

MANATEE COUNTY: HISTORY OF BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH & CEMETERY

The following Church history and cemetery records were compiled and contributed by Mrs. Vera M. Dupree, Rt. 1, Box 41, Myakka City, Fla. 33551.

When I think of the history of our own Bethany Baptist Church my mind goes back to the times we children sat around our invalid grandmother's knee and she told us stories about the early history of our county. This grand old lady was Mary (Williams) Rye.

Her parents came to Manatee County when she was seven years of age. They came from Georgia to Manatee County about 1851.

It is a tragedy that more records were not kept and it seems that we have lost a lot of precious history. However, our Christian worship programs migrated here along with our forefathers.

I remember hearing my Uncle William Rye (born 1866) tell about his earliest school days being in a frame building east of Creig Branch about two miles west of where Bethany Church stands now. In this building the community met on the Sabbath and worshipped. There was also a cemetery at this spot. At that time there were no bridges to cross the swollen streams so if some settler passed away they had to bury them at the most convenient place available. This cemetery was abandoned in later years and there is no sign of it today.

In the years before our earlier settlers erected buildings of worship they made open shelters covered with cabbage palm leaves for protection from the weather. They called these shelters "brush arbers". One of these arbers was located near the home of a family whose name was Creig, at present we call it the Charlie Powell home site. This is located about two miles west across from Bethany Church. There are two graves of early settlers near that spot.

Another arber was erected one mile west of Bethany on the north side of Highway 64. Still another, north of our present Bethany Church buildings, between the buildings and our present Highway 64.

These are some of the places of worship our forefathers used between the years of 1860 and 1888.

Bethany Baptist Church is located 20 miles east of Bradenton on Highway 64 in Manatee County. It was organized in March 1888 under the name of Manatee Baptist Church of Christ at Rye post office. Elder J. B. Lamb was the first pastor. Mr. J. W. Stewart was the first clerk and treasurer.

In March 1888, Mr. J. H. Guthrie was the first man to be baptized and Mrs. Joan Stewart being the first woman baptized in July 1888 and taken into the fellowship of the Church.

On August 12, 1888, the following people were added: M. E. Rich, J. R. Swain, E. E. Swain, N. E. Lamb, J. W. Stewart, S. C. Taylor, and J. A. Wingate. Bro. A. R. Rich and J. R. Swain were ordained Jan. 27, 1889 as the first deacons. The ordination services were lead by Rev. A. I. Redd and pastor J. B. Lamb.

May of 1890 was a time of discouragement and the record shows the following: "People became discouraged and took a vote to forsake the Church." Then no minutes until April 1891 and they resume with no mention of that year.

In October 1894 a new Church building was constructed under the leadership of Rev. A. J. Farabee at Riley, Florida (Riley was the name of the post office for this area at that time located one mile west of the present Bethany Baptist Church), and the name of the Church was changed to Bethany Missionary Baptist Church. This building was erected east of what is now known as Corbitt Branch about three quarters mile