

A FEW SCRAPS OF PAST HISTORY ABOUT GOD'S PEOPLE IN LAUDERDALE COUNTY

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A few days ago I read, with great interest, brother Wayne Kilpatrick's "History of the Church of Christ in Northwest Alabama, 1823 – 1861". Wayne is the professor of history at International Bible College. He has done the most thorough job of dealing with the early restoration movement in Northwest Alabama that has ever been done. Being greatly interested in restoration history myself, I appreciate all the hard work brother Wayne has done on this; and I count myself fortunate that he would present me with a copy of his work. Let us now share with you a few "scraps" of history that I consider "gems".

In 1856 brother J. H. Dunn of Limestone county was coming into Lauderdale county to preach the gospel. He sent the following report to the GOSPEL ADVOCATE in December of 1856:

"I visited Old Cypress—now called Stoney Point—Lauderdale county, Alabama, and held a meeting of three days continuance, including the third Lord's day in last month (November), at which time we had three additions by confession and baptism. The drooping spirits of the brethren and sisters were much revived during the very pleasant interview."

Those who have read THE VOICE through the years know from past articles that I have contended that Stoney Point is a continuation of the Cypress Creek church (being first known as the Republican church). This quotation from brother J. H. Dunn removes all doubt anyone might have had. On page 15 brother Kilpatrick says, "Republican was slowly undergoing a name change during the late 1830's. The name was being called Old Cypress. This name remained until the middle 1850's when it was begun to be called Stoney Point." (History of the Church of Christ in Northwest Alabama, 1823 – 1861).

Brother Kilpatrick tells us who served as elders of the Old Cypress church: "With the coming of the decade of the 1850's the work here was on a fairly good footing. The burden of keeping the flock together fell on the eldership, which was composed of P. Gresham, C. W. Wesson and Andrew J. Grisham, and probably others." (History of the Church of Christ in Northwest Alabama, 1823 – 1861). The 1850 census of Lauderdale county tells us that C. (Claborn)W. Wesson was a farmer from North Caroline, and Andrew J. Grisham was a blacksmith from Tennessee.

The following is a report that brother John Taylor (from Colbert county) sent the GOSPEL ADVOCATE in October of 1860:

"I attend the congregation at Stoney Point, in Lauderdale once a month, and have thus far fourteen additions." . . . "This congregation now numbers over one hundred, meets every Lord's day, and are in a prosperous condition."

Remember, this was the condition of Stoney Point at the beginning of the Civil War. Alabama adopted an ordinance of secession from the union in January of 1861.

Brother Kilpatrick points out (History of the Church of Christ in Northwest Alabama, 1823 – 1861, page 21) that brethren at Stoney Point were expecting Tolbert Fanning to come in 1860 and spend a week with them. Brother Fanning had obeyed the gospel here in 1827 when the church was known as Republican. Brother Fanning at this time was one of the editors of the GOSPEL ADVOCATE (along with brother William Lipscomb). The Advocate had been started in 1855 as a medium to study the issues of the day – the “Missionary Society” and “Cooperation Meetings”. Brother Fanning was opposed to the Missionary Society. He believed that the church was “fully adequate for all our moral and spiritual wants”. (Quotation from The Hazard of the Die, page 182).

Brother Kilpatrick makes this statement in his conclusion: “We can now see that it was not, solely, Larimore’s work that made this area so well blessed with churches. Many of Larimore’s preaching engagements were at churches already in existence when he came to north Alabama” (History of the Church of Christ in Northwest Alabama, 1823 – 1861). This is a truth about the beginning of the church in Lauderdale county that so many do not understand. Because T. B. Larimore was so outstanding with all the books written about him, many seem to date the beginning of New Testament Christianity in Lauderdale county with his coming to the county. But, the truth of the matter is that New Testament Christianity had been in Lauderdale county almost fifty years before T. B. Larimore came here in 1868. The church at Stoney Point had been existence close to fifty years when he came. It had been called “Republican”, “Old Cypress”, and finally “Stoney Point”.

There was also a church at “Hopewell” when brother Larimore came. F. D. Srygley said that Larimore’s school was “Scarcely more than a stone’s throw from Hopewell” (Larimore and His Boys, page 98). From this statement by Srygley we can see that “Hopewell” was located in what we now know as the Mars Hill community. Brother Larimore gave it the name “Mars Hill”. So, there was a church in what we now know as Mars Hill before brother Larimore came. The church at Antioch was also in existence when he came to the county (Larimore and His Boys, page 185).

This is not said to take anything away from brother Larimore’s work, but to cause you to be aware of fifty years of restoration history that is overlooked many times because Larimore’s work overshadows it. Most of the time when we think of the early days of the restoration movement we think of Kentucky and Virginia and other places. We don’t generally think of northwest Alabama as being one of the early centers of the movement to restore New Testament Christianity, but it was!

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