

The congregation got an indication of the fate of the second church while it was under construction. Before it could be completed a storm hit the town, struck the church and greatly damaged it. The heavy winds left the building leaning. It had to be uprighted and repaired before it could be put into use. A plot behind the church was used for a cemetery until the town provided one later. This church stood only a few short years until it was completely destroyed by the "Big Tornado of 1896", along with the Methodist Church, many of the business houses and a large number of homes.



The "Big Tornado of 1896"

In the High Springs Sentinel of October 1, 1896, the destruction of the storm was described.

"High Springs lies in ruin today and is but a wreck of its former self. The sad scene of destruction that spreads itself before the vision is but a potent reminder that the visitation of one of the most fearful agencies that can blight the land has spent its strongest energies on High Springs."

After describing the scene of damage and destruction to property throughout the town and in the surrounding communities of Ft. White, Wade Station and Newberry, the Sentinel continued:

FBC High Springs

"In addition to the wreckage in High Springs we will say that the Baptist and Methodist churches were swept away and the academy shared a similar fate."

Truly, those early years were difficult and church growth was slow. High Springs was a wild and rough town just like those booming towns on the western frontier. The miners worked hard and played hard. They were rough and rowdy. The saloons and gambling halls were doing a big business. The miners and other town people were drinking, gambling, fighting and killing as they did in the old west. It was in this kind of setting that the people of God were struggling to build churches. The need was very great and the task was not easy. In 1888-89 Rev. B.K. Rodgers was called to serve the church, following him was Brother R.W. Jones in 1890, then Rev. R.B. Moseley in 1891-92. The latter two men were very active throughout the Harmony Baptist Association for a number of years, according to the records of that body. Brother Moseley was a delegate to the Southern Baptist Convention three times. The church struggled, growing very slowly with more being added by letter and restoration than by baptism. The faith of these early people were tested in every way. Seventeen members were expelled or excluded from membership in the first twelve years. After the tornado had wrecked the town with its destructive forces, the people were no doubt depressed but not defeated. They set about to build or repair their destroyed or damaged property. The members of the Baptist Church, for the third time in less than ten years, proceeded to build a house of worship. In a sense it was really four times, since they had to do extensive repairs to the second building after the first storm. This time they started from scratch, all over again, and erected a new building. During the period while the rebuilding was being done, a tabernacle was set up on a site between the present location of the Women's Club and the Gulf Life office building. There all denominations worshipped together, while the churches were being rebuilt, holding preaching services, Sunday School and prayer meetings. Mr. D.E. Whitstone served as the Sunday School Superintendent in the tabernacle. Mr. Whitstone was an early landholder and developer in High Springs, having moved from Leno up on the river, and was one of our forefathers who worked, prayed and studied together to keep the worship of God continuing in High