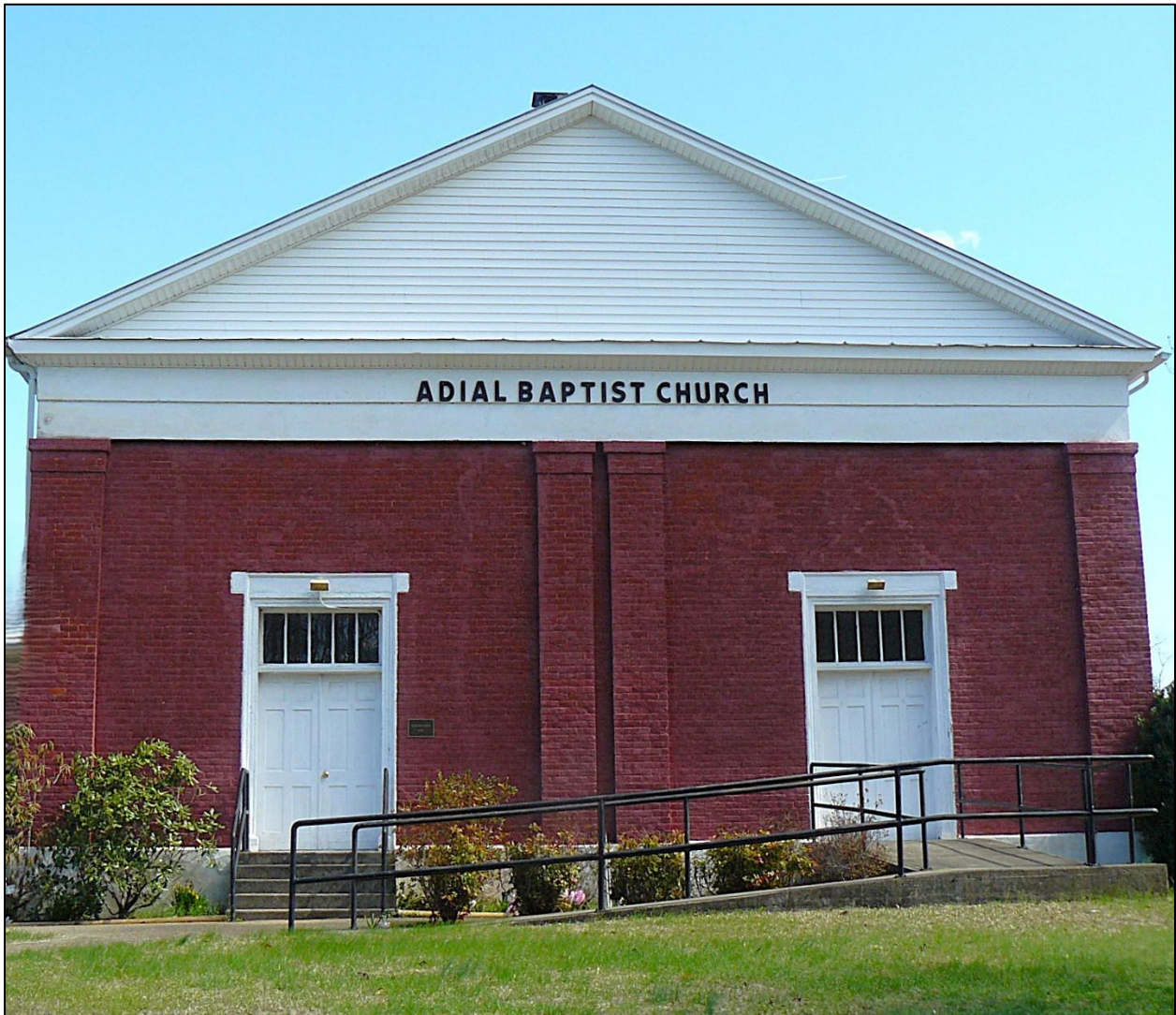


# Early History of Adial Baptist Church

Submitted to NCHS by Lynn Coffey

*This early history of Adial Baptist Church in Nelson County was found in an early "Valley News" newspaper that stated the information was taken from an old diary but did not give any names or dates. This history was submitted by Betty Haines and was printed in the July 2004 edition of the Backroads newspaper. The church was established in 1815 and was originally located in an old schoolhouse, close to the location of the current building which was built in 1854. The log schoolhouse building no longer stands. The name "Adiel," Hebrew for "Ornament of God," was the church's original name but there was a mistake in the spelling when it was recorded in Washington and the mistake was never fixed. The name "Adial" remained, which was the same name as a nearby post office and the church has been known by Adial ever since.*

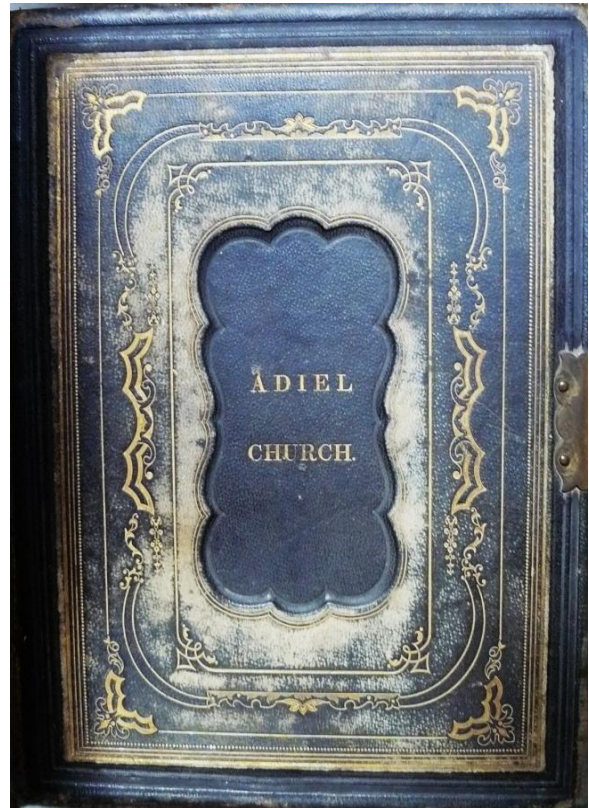


*Adial Baptist Church as it looks today*

Adial was an old-fashioned red brick church that sat in a grove of oak trees. The building measured 44 feet wide by 54 foot long and 30 foot in height. It had two doors in front, one near each end and one door on each side near the front, around the corner from the two front doors. These side doors led to the gallery, that in that time was occupied by the slaves and this gave them their own entrance.



*A side door leading to the gallery*



*Early bible with the original Adiel name*

The gallery ran on both sides of the church and in front. The slaves belonged to the same churches that their masters did. At that time, they did not have churches of their own until after the Civil War. Many years afterward, the only person who sat in the gallery was the sexton of the church; an elderly black man and a member of the Adial Baptist Church. He never joined any other church but remained a member of Adial until the day of his death. He sat alone and when communion was held, one of the deacons would go up to the gallery and serve him. He was a good Christian man and all the people there thought there was no one like “Uncle George.”

There was a partition down the middle of the church. The men sat on the right-hand side and the women and children on the left. You never saw a man sitting on the women’s side unless he was newly married or about to be married. It didn’t look right to see a man sitting on the women’s side.

The pulpit was on the top of a platform about ten feet high and all of the front of the pulpit was enclosed so that you only saw the head and shoulder of the preacher. There were steps on each side leading up to the pulpit and an alcove behind it with a curtain across it. This kind of made a



*The dividing partitions separating the men from the women and children*



*The slave gallery with wooden benches, above the main floor*

private room for the preacher. The whole thing was painted snow white. When the preacher got up there, he could look over the whole congregation and the people had to look up to see him and this gave the preacher some dignity; when the people had to look up to him physically as well as spiritually.

The church was surrounded by woods and when you went there you would see horses tied by their bridles to the limbs of nearly every tree. A few buggies and spring wagons and occasionally a small farm wagon would come but most people rode horseback, both men and women. Uncle George rode his steer with a saddle and bridle and always attracted a great deal of attention.



*The church's early large congregation*



*Adial around 1924 with early automobiles out front (notice oak tree to rear of church)*

They had a platform called a stile for the women to ride up to and get down from their horses. It was a table about 10 feet square and four feet high, made of rough boards with steps on one side to come down to the ground. When a lady rode up to it sideways on her horse, it would just strike her foot and made it easy for her to get off her horse. Whenever a lady or young girl came to church without her parents or an escort, some young man in the crowd in front of the church would walk out to the stile and lead her horse around to the right side so she could get down and then lead the horse to a nearby tree and tie him to it. The young lady would wait on the stile until he came back and then he would walk her up to the church door, take her by the arm and help her up the steps into the door, then return back to the crowd of men outside. Nearly all the men stood in groups in front of the church discussing their crops, politics, religion and neighborhood gossip until one of the leaders in the church started to sing. This was the signal for them to go in. Some of the boys were very shy and would not go help the girls until some older man pushed him off and almost had to make him go, as it would have been a disgrace for a young lady to tie her own horse. The boys were always very proud to walk up to the church with a young lady and have the chance to say a few words to them they could not have met in any other way. The older men good-naturedly joked and poked fun at them when they came back.

The ladies wore long black skirts over their dress to keep it from getting wet by the water splashing on it when they forded a stream and also to keep the dust from settling on it from the dirt roads. It also protected it from the horse hair, perspiration and the flakes of foam from the horse's mouth. It was long enough to cover their feet and keep their shoes from getting soiled. This skirt was called a riding habit and after they got off the horse onto the stile, they would unfasten it from around their waist and let it fall to the floor, step out of it, and stoop over to pick it up and throw it across the saddle. The stirrup was then placed across to hold it on the saddle and keep the wind from blowing it away. Some of the better class of farmer's wives had a riding suit made of heavy, fine black material they wore in place of a dress and riding habit and they wore these to church. The skirt was long and when they walked, they would hold up the skirt with one hand to keep from stepping on it. They looked stylish and aristocratic and ladies of this class did not have to do much work at home and they rode their horses for exercise. An old man once said, it was cheaper to furnish his girls with riding horses than to furnish them with a doctor.

On the inside of the church there were two aisles; one on each side. Along each one of these aisles, there were five pillars about thirty feet high. They reached from the floor to the rafters and were fastened to them about midway between the outside walls and the comb where the rafters joined together to make the roof. They were about ten inches square and were hewn out of long, yellow locust logs and were varnished, giving them a rich yellow color as they aged. You could see the axe prints in them. On the other side of the aisle were shorter pillars that supported the gallery. On each side of the pulpit, just in front of where the aisle ended, was left a square space about ten feet square for the stove to stand. There was one long seat next to the windows and the other seats were short ones running the same direction as the aisles ran. This was known as the "Amen Corner" and the old men usually sat there. In the square was a platform for the stove to set on. It was made by nailing 2x4's together. It was about five feet long and about four feet wide.

This box was filled with sand for the stove to set on; the same would keep the floor from catching fire and served as a good place to spit in. There were also a goodly number of spittoons sprinkled around the amen corner as nearly all the old men chewed tobacco.

There was preaching at Adial once a month on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, but they had Sunday School every Sunday except during the winter months when it would close just before Christmas. Services would start up again the middle of April. The roads were so muddy and most people lived a good distance so the children could not attend. It was always a good day when the weather got better and we could go to church and organize our Sunday School. For years, my Papa was elected Superintendent and would send to the American Baptist Publication Society in Philadelphia for our quarterlies.

Going to church was the only diversion we ever had and the only contact we had with the outside world so we always looked forward to it with a great deal of pleasure. After six days of hard work in the corn or tobacco fields, going to church to meet your friends, see other young people, hear the singing and listen to the preacher expound the scriptures was a welcome diversion. We listened to him earnestly for we wanted to hear from our betters about things that are beyond us and to be roused up now and then like sheep with a good dog after them.

When they had their "big meetings" or revivals in the summertime, it was the time for new people to join the church and be baptized (they only did this once a year). They had an all-day meeting; with one sermon in the morning at 11 o'clock and then adjourn for dinner and a good time of visiting then have another sermon about 2 o'clock in the evening. And what dinners they had! Fried chicken, country ham, and mutton, which we never saw until the big meeting time. There were all kinds of cakes and pies, tomatoes and pickles, watermelons and muskmelons which were nearly as large as the watermelons. No one had ever heard of a cantaloupe back then. The farmers would have a race with each other to see who could bring the first tomatoes and watermelons. Their wives would have a race to see who could make the best cakes and pies and get the most comments on them. They would bring them around themselves and urge you to try a piece of their cake, no matter how much you had eaten, and you would take another piece and tell them how good it was, just to please them. The old men would go out in the crowd and seek out the ill-clothed and bashful boys and men from other neighborhoods that came there only during the big meeting and were not acquainted with people from Adial. They would bring them to the table and make them feel welcome.

Adial was a long way from any water; there was a spring down the side of the mountain about a quarter mile from the church and there was a continual stream of people going back and forth from this spring. Everybody got thirsty at church on a long summer day and the children were continually asking for water. I never thought about a drink of water until I got to church and then I thought I'd die of thirst.

We made an arbor down in the woods a short distance behind the church, by cutting down long poles and setting them upright in the ground with pieces of the same material on top for supports. We would lay green boughs with the leaves still on to keep out the sun. Just enough sunshine would sift through the leaves to make it look romantic and yet not make it too hot. They would

make benches out of rough boards or saw-mill slabs for the people to sit on, with their feet touching the ground.

I heard a preacher say education that was not based on Christianity was a hindrance to us instead of a help. It just made us bigger devils and I believe he was right!



*Adial Baptist Church baptizing, 1904*



*Stump of the 200-year oak that graced the rear of Adial by the cemetery*



*Remains of the grand old oak and one of the ornaments made from its wood*

**Note from Lynn:**

*Church historians believe the church was founded by a man name Matthew Harris. The first pastor after the congregation relocated to its current building was John Massey, who eventually went on to be the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia.*

*In August of 2015, Adial Baptist Church celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A stately oak tree that stood to the rear of the church, thought to be around 200 years old, died and was cut down before Adial's bicentennial celebration and many mementos were fashioned from the wood of the ancient oak and sold as souvenirs. The current pastor is Mike Hevener who has served Adial since 2007. Special thanks to Pastor Hevener for early history and giving us a tour of the church for photographs.*



Mike Hevener, Pastor of Adial Baptist Church



*Stately Adial Baptist Church near Nellysford, Virginia*



*Brass plaque on the front of the church, depicting early date*