

# THE FIRST CHURCH IN LAUDERDALE COUNTY THAT STROVE TO RESTORE THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THINGS - THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

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It seems to me that the history of God's people should always be of interest to His people in any age. Personally, I derive great pleasure from the study of church history. I sometimes takes a lot of reading and research to find the true facts of the past. Many times hearsay and legend get repeated and written down as facts. When this happens it is hard to get people to accept the true facts. I find this to be true with the beginning of the church of Christ here in Lauderdale county. I read things in newspapers and other places that do not correspond with the true facts of history.

Let us now look at statements in Jill Knight Garrett's book, "A HISTORY OF LAUDERDALE COUNTY ALABAMA", and then set the record straight where she is correct. She said, "*According to the local church history, the church of Christ group was meeting in a community seven miles north of Florence in the 1820's. The first building was erected in 1850. The first church was the Stony Point church.*" (page 144). I intend to prove from reliable sources in restoration history that Mrs. Garrett is correct in her first general statement in the first sentence.

The community this congregation was located in seven miles north of Florence was Brandon Mills (White's Lake today). This is the congregation where Tolbert Fanning obeyed the gospel under the preaching of B. F. Hall in 1827. Here is B. F. Hall's own account of his meeting with this congregation and of the conversion of Tolbert Fanning: "*The next year (1827 because in the paragraph before he was discussing the year 1826 - dt), in September I think, I preaching baptism for the remission of sins on Cyprus creek (emphasis mine - dt) in Lauderdale county, Ala. on Lord's-day night. Talbert Fanning was present and heard the discourse, was convinced of the truth, and, when the invitation was given, came forward and made the good confession, and was immersed the next morning for remission of sins by brother James E. Matthews. I witnessed the immersion.*" (AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ELDER SAMUEL ROGERS, pg. 60).

The following is a report found in the July 25, 1827 issue of THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER edited by Barton W. Stone. Editor Stone says, "*A letter addressed to the Editor from Elder James E. Matthews, of Alabama, near Florence, dated March 27, 1827, says, 'We have lately had a very reviving season - last Saturday and Lord's day, eight persons were added to the church, and in a few months past, sixteen have professed faith in Christ. Last Sunday evening I baptized six, one of whom was a poor sinner, crying as they did on the day of Pentecost, 'What shall I do?' I gave him Peter's direction; and being baptized, he came up out of the water rejoicing. I anticipate glorious times in this neighborhood. The people are generally in a state of serious enquiry. Prejudice is giving way.'*" (CHRISTIAN MESSENGER, Vol. 1, page 218). James E. Matthews was here reporting on the work of the Cyprus Creek church which was located on Cyprus Creek near Brandon Mills (White's Lake).

In discussing the life of Tolbert Fanning, brother H. Leo Boles says in his book, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF GOSPEL PREACHERS, page 151, that the church at Cyprus Creek was called "Republican". Brother Boles said, "*The next two years of his life were spent chiefly in studying the Scriptures and attending school. On the first day of Oct. 1829, by the advise*

*of the church at Republican, where he made the confession, he left home for the purpose of preaching the gospel to all who would hear him."*

The meetinghouse of the church at Republican (or Cyprus Creek) was built of logs, faced the south, and was entered from the south end according to brother Vernon Freeman, who can remember where the old building stood.

A natural question arises in our minds as to when the Republican (or Cyprus Creek) church was established. It is hard to pin down the exact time. Mrs. Jill Garrett, in her aforementioned book, says that the church was established in the 1820's. Now, let us get as close as we can by looking at some facts we have. We know that Ephraim D. Moore and James E. Matthews were preaching here in 1826. When Barton W. Stone published his first issue of THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER on November 25, 1826, James Matthews was the agent for THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER in Florence. James R. Wilburn says this about Moore in his book, THE HAZARD OF THE DIE, page 13: *"During the time that he preached in Alabama in 1826, he taught young Tolbert Fanning to search the Bible for the way of salvation rather than wait for the Holy Spirit to enter his heart through some direct exstatic stirring."*

We also know that Tolbert Fanning heard B. F. Hall (from Kentucky) preach on the subject, "Baptism for the Remission of Sins" at Republican on Cyprus Creek on Sunday night, Sept. 30, 1827, that he had responded to the invitation, made the confession, and was baptized the next morning, Oct. 1, 1827, by James E. Matthews. Then James R. Wilburn in his book, HAZARD OF THE DIE, tells us how long Fanning has been acquainted with this group before he obeyed the gospel. He said, *"Yet for almost five years now he had been familiar with a growing group of people in his neighborhood who preached that there was, "But one body of Christ, one faith and one creed for Christians".* (page 12). So, from this information we could say that the church at Republican was established between 1820 and 1822.

It is evident from church history that the early days of the restoration movement in Lauderdale county and north Alabama was through the efforts of men influenced by Barton W. Stone out of Georgetown, Ky., and not Alexander Campbell. Campbell and Stone did not unite until 1832. The following is a quotation from bro. David Edwin Harrell, Jr., in his book, QUEST FOR A CHRISTIAN AMERICA: *"The acquaintance of Stone and Alexander Campbell began in 1824. Their differences were slight and as the two streams converged upon each other in Kentucky in the late 1820's, the two leaders, after some negotiations, agreed in 1832 to unite. The actual process of union took place in an amazingly successful merging of local congregations at the grassroots level, or by simply agreeing to fellowship one another, that is, to accept one another as true "Churches of Christ".* (QUEST FOR A CHRISTIAN AMERICA, page 7).

Now, there is the question of what happened to the Republican church on Cyprus Creek located close to Brandon Mills? The brethren moved their location of meeting from Cyprus Creek to the Stony Point community which was not very far away. I talked to a young man a few days ago who has found the notice of their change of location from Cyprus Creek to Stony Point in an old GOSPEL ADVOCATE. This man is in Harding Graduate School in Memphis, and writing on the history of the church in north Alabama, if I understood him correctly. His statement of fact found in the GOSPEL ADVOCATE of this change of locations removes all doubt about Stony Point being a continuation of the old Republican church. I had come to this conclusion by inference in my study of this in 1973. I believe he said the change came about in the late 1850's. The meeting place in

the Stony Point community was the school house until T. J. Denson and wife deeded the church some land for a building on Sept. 10, 1886, and a building was erected on top of the hill from the school house. Trustees of the property when the building was built were William Grisham, William Stenson, Sr., and Jasper L. Townsley.

Now, back to Mrs. Garrett's second and last sentence, "*The first building was erected in 1850. The first church was Stony Point church*". Now, if you understand that the church that meets at Stony Point was first established on Cypress Creek in the early 1820's and was known as "Republican" before it moved its location to Stony Point, this statement is correct. Her statement of the first building being erected in 1850 is incorrect. They had an old log building on Cyprus Creek, and I know of no way of determining just when it was built, but it would seem reasonable that it would have been about as old as the church.

This bit of history is written that we might have a little better understanding of the early efforts to preach the gospel in this county, and to help clear up errors that have crept into the history that has been recorded.

*(Note: The spelling of "Cyprus" used in this article was the spelling used by those men who are quoted. The correct spelling is "Cypress".)*

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