service to God

Compiled by Lynn Coffey



This invaluable early history of Beech Grove Church was given to me in 2001 by the late Jerry Campbell, who was raised in the community. I originally published it in the Backroads newspaper that same year but felt it deserved to be included in 2025 as the church is now celebrating its 150th anniversary and because the detailed information needs to be more permanently preserved as part of the church's history. My special thanks to Jerry who graciously shared a part of Beech Grove's history that may have been forgotten.

“I have retyped this 100-year history of Beech Grove Christian Church from a copy given to me by my aunt, Thelma Campbell Leech. I do not know who wrote the original version and I cannot make any claim as to the correctness of the information. My mother, Margaret Campbell, thinks Miss Beulah Fitzgerald had a book containing the history of the church but the book disappeared after her death. Perhaps someone living in the Beech Grove community or attending the church knows something of that book.

My family moved to Beech Grove in 1944 after my grandmother, Laura Dodd Campbell, died. Some of my earliest memories are of attending services at the church that stood in what is now part of the church cemetery on Cub Creek Road. I remember Mr. Clarence Campbell serving as Sunday School Superintendent. He was a very tall, imposing figure of a man. I especially remember the lawn parties that were enjoyed by all, on the church lawn each summer. Mr. Tom Quick would always make lemonade in my grandmother's twenty-gallon crock, which I have in my home today. I remember going to Waynesboro with my uncle, Irving Campbell, to get ice cream and ice. The ice cream would be packed in dry ice to keep it from melting and we would wrap the blocks of ice in tarps to keep it clean and reduce melting.

I accepted Christ at a 1951 revival in which J. T. Watson was preaching. I was baptized in the river flowing through Beech Grove. The "wash hole" was used for baptizing and this was located across the road from where Mrs. Melba Fields lives today. Many of the people mentioned in this history were familiar to me as I grew up in the community. I married in 1959 and moved to Waynesboro and lost touch with a lot of people living in Beech Grove. There are some folks not mentioned in this history that I know gave of their time, talents, and finances for the betterment of the church. Some that come to mind are: Pearl Smith Campbell (wife of Clarence and later married to Tom Quick), Nanny Campbell (wife of Palmer), Dorothy Ellinger Thompson (wife of Worthy), Lawney Fitzgerald (who served as Sunday School Superintendent), Donald Falls (who also served as Superintendent), Ruth Shirley McGann (wife of Luther), and Stanley McGann. Dorothy Thompson and Nanny Campbell were Sunday school teachers of mine in the 1940's and 1950's.

I hope this recorded written history will be distributed to the members of Beech Grove Church today and they will have an appreciation of what has taken place over the last 125 years."

Jerry Campbell ~ September 4, 2001

The earliest records of Beech Grove Church have been lost over the years but much information has been preserved, both orally and in written form from its senior members.

Services were conducted prior to 1875 in a grove of beech trees in the open, according to data found on a card that was placed in a small book, "Methodist

Hymns” that had been used by John W. Lockridge in services he apparently led. Harry Hughes had given this book to the church. Later, the meetings were held in an old building located near the home of Sallie McGann. From these early gatherings, Beech Grove Christian Church was formed.



Early Beech Grove Church and Congregation

Determined from facts found by Beulah Fitzgerald and the Rev. J. T. Watson, in a 1880s church newspaper called “The Atlantic Missionary”, the files are now in the University of Virginia archives, in Charlottesville, Virginia. These files state that the church at Beech Grove was founded in 1875. The Rev. Z. Parker Richardson of Louisa, Virginia organized the first church and he preached there on and off for thirty-five years.

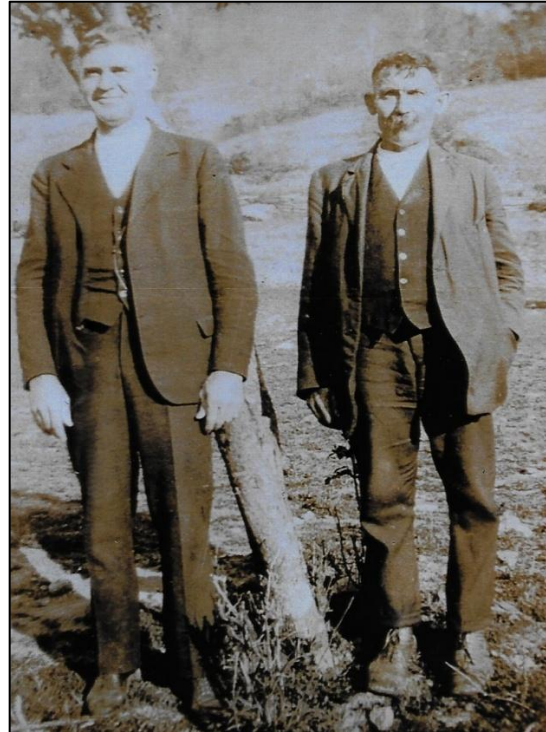
Mrs. Ernest Fields recalls hearing her parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. P. S. Dodd, speak of the three ministers in their early life at the church; Rev. Z. Parker Richardson, Walter S. Hoye, and C. R. Perry. These men traveled throughout the Piedmont District of churches, holding revivals and preaching at irregular intervals and it was in one of these services that young Martha Dodd accepted Christ as her Savior. It was a while before any preacher returned for another service and when the day came for the young girl’s baptism, the weather had turned cold and ice had

to be broken on a pond before she could be immersed. The last record of a service held by Rev. Richardson was in 1910.

Brother H. Davis Coffey writes in his biography: “The Beech Grove Christian Church was organized many years ago by Walter Hoyer and Parker Richardson.



Early pastor: H. Davis Coffey



Left: Rev. J. T. Watson & Joe Coffey

An old store building was used as a church and I preached in that building several times before we decided to erect a church building. The walls went up because the people had a mind to work. We worked almost three weeks before it was completed and seated. I walked more than a thousand miles across the high point of the Blue Ridge Mountains to preach for that church for a period of eight years and received three dollars for the job of building the church, preaching and visiting. I did not ask for that much. Some splendid people live in that section.”

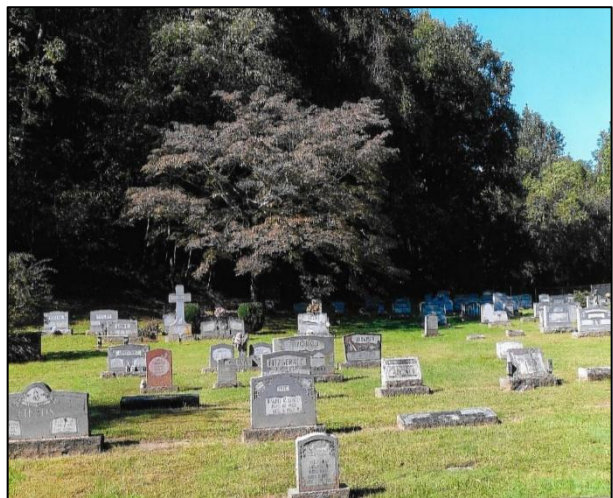
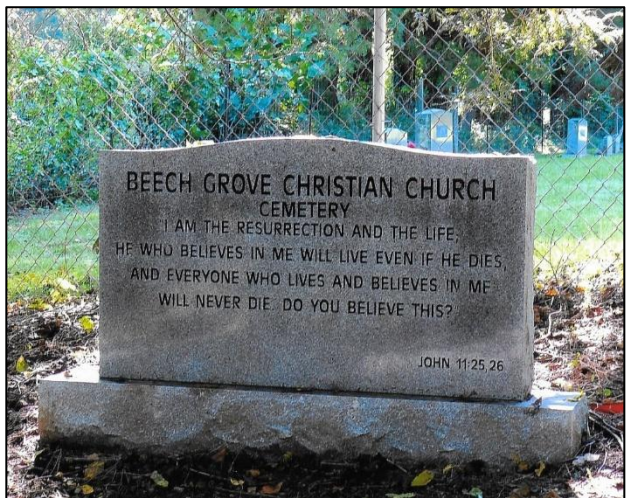
Records show the parcel of land on which the church was built was donated by W. R. Rodes and is very near the site of the present Beech Grove Church. At this time the church was given the name of Union Church and was used both by the Baptists and Disciples of Christ. Later the Baptists ceased to use it and it became the soul property of the Disciples. They worshipped there from 1888 until 1916, when the building fell into disrepair.

Mrs. Ernest Fields writes again in her memoirs, “My first remembrance of church life was a one-room building a few yards from our present church. Rev. Abner C. Knibb was one of the active ministers at this time and baptized me in 1911.”

In 1915, the Beech Grove Junior High School was built and after the above-mentioned church could no longer be used for worship, the people were given permission to hold services in the auditorium of the school. Rev. J. T. Watson was one who came to preach at Beech Grove in 1915. It is told that he went to the mountains and helped cut logs to build the new school. He came many times to preach and held many revivals over a period of years in three different Beech Grove Church buildings.

No one could find a written record of charter members but with the help of older members it was found that some of these were: William Dodd (known as Uncle Billy), Jack Hughes, Martha Dodd, Lawson Campbell, Jetsel Fitzgerald, and Mary A. Dodd, Alec Dodd, Robert Fields, Napoleon “Po” Fitzgerald, Myra Dodd, and Patrick S. Dodd, also known as “Pete”.

After four years of holding worship services in the school auditorium, the group moved one Sunday morning in 1920 to a new church that had been purchased from the Dunkards. This was located on the land where Beech Grove Christian Church Cemetery now stands on Cub Creek Road.



Beech Grove Christian Church Cemetery on Cub Creek Road

At the time of the move, the Rev. Alfred E. Sims was the minister. From all that could recall, he was known as a fine organizer and the congregation grew and

progressed rapidly. A. C. Knibb came frequently to hold services. Also listed as ministers were W. H. Leake and Alvin Reynolds.

One of the stories told of the early days was that the church was not just there for Disciple ministers to preach and teach the word of God to the people, but several Presbyterian ministers were welcomed into the church to hold services and to help in whatever way possible. One of these men, Rev. Profitt, was instrumental in building the present-day Beech Grove Church for the Presbyterians, but the denomination didn't grow in the community and it wasn't long until the minister had no flock of his own and came to preach to the Disciples on occasion.



Grave of Mary Elizabeth Fitzgerald

One story about loving and serving is told of the late Jim Thompson, (father of Londie Thompson, now deceased, and grandfather of Worthy Thompson and Mrs. Blanche Fields), who brought unleavened cakes of bread that had been baked by his wife for each Lord's Day Communion service at the church. He walked to the church each Sunday for many years, performing this service for the ongoing of the church. There were also many others who made the work of the church an intricate part of their lives. H. Glenn Haney served Beech Grove Church for some time and many members have fond memories of him. R. Lee Sadler also came from Lynchburg for irregular intervals of preaching until his health broke.

John McKinney was called as pastor in 1936 and served for ten years working with Wintergreen Christian Church as well as Beech Grove. On Sunday, January 9, 1944, the late Clarence Campbell announced that he wanted the members to start a building fund for a new church. Maphis Campbell recalled that there were only six people attending the morning service that day. They were: Tom Quick, Londie Thompson, Palmer Campbell, Irving Campbell and Clarence Campbell and Maphis Campbell. These faithful men had come to church in snow that was extremely deep. Clarence had ridden his horse from where he lived and the snow was up to the horse's stomach. But enthusiasm was as great as the snow and the collection of ten

dollars was the beginning of the building fund. Since that day, the second Sunday of each month was designated “Building Fund Sunday.”



Early photo of Wintergreen Christian Church and congregation

In late summer of 1944, M. Met Hughes, a Beech Grove native, now deceased, showed his interest in the building program by offering the church five-hundred dollars provided the people could raise an equal amount by November 12, 1944. A committee was appointed which consisted of: Mrs. Ernest Fields, Sallie McGann and Margaret Campbell, and these three ladies were to canvas the community and friends for the matching five-hundred dollars. They exceeded their goal by \$56.37. It was six years of faithful and loving sacrifice by the members of the church, along with donations by other church members in and out of the state that finally brought about the dream come true. In July of 1950, the sum of \$5,622.81 had been raised and the present building was purchased for \$3,800.00. Built of native stone, the church had been known as Hudson Memorial Presbyterian Church, organized in about 1922, and was later used as a private residence.

In January of 1951, remodeling began under the capable supervision of Londie Thompson. In nine months' time, donations came in from many sources and \$7,576.37 was on hand for the work in progress. Again, as many years before, H. D. Coffey said of the people at Beech Grove, “They were of a mind to work”, and the members gave many hours of hard work.

The church was dedicated on September 9, 1951 and about six-hundred people, from near and far, gathered to celebrate that special Sunday. Not the least of the drawing cards was the bountiful and excellent food served for lunch. The Rev. Kenneth Lambdin was pastor of the church at this time.



Beautiful interior of Beech Grove Christian Church

J. T. Watson, former pastor of the church, gave the dedication address, followed by the act of dedication by the pastor and congregation. Robert Whitehead, Nelson County Delegate to the Virginia House of Delegates, gave the “Afternoon Challenge.” The service closed with the singing of the hymn, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds.” After the dedication there was still much work to be done by the congregation as followers of Jesus Christ as \$3,000 was still needed to pay off the balance owed on church furnishings, heating, and other church-related items. This amount was borrowed for a ten-year period but again with donations being made by so many, both in and outside the church, it was only three years before the note was paid in full and the church was debt free. E. Elwood Campbell was pastor at this time. He was studying for the ministry and was serving both Wintergreen and Beech Grove Church. The note burning took place on February 14, 1954. Maphis Campbell, in giving his tribute to the church that Sunday, stated: “It shows what

organization and leadership combined with love and the desire for a better place to worship can do. In memory of the late Clarence Campbell, who had the vision of a new church and the initiative to launch a building fund, and Uncle Billy Dodd, P. S. Dodd, H. D. Fitzgerald, M. C. Campbell, Otis McGann, J. D. Hughes, Luther McGann, along with our fathers and others, who down through the years served faithfully as Christian leaders and teachers in the community.”

Under the leadership of Elwood Campbell, the church went through amazing changes for the better as far as structural organizing was concerned. Committees were formed that functioned quite efficiently and they grew in many ways. He stressed the need for Sunday school classrooms since all of the classes were being held in the sanctuary and it was very confusing for all concerned. So, on February 3, 1954, a committee was formed to look into the prospects of classrooms. The members of this committee were: Basil Campbell, Irving Campbell, Jess Hughes and Garth Fields. Elwood Campbell resigned from Beech Grove in 1956 and in July of 1957, the Rev. J. D. Farris was called to serve the Beech Grove/Wintergreen Field.

Along with ministering to the congregation and other pastoral duties, the pastor had also fallen heir to still another dream of the Beech Grove people; building classrooms. Rev. Farris was just the man to offer extraordinary help along these lines, being skilled in carpentry and planning.

In May of 1958, plans were drawn up by Rev. Farris and submitted to the congregation for approval and suggestions. Members voted to accept the plans and go ahead with the building on Sunday, June 29, 1958. On the first Sunday in August the trustees' broke ground for the educational unit. The plans called for six classrooms in a semi-basement, two classrooms on the first floor along with a kitchen, two bathrooms and a baptistery. The work began and progressed rapidly with the first floor near completion and with heating installed, it was possible to hold a Thanksgiving supper in November. The event brought in over four-hundred dollars in additional money to be paid on classroom expenses.

By May of 1959, the addition was nearing completion and the cornerstone was laid on the last Sunday in May. The history of the church, names of officers, teachers, and the enrollment of the Sunday school and church were placed in a box, sealed permanently and enclosed in the corner of the new building.

Dedication of the new addition was on the second Sunday in August, 1959. Rev. Myron Kaufman was guest speaker for the occasion and that same day Rev. Clarence

Smoot began a week of revival services. Rev. Farris remained pastor until June of 1965 and resigned at that time for another field.



The 1959 Stone addition to Beech Grove Church

Ben Bohren came in September of 1966, a fresh young student from Lynchburg College and very able to cope with the young people needing a revitalized program. This young man did an outstanding work with both Wintergreen and Beech Grove for two years and then left to go on to seminary at Lexington, Kentucky. Ken Paquin took up where Ben Bohren left off (he was also a student at Lynchburg College) and he was very capable and energetic, doing great work for the up-building of the church. But he too, left us in May of 1971. At that time, Rev. Farris was called back to pastor Beech Grove and at this time of writing he continues to serve.

Perhaps, as this history of the 100 years at Beech Grove Christian Church comes to a close, we should stop and think about the great legacy that has been left to us by our forefathers. There is a divine reason in the fact that when other denominations tried and failed in the community, the Disciples kept on through many trials and tribulations. Let us not be lacking in the strength that made the church have great meaning and promise for several generations. We have finished 100 years, but we also begin another era and we cannot do less than has been done for us if we are to extend the same legacy to future generations.

~Submitted by Thelma Campbell Leech

PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED AT BEECH GROVE:

Z. Parker Richardson, Walter S. Hoye, C. R. Perry, H. Davis Coffey, Abner C. Knibb, Alfred Simms, Hoye Leake, Alvin Reynolds, Glenn Haney, Lee Sadler, John McKinney (1936-1946), Raymond Morgan (1946), Walter Bingham (1946-1948), J. T. Watson (1949-1950), Kenneth Lambdin (1950-1953), E. Elwood Campbell (1953-1956), J. D. Farris (1957-1965), Benjamin Bohren (1966-1968), Kenneth Paquin (1968-1971), Rev. J. D. Farris, Earl Burch, James Lowe, Rhoads Artz, Don Gardner, Kaye Edwards, Linda Parker, Charlie Ellis, Ken Schuler, Ray Coffey, Ernie Love, Saylor J. “Billy” Coffey, Mike Auen, Nick Leary, and current pastor, Mike Coffey.

PASTORS WHO HAVE CONDUCTED REVIVALS:

J. T. Watson, J. W. West, W. F. Shinell (a blind preacher, humorist, and lecturer), Miles Austin, J. D. Farris, H. Myron Kaufman, Barney Stephens, John Suttentfiled, Melvin Bobbitt, Alvin Reynolds, Clarence Smoot, Jack Hamilton, Danny Beard, Warren Burbaker, Jann Linn, James D. Lowe, E. Elwood Campbell, Dennis Reynolds, and Saylor J. “Billy” Coffey.



Editor’s Note:

Bud Quick told me his aunt, Sally Campbell, lived in the church when it was a private residence. It wasn’t “quiet” enough for her so she moved to the last house on the right side of the road, near the top of the mountain. The home burned down after she died. Also, a special thanks to the late Melba Fields, Ruth Shirley McGann and Ollie Hughes for the information on the pastors.

Today, Beech Grove Christian Church continues to hold services and is a thriving congregation. Mike Coffey, the current pastor who was voted on and accepted in 2024, is loved by his flock. The church is non-denominational and welcomes visitors and those looking for a church home. Services include worship on Sunday mornings at 11:00 a.m. along with a children’s church.

Beech Grove’s current pastor and wife: Mike and Kim Coffey