



HISTORY OF MT. GEORGE CHURCH OF CHRIST

MT. GEORGE,
YELL COUNTY, ARKANSAS

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The first congregation of the Lord's church in Arkansas was established in 1806 in the eastern part of the state where the Black, Spring and Eleven Point rivers join.¹ Three families worshipped in their homes. But, according to Brother Boyd Morgan, it was not until 1852 that a congregation started that is still existing today. This congregation is the Birdell church in Randolph County.² This writer talked with Brother Wallace Alexander of Delight, Arkansas and discovered the Delight congregation started is the oldest existing congregation of the church of Christ in Arkansas and possibly west of the Mississippi River. That congregation started in 1833.³ The Surrounded Hill church of Christ was established in 1850 and still meets today in Jackson County.⁴ Michael Wilson claims that the Disciples church of Christ originated in Little Rock on 4 July 1832 after Benjamin F. Hall had preached a revival. They met on this date to renounce, "their creed, rules of decorum, their name (Baptists) and every other appendage of human invention, taking only Jesus as their King and Lawgiver."⁵ These later went with

¹ Boyd E. Morgan, Arkansas Angels, (Paragould, Arkansas: College Bookstore and Press, 1967; reprinted/) preface.

² Ibid., preface.

³ Interview with Wallace Alexander.

⁴ James Logan Morgan, History of the Surrounded Hill Church of Christ 1850-1978, (Newport, Arkansas: Morgan Press, 1978, p.1

⁵ Michael L. Wilson, A History of the Church of Christ In Little Rock, Arkansas, (Thesis, Harding

the liberal movement therefore they cannot be considered as the oldest congregation of the church of Christ in Arkansas.

In a report sent to Alexander Campbell in 1836 it is stated,

Last Lord's day was united the first Christian congregation ever to assemble in Washington County. They assumed that uniting name, at which every knee is to bow. Twenty of us united and gave ourselves to the Lord, and to each other a solemn covenant, ratified by the right hand of fellowship to walk in all the commandments of the Lord, and to take the Word for our guide in all things.⁶

The writer of the above statement is unknown as well as the congregation. Therefore, the Delight congregation is the oldest existing congregation of the church of Christ in Arkansas. But it seems unclear as to which is the second oldest. This writer, after much research, asserts that it is the Mount George church of Christ located in Yell County. The plan of this paper is to establish this fact by a study of: (1) the people of Mount George during the period 1843 – 1900, and (2) a history of the Mount George congregation during the period 1843 – 1900

1. The people of Mount George During the Period 1843-1900

The founder of the congregation of the church of Christ in Mount George was Hardin George. Hardin was a descendent of four George brothers who came to America from England and settled in Dalton, Georgia. He was born on

Graduate School of Religion, 1980), pp. 11-12.

⁶ H.H. Dunn, From Rags to Riches, (Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1979), p. 276.

10 November 1805 in Sumner County, Tennessee. He married a young girl named Angeline Miller in 1826 or 1827.⁷

Angeline came from the family of Louis Miller, and was probably a descendent of Samuel Miller who sailed from Kent, England in 1640 and settled with his family in Boston, Massachusetts. They descend from Nicholas Miller, High Sheriff of Kent, Baron and Nobleman during the reign of Charles I. Mr. and Mrs. Louis Miller had six children, one of which was Angeline, born 11 April 1811.⁸ The 1850 census of Arkansas states that she was born in North Carolina. In a letter written on 8 October 1946 by Lewis Miller, a nephew of Angeline, the story is told that when Angeline was a little girl her grandfather would take her on his lap and teach her to spell "liberty" that was carved on his drinking cup. He told her that liberty was what her grandfather had fought for in Washington's War.⁹ Before her death in 1889, it is said that Angeline would always carry a little bag of gold. The kids would say, "Here comes Angeline with her little bag of gold and soap paddle."¹⁰ When she died she had 240 descendents which was the largest family in the state at that time.¹¹ Angeline and Hardin are buried side by side in the Mount George cemetery which Hardin donated to the church. The interior decoration for Hardin's casket was bought for a total of \$5.61.

As was mentioned, Hardin and Angeline were married in 1826 or 1827. They lived in Alabama where their first three children were born. They moved to middle Tennessee near the Alabama state line and then migrated to Arkansas in

⁷ Lola Virginia Person Cooper, Links That Bind the Armour, (Person Press, 1968), p.2

⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹ Lewis W. Miller, "Letter to Kindred L. Miller and J.E. Floyd," 8 October 1946, In possession of Mrs. Lola Scott, Dardanelle, Arkansas, pp. 3-4

¹⁰ Interview with Mrs. Lola George Scott, Dardanelle, Arkansas, 28 March 1985.

¹¹ Lewis W. Miller, "Letter," p. 3

an emigrant wagon in 1843.¹² The spokes stopped turning in the Arkansas River valley about four miles from a small town named Chickalah. Chickalah was the hiding place for outlaw queen Belle Star in 1885.¹³ The place where Hardin and Angeline homesteaded would soon be called Mount Homer (according to old maps) and around 1910 the name was changed to Mount George. In 1843 the Georges were raising seven children and had seven more to make a total of fourteen. One died as an infant. At this point, it would be profitable to look into the lives of these children of Hardin and Angeline George since many of them were leaders in the Mount George church of Christ.

Lucy George, the firstborn of Hardin and Angeline, was born in 1828. In her later years she was given the name "Aunt Puss," for reasons unknown to this writer. She had six children. Seth Walker, a grandson of Lucy who still lives in Mount George, remembers his mother telling the story that her mother (Lucy) would take them to the worship services in a wooden church building and would set her and her brothers and sisters on a quilt behind the pews. That was in the year 1859. "Aunt Puss" was a devout christian woman.

Next born was William P. "Pres" George on 24 July 1830. Pres raised ten children at Mount George and was a member of the church. He died on 20 April 1921. In 1832, Ethelburt B. "Seb" George was born. Seb married and moved to Texas early in life. John George was born in 1833. He married in 1859 and reared 8 children at Mount George. He was a good man and a leader in the church. His grandson was Buford George, born in 1888, who became a

¹² Ibid.,p.2; Wayne Banks, History of Yell County, Arkansas, (Van Buren, Arkansas; Pres-Argus Press, 1959),pp.39,182.

¹³ Ibid., p. 177.

tremendous gospel preacher and preached at Mount George for several years around 1929.

The fifth child born was Martha L. George in 1835. She married William Neal from Chickalah, whose family supposedly harbored Belle Star in 1885. William and Martha moved to Texas early in their married life. Next born was Francis "Fannie" George in 1837. She married before 1860 and raised eleven children near Mount George. It is unknown to this writer if she was a christian. The seventh child born was Jesse James George in 1838. On 19 April 1866 he married Martha Cook and later Jesse became a school teacher. He taught at Elmwood, a community three and one half miles northeast of Mount George. This was in District #48 which was formed in 1882.¹⁴ This gives an idea as to when he taught school. Jesse also taught at Boggs Mill in the 1890's. It is not known if Jesse was a member of the church. The eighth child died as an infant. The ninth child was Margaret Virginia George born on 15 November 1840. She married after the civil war broke out and raised seven children Ranger, a settlement near Mount George. The story is told that Margaret was totally against the church of Christ. One of her daughters wanted to be baptized and Margaret would not let her have clothes to be baptized in. She died in 1908 and was buried with at least nine of her brothers and sisters in the Mount George cemetery.

Now we come to a five year gap between children. Then in 1845 W.H. Hardin "Peter" George was born. Peter was short and heavy and an old friend of his said he could entertain any crowd that he was with by his clever wit. When

¹⁴Catherine Eikleberry Rogers, Readin', Ritin', and Rithmetic, (Retired teachers of Yell County Project, 1981), pp55-5

the civil war broke out Peter joined the Union Army, Co. F. 3rd Arkansas Infantry, U.S.A., along with his brother Robert Henry George, born 4 July. Robert began fighting in the civil war at sixteen years of age. He was well acquainted with raising kids since he had twenty-one and raised twenty-four! He was also very acquainted with grief. At age eighty-six, Robert had outlived seven of his twenty-one children, all of his brothers and sisters except two or three, and two wives. He had a very beautiful granddaughter that he was proud of named Susie. She was an exceptional christian girl and had radiant eyes. But she also was surrounded by life's woes. She married at age seventeen but soon lost her husband to spinal meningitis. His corpse was sent from Carden Bottoms to Mount George for burial but the weather was so bad that Susie could no go. She finally remarried a Baptist man and started attending the Baptist church. She lost two of her infant sons and then she died in 1910 of "congestion." While exploring the Mount George cemetery this writer discovered the grave of her grandfather and her great-uncle Peter, both marked with civil war headstones.

The twelfth child was David Hawkins "Hawk" George born in 1849. He married Mary Dacus in 1867. Mary was a true christian who had a great influence on many people. It is said that she knew her Bible from cover to cover. She bore fourteen children to Hawk and raised them near Chicklah. Hawk and Mary were married for sixty-eight years. When Mary was thirteen years of age, a preacher named Brother Thomason preached at Mount George and she was baptized. From that day on Mary touched many lives. Never did a gospel preacher travel through Mount George without a hot meal from "Aunt Mary." An entire page of the Dardanelle Post-Dispatch on 12 September 1935 was

dedicated in memory of Mrs. Mary George. In it was printed the following letter written by Mary to her ten children about two months before death. It was sealed and to be read after her death.

Dear Children: I'm home in heaven, dear ones, so happy and so bright. There is perfect joy and beauty in the everlasting light. All the pain and grief, restless tossing past. I am now at peace forever, safely home in heaven at last. Do you wonder that I went so calm toward the valley of the shadow. Oh! but Jesus' love luminated every dark and fearful shadow. He came himself to meet me in the way so hard to tread. But with Jesus' arm to lean on, could I have no doubt? So dears, then you must not grieve, for I love you dearly. Still try to look beyond earth's shadow. It pays to trust the Father. There is work waiting for you to do, so do not idle stand - do it now while life remains. Then you shall rest in the Heavenly Land. When that work is completed - he will gently call you home. Ho, the rapture of that meeting. Ho, the joy to see you come. These are my thoughts as I leave this old sinful world. So go by, dear children. Mother.¹⁵

The thirteenth child was Thomas George, grandfather of Mrs. Lola Scott whom this writer is indebted to for so much help in research, born on 26 March 1851. He married at the age of twenty, raised eight children at Mount George, AND DIED ON 12 September 1933. He was a fine christian man.

The last of the children born to Hardin and Angeline was Evelyn "Eva" Geneva George. She came into this world on 11 August 1853 and died at the young age of forty-seven.¹⁶

¹⁵ "In Memory of Mrs. Mary George," Dardanelle Post-Dispatch, 12 September 1935, p. 2

¹⁶ The information given above concerning the fourteen children of Hardin and Angeline George was derived mainly in an interview with Mrs. Lola Scott and from Lola Virginia Person Cooper's, Links that Bind the Armours, pp. 1-29.

2. A History of the Mount George Congregation During the Period 1843 -1900

In 1843 Hardin and Angeline George settled in Arkansas. They were affiliated with the Baptists. But there is no evidence that they continued in this doctrine after they arrived in Arkansas. The Mount Tabor Baptist church originated about the same time they got here and was very close to where Hardin and Angeline settled, but they never attended it. It is thought that a circuit preacher traveled through and baptized Hardin and Angeline. It is possible they could have taught themselves from their Bible. Either way it is definitely clear that Hardin and Angeline did not associate with the Baptists in Arkansas, but rather with the "Campbellites," as they were called.

The times were hard in the 1850's, but the people seemed to enjoy life. Wayne Banks describes these times in this way:

The moral spirit and its feeling of neighborhood obligations knew no heights. The sense of usefulness to another, father to son and brother to brother was boundless and was the unwritten law of understanding....They were all on the democratic level of equal opportunity and almost equal poverty. They had buckskin breeches, shooting irons, scythes, reapers, and irons for fireplaces but most of all unspoiled or untarnished names.¹⁷

In the 1850's the Dardanelle Post-Dispatch ran a column in which it paid tribute to men "who did so much to make this country prior to 1850." Included in those names is the name George.¹⁸ Others who later on took a leading role as leaders in the church were Marcus Wallace, Virgil Cook, Nelson George, Wayne Jones, the Howard family, and Hume Cook. Hume married into the George family and was a pillar in the Mount George congregation.

The ways of life were different before the civil war. S.C. Tucker, Jr. wrote, "The few years immediately preceding the civil war have been described as a pastoral prelude before a shattering holocaust."¹⁹ Life went on as usual. Gardens were planted, wood was chopped, and everyone went to church services in a

¹⁷ Banks, History of Yell County

¹⁸ Banks, History of Yell County, p. 48

¹⁹ S.C. Tucker, Jr., To Sell A Good Bull: A Story of the Arkansas River Valley, (Danville, Arkansas: Pub. by Danville Bicentennial Committee, 1976), p. 28.

buggy pulled by a horse or a mule. The lot around the church building would be filled with these buggies.

School was also a common event for the children. All thirteen of the children of Hardin and Angeline went to school at Mount George.²⁰ The children were fifteen, thirteen, eleven, ten, eight, six and five years old when they arrived in Arkansas. Each of these attended school about one quarter of a mile from their home at Dale Bend school. This school originated in the 1840's. The old school building later burned in 1918.²¹ The George children also attended school at Louvean church house.²² Virginia Pickens, born 1892, told this writer that she went to school for one week after she got married at age sixteen. She did not like it so she did not go back. It is interesting to note that the textbook that was used to teach reading was the Bible accompanied by a blueback speller.²³

When the gold rush of 1849 hit in California, Mount George heard about it. Two of the older sons of Hardin hitched up two old oxen to a wagon, got their shovels, and headed for California. When they got to Texas one of the oxen dropped dead. The boys, deciding it was useless to go any further, unhitched the other ox and let it go. They returned to Mount George. Hardin was upset because they left his pet ox in Texas. Several weeks later Hardin was eating breakfast and he heard an ox bellowing. He ran outside to find his pet ox returning home!²⁴

At this point let us trace the history of events dealing with the Mount George congregation. The christians first met in the log house of Hardin George. It was a two-room log cabin separated by a dog-trot. It is thought that that first Mount George church building was built before Dale Bend school started. This would place the building being erected around 1844. Hardin George donated five acres for the church building and a cemetery. The Yell County Chancery Court records of 1880 say there is a deed in which Hardin George donated two acres for a grave yard in,

²⁰ Cooper, Links That Bind the Armours, pp. 3-29

²¹ Interview with Mr. Elbert Frost, Mount George, Arkansas, 30 March 1985

²² Cooper, Links That Bind the Armours, p. 3-29.

²³ Interview with Mrs. Virginia Pickens, Mount George, Arkansas, 29 March 1985

²⁴ Interview with Mr. Elbert Frost.

*the NW corner of the SE1/4 of the SW1/4 of Section 4, Tp. 5 N.R. 21 West and running south five acres in length and one acre in width including the grave of the said Hardin George deceased which said two acres is hereby dedicated for the purpose of a grave yard and*²⁵

That is the end of the record. It should continue "three acres for the church building" which is exactly where the building is located today on three acres. Because of this deletion the Christian church tried to come in and claim the building in the 1880's but they were soon ran out of the area. The old building of 1844 was the meeting place for the church for many years. It was in this building that Lucy George took her children to the services and sat them on a quilt behind the pews in 1859. Also thirteen year old Mary George heard Brother Thomason preach here and was baptized in Shut-in creek in 1864.²⁶

Shut-in creek (presently called Choate creek) was and is directly east of the church building about one hundred yards away. Many people were baptized in Shut-in creek including Virginia Pickens at age twelve.²⁷ Old Brother Keltner was one of the preachers who waded the waters of Shut-in. Brother Keltner was and old preacher who lived in Fort Smith, Arkansas. He would ride a circuit throughout eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas and he preached many times in Mount George. Mrs. Sybil Miller Harkey who lives in Dardanelle tells how her blind Aunt Jane was baptized by Brother Keltner in 1864. They had to break the ice to get to the water! Men like Brother Keltner were a great inspiration to the Mount George church of Christ. On one occasion Brother Keltner was preaching a meeting at Mount George and staying with the Howard family. They would ride to the building in a buggy and each evening they would get pelted with rocks by some mischievous boys who needed their trousers warmed up on the back side.²⁸ There were other great men who preached at Mount George such as Marcus Wallace, Brother Howard, and Brother Clark (full name not known).

²⁵ Chancery Court, Dardanelle District, Yell County, Arkansas, Chancery Record Book "A," 18 August 1880-, p. 187;(Original in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Qualls, Mount George, Arkansas).

²⁶ "In Memory of Mrs. Mary Geo4rge, Dardanelle Post-Dispatch, p.2.

²⁷ Interview with Virginia Pickens.

²⁸ Interview with Mr. Elbbert Frost.

In the 1870's and 1880's at Chickalah, the church of Chris and the Methodist church conducted long and heated debates. These were held under brush arbors and people would travel great distances and camp out on the Hugh Barnett place.²⁹

On Christmas eve in 1889 the Mount George christians met at the building to have a Christmas tree. Elbert Frost recalls the story that his father had told him:

It was easy for tempers to flair at times and evidently they did on that night. The congregation broke out into a free-for-all fight. The only reason it stopped is because my father, who was eight years old at the time, was scuffling with another little boy and he fell down the well. The men formed a ladder by holding on to teach others ankles and my father was rescued!

Sometime around the 1870's a new building was built at Mount George. Then in 1919 this building was rebuilt. The builders used the old foundation's logs from the building of the 1870's and they are the foundation of the present-day building. If one crawls under the building he will find these old hand-hewn logs along with some initials carved on them. The building of the 1870's is shown in supplement number three.

Conclusion

There is no doubt in the mind of writer that the Mount George church of Christ is the second oldest congregation of the church of Christ in Arkansas. It could possibly be the second oldest congregation of the church of Christ west of the Mississippi River. The year that Hardin and Angeline George moved to Arkansas marked the beginning of the church of Christ in Mount George. For one hundred forty-two years this congregation has been practicing New Testament Christianity, helping those in need, and molding preachers. Great evangelist such as H. H. Dunn, Al Jolly, and C.V. Langford have graced the pulpit. Brother Cleon Lyles held his first gospel meeting at Mount George at the young age of eighteen. Herman Alexander started out at Mount George. It is the privilege of this writer to boast that he has even preached a few sermons at the Mount George church of Christ. May God bless this congregation with many more years of service to Him!

²⁹ Banks, History of Yell County, Arkansas, pp. 106.

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