

Tye River Pentecostal Holiness Church, 1923 -1969

By Wade Lanning

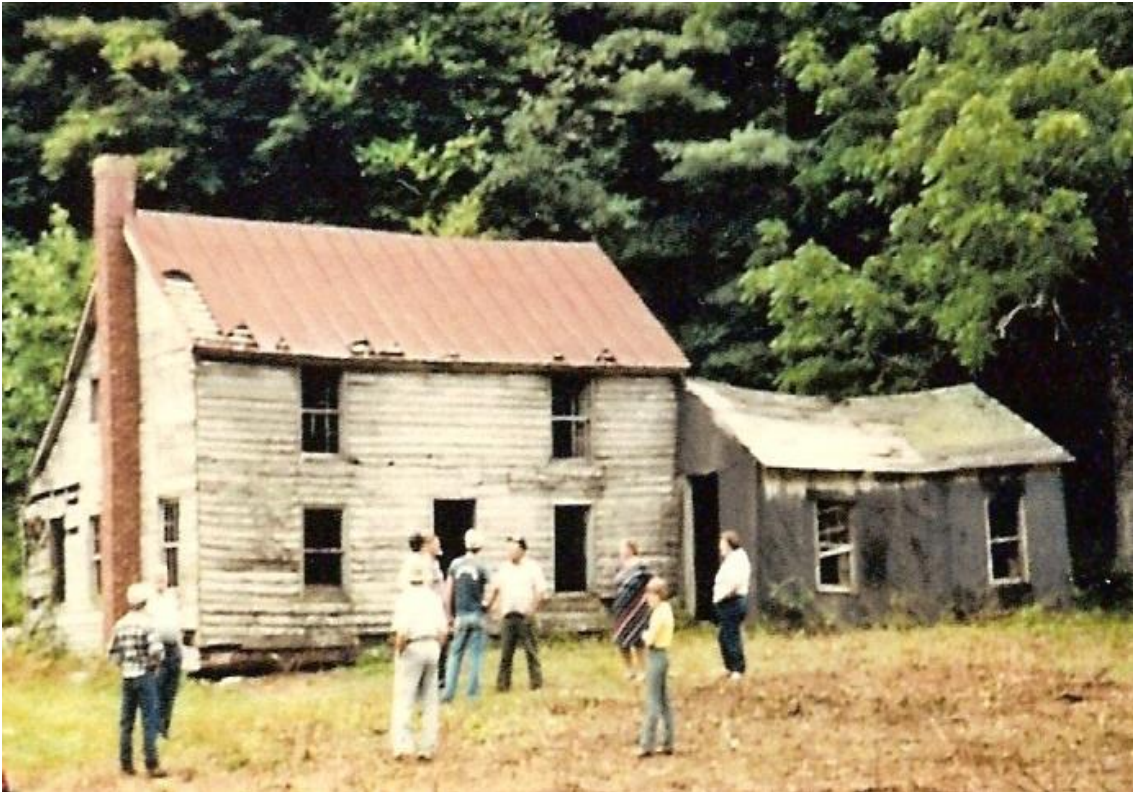


Lynn's Note: For many years I have been looking for a photo of the old Pentecostal Holiness Church, which was located at the southern end of North Fork Road. By a stroke of luck, while talking to Wade Lanning who now owns the property, he not only had early photos of the church building and interior pews, but also wrote the history of the former church. I am pleased he has given permission for his work to be included in the NCHS's Backroads Blog. Special thanks to Wade for his invaluable contribution to Nelson County history.

The Tye River Pentecostal Holiness Church was located on the North Fork Tye River about ½ mile downstream of Mill Creek. Its location is shown in the September 2003 issue of Lynn Coffey's "Backroads" magazine. The church site is number 49 on the list of sites in the North Fork valley as a church symbol on the map in that issue of *Backroads*.

Courthouse records show that on November 10, 1923, a 1/5th acre tract of land with a reverts clause was conveyed to the church by John I. Robertson from his tract of land. The church site was at the northwest corner of his tract. Apparently, the church was built soon afterwards. Included in this conveyance was a right-of-way

to a nearby spring, no doubt for the congregation to have a drink of cool water after attending church. The church site was on the south side of the river, opposite side of the road. To get to the church, a right-of-way was granted by A.G. Sorrells from the road to the river. The river had to then be forded to get to the church. Lena Maddox Zirkle was raised on the adjoining property; her family home was perhaps 100 yards from the church. Lena and others remember that the spring behind the church had very good water. Elizabeth Hatter's grandparents lived across the river from the church. When asked about it in 2008, Elizabeth's grandmother still had memories of going to church services there.



The homeplace of Lena Maddox Zirkle, which was about 100 yards away from the Tye River Pentecostal Holiness Church where her family attended.

According to Lena Zirkle, her father helped build the church along with other men in the valley. Not only did they build the church, they also built the pews, several of which still exist. Ed Allen once said there were about 40 families in the valley between Nash and Montebello during that period that used the church regularly up until World War II.

Photos of the early Pentecostal Holiness Church pews



Reverend Firebaugh was the regular preacher in the early days of the church. He worked at various farms during the week using his portable farm equipment and preached on the weekends. Wilmer and Joyce Allen recall the church holding services into the late 1950's. They said that about 200 people would attend church reunions there.

The Robertson tract was later sold to J. R. Fitzgerald, then to J. E. "Ed" Allen and then to H.D. (Homer) Fitzgerald. The church conveyance with the reverts clause and spring right-of-way was transferred through each property owner. In 1962, Francis and Stella Lanning bought the tract from Homer Fitzgerald. By this

time church services had not been held in several years and the building was deteriorating. Part of the roof had been recovered with tin roofing and the rest still had the original wood shingles. Apparently, church trustees had started replacing the wood shingles with tin but did not finish. The section that still had wood shingles was in very bad condition. Most of the shingles had rotted away and the weather was taking its toll on the interior. Even though the building was getting in bad condition, the front door still had a sign above it that read "Tye River Chapel" in 1962.

In the 1960's, there were still a number of homemade pews, a simple pulpit lectern and a foot pump organ in the church, however the organ was in very bad condition due to the roof leaks. The pews were made of 1" rough sawn lumber. The three vertical supports were single planks 14" wide with 3" wide back supports nailed to them. The seat and backrest planks were also made of 3" wide boards.



Circular saw mill marks on pew legs

The sill timbers, floor joists and wall studs were made of poplar. The floor joists were logs that had been sawed flat on the top. Rafters were made of black birch poles that had been flattened by axe on the roof side. The back outside wall consisted of vertical rough sawn chestnut boards. The other outside walls and floors were poplar that had been planed smooth. The interior walls and ceiling were tongue and groove sheathing.

Even in the early 60's the leaking roof had taken its toll on the interior and the window sashes were falling apart from years of exposure to the elements. The end of the church came as a result of Hurricane Camille on August 20, 1969. Floodwaters lifted the building off the foundation and floated it a short distance

Inside there was a little fence across the back part of the church and the floor was raised in this section, probably where the preacher would deliver his sermon and for the choir. It had a metal flue through the roof, which probably was for a wood or coal burning stove at one point in time. A footbridge made of oak logs was still across the river adjacent to the ford in 1962, and the ford itself was still in place, although it was not passable anymore.

As for the building, it was about 20 feet wide and 24 feet long.

Construction of the building was interesting in that it showed how the congregation used available materials.

where it lodged against a large tree. Although it was still intact, it was not practical to try to move it back to its foundation given its overall condition.

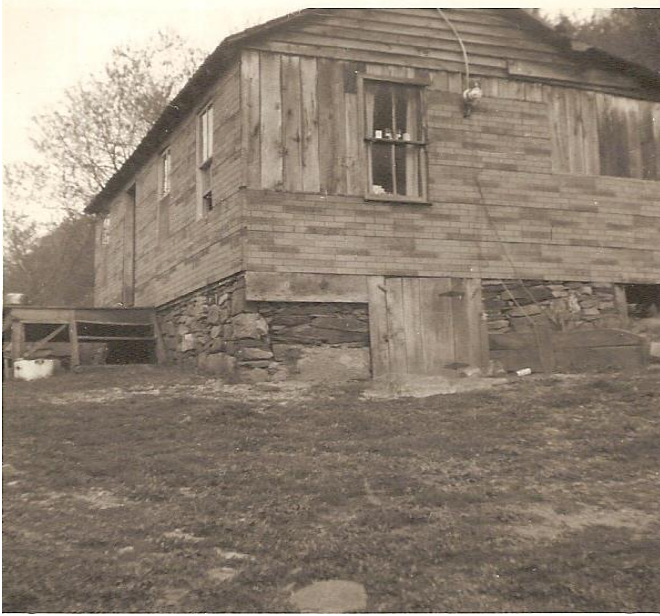


Church Building After Hurricane Camille – Lodged Against a Tree

Following the flood, Francis Lanning bought the building from the church trustees and exercised the reverts clause, returning the 1/5th acre to his tract. The building was then disassembled. As mentioned above, the organ was in bad condition and only the reed box could be salvaged. Some of the original window panes were saved as well as some of the pews.

The church was used regularly for at least 20 years in the early 1900's. By 1962, church members attended church at another location or had moved out of the valley. Now there are only few foundation piers left at the site. Hurricane Camille also washed away the footbridge and ruined the ford across the river. About the only other thing left there is the water spring used by the congregation under the canopy of large shade trees.

The Lanning Home: Before and After



The photo at the left is a picture of the Lanning house as it looked when the property was bought from Homer Fitzgerald in 1962. It is believed the house was built before 1910 possibly by John I. Robertson.

Homer Fitzgerald said a previous house at the same location burned down before this one was built.



Present Lanning home after extensive additions and renovations