

# HISTORY OF ONE OF THE FAMOUS MISSISSIPPI PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES.

## The Presbyterians of Woodville Will Celebrate the Eightieth Anniversary of Their Church.

The Church Was Organized Eighty Years Ago and Has on Its Rolls the Names of Some of the State's Most Noted Men.

Woodville, Miss., April 6.—The Presbyterian Church at Woodville will shortly celebrate the eightieth anniversary of its organization and foundation. The church was among the first of that denomination organized in Mississippi, and on its membership rolls are the names of some of the most famous men in the State.

The coming celebration will be a great event among the Presbyterians of this section, and many visitors from this and adjoining States will participate in the ceremonies.

As the event will be of historic interest, the Playmate prints below a history of the church, which was written by one of the members of the congregation, the data being obtained from the official church records and from records kept by the families connected with the congregation:

**THE WOODVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.**

The Presbyterian Church in Woodville, Wilkinson County, Miss., was formally organized in 1827, in the Baptist Church, by Rev. J. L. Montgomery and Brother Benjamin Chase, with fifteen members, to-wit: Dr. David Holt, Mrs. Holt, Charles Mc-

made of Major James L. Trast, one of the founders of the Church. He was a native of Brunfield, Mass., and came to Wilkinson County in 1815, where he resided at the time of his death, August 25, 1855, in the seventy-fourth year of his age.

Major Trast was a large and successful cotton planter, as well as a zealous and conscientious Presbyterian. His acts of charity were many, and he gave freely and willingly of his abundant means to the support of the Church, and was, perhaps, its most liberal contributor, especially to the fund for the erection of the old brick church.

Thus these true and tried servants of the Lord have fought the good fight and have received their crowns of righteousness. But they left their impress, and their influence is still felt. The church they formed and established in the pioneer days of Mississippi still lives, and is true to the faith once delivered to the saints. The Church during all these years has been served by godly men, both in the pastorate and eldership and also in the deaconate.

Bro. R. L. Stanton, D.D., subsequently President of old Oakland College, succeeded Mr. Law in April, 1841, and continued pastor until 1844, when Rev. Horace Beech supplied the church for some time. In 1846 Rev. Charles Beech became pastor. The church under his pastorate was in a flourishing condition. During it Horatio N. Smith, Dr. Barlow Baldwin, John F. Dameron and J. H. Stanwood were elected and ordained Ruling Elders. Mr. Beech resigned in May, 1857, and in November of the same year Rev. R. B. Williamson was invited to supply the church, which he did for about one year.

The church was then vacant until March, 1859, when Rev. A. H. Holloway became the regular pastor. The sound of life and drum, the rattle of musketry and the roar of cannon was not to his liking. So he left the church in 1861 and went back North, and has not been heard from since. The presbytery sent a committee to Woodville to investigate the matter. The committee declared the pulpit vacant and preached a sermon of censure to the absconding pastor,

session of the Church adopted the following:

"Whereas, it has pleased the great Head of the Church, in his all-wise and inscrutable providence to remove from us by death our beloved brethren and collaborators, Dr. Barlow Baldwin and Horatio N. Smith; therefore, be it

"Resolved, first, That in this affliction of Providence the Church has lost two devoted members and officers-bearers who were faithful, diligent and efficient in the discharge of their public duties, and this lesson two beloved and tried counselors.

"Resolved, second, That we, as a session, do sympathize with the families of the deceased in their sore bereavement, praying that this affliction may be sanctified to the spiritual welfare of the surviving members; that this session and Church, of which they were members, are hereby called upon to increased diligence and exertion in the cause of the Redeemer, in view of the truth so impressively taught that the time is short, and that whatever our hands find to do must be done with our might, since in the grave there is no work, no device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge.

"Resolved, third, That those resolutions be entered upon our sessional records, and that a copy of the same be furnished to the families of the deceased."

The two other elders who were ordained during Rev. Charles Beech's pastorate have also died, after serving the Church for many years with great acceptance and efficiency—J. H. Stanwood in 1882 and John F. Dameron in December, 1882.

After the departure of Rev. A. H. Holloway in 1861 the Church remained vacant until 1863, when Rev. G. S. Roudabush became Pastor, his pastorate continuing until 1865. In 1866 Rev. A. Z. Young preached occasionally. Rev. James Stratton supplied the Church occasionally in 1867 and 1868. The Church was then vacant until 1870 (with the exception of an occasional visit from some member of the presbytery), when Rev. W. A. Hall became Pastor. R. S. Brown was elected and ordained a ruling elder in 1871 and died in 1875. Mr. Hall's pastorate continued until 1875. The church was then closed again until 1880, with the exception of visits at long intervals from the Rev. M. B. Shaw, the present Pastor and son of the late Rev. Benjamin Shaw before mentioned.

In March, 1878, Rev. M. B. Shaw visited this church and preached several days, and on the 31st day of the month ordained and installed Davis E. Holt and Hugh T. Davis as Ruling Elders. Mr. Holt served for a few years and then left the Church. Mr. Davis moved to Texas, and on July 12, 1891, was dismissed to one of the Presbyterian churches in Austin.

In June, 1880, Dr. C. M. Shepperson commenced to supply the Church once a month, which he continued to do for about one year, when the Church was again without preaching, with the exception of an occasional visit from some member of the Presbytery, until July, 1883, when Rev. R. F. Patterson visited the Church as an evangelist of the Presbytery and preached several days. During this meeting Peter M. Stockett was elected and ordained a Ruling Elder. The congregation invited Mr. Patterson to supply the Church, which he continued to do until April, 1889, when he resigned to go to the Plains Church.

Peter M. Stockett continued to serve the congregation until his death, which occurred on Nov. 30, 1901.

The Presbytery of Louisiana, which has jurisdiction over the Woodville Church, took the following action on the death of Elder Stockett:

"The Presbytery of Louisiana having learned of the death of Ruling Elder Peter M. Stockett, Woodville Church, desires to put on record the following:

"Resolved (1), That in the death of Brother Stockett one of our most useful and honored Ruling Elders has been transplanted from the labors below to the joys and rewards above.

"(2) We bear witness to his love and ardent zeal for the upbuilding of our Zion, and his untiring devotion to the welfare and prosperity of the Woodville Church, which has left a precious memory of him as a 'brother beloved' and a faithful co-worker with us in the Master's vineyard.

"(3) To his bereaved wife and sons the Presbytery extends its cordial sympathy, and our prayers go up to our Lord that they may be comforted, and that 'like precious faith' may be theirs in the last hours as was his.

"(4) He was for many years one of the trustees of the Presbytery, and often represented this Presbytery in the highest councils of the Church. He was ever faithful to the trusts committed to him. We would especially commend his faithfulness to the Woodville Church, when 'the days were dark,' and we feel that, under God, the continuance and prosperity of that church is due to his love and persistent devotion."

Mr. Patterson was succeeded by Rev. A. Knobel, and he by Rev. F. Bank, since which time the pulpit has been supplied by Revs. Frank W. Lewis, D. M. Hawthorne, D. F. Wilkinson and D. O. Byers.

In recent years Dr. L. A. Murdoch served for a short while in the eldership. He removed to Port Gibson and took his Church membership with him. June 23, 1892, Dr. John F. Therrel was elected and ordained as ruling elder and Geo. J. Adams as deacon, both of whom served in their respective offices until they died, a few years ago.

The present session is composed of Rev. M. B. Shaw and Elders William J. Stockett and J. M. Kelly. S. O. Stockett and J. A. Redhead are the deacons. The congregation is in a more satisfactory condition now than it has been since the war. Material advancement has been made under the present pastorate. New members have come into the Church, and improvements and additions have been made all along the line. Rev. Mr. Shaw was installed by a commission of the Louisiana Presbytery in 1904. William J. Stockett was elected and installed Jan. 19, 1901; J. M. Kelly on Nov. 21, 1904, and S. O. Stockett on Jan. 19, 1902, and J. A. Redhead on May 21, 1905.

The Pastor, as has been stated, is the son of a former pastor. One of the elders and one of the deacons are the sons of a former ruling elder, and L. T. Ventress, one of the Building Committee of the new church, is a near kinsman of Major James L. Trast, one of the founders of the church.

The largest contributions to the building fund of the new church came from Peter M. Stockett, Ventress brothers and Misses S. J. and A. L. Johnson, who, together with the entire membership of the church and the public generally, worked untiringly for the erection of the new building to replace the old one which had fallen and which had been for so many years one of the landmarks of the town.

Mrs. Selah H. McGhee has always been active in her efforts to advance every interest of the church, giving to its support and attending upon its ordinances.

Founded in the early years of the last century, the church has come down to us through the trying times of 1861-65 and the dark days of reconstruction, and at all times true to the best interests of the Southland. The past history has been written. What shall the future be?



ELDER PETER M. STOCKETT AND HIS FAMILY.

Dermott, Mrs. McDermott, Major James L. Trast, Mrs. Emily Waiso, Mrs. Anna Bull Montgomery, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. E. H. Dunlap, Mrs. E. B. Roane, John Scott, Mrs. Sophie Hunt, Mrs. Elizabeth Posey, Miss Welsh and H. D. Kellogg. Dr. David Holt and Charles McDermott were elected and ordained ruling elders.

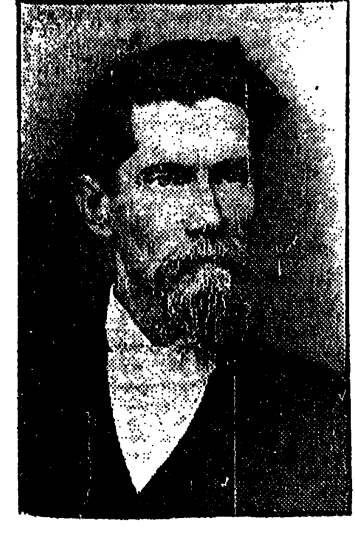
The church records from 1827 to 1851 have been lost, perhaps destroyed

the beautiful new building on the old lot facing the public square, where the congregation now worships.

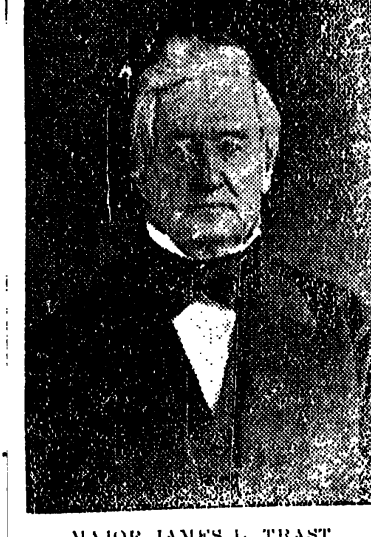
Revs. J. L. Montgomery and Benjamin Chase have long since gone to their rewards, after having done a noble work in southwest Mississippi in the early days. Rev. Mr. Shaw resigned his pastorate in 1879, and he and Elder McDermott re-

who had so unceremoniously skipped out.

The congregation was loyal to the Stars and Bars, and gave themselves and placed their all on the altar of the Southern Confederacy in the defense of constitutional liberty. The silver-toned bell that in those days called the worshippers to prayer was taken down and given to the Confederate Government to make cannon to shoot the Yankees.



REV. M. B. SHAW, Present Pastor Presbyterian Church, Woodville, Miss.



MAJOR JAMES L. TRAST.



REV. BENJAMIN SHAW.

during the Civil War, and many of the facts contained in this sketch were gathered from other sources, mainly from data collected by Peter M. Stockett.

Mrs. Holt, the widow of Elder Holt, a few years before her death prepared the following paper on her recollections of the beginnings of Presbyterianism in Woodville.

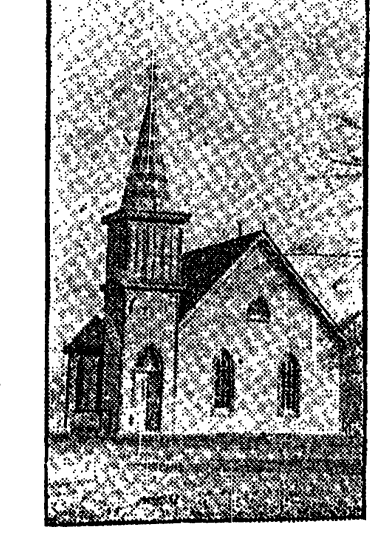
"The Episcopal Church in Woodville was built by the Presbyterians and Episcopalians for their joint use. In the course of a short time the Episcopalians largely outnumbered the Presbyterians, and having the greater moneyed interest in the building, the Presbyterians could not hold a meeting in it without special permission of the vestry. About this time (1827) the Presbyterian Church was regularly organized by Revs. J. L. Montgomery and Benjamin Chase. It was organized in the Baptist Church with fifteen members. Dr. David Holt and Mr. Charles McDermott were ordained elders. They worshipped where they could—in the Methodist or Baptist Churches (both of which were mostly kindly offered for their use), in a school-house or in the courthouse. After a while services were regularly held in the courthouse.

"The Church flourished and increased. Prayer meetings were held in private houses. Mr. Montgomery was the minister, but could give them only a part of his time, as he had another church at St. Francisville. The first regular pastor was Rev. Benjamin Shaw, under whose pastorate the church now standing was built."

The church building referred to is the old brick, built some time prior to 1840, at a cost of \$16,000, and at the time the handsomest public edifice in the town.

The report of the Presbyterian Board of Missions in 1839 says: "The congregation of Woodville, Miss., found it so inconvenient to assemble

moved to Chicot County, Ark., where he died. Mr. Shaw was a native of Newport, R. I., but when a youth he moved to Danville, Ky., where he entered Centre College in preparation for the Presbyterian ministry, and completed his education at the Auburn (New York) Theological Seminary, and was ordained by Cayuga Presbytery. He came to New Orleans as an agent of the American Tract Society, and from that city to Woodville, where he remained until his removal to Arkansas. Dr. Holt was an eminent physician, with a large practice, and died in Woodville on Nov. 25, 1851. In the nineteenth year of his age. Often, in the absence of a minister, Dr. Holt and Mr. McDermott led the congregation in worship and expounded to them the Word of God. Special mention should



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Woodville, Miss.

And, too, 'the congregation in antebellum days was composed mainly of land owners and slave owners. The old minute-book of the session shows numerous instances of the baptism of slaves, their reception into the church and occasionally their expulsion from it. The church then held to the doctrine that the master was responsible for the moral and religious welfare of the slaves God, in his providence, had committed to him.

"April 30, 1852, session met at Elmley plantation and was opened with prayer. Present: The pastor and Elders Dr. David Holt and Horatio N. Smith. The following named servants of H. N. Smith, viz, Patsy, Cordella, Clara, Helen and Lucy, being present and applying for admission into the church, were examined as to their knowledge and piety, and, the examination being deemed satisfactory, it was resolved that their request be granted and that they be received as members of this church. Adjourned with prayer."

Again:

"April 29, 1860, session met at the church on Mrs. H. N. Smith's plantation and was opened with prayer. Present: The pastor and Elders David Holt and J. H. Stanwood. Adel and Isabel, servants of Mrs. Smith, were present and made application for admission to membership in this church. They were examined as to their knowledge and faith, which being satisfactory, they were admitted.

"Harry, a servant of Mr. Smith and a member of this Church, having been accused by common fame of the crime of adultery, was called before the session and confessed his guilt. After deliberation on his case, Harry was suspended from all the privileges of the Church until such time as he gives evidence of true repentance. And it was ordered that this sentence be read from the pulpit on the Sabbath to the colored congregation. Closed with prayer."

Dr. Barlow Baldwin died Nov. 15, 1853, and Horatio N. Smith on March 6, 1854, and on — June 2, 1854, the