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## Enon Baptist Church History

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ENON BAPTIST CHURCH  
MARKER DEDICATION

June 6, 1998

Hosts for this occasion were members of the History Committee: Bob Alverson, Kitty Johnson, Joe Jones, Ola Ann Lee, Polly Lucas, Sara Stokes, and Barbara Sweeney. The principal address, a history of the church, was written by Mildred B. Bobo and presented by Polly Lucas. Excerpts of that history are given below.

In 1809 the area now known as Madison County, Alabama, was part of the Mississippi Territory. Although the federal government had not authorized settlement in the area, nor had sale of public lands begun, early settlers had already arrived. Thomas Freeman, a government surveyor, was assigned to survey the area and take a census; he completed his work and sent his "Squatters List" to Washington early in the year 1809.

On June 3, 1809, a small group of Baptists who lived in the vicinity met and constituted a church under the name of "West Fork of Flint River." One month later, at their monthly business meeting, they agreed to change the name to "Enon Church." The name "Enon" was chosen from John 3:23 and had come to be associated with a place near "much water." It can be assumed that these earliest monthly church meetings took place at the home of settlers. They met on Saturday to transact church business.

At their August meeting, Enon Church called a pastor, Brother John Canterbury, and he accepted the call. Another significant item of business that day was the appointment of "Brethren Box, Prewit, Pugh, and Grayson to view a place to hold church meetings." No record of their committee report has been found. Nearly two years later on Saturday, June 1, 1811, Enon Church appointed "Brethren Watkins, Prewit, Brock, Birdwell, and Powell to view a place for a Meeting House," but their report was not recorded in church minutes. However, work on a Meeting House must have been started, because on February 6, 1813, the church appointed Brethren Hellums, Prewit, Watkins, and Powell to *superintend* the finishing of the Meeting House. On July 3, 1813, the church named Brethren Watkins, Prewit, and Hellums, to "form the plan and build a shed for the black people."

On July 2, 1814, the church appointed "Brethren Hellums, Prewit and Vining to act for them as trustees to receive a letter for the bounds of land agreed upon by them and Joseph Powell for the Meeting House to stand on." That entry in the minutes seems to indicate that the land selected earlier and used for the Meeting House was owned by Joseph Powell, and that the church wanted his agreement in writing. If a letter was tendered, it has not been found. Under the laws governing the Mississippi Territory, it is understood that churches were not recognized as land owners.

In 1814 Enon Church sent messengers and became a charter member in the organization of the Flint River Association of Baptists; the meeting took place at

Bradshaw's Meeting House, Lincoln County, Tennessee, on September 24th and days following. Seventeen churches from northern Alabama and southern Tennessee, constituting 1118 members, sent messengers. Enon Church, which had been in existence slightly more than five years, accounted for 69 of those members. The following year, on September 30, 1815, and days following, Enon Church was the site of the annual meeting of the Flint River Association of Baptists. The minutes of that body clearly state that the meeting place was at "Enon in Madison County, Mississippi Territory, on the Briar Fork of Flint River."

On December 2, 1815, the church agreed "to appoint Brothers Prewit, Hellums, Johnson, and Powell to write subscriptions and circulate them." This is interpreted to mean that the committee was to accept pledges of money for a building fund, and/or possibly a general expense fund for the church. So far as the early records reveal, the major expenses, besides the building, were for printing of minutes of the Association and for the communion table supplies. No record has been found during the early years of Enon Church to indicate any payments to the Pastor or any other officer of the church.

On May 4, 1816, the church appointed Major Daniel Wright, Samuel Saxton, Grief Johnson, Benjamin Wofford, and Thomas Vining to superintend the repairing of the Meeting House--to form the plan and to engage workmen to perform the work. On July 6, 1816, the church agreed to hand security to the commissioners for the payment of the money subscribed for the repairing of the Meeting House. On November 2, 1816, the church agreed to appoint Brother Baker collector of the money subscribed for repairing the Meeting House.

Enon Church Minutes have been kept from the June 3, 1809, meeting until the present, and are accepted by church historians as authentic. The keepers of those records, limited in time and writing materials, did not always record information which would be valuable today. However, there is ample proof that the church known as Enon Church during most of the 19th century, was legally renamed "First Baptist Church of Huntsville" in January 1895, and continues under that name at the present. In 1981 the History Committee of First Baptist Church made a serious effort to document the location of the first church building. They were able to confirm this place as the original site.

The treasured church minutes, though they are often brief and to the point, repeatedly reveal a sharing spirit and a missionary outreach. On Saturday, July 3, 1824, Enon Church "agreed that some of the members in this church sit in conference on the Saturday before the third Sabbath in the month at the Sixteenth Section for the purpose of hearing experiences and receiving members to constitute an arm of this church at that place." The Sixteenth Section was approximately two miles east of the location of the original site of Enon Church. Official Probate Court Deed Records reveal the following:

"On April 15th, 1824, James Shackelford and his wife, Mary Shackelford, deeded approximately 1.14 acres of land to William Petty

and Williams Wright, in Trust, for the denomination of Christians called Baptists. [At the time, William Petty and Williams Wright were members of Enon Church.] The deed stated that the transfer of ownership was in consideration of the good will and affection which the said James Shackelford hath and beareth unto the said Baptist Church.”

The location of the property was in the Southwest quarter of Section 15 in Township 2, Range 1 E. Using a current map, the location of that property would have been in the northeast corner of the intersection of Eakin Road and Moore’s Mill Road.

On February 5, 1825, Enon Church “granted permission to the arm of this church at the Sixteenth Section to have and appoint their own Communion Seasons.” On March 5, 1825, Enon Church “agreed by all members present that our meetings be removed to the new brick Meeting House, if not objected to on our next church meeting day by members that are now absent, and that it bear the name of Enon Church.” The minutes reveal no clues as to how the new brick Meeting House was financed or built. On April 30, 1825, Enon Church “appointed Brethren William petty, William Echols, Ezikiah Eastland, and Col. Williams Wright, Commissioners, to dispose of the old Meeting House and the lot of land on which it stands.” A search of Madison County Probate Records concerning land transactions has failed to locate a record of the disposition.

The relocation of the church seems to have gone very smoothly, and a number of historic events are recorded at that location in the next several decades. As early as 1857, Enon Church had held a meeting in Huntsville to receive members. On January 16, 1858, Enon Church extended an arm to Huntsville for the transaction of church business. In July 1858, Elder Eugene Strode and his wife, Sallie I Strode, united with the Enon Church, and Reverend Strode assumed the duties of Pastor. He was also involved in raising funds to build a Baptist Church in Huntsville, and by November 1860, a brick church building had been erected on Clinton Street.

Due to flooding in the area of Enon’s brick church building in the rural part of the county, no preaching was held at that location from October 1859 until March 1860 and again from October 1860 until March 1861. At that time Enon Church unanimously adopted a resolution “to meet hereafter as a church in Huntsville, where most of our membership resides and where a wider field of usefulness is open to us and our Pastor.” And thus it came to pass that Enon Church, organized on the bank of the Flint River and serving the area for over 50 years was relocated to a new house of worship just north of the waters of the Big Spring in Huntsville, Alabama. It was the only Baptist Church of missionary persuasion in the city of Huntsville at that time.

In February 1888 a fund was started by Enon Church for a new church building in Huntsville. During the planning for the new building, it was decided to legally change the name of the church to “First Baptist Church of Huntsville,

Inc.” and transfer the accumulated funds into that account. This was accomplished on January 9, 1895. The brick church on Clinton Street which had survived the Civil War was torn down and the new one started in July 1894. It was dedicated on March 10, 1895.

Plans for a move to Governors Drive were started in 1956. The first service at the new site was January 13, 1963. The Sanctuary at the Governors Drive site was first used on February 20, 1966.

Although this review has dealt with land and buildings, it is generally accepted that these are only a means to an end. The history of Enon Church, which for over 100 years has borne the name of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Alabama, is really a history of people. To date there have been 39 pastors, numerous assistant pastors, scores of church staff and maintenance personnel, and many hundreds of lay teachers and workers. No attempt is being made to summarize or commemorate the total impact or achievements resulting from the constitution of a Baptist Church in this place in 1809. Rather, the purpose is to commemorate the roots of this organization and to speak humbly and gratefully for the presence of the Holy Spirit in this place in 1809, and in all other locations which the church has enjoyed in the past 189 years.

Amen.



Mr. David Hinkle and Mr. Bob Quick reveal the new Enon Baptist Church marker.