

POWELL'S CHAPEL:
A CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Following the Civil War, many rural churches sprung up across the South. They served as community centers during perilous times. Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, located in northern Rutherford County near the Wilson County line, is an example of a rural church founded after the Civil War that thrived despite great obstacles such as a fire, the Great Depression, two World Wars, and great social change.

The religious faith of the members along with close community and kinship ties allowed the church to flourish while many other rural churches perished under the strain caused by the social movements of the twentieth century. Its rich and well-documented history makes it a strong case study for the study of rural religion and its relationship to community in the rural South.

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CHAPTER I

FOUNDING OF A CHURCH, 1875-1900

The Civil War greatly altered the lives of the people of Middle Tennessee. Battles raged in their backyard; economic burdens decimated family fortunes; men lost their lives on the battlefield; and the formerly enslaved tasted freedom. People in rural areas in the South saw their safety threatened and crops destroyed by troops from both sides. People huddled in their homes, and social gatherings, including church services, were curtailed until the war ended. When they emerged from the difficult war years, rural white southerners found a world forever changed. Many adults who grew up in privileged homes with enslaved workers struggled with the new realities of a post-slavery era.¹ Poorer whites found their lives also altered by a ruined economy and a changed social structure. Confusion and turmoil reigned.² Religious institutions, especially in the South, also experienced great change during the war and in the years following. Many church buildings were destroyed during the war; ministers from the North, under orders from the Secretary of War, took the pulpits of many of the surviving churches, including both Baptists and Methodists.³

Rutherford County, Tennessee was a crossroads of the Civil War. Massive numbers of troops from both sides moved through its borders throughout 1862,

¹Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction, 15th Anniversary Edition* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), 26.

²William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1974), 59-60.

³Ibid.

culminating in the Battle of Stones River at the end of the year. Following the battle, the Union army occupied the area until the war ended in 1865. The war destroyed a large portion of the county's religious infrastructure. First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, for instance, suffered greatly during the war. Union troops seized the building following the Battle of Stones River, used it as a hospital, and burned the pews for firewood. Although the army returned the building to the congregation, the extensive damage forced the congregation to find a new meeting place.⁴ The First United Methodist Church suffered a similar fate. The Union Army occupied the building during the war, then "Loyal Methodists" from the North occupied the building and refused to turn it over to the local congregation until the end of the war.⁵

For rural areas in the South, like most of Middle Tennessee, establishing churches was essential to recovering a sense of community after the war. In *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South*, Stephen Ash writes that "No institution save the family loomed larger in the eyes of the rural folk, whose churches served not only as house of worship, but as emotional vent, moral arbiter, and social adhesive."⁶

⁴Fred Rolater, *Concord 200: The Story of the Concord Baptist Association, 1820-2010 Including Its Churches and People* (Murfreesboro, TN: Concord Baptist Association, 2010), 87-88.

⁵Kay Horner, "History of First United Methodist, Murfreesboro, Tennessee," accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.fumcm.org/FUMCHistory.pdf>.

⁶Steven V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 32.

Religion provided certainty in an uncertain time by creating order and explaining the unfathomable to a people dealing with catastrophic change.⁷ Thus, as Ash observes, “Restoration of order in the rural areas was the key to economic and institutional revival in Middle Tennessee. Wartime violence and chaos had kept country folk fearfully at home, thus sundering their social bonds, strangling their economy, and maiming or wrecking their institutions of government, education, religion, and community.” The end of the war and Union occupation allowed residents of Middle Tennessee to reestablish social bonds and community institutions, including schools and religious institutions. With the freedom to emerge from their homes without fear for the first time in five years, the first stop for many rural Tennesseans was the church as they valued Christian fellowship second only to their livelihoods. The church provided both a social outlet and source of comfort during painful and confusing times.⁸

Religious institutions, however, were not immune to chaos and division in the years following the Civil War. Southern Baptists during Reconstruction also sought the social communion of the church as a stronghold for fighting the changes, political and social, brought about by the Civil War. Some white churches urged members to send their children to private schools rather than integrated schools. They also fought the northern missionaries sent to evangelize the newly freed African Americans. While southern congregations wanted to see the black population evangelized, they resented

⁷I.W. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 399.

⁸ Ash, 176-177.

another “invasion” from the North and forever severed the ties between the Northern and Southern Baptist Conventions.⁹

Southern Baptists fought their own Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century. In the early 1800s, Alexander Campbell, a Baptist minister, adopted controversial views on salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit. He believed that followers must be baptized by immersion to complete their salvation. He also taught, contrary to the Baptist doctrine, that the Holy Spirit did not guide believers until after baptism. He spread his views on theology to churches around the South, causing many to abandon the Baptist Church and join his new denomination known as Disciples of Christ. Another preacher, James R. Graves, rose to combat the Campbellites and caused a greater controversy that lasted well into the late nineteenth century. Graves, based in Middle Tennessee, led the denomination in the state as publisher of *The Baptist* (later *The Tennessee Baptist*) from 1848-1889. Taking a contradictory view to Campbell’s theology, Graves sought authenticity in the church and harkened back to the New Testament for his inspiration. His movement was known as Landmarkism. Graves and his followers believed in the sovereignty of the local church and refused to answer to higher organizations such as regional and national associations and conventions. They closed communion to those who were not believers in the faith, and they required members to be baptized by a Baptist minister. They also refused to collaborate with other denominations believing that

⁹Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 23-25; Joe Early, Jr. “Tennessee Baptists and the Civil War,” *Tennessee Baptist History* (Fall 2006): 21.

the Baptists of that day were the pure successors of the true Christian church of the New Testament.¹⁰

The rise of Landmarkism created a great rift in the Southern Baptist denomination, especially in Graves's home state of Tennessee. He used his position as editor of *The Tennessee Baptist* to fight those who questioned his beliefs. According to Herman A. Norton in *Religion in Tennessee, 1777-1945*, "About the time Reconstruction ended there was a resurgence in 'Landmarkism.' The renewed emphasis on extreme localism and exclusiveness developed enormous disruptive powers, and between 1876 and 1880 the Southern Baptist churches in Tennessee lost almost half of their members, dropping from 101,241 to 57,090."¹¹

The Baptist Church, however, recovered and gained hold as the fastest growing denomination in post-bellum Tennessee. Despite the loss of members to Landmark churches, Southern Baptist churches made rapid gains in membership from 1870 to 1890 with 1,282,220 members in 16,654 churches by the end of 1891.¹² Southern Baptists also strengthened their theological doctrine by placing a greater emphasis on their

¹⁰Fred Moritz, "The Landmark Controversy: A Study in Baptist History and Polity," *Marantha Baptist Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (May 2012), accessed February 22, 2014, <http://more.mbbc.edu/journal/volume-two/the-landmark-controversy/>; Harvey, 88-92.

¹¹Herman A. Horton, *Religion in Tennessee, 1777-1945* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 76.

¹²Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 147; Baker, Robert A., "Southern Baptist Beginnings," *Baptist History and Heritage Society* (no date), accessed January 6, 2014, <http://www.baptisthistory.org/sbaptistbeginnings.htm>.

fundamentalist beliefs, foreign missions work, and theological education. This renewed focus left the Southern Baptist Convention with “a sense of unity and a spirit of aggressiveness.”¹³ W. Fred Kendall captured this sense of renewal in *A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention*: “Only a great dynamic faith could have strengthened Tennessee Baptists to have the courage and determination to undertake the task of rebuilding required after the devastation of the Civil War. The challenge of the spiritual needs and the open doors of opportunity for working in the new day supplied the motivation needed.”¹⁴

As part of this renewed charge, Southern Baptists in Tennessee came together and organized as a state-wide entity, the Tennessee Baptist Convention, in 1874. The state convention immediately set out to evangelize throughout the state, hiring its first general evangelist, J. H. Cason, before there was even a budget or office. The formation of a state-wide organization significantly improved the lives of Tennessee Baptists and eased the geographical divisions that formerly plagued the religious community.¹⁵ The new convention united Tennessee Baptists into one organization instead of the three separate regional organizations. It also allowed the state to establish Southwestern Baptist University in Jackson, Tennessee. Graves and the followers of the Landmark movement dominated the convention until the turn of the century placing the new convention in jeopardy as congregations who did not believe Graves’s teachings disavowed the new

¹³Barnes, 166-7.

¹⁴W. Fred Kendall, *A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention* (Brentwood, TN: Executive Board of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1974), 138.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 170; Early, 22.

group. The convention, however, counteracted the loss of non-Landmark congregations by focusing their energies on starting new churches.¹⁶

In the summer of 1875, in the middle of this evangelical emphasis in Tennessee, a twenty-one year old student from Union University in Murfreesboro traveled through the Fall Creek area in northern Rutherford County near the Wilson County line. William David Powell taught school at Rockdale Academy in a nearby community, and he passed an abandoned Methodist Church on his way home. He talked to the teacher, Miss Eliza Crosthwait, at the community's school about the possibility of starting a Baptist Church in the area, using the abandoned building as a meeting place. She identified eight women and two men affiliated with the Baptist faith.¹⁷

Rev. Powell held a series of meetings in the abandoned Shady Grove Methodist Church building in July of 1875. At the final meeting on July 25, Powell, along with fellow preachers George E. Truett and Enoch Windes, invited individuals to unite with the church. Ten responded and became the founding members of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church: Callie Jones, Sarah Short, Miss P. P. Sanders, Elizabeth Short, Mariah J. Malone, Martha Tucker, Sarah A. Short, Mary A. Harris, William Short, and William Barrett.¹⁸ Powell, as moderator, called for a ballot to name the church, and the members unanimously chose Powell's Chapel Baptist Church. Although the church members chose

¹⁶Rolater, 108-110; Horton, 76.

¹⁷William David Powell, Letter to Luther M. Vaughter, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, October 1, 1930, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Archives.

¹⁸Sarah Short and Sarah A. Short are two different women who were both founding members of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church.

the name, Rev. Powell did not agree with their choice. In a 1930 letter detailing the founding of the congregation, he wrote, “When it was proposed to call it Powell’s Chapel I begged them not to do it, but they did.”¹⁹

The name was not the only controversy surrounding the founding of the church. Simpson Harris, husband of Mary A. Harris, was a wealthy landowner in the area who, according to Powell, did not approve of the Baptist faith. He belonged to another denomination and did not want his wife to join the new Baptist church. His father, John C. Harris, donated the land for the neighboring Jerusalem Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and Harris maintained close ties to that congregation. His strategy for thwarting her decision, however, was a bit odd. He attended the first meeting and encouraged the appointment of Powell as pastor. Powell later wrote of the controversy, “I think he thought I would make an inglorious failure and that his wife would be willing to join his church.” After the first service of the new congregation on July 25, Powell failed to announce the next meeting time for the congregation. Church tradition holds that the disgruntled husband said to Powell that no one would attend the next service, so he did not need to bother setting a meeting. The women in the room rose up and said there would be plenty of people in attendance, so Powell set the next meeting date and the church was founded.²⁰

¹⁹Luther M. Vaughter, *History of Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church*, October 5, 1930; Powell, Letter to Luther M. Vaughter.

²⁰Nell Blankenship, *Rutherford County, Tennessee: History and Families* (Murfreesboro, TN: Rutherford County Historical Society, 2002), 53; Powell, Letter to Luther M. Vaughter.

Harris was not daunted in his task, however. Shortly after the first church meeting, Harris arrived at the church building one Saturday during a worship service with wagons and servants. He had purchased the building and planned to remove it to his property. Harris and his men waited outside the building until the congregation sang the last hymn and then began dismantling the structure. “The wagons were immediately placed in position and ladders set against the walls. The men scaled the ladders and began to remove the roof, while many of the worshipers looked on.”²¹ According to Powell, “This prejudiced man bought the building and had his Negroes to tear it down and move it to his home and made a barn of it and filled it with fodder.” Powell still harbored hard feelings over the incident more than fifty years later when he wrote, “The Lord God struck his house with lightening and burned it and nobody ever hear of my shedding any tears.”²²

Despite the bitter opposition of this husband, the community came together and built a meeting house for the fledgling church. In October of 1875, the church held a ten-day meeting and added twelve more members bringing the congregation to twenty-two. The members who joined in October were: William A. Evans, Martha M. Evans, John B. Vaughter, Sarah J. Vaughter, Mrs. Ann E. Tucker, Lucretia C. Harrison, Persilla A.

²¹Allen C. Barrett, *Reflections: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1875-1975* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), April 27, 1975. This source is a reprint of articles in the church bulletin and does not have page numbers. It is organized by date of publication of the articles.

²²Powell, Letter to Luther M. Vaughter.

Harrison, Miss Harriett Barrett, E. A. Shotwell, Miss Charlotte Barrett, and Miss Willie Short.²³

While the names of the pioneers of Powell's Chapel are well noted in the church's history, little has been told of their lives. Who were these twenty-two people and what was the true make-up of the church after its first series of meetings in October of 1875? No correspondence from these original members exists, but much can be gleaned from census records and other public documents to paint a picture of the people who founded the church and the lives of the surrounding community in 1875.

The data in public records from the time identify several trends in the membership of the church. As of October 1875, the church membership included sixteen women and six men. They ranged in age from seventeen to over fifty. Most of the women in the congregation were younger than fifty with a number of children at home. The members owned land in the area surrounding the church. They were neighbors and many were family. Church attendance also included several children who probably attended with their mothers or both parents, illustrating their desire to raise families in the church.

Table 1. Ages and Gender of Pioneer Members of Powell's Chapel, October 1875

Gender	17-25	26-35	36-45	45-50	50+	Unknown	Total
Male	2	0	1	0	1	1	5
Female	3	5	2	2	2	3	17

Source: Data compiled from the 1870 and 1880 United States Census.

²³Vaughter, *History of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church*.

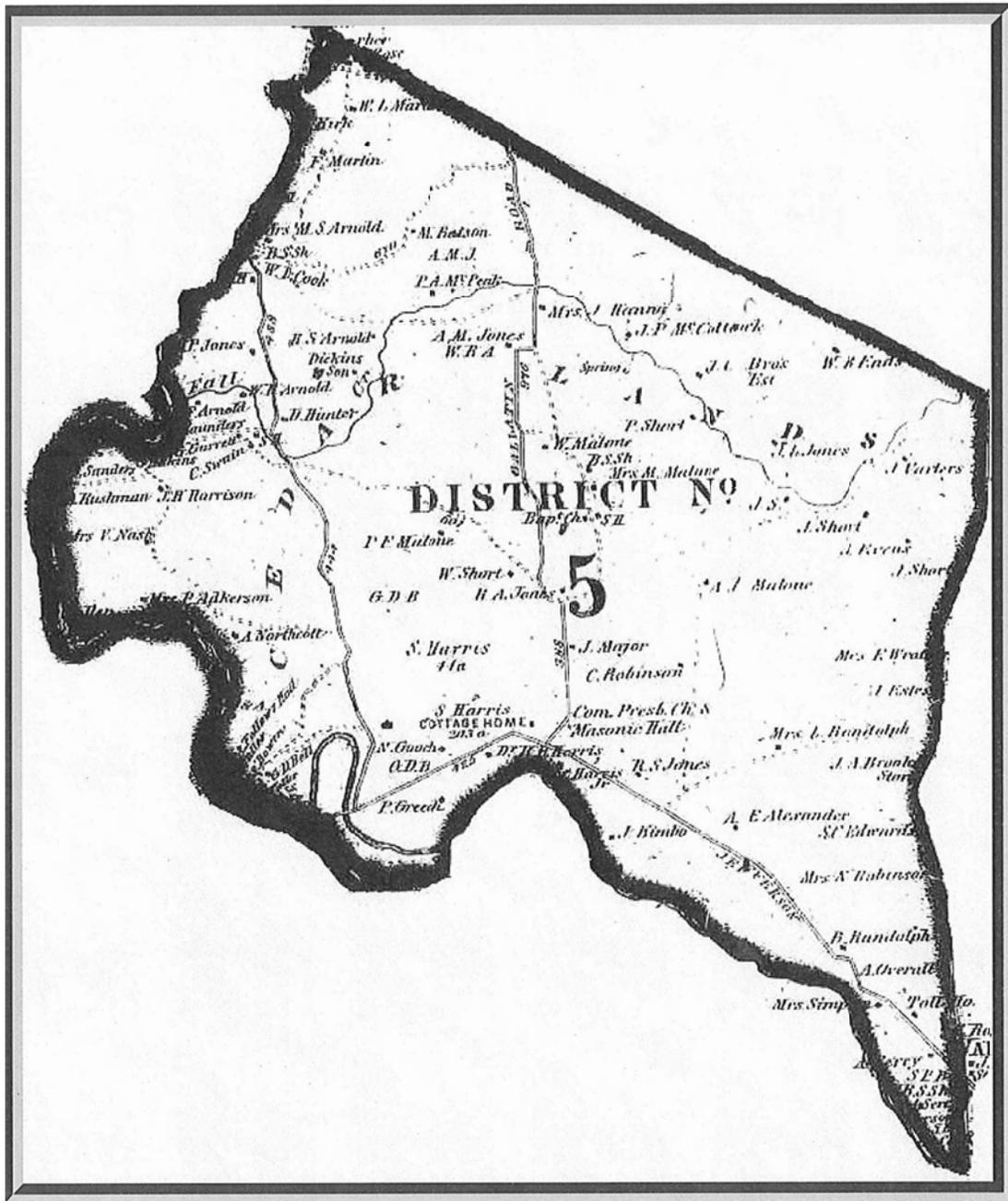


Figure 1. 1878 DeBeers Map showing District Five of Rutherford County. Powell's Chapel Baptist Church is located in the center of the map just under the word "District." The homes of many of the pioneer members' are located around the church. Rutherford County Archives, <http://www.tngenweb.org/rutherford/map1878/district05.htm>.

Table 2. Ages and Gender of Children at Powell's Chapel, October 1875

Gender	0-3	4-7	8-12	13+	Total
Male	2	3	3	3	11
Female	2	4	3	1	10

Source: Data compiled from the 1870 and 1880 United States Census.²⁴

One of the most noticeable trends evident from church records is the role of women in populating the church. As Powell noted in his letter, the women stood up to the husband who did not want a Baptist church in the area to insist that the church continue. Paul Harvey, in *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925*, writes that “Rural men improved houses, land, and machinery, but still conceived of religion as a ‘nickel-and-dime’ business to be fostered chiefly by women.”²⁵ Southern Baptist women took advantage of their roles in religious life to expand their sphere. They worked together and formed societies to rebuild churches, pay ministers, fund orphanages, and support missionaries around the world.²⁶ Edward Ayers writes that “Many women of both races found in the church their greatest sanctuary. Women played increasingly important roles on church committees—especially those dedicated to fund-raising—and assumed positions of greater authority.” It was the

²⁴Ages at the time of the founding of the church calculated by ages listed in 1870 and 1880 United States Census Records.

²⁵Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 81. Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 101-143.

²⁶*Ibid*, 26.

women who funded missions, maintained the church buildings, and took care of the needy.²⁷

Like many of their fellow Baptist sisters, the women of Powell's Chapel stepped up early as leaders of the church. One of the most influential women was Mariah Hoover Malone. The elder stateswoman of the church founders, Mariah Malone was seventy-one when she joined Powell's Chapel. Her husband, Billy Malone, passed away on July 13, 1847. That same year, she lost a seventeen-year-old son, William, and her sister Martha. From that date, Mariah became head-of-household for a large family. She remained listed as head-of-household until the 1880 census when her son, Thomas, was listed as head for the first time. She retained the title despite living with her son and his family, indicating a strong female presence in the home.²⁸

Mariah's husband, Billy, made her a wealthy woman upon his death. After their marriage in 1824, he purchased 426 acres of land in Fall Creek for \$3,109. The Malone family was also one of the largest slaveholders in District Five of Rutherford County. In 1830, they owned nineteen slaves, twenty-seven in 1840, thirty-six in 1850, and thirty-one in 1860. Mariah also was a business woman, having inherited a cotton gin along with 650 acres of land upon her husband's death. By the time of the Civil War, Mariah owned land worth \$20,000 and personal property worth \$27,000.²⁹ However, according to family stories, the Malone family farm did not fare well in the Civil War. Mariah hid

²⁷Ayers, 169.

²⁸1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 United States Census.

²⁹1860 United States Slave Schedule; 1860 United States Census.

hams in the rafters of the house, leaving grease rings that lasted for years. Like many Southern women, she buried the silver in the family graveyard so it survived the war to become cherished family heirlooms. The war also took a toll on the Malone family fortunes. By 1870, the value of her real estate had dropped to \$8,000 and personal property to \$400.³⁰

The importance of religion to Mariah Malone and her family, however, did not suffer. In 1834, her husband had set aside land where the Methodist Episcopal Church held campground meetings. Eventually the congregation built the Shady Grove Methodist Church, which was abandoned during the Civil War. This building was the first meeting place of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church. After the original meeting place was purchased and destroyed, Mariah and her son A. J. donated the land on which the new church was constructed. Her granddaughter and her husband continued the tradition by donating additional land in 1921 for church expansion to accommodate the growing congregation.³¹

Along with strong women leaders, the founders of Powell's Chapel represented connections to the way of life before the Civil War. In addition to the Malone family, at least three other families were slaveholders or the children of slaveholders. The Short family, which included five of the early members of the church, owned eight slaves in 1860. The Harrison family owned two slaves. The Jones family owned twenty-one, while

³⁰Billy Pittard, "Mariah Hoover Malone, 1804-1898," *Southern Roots and Branches*, accessed February 6, 2014, <http://southernrootsandbranches.wordpress.com/2011/01/08/mariah-hoover-malone-1804-1898/>; 1870 United States Census.

³¹Pittard.

the Harris family owned twenty-five. With the exception of the Malone family, the slaveholders in the family were the fathers or husbands of the future church members. Only Mariah Malone and her eldest son A. J. were listed in the census as heads of household and slave owners.³²

Despite losing their slaves and much of their wealth, the families who were of the elite class prior to the Civil War retained their status after the war. Ash writes, “Not only did a wealthy elite continue to dominate Middle Tennessee economically after the war, but to a great extent that elite consisted of the same families who had ruled the heartland before the war. Land and professional skills remained for the most part in the possession of those who had always had them, as did poverty and ignorance.”³³ Though the amount of wealth held by the upper class declined greatly as a result of the war, their proportion of wealth did not change significantly.³⁴

This was true in the Fall Creek community near Powell’s Chapel. The founders of the church retained significant land holdings in the 1870s with almost all of the pioneer members owning land in the area surrounding the church. Although they suffered a significant drop in wealth between 1860 and 1870, the wealthiest people in the community in 1860 were still the wealthiest in 1870 and 1880.³⁵

³²1860 United States Slave Schedule.

³³Ash, 230.

³⁴Ibid., 228.

³⁵1860, 1870, and 1880 United States Census.

The social class of the members of Powell’s Chapel also highlights another trend that becomes apparent when tracing the histories of the founders of the church—kinship. Not only were these people neighbors and social peers, but most of them were related in some way. Of the founding twenty-two members of the church, five were from the Short family, three from the Harrison family, two from the Tucker family, three from the Barrett family, and four were related to the Evans family. Many of these founding families still have descendants active in the church today. This trend was quite common in rural churches in the post-war era. In the rural South, the devastation of the Civil War failed to weaken kin ties. Shared political ideas and the rural isolation of farms strengthened community and kinship ties after the war.³⁶ In *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900*, Jean E. Friedman writes that “The evangelical community, a church-directed, kin-dominated society, linked plantation, farm, and town in the predominately rural South . . . the coming together of elite and farmer kinsmen and kinswomen in the churches made kin rather than class the principal determining element in social relationships.”³⁷

The Short family was perhaps the most significant family to the founding of the church. William Short and his wife, Mahala Elizabeth “Betty” Williams Short, were the only married couple in the original ten founders. William and Betty Short married in Wilson County, Tennessee on November 21, 1860. William served as a farmhand for one

³⁶Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 92-94, 114-115.

³⁷*Ibid.*, xi.

of her relatives prior to their marriage. The Shorts were one of many of Powell's Chapel families who traveled across county lines between Rutherford and Wilson County during the mid-1800s. William's father, Anderson Short, lived next door to Mariah Malone and also owned slaves. Anderson was a large landowner in the Fall Creek area with land valued at \$9,000 and property valued at \$10,000 in the 1860 census. William and Betty, who probably was pregnant when Powell's Chapel was founded, had twelve children, all of whom survived to adulthood. Betty's first cousin, Sarah A. Short, was married to William's younger brother Patrick. Their teenage daughter Willie also joined the church in October of 1875.³⁸

Another trend evident in the founding members of Powell's Chapel is a direct link to the Confederacy. The Civil War had a profound effect on the congregants. The earliest families represented in the church were all affected personally by the Civil War. Whether it was a husband, son, or father, almost all of the earliest members had someone who served in the Confederate Army.

The Battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga had the most lasting effect on the community. Many of the men from Fall Creek served in the 45th Tennessee Infantry, which suffered great losses during the fight for Snodgrass Hill. They lost ninety-eight men of the 226 engaged in the battle. As for the area of Fall Creek, Joseph Peyton, age twenty and related to the Malone family by marriage, was killed in the battle. Mariah Malone's son George, age twenty-two and in the 18th Tennessee Infantry, also perished in the battle. James W. Evans, whose wife and son would be instrumental in the early

³⁸Ancestry.com. *Tennessee State Marriage Records, 1780-2002* [database online], Provo, UT, accessed November 14, 2013; 1860 United States Census; Vaughter.

history of Powell's Chapel, served in Company I of the 45th Tennessee, was captured during the Battle of Chickamauga and spent the rest of the war in a northern prison.³⁹

Patrick Short, brother of William Short and husband of Sarah A. Short, also experienced profound changes at the Battle of Chickamauga. Although no family letters exist to tell how members felt about the war, Patrick's story illustrates the conflicted feelings and divided families created by the Civil War. Patrick's older brother, William, served in Smith's Fourth Regiment, while Patrick was conscripted in November 1862 to serve in Company C of the 45th Tennessee Infantry. Patrick, however, never committed to service in the Confederate Army and is listed as "absent without leave" in most of his Confederate service record. His reluctance to serve could be explained by his age, thirty-two, or his family obligations. His actions, however, point to Unionist beliefs that differed from his slaveholding father and Confederate brother.⁴⁰

Following the Battle of Chickamauga, Patrick presented himself at the Union lines and deserted his post in the Army of Tennessee. He was taken to Camp Nelson in Lexington, Kentucky, where he took the oath of allegiance and joined Independent Battery E of the Kentucky Light Infantry; he served with this infantry group for the remainder of the war. Camp Nelson was a support depot for northern troops fighting in

³⁹Pittard; Mike West, "The 45th Tennessee Fights at Chickamauga and Stones River," *Murfreesboro Post*, (no date), accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com/the-45th-tennessee-fights-at-chickamauga-stones-river-cms-6224>; "Civil War Service Records, Confederate Records," digital images, *Fold 3*, Co. C, 1st TN Inf., entry for Patrick Short; "Civil War Service Records, Confederate Records," digital images, *Fold 3*, Co. I, 1st TN Inf., entry for James W. Evans.

⁴⁰"Civil War Service Records, Union Records," digital images, *Fold 3*, Batt'y E, KY L. Art., entry for Patrick Short.

Tennessee and Virginia. It also served as the third largest African-American recruitment camp in the nation. Battery E of the Kentucky Light Infantry performed garrison duty in Kentucky and Tennessee and only fought in one battle during the war, at Saltville, Virginia. Patrick returned to Fall Creek following the war and remained an active member of the community, as illustrated by his status as a Freemason and his wife's place in the Powell's Chapel Church community. It is unclear, however, how community members felt about his Union service. The close kinship ties of the community indicate that blood may have surpassed any controversial political stances by Patrick Short. Upon his death, Patrick's father divided his estate equally among his three sons and Patrick prospered financially as a member of the Powell's Chapel community until his death.⁴¹

After rejoining their community following wartime service, many of these men accepted roles as community leaders. Shortly after constituting as a church body, Powell's Chapel took steps to elect leaders for the new church. The leaders elected were overwhelmingly male, although Martha M. Evans was elected treasurer. This role allowed Evans a leadership role in the church but kept her within acceptable social boundaries. Many women managed the finances for their homes so the role of treasurer fit within social norms. Men were expected to lead the congregation while women served as moral examples for their families and community.⁴² Martha served as treasurer for three years and upon her resignation the church abolished the office until 1917. While it

⁴¹Ibid; Anderson Short, Last Will and Testament, Murfreesboro, TN, November 6, 1876, Rutherford County, TN, Rutherford County Archives.

⁴²Harvey, 212.

may have been an appropriate role for a female in the church, no other woman would occupy the position throughout the next one hundred years of the church.⁴³

For its first official act of business in July 1875, the church selected its only two male members, William Short and William Barrett, to take a request from the church to unite with the Concord Baptist Association. Founded in 1810, Concord Association is the oldest Middle Tennessee congregation of the Tennessee Baptist Convention and played an instrumental role in the founding of the convention at Murfreesboro Baptist Church in 1874.⁴⁴ By aligning with the Association, the congregation legitimized Powell's Chapel as a church and partnered with fellow Baptists in the region. The church sent messengers to the Concord Baptist Association yearly meeting and submitted an annual report to the Association. Powell's Chapel also hosted meetings for the Association as soon as it had a building large enough to hold the group.⁴⁵

At the October 1875 meeting, the church elected its first two deacons, William Short and John B. Vaughter. They were quickly ordained and entered into service for the church. Short was the elder statesman at age fifty-two, and Vaughter was thirty-six. Both men were married to much younger women and had small children at home. Martha Evans's twenty-two year old son William also served in a leadership position in the church. He was elected to serve as the first church clerk and remained in the position

⁴³Donald A. McRae, *Centennial History: Our Glorious Past Challenges the Future* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), 38.

⁴⁴Fred S. Rolater, "'Padlocking the Building, Releasing the Spirit': Concord Baptist Association, 1930-1950," *Tennessee Baptist History* (Fall 1999): 53-54.

⁴⁵Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of October 25, 1875, Minutes Book, 1875-1885.

until 1885. Much of what is known of the early years of Powell's Chapel exists because of the record he left in the minute books.⁴⁶

William Powell married Mary Frances Maberry on October 5, 1875, in Rutherford County. At about the same time, he discovered he had tuberculosis in the "insipid state." Doctors advised him to move to Texas. On October 25, 1875, after just three months as pastor, Powell offered his resignation. He did not even stay long enough to see the first new church building erected for the congregation that bears his name.⁴⁷

Following Powell's resignation, the church immediately called Thomas Hutcherson in December 1875. No information is known about Hutcherson except that he served the church until August 1880. After Hutcherson, the church called A. J. Brandon in September 1880. Although he served only one year, Brandon pastored many churches in Middle Tennessee throughout his long career and was very active in the Concord Baptist Association.⁴⁸ The next pastor, S. G. Shepard, had the distinction of holding the longest pastorate for the church. He served from 1882-1894 and again from 1905-1909.

Powell's Chapel's experience with a succession of pastors was quite common for rural churches at the time. Edward Ayers writes that "Ministers had a hard life; most, it appears, stayed at a church only a year or two before moving on to greener pastures.

⁴⁶McRae, 33.

⁴⁷Ibid., 16; Powell, Letter to Luther M. Vaughter. W.D. Powell continued his faithful service after he moved to Texas helping to found the first Hispanic Baptist Church in San Antonio in 1888. In his career, he helped build 600 churches across the United States and Mexico; Powell's Chapel was the first. For more information on Powell's career, see I.G. Murray, "W.D. Powell, the Champion Church Dedicator," *Baptist and Reflector*, October 22, 1930.

⁴⁸McRae, 16.

About half were forced to work other jobs to support themselves. Fewer than a quarter of rural churches had a full-time minister, and over a third of rural ministers served four or more churches.”⁴⁹ Powell’s Chapel fared better than most congregations of its size.

During its early years, the church retained two men who remained with the congregation for long periods of time. Most rural churches held an annual call for pastors and struggled to pay their salaries, which created difficulty in retaining good men. Rural ministers, on average, also lacked the education and experience to effectively lead a congregation.⁵⁰

Powell graduated from Union University, but it is not known how much education the other early pastors of Powell’s Chapel possessed.

For Southern Baptists, like those led by the pastors of Powell’s Chapel, faith remained personal, and the education level of a pastor did not matter as much to his flock as his ability to win souls for Christ. The church placed its emphasis on personal salvation to prepare for the next life but also focused on matters of morality and personal conduct in this life. Rufus Spain writes that “The role of the church in this process was that of keeping its members consistently walking in the heavenly way through admonition reproof, and, as a final resort, church discipline.”⁵¹ Baptists focused on the personal habits and actions of members as a way to ensure the morality of their community. The most egregious offenses were drinking and dancing. One vice that caused controversy was tobacco use: “Attitudes ranged from a forthright condemnation

⁴⁹Ayers, 162.

⁵⁰Rufus Spain, *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 210; Harvey, 158-162.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 198.

of the use of tobacco as a sin second only to drunkenness to a spirited defense of its use as beneficial in soothing the nerves, aiding digestion, and preventing ‘local scurvy.’”⁵²

The men of Powell’s Chapel fell into the latter camp. After church, the men gathered in the front of the church, but conversation could not begin until each man had placed a plug of tobacco in his mouth. Allen Barrett detailed a less civilized use of tobacco at the church:

At one of the mid-week services a visitor of another faith was in attendance. The service took on the semblance of a debate between the leader of the service and this visitor. As the discussion warmed up, this man put his left hand to his face gave the victory sign and ejected a sizeable quantity of tobacco juice between his raised fingers which splattered on the floor there in the altar. This man, if alive today, wouldn’t be any slouch in competing in the National Tobacco Spitting Contest.⁵³

While tobacco use did not raise the eyebrows of the members of Powell’s Chapel, they did not hesitate to discipline members regularly for other offenses. The church maintained a certain order for disciplining parishioners. First, an offense would be brought before the church and two or more members would be assigned to meet with the alleged offender to ascertain his or her guilt. The committee would then report back to the church in a month or two for a vote by the church. The church minutes do not specifically outline the offenses of most members accused of wrong-doing in the 1870s and 1880s; however, founding member William Barrett received a visit from John Vaughtner and E. A. Shotwell in March 1877 for failing to attend church.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid., 202.

⁵³Barrett, June 15, 1975.

⁵⁴Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of March 1877, Minutes Book, 1875-1885.

In 1878, a charge was brought against Robert Lannom for “unchristian conduct.” His specific offense is not told, but three men were elected to investigate his behavior. The church voted to exclude W. B. Eads for “non-fellowship.” J. Nipper also received a visit for unchristian conduct in March 1880. In May 1880, the committee reported back that the charge against Nipper was sustained. The following January, the church sent a committee to question J. Barrett about immoral conduct. It is unclear what punishment these members faced, but it is clear that the church body actively policed its members’ behavior and viewed this as the proper role of a local church.⁵⁵

One way Powell’s Chapel and other Baptist congregations sought to lead their members to a higher standard of moral conduct was through the establishment of Sunday schools. Southern Baptists emphasized Sunday school. They viewed it as a way to provide religious instruction for members and serve as an outreach tool for the local community.⁵⁶ Powell’s Chapel started its first Sunday school in 1883 with W. P. Henderson serving as superintendent. “All classes met in one room, and the sanctuary, and continued to do so, except for some two years when it met in the school house.”⁵⁷ Sunday school has continued uninterrupted at Powell’s Chapel from 1883 to the present day.

By 1890, Powell’s Chapel was well established in the local community. Although the minutes from 1885-1908 are lost and little is known about those years, the church did

⁵⁵ Ibid., March 1880, May 1880, and January 1881.

⁵⁶ Norton, 84.

⁵⁷ Barrett, March 2, 1975.

continue to grow. Following the loss of the original meeting place, the congregation built a one-room church, giving it a permanent place in the community. A chronological register of members shows people from the local community continued to join the church. The yearly statistics for 1897, the last report available for in the nineteenth century, reveal that total church membership was 134, an increase of 112 from the twenty-two pioneers who helped start the church in 1875. Fifty-eight people were enrolled in Sunday school with an average attendance of thirty-eight, a robust number in a small, rural community.⁵⁸ While some members were lost to death and others “joined the Campbellites,” Powell’s Chapel continued to add to its numbers. The new century would bring new challenges to the community.⁵⁹

⁵⁸In contrast, the population of District Five in Rutherford County declined significantly from a population of 1,574 in 1870 to 956 in 1900; United States Census 1870 and 1900.

⁵⁹Chronological Record of Members, Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, 1875-1939.



Figure 2. Earliest known photograph of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Sunday School, circa 1900. Courtesy of Bruce and Mary Alice Short.

CHAPTER II

GROWING IN THE FAITH: 1900-1929

At the turn of the twentieth century, the people of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church entered the new era with a strong, growing membership. In 1900, the church role listed 149 members; by 1930, church membership numbered 228, an increase of 53 percent.¹ Unlike the church, the population of the community surrounding Powell's Chapel experienced little growth in the years between the turn of the century and the dawn of the Great Depression in 1929. The 1900 United States Census lists an approximate population of 860 in Rutherford County, District Five, but the 1930 census for the district only shows 859, a decrease of one.² Rutherford County as a whole also saw a decrease in population from 1900 to 1930. The congregants of Powell's Chapel faced many challenges in the early twentieth century as they battled social changes, sickness, changing gender roles, and World War I, but they continued to grow in their faith and in fellowship.³

The community surrounding the church remained rural with farmers growing a variety of crops and raising livestock in the fields around their homes. The area resembled most of the State of Tennessee during this time. Tennessee's rural population

¹Donald A. McRae, *Centennial History: Our Glorious Past Challenges the Future* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), 81.

²1900 United States Census; 1930 United States Census.

³"Census Data for State of Tennessee," accessed January 5, 2014, www.census.gov/population/cencountys/tn190090.txt. The population in 1900 was 33,543, while by 1930, it had dropped to 32,286.

ruled the state in the 1920s with 74 percent of the population living in communities of less than 2,500.⁴ The Southern Baptist Convention also remained dominated by rural churches during the first decades of the century. Paul Harvey writes that “In the early 1920s, a survey of over nineteen thousand SBC congregations revealed the extent to which rural people and churches dominated the region’s largest religious group. About 80 percent of Baptist church members were farmers; 35 percent of those were tenants.” He also notes that 86 percent of churches connected to the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1920s stood in places with a population of less than one thousand people.⁵

For rural areas, churches like Powell’s Chapel provided a social outlet that many farm families needed. In the years after the Civil War, a new type of community emerged as hamlets developed where roads crossed in rural areas throughout Tennessee and much of the South. Whereas plantations with numerous enslaved workers were self-contained entities prior to the Civil War, the ending of the plantation system gave rise to crossroads communities to provide support services for the farm families, everything from supplies to education to a place for socializing. Most included a general store, a school, and one or more churches. In the crossroads near Powell’s Chapel, called Mona, the Baptist Church, located about a mile from the community center, along with Jerusalem Cumberland

⁴George E. Webb, “Demographic Change and Antievolution Sentiment: Tennessee,” *Creation Evolution Journal* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 38.

⁵Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists: 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 86.

Presbyterian Church served the spiritual needs of the farmers.⁶ The Jerusalem Church, founded in 1840, also housed the local Masonic lodge on the second floor until the congregation built a new one-room structure in 1905. Of the twenty-one churches admitted to the Concord Baptist Association in the years between 1875 and 1912, sixteen, including Powell's Chapel, were located in crossroad communities.⁷

The ties created by church families strengthened the bonds in rural communities. Stephen Ash writes that "The country churches and the folk communities they embodied gave rural life much of the unity and stability it possessed."⁸ I. W. Newby, in *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915*, also tells of the importance of the church in creating bonds. He writes primarily of southern mill towns, but his research correlates to rural farm communities like Powell's Chapel. He says that "In many villages, the church was the only institution of significance outside the family and the mill, and the only source of group activity. Church, Sunday school, Bible school, choir practice, youth programs, socials, revivals, and even funerals constituted the core of

⁶For the purposes of this thesis, I refer to Powell's Chapel Baptist Church and the surrounding community both as Powell's Chapel. The area near Jerusalem Presbyterian Church and the general store is called Mona. Powell's Chapel Baptist Church is located approximately one mile north of this area.

⁷Nell Blankenship, *Rutherford County, Tennessee: History & Families* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 2002), 53; Fred Rolater, *Concord 200: The Story of Concord Baptist Association, 1810-2010 Including Its Churches and People* (Murfreesboro, TN: Concord Baptist Association, 2010), 112-113.

⁸Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 38.

social life for many villages.”⁹ In several rural areas, people attended three or four churches each month depending upon which denomination met on which day. As New South historian Edward Ayers writes, “Each church preached the same morality, and people could take satisfaction in feeling a part of a larger Protestant Christianity.”¹⁰ Despite the social aspects afforded by visiting all churches in the community, membership in Baptist churches, such as Powell’s Chapel, grew quickly during this time period. The rural population responded favorably to the Baptists’ emphasis on future rewards and the personal experience of salvation that formed the backbone of church doctrine.¹¹

These white Southern Baptists congregations resembled each other in more than their beliefs. Seventy-five percent of churches that existed in the early part of the 1900s were founded after the Civil War. Paul Harvey describes the meeting places for these fledgling churches: “Eighty-five percent of congregations with church houses met in one-room structures often in little cabin-like meeting houses with no carpets on the floor, no organ, no song books, and not even a Bible on the desk.” Most only convened once a month and called their pastor yearly. They focused on saving souls and assisting members in their quest to remain on the “straight and narrow” path.¹²

⁹I. W. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 399.

¹⁰ Edward P. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction, 15th Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167.

¹¹Ash, 33.

¹²Harvey, 86-87.

Powell's Chapel closely fits the description of the typical rural church in the early 1900s. In 1907, the congregation, having outgrown its original building, exchanged the original land with R. H. Henderson for a new lot one-half-mile south. At this location, the congregation built a new, larger building.¹³ Allen Barrett, a deacon in the church, describes the one-room church building where the congregation met during these years.

He writes that:

For cooling this large room, all six windows were raised. . . . As for heating, a large, pot-bellied stove stood in the center aisle, half-way between the door and the pulpit. When this huge stove and about two joints of the long pipe which extended through the ceiling and roof was red hot, should the preacher, who came only once a month, choose to preach on the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace or the final abode of the wicked, he had a ready illustration for his sermon in this central heating system.

He also recalls that the seating arrangement segregated the congregation by gender. Men sat on the left while women sat on the right, and the custom continued until the early 1920s. Barrett also tells of the church décor during the era: "On the pulpit stand three articles were ever present—large Bible, pitcher of water, and glass. The pastor read from the big Bible, the water was for relief of the raspy voice which generally developed near the close of a one or one and a half hour sermon." The glass the pastor used to soothe his parched throat also served as the communion cup where the entire congregation shared it to partake of the wine during the Lord's Supper observance.¹⁴

¹³Luther M. Vaughter, *History of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church*, October 5, 1930.

¹⁴Allen C. Barrett, *Reflections: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1875-1975* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), March 1, 1975 and June 22, 1975.

Although Powell's Chapel thrived during this time period, many rural Baptist churches struggled. The problem greatly concerned the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1916, the superintendent of publicity for the Home Mission Board, Victor I. Masters, published *Country Church in the South*. This book documented the decline of rural churches during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Some of the culprits he identified as responsible for the decline included inadequate programs, absentee pastors, and old, deteriorating buildings. He also blamed many of the problems on congregational individualism, exclusive focus on the need for personal salvation, and the reluctance of many churches to pay pastors.¹⁵ Masters wrote of the state of the rural church in 1916:

Consider in plain fact that the denomination which made this wonderful advance is made up of churches three-fourths of which meet for worship only once monthly. One-fourth of our churches are without a Sunday-school. Two-thirds of them have no Woman's Missionary Society. Three-fourths of them—nine-tenths of all the rural churches—are served by absentee pastors. These "pastors" not only do not live among their people and give the full powers of a God-called life to serving their needs, but the average term of service by the minister to one of these churches is probably less than three years. So that, beyond a casual acquaintance, the majority of rural church members are hardly known to the men whom God has called to feed the lambs and shepherd the flock!¹⁶

Masters also encouraged rural churches to advocate against tenant farming, stating that it would eventually destroy southern civilization. He believed it was up to the church to halt this system and restore rural stability.¹⁷

¹⁵ J. Wayne Flynt, "Southern Protestantism and Reform," in *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience*, ed. Samuel S. Hill (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 141.

¹⁶Victor Irvine Masters, *Country Church in the South* (Nashville, TN: The Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1916), 9 [Adobe PDF ebook].

¹⁷Flynt, 142.

Masters's call asked churches like Powell's Chapel to look beyond their focus on saving souls to address social issues in their community and in the larger world. The people of Powell's Chapel, like many of their country church brethren, did not heed this call. In an essay detailing the response of southern protestants to the reform movements at the turn of the century, J. Wayne Flynt writes, "Country churches clung to a narrow doctrinal emphasis and outworn orthodoxy, which admitted no link between religious and social problems." When asked to rank the highest priorities of their faith, Southern Baptists ranked evangelism and missions at the top of the list. Social ministries, like advocating for the abolition of the tenant system, ranked near the bottom. Southern Baptists recognized injustice, but as religious people they believed it was their responsibility to respond to the pain and difficulty involved in spiritual salvation of the person, not social action.¹⁸

Depending on their community, many rural Baptists failed to see injustices evident to city congregations. In *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, John Lee Eighmy argues that the average Southern Baptist church reflected the values of its local community instead of critically assessing those values. He writes that "As compared to the Presbyterians and Methodists of the South, the Baptists had greater difficulty accepting the social-gospel ideology because their religious individualism, theological conservatism, decentralized authority, and denominational isolationism, taken together, formed greater barriers to cooperative social

¹⁸John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), xiv.

action by churches.”¹⁹ Rufus Spain, in *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900*, concurs with Eighmy’s assessment of the denomination’s reaction to the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He writes that “Baptists usually approved those reform objectives for which they could find a precedent in the Bible or in traditional Christian morality, but they generally ignored or opposed those movements which lacked Biblical or moral sanction.”²⁰ As a result, Baptists failed to embrace the Social Gospel movement sweeping the country during the Progressive Era.

William G. McLaughlin, in *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: A Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977*, states that “The Social Gospel movement got its name because it rejected individual salvation as the beginning and end of Christ’s message and because it argued that men must come to God not as discrete, atomistic individuals, pure only in and of themselves, but as parts of the brotherhood of man, in which each is spiritually and ethically united to his neighbor.”²¹ By 1920, the religious community divided into opposing camps over the Social Gospel movement. Fundamentalists, like Southern Baptists, witnessed to others about their faith by telling of their conversion experience. Liberals showed their faith through social action.

McLaughlin further explains that “The former [fundamentalists] thought of religion in

¹⁹Ibid., 70-71.

²⁰Rufus Spain, *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 149.

²¹William G. McLaughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 171-172.

terms of subjective relationships to God, the latter [liberals] in terms of social relations with God's children."²² Many fundamentalists argued that if churches fulfilled their commission to save souls, reform movements would be unnecessary.²³

One of the most outspoken proponents of this view, fiery evangelist Billy Sunday, regularly preached about the need for Christians to save souls, not focus on social issues. Sunday, one of the most famous preachers of the era, told a reporter in 1915 that the trouble with churches and all of their organizations including the YMCA and young people's groups is that they "have taken up sociology and settlement work but are not winning souls to Christ We've had enough of this godless social service nonsense."²⁴

Despite their objections to the focus on social services by other denominations, Baptist churches such as Powell's Chapel did test the waters of the Social Gospel movement near the turn of the twentieth century, although not nearly to the extent of their northern neighbors. During the late 1880s and 1890s, Southern Baptists founded orphanages in most states, including Tennessee.²⁵ In May 1891, a group of ladies in Nashville founded an orphanage. Concord Baptist Association supported the effort and encouraged its member churches to donate to help support the home. In 1898, the proprietors of the orphanage reported to the Concord Baptist Association that they were

²²Ibid., 153.

²³Ayers, 171.

²⁴McLoughlin, 198-199.

²⁵Spain, 164.

servicing thirty children at that time, and in the seven years since founding the home, 150 children had moved through the home.²⁶

In 1910, the Tennessee Baptist Convention expanded on the work at the orphanage. It purchased land in Williamson County, constructed new buildings, and opened the Tennessee Baptist Orphan's Home on June 7, 1912, with fifty-five children in residence. Churches throughout the state, including Powell's Chapel, raised money for the home.²⁷ In July 1911, Powell's Chapel members collected a special offering for the orphanage, and continued to designate special offerings for the children's home until the end of 1945. According to the church minutes, the congregation supported the orphanage as the main Social Gospel ministry during the first four decades of the 1900s. For example, in December 1916 the church collected \$12.13 from the Sunday school as a Christmas gift to help complete the baby building at the orphanage.²⁸ By the late 1920s, Tennessee Baptists broadened their horizons from orphans to include statements for a compulsory school law, against mob violence or lynching, and the breaking of the

²⁶Rolater, 126.

²⁷W. Fred Kendall, *A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention* (Brentwood, TN: Executive Board of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1974), 227-228.

²⁸ Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of June 18, 1911, and January 6, 1917, Minutes Book, 1909-1917. It is unclear if the church supported the orphanage prior to 1909 as the church minutes are missing from 1885-1909. The church still supports the Tennessee Baptist Children's Home which is the successor to the orphanage founded in 1891 through the Mother's Day Offering sponsored by the Tennessee Baptist Convention. The Home is still located in Brentwood, TN.

Sabbath. Powell's Chapel, however, focused its efforts on raising money for the orphanage and supporting prohibition efforts in Rutherford County.²⁹

In 1877, with help of the state's religious community, Tennessee passed the Four Mile Law prohibiting the sale of liquor within four miles of a chartered school outside the limits of an incorporated town. This law served as the basis for temperance statewide. The fight for a dry state also signaled the entrance of the evangelical church into politics. For the first time, religious organizations switched their focus from changing the morals of the individual to changing the laws of the state.³⁰ Tennessee Baptists worked closely with the Anti-Saloon League for prohibition. The women of the denomination also worked with the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Fred Kendall writes that "In 1904, action was taken by the Convention recommending that churches neither receive nor retain in their membership those who drank or those who sold the 'distilled damnation'. They also asked that Christians refuse to vote for a man or party for any office known to be in sympathy with the saloon."³¹ The Convention asked the state legislature in 1907 to abolish saloons in the five remaining towns in the state with saloons. In addition, they asked Congress to make liquor laws applicable based on the state to which the spirits were shipped. The Convention rejoiced when Tennessee enacted prohibition in 1909.³² These actions marked a great change for the Convention, from

²⁹ Kendall, 262.

³⁰Herman A. Norton, *Religion in Tennessee, 1777-1945* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 90-91.

³¹Kendall, 223-224.

³²Ibid.

focusing on individual reform to reform on the state and local level; however, rural congregations often were conflicted on the issue prohibiting the manufacture, sale, or use of alcohol.

While Powell's Chapel's minutes do not mention active prohibition activities, the church's close relationship with the Concord Baptist Association indicates that it probably followed the directives of the association. Many members of Powell's Chapel served as leaders in the association during this time, most notably Luther M. Vaughter, who served as church clerk from 1916-1942 and Concord Association clerk from 1924-1949. Concord Association adopted two resolutions in 1925.³³ The first asked members to "cooperate with the enforcement of the laws, to refuse to vote for any candidate for office who supported selling intoxicants, and to preach regularly on the subject of temperance." According to the minutes of the association, the resolutions passed with a very low number of votes, indicating many in attendance abstained from voting. Fred Rolater in his history of the Concord Association suggests that the number of farmers in attendance and in local congregations might have accounted for the low number of votes: "Most preachers realized that many of their members made their living raising corn and making bootleg liquor or selling it to those who made it."³⁴

Many Baptist churches supported prohibition by adopting a policy of total abstinence for their members; however, these policies addressed the consumption of liquor, not the manufacture and sale. Tennessee Baptists touted the success of prohibition by reporting the great decline in arrests for drunkenness and announced that 238 of 275

³³McRae, 50.

³⁴Rolater, 152-153.

homes for drunkards closed because they were no longer needed.³⁵ Powell's Chapel adopted a Church Covenant provided by the Baptist Sunday School Board which stated that members were "to abstain from the sale of and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior."³⁶

Along with fighting against alcohol, fundamentalists fought another large battle against science with the Scopes Trial of 1925. Tennessee passed the Anti-Evolution Law (Butler Act) in 1925 with overwhelming majorities in both the House and Senate. The famous *State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes* trial involved a science teacher in Rhea County who taught evolution instead of creationism in his classroom.³⁷ While Powell's Chapel's historical documents do not include references to the largest evangelical challenge of the era, Tennessee Baptists responded quickly in support of the law and condemned those who like Scopes failed to obey it. After the Anti-Evolution Law passed, the Tennessee Baptist Convention adopted the following resolution: "That we endorse and support the law now upon the statute books of Tennessee, which forbids the teaching in public school of any scientific theory which says that man came into existence through a process of evolution from lower forms of animals." The convention also appointed a textbook committee that reported annually on the education programs and teaching at Baptist Schools. In 1925, "they commended the governor and the legislature for the law which had recently been passed to protect the children from the

³⁵Eighmy, 51; Kendall, 262.

³⁶Card inserted in Powell's Chapel Minutes, 1930-1932.

³⁷Charles A. Israel, *Before Scopes: Evangelicalism, Education, and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), ix-x.

errors of evolution.” In 1927, the convention reiterated the sentiment by affirming “that Baptists did not object to the teaching of the truth, from whatever source, but they did object to the teaching of theory and labeling it truth.”³⁸

Concord Baptist Association went a step further than the convention and did address the issue of evolution. Following the death of William Jennings Bryan in July 1925, Bryan having represented the State of Tennessee in the Scopes trial earlier that year, the association adopted a resolution condemning the teaching of evolution and urged churches to withdraw fellowship from those who taught the theory. The association also refused to support Baptist schools that taught the theory of evolution.³⁹

In addition to the evils of liquor and the teaching of evolution, the members of Powell’s Chapel battled other internal demons during these years. In 1914, the church experienced a great disagreement which threatened to split the congregation. The minutes are unclear about the actual cause of the argument, but the seriousness is clear in the tone of the minutes: “The object of this meeting is that the church get together like Christian people should do and let peace and harmony exist.”⁴⁰ As John Forrest writes in his study of dissent in a rural Georgia church, “Wherever dissent may start in the church, it always comes to a head at business meetings, and one way or another, it is resolved

³⁸Kendall, 239-240.

³⁹Rolater, 153.

⁴⁰Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of January 11, 1914, Minutes Book, 1909-1917.

there.”⁴¹ This is the case with the great issue that arose at Powell’s Chapel. Allen Barrett states that the main source of the conflict concerned a female member who wanted to preach from the pulpit.⁴² William Wright Barnes, in *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953*, writes that “Southern Baptists, in particular, were ultra-conservative on the question of women taking any part in church life, especially in the matter of women speaking before mixed audiences. The social objection was strongly buttressed by theological argument.”⁴³ The idea of a woman speaking from the pulpit would have constituted a major event in any conservative church.

Powell’s Chapel resolved the conflict in a special business meeting on January 11, 1914. Luther Vaughter documented the exchange in detail in the church minutes:

Church met. Pastor not present. Bro. J. R. Phillips elected as moderator. The object of this meeting is that the church get together like Christian people should do and let peace and harmony exist and all be of one accord and no confusion of her actions. Bro. S. D. Short arose and made apologies to each and every body and to the church saying he felt that God had forgiven him then extended motion to everybody that could say and wanted to do the same stand up, promising to bury everything in the past and let it be the past. Extended by Bro. Phillips that we were not to talk [of] them even, just let there be no more everybody stood up continued in singing old familiar song and brethren extended right hand of Christian

⁴¹John Forrest, “The Devil Sits in the Choir,” in *Diversities of Gifts: Field Studies in Southern Religion*, eds. Ruel W. Tyson, Jr., James C. Pencola, and Daniel W. Patterson (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 80.

⁴²Barrett, May 25, 1975. None of the church records specifically indicate that a woman requested to speak from the pulpit; however, no other cause for the rift is given in any records. Barrett was approximately eleven years old at the time of the incident.

⁴³William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1954), 140.

fellowship to each other and results was much happiness reined among us again.⁴⁴

The incident is not mentioned again in church records. The congregation moved forward with new initiatives and faced the challenges in the rest of the decade as a united body.

In 1918, the community of Powell's Chapel, along with the rest of the world, battled the flu epidemic. Worldwide, the flu pandemic of 1918 killed an estimated fifty million people. Young adults were especially hard hit. "In one year, the average life expectancy in the United States dropped by twelve years."⁴⁵ The first cases of the flu in Tennessee were reported in Memphis on September 27, 1918, the date when officials first required doctors to report on the virus. By October 10, officials reported seventy-six cases in Nashville. In mid-October, the disease reached Knoxville. Rural communities reported few, if any, cases while larger cities, such as Nashville, were hard hit. Before the end, Nashville doctors estimated 40,000 cases with 468 deaths. Nonessential businesses, schools, and churches closed for almost a month.⁴⁶

Although the flu affected primarily urbanized areas, it reached the Powell's Chapel community in the winter of 1918. Anna Lee Arnold Jones, who attended Powell's Chapel, wrote of the fear associated with the epidemic:

⁴⁴Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of January 11, 1914, Minutes Book, 1909-1917. It can be assumed that the woman in question did not preach from the pulpit.

⁴⁵National Archives and Records Administration, "The Deadly Virus: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918," accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/influenza-epidemic/>.

⁴⁶United States Department of Health and Human Services, "Tennessee: The Great Pandemic: The United States in 1918-1919," accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.flu.gov/pandemic/history/1918/your_state/southeast/tennessee.

In the winter of 1918, flu broke out everywhere. There was at least one sick or more in most families. All four of us were in bed at the same time and really sick. Those who did not have the flu were afraid to go in and help others. Dr. Sanders . . . was our doctor, he was so good to us. Sometimes he would put his horse in the barn and stay all night with us because we were so sick. I don't know how he kept going. Someone asked him how come he didn't get the flu, he said when he left home he filled every hole full of Vick's salve.⁴⁷

The number of members who passed away in the 1918 epidemic is unclear as the minutes from 1918-1919 were lost. However, the flu returned to the community in 1920 with devastating consequences.

The virus hit in February, 1920, and worked its way through the small community. The church closed for the month of March on account of the flu. Just as the flu epidemic of 1918 attacked young adults, the 1920 version took two young women from a prominent family who served as leaders of Powell's Chapel. The church placed an obituary in the *Baptist and Reflector* honoring the lives of both girls and acknowledging that "Death came into our midst and plucked from us two of our fairest and best."⁴⁸ On February 24, 1920, fifteen-year-old Erlene Wrather passed away. Only a few days later, on March 2, her twenty-six-year-old sister Lula Bell Wrather also passed away. Lula Bell, in particular, had a deep commitment to the church and her service to God. She left home to attend the Women's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Kentucky in preparation for service in the mission field. Unfortunately, failing eyesight forced her to return home where she actively served the church as a Sunday school teacher and in

⁴⁷Anna Lee Arnold Jones, "How We Lived," unpublished manuscript, 1994. Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Archives.

⁴⁸Clipping of Obituary from *Baptist and Reflector* in Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Minutes, 1920-1922

the Women's Missionary Union. As eulogized by the church in her obituary, "The gentle voice is hushed, but her influence lives on in the lives of those with whom she came in contact. Her greatest joy was in service for her Master, always ready to try to lead the unsaved to Him who alone can forgive sin, and no doubt, when she stood face to face with her blessed Lord, she had many trophies to lay at His pierced feet."⁴⁹ Upon the death of both young women, the congregation also passed a resolution, "That we as a church and Sunday school, while we deeply feel the loss of these noble workers, bow submissively to the ruling of an all-wise God."⁵⁰

In addition to internal conflict and great losses from the flu epidemic, the church sent nineteen young men to fight in World War I. While many fundamentalists, especially Southern Baptists, initially opposed American involvement in World War I, by 1917, they agreed with Woodrow Wilson's assertion that this would be "the war to make the world safe for democracy."⁵¹ Tennessee religious leaders used World War I to reinforce the belief in the United States as a Christian nation, especially as opposed to Germany.⁵² Paul Harvey writes that "The period during the First World War witnessed a great flourishing of religious progressivism across denominations. Baptist churchmen, always in but not quite of the large national movement, joined in the crescendo of

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰McRae, 44; Clipping of obituary from *Baptist and Reflector* in Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Minutes, 1920-1922.

⁵¹McLoughlin, 177.

⁵²Charles Alan Israel, "'There Can Be No Education without Religion': Tennessee Evangelicals and Education, 1875-1925" (PhD diss., Rice University, 2001), 280.

Protestant excitement even while remaining self-consciously separate from the large interdenominational ventures of the era.”⁵³ Baptists supported the war effort by advocating for the purchase of war bonds and encouraging patriotic shows of support for the country and troops. They rejected, however, interfaith meetings and efforts to create a national joint faith council.⁵⁴

Powell’s Chapel held a special service shortly after the United States entered the war. A. J. Brandon, Jr., the son of a former pastor, served as the speaker. Brandon invited the congregation to purchase war bonds and encouraged patriotism in the congregation. According to Allen Barrett, the meeting was an unqualified success: “Thousands of dollars were invested in bonds and the longest cedar pole that the forest could furnish was erected in the triangle directly across the road from the present pastorium. From this lofty position, Old Glory waved for many weeks.” Apparently, Brandon did not convince all members of their patriotic duty as some opposed the flying of the flag on church property because it violated the separation of church and state.⁵⁵ Other local Baptists also supported the war effort. In November 1917, Tennessee College students held a Food Conservation Parade culminating in a sermon by pastor Austin Crouch about the sin of waste.⁵⁶

The Tennessee Baptist Convention met two days after the signing of the Armistice in 1918. It passed a resolution declaring November 28 as a “day of praise,

⁵³Harvey, 222.

⁵⁴Ibid.; Rolater, 139.

⁵⁵Barrett, March 16, 1975.

⁵⁶Rolater, 139.

worship, and thanksgiving throughout the state. The people were to assemble in their churches and especially to pray that those assembled at the Peace Conference would make such terms of peace as would be pleasing to the Almighty God and in keeping with the teachings of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ World War I awakened many Baptists to the greater world and the needs, both spiritual and physical, outside their borders. Tennessee Baptists emerged from the war with a renewed spiritual interest that caused many, like Powell’s Chapel, to implement new educational programs for its members and the community.

Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church organized its first Sunday school in 1884. During the early years of the 1900s, the church greatly expanded its training offerings for its members. Powell’s Chapel was not alone in its growth in Christian education in the years surrounding World War I. Tennessee Baptists developed new education materials in the 1920s that helped start new programs in local churches. Fred Kendall, in the *History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention*, writes that “The changed atmosphere after World War I brought an emphasis on growth and enlargement. Public education was greatly enlarged and the demand for education and learning was tremendous. This affected the churches and brought great demand for better trained leadership. There was also a demand for a better educated church membership.”⁵⁸ The outbreak of World War I also resulted in an increase of calls to use the Bible in public schools. The Tennessee General Assembly responded by passing a law in 1915 regulating the reading of the Bible in the state’s

⁵⁷Kendall, 209.

⁵⁸Ibid., 252.

schools. Tennessee Baptists protested this change, most notably in a critique by J.W. Gillon in the *Baptist and Reflector* that stated, “Forced Bible reading [in public schools] was a sign of great spiritual decay.” In reaction, Baptist increased religious education provided by local churches.⁵⁹

In 1916, Powell’s Chapel organized its first Baptist Young People’s Union (B.Y.P.U.). The purpose of the group was to unify Baptist youth, increase spirituality, provide instruction in Baptist faith and doctrine, improve knowledge of the Bible, and encourage missionary service and support.⁶⁰ Barrett reports that the church discussed the pros and cons of the organization before voting to establish it: “The pros said that our young people needed something within the church designed to help young people stand on their feet and express themselves. The cons countered that the B.Y.P.U. would serve only as a courting place for young people.” The church as a whole, however, decided that the pros outweighed the cons and voted to organize a group.⁶¹ The group at Powell’s Chapel met on weeks where there was no regular preaching service, thus providing a social outlet as well as spiritual training. While the group started slowly, by 1922 it served as a vital part of the church organization. In 1928, Powell’s Chapel had one of the strongest B.Y.P.U. groups in Concord Association.⁶² The group met on Sundays without

⁵⁹Israel, *Beyond Scopes*, 121-122.

⁶⁰Dorothy A. Davis, “Inventory to the Baptist Young People’s Union of America Collection,” Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, July 2008, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.sbhla.org/downloads/46.pdf>.

⁶¹Barrett, March 9, 1975.

⁶²Rolater, 151.

regular preaching. Meetings included Bible study and social activities such as singing and refreshments.

In 1925, Powell's Chapel started planning for a Women's Missionary Society chapter with assistance from Rachael Vancleave, Director of Women's Work with the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville. The Women's Missionary Society officially formed in 1926 with six charter members who lived in the immediate community. They were Lucy Short, Zoa Jones, Bettie Robertson Short, Winnie Arnold, Azilee Phillips, and Anabel Vaughter Dunaway. In 1928, there were ten members, which remained the same until 1932. Through the society the women in the church expanded their leadership role by collecting missionary offerings and conducting special meetings to share the work of Baptist missionaries in the United States and abroad.⁶³

The national Women's Missionary Union (WMU), which the Powell's Chapel society followed, was founded in Richmond, Virginia, in 1888 as an auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention. The WMU's main purpose, which remains unchanged since its founding, is "to educate and involve adults, youth, children, and preschoolers in the cause of Christian missions." Southern Baptist women led the church in mission education and giving as well as providing programs like Sunbeams to educate children and young people about missions around the world.⁶⁴ The Women's Missionary Union allowed Baptist women to exert themselves in an area that did not threaten their accepted

⁶³James Powers, "Missions Through the Years," unpublished manuscript, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Archives, 1 and 23.

⁶⁴Catherine Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of the Women's Missionary Union* (Birmingham, AL: Women's Missionary Union, 1987), 42-46.

role in the religious order. Spain writes that “Although Baptists opposed the women’s rights movement, they welcomed the expanding role of women in behalf of benevolent and religious causes.”⁶⁵ This new organization at Powell’s Chapel proved to be an acceptable area for women to provide leadership to the church without challenging conventional gender roles.

In addition to the new opportunities for leadership offered by the Women’s Missionary Union, women at Powell’s Chapel experienced other opportunities for leadership during this era. Prior to 1918, the Southern Baptist Convention did not permit women to attend its meetings or vote in deliberations. However, in 1918, when the suffrage movement was at its height, the convention admitted women to its meetings as delegates for the first time.⁶⁶ Many critics viewed women at the national convention as contrary to the biblical role of women. Progressives argued, however, that women were necessary to the future of the convention, especially in the role of home and foreign missions. It would be another ten years, however, before they could speak in a meeting without a male proxy.⁶⁷

Concord Baptist Association admitted women as delegates five years earlier than the Southern Baptist Convention, although its reasons are unclear. In 1913, Powell’s Chapel appointed its first two female delegates to the Concord Association meeting, although the church minutes note one of the women only as “William Short and wife.”

⁶⁵Spain, 168.

⁶⁶The 19th Amendment would pass a year later and become law in 1920.

⁶⁷Harvey, 212.

The other woman was also from the Short family, Mrs. Bettie Robertson Short.

Following that year, women regularly represented the church in association business.

Callie Jones became known as the “grandmother of the Concord Association” for never missing a meeting.⁶⁸

From 1900 to the end of 1928, Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church grew from a small church with preaching once a month plus a Sunday school to a thriving church organization. During this era, the congregation built a new building, added programs for young people and women, and started tentatively reaching beyond its walls by donating to the orphan’s home. They provided leaders to the Concord Baptist Association and served as a beacon to the community whether by flying a large American flag to remind their neighbors to support the war effort or as an example to fellow churches who marveled at their growth. Their greatest challenges, however, lay ahead as they literally faced trial by fire.

⁶⁸Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of July 6, 1913, Minutes Book 1907-1917; McRae, 71. Callie Jones was one of the ten founding members of the church as well as a leader in the Concord Association.

CHAPTER III

RISING FROM THE ASHES: 1929-1950

On March 10, 1929, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church faced its darkest hour. On that Sunday morning, the congregation prepared for Sunday school when a spark from the flue landed on the shingle roof and ignited the building. According to newspaper reports, the fire fully engulfed the roof before anyone noticed it. *The Home Journal* in Murfreesboro reported that "Fifty or more people had gathered at the time for Sunday school and the furnishings and piano of the church were saved." The church building burned to the ground. The congregation, however, vowed to continue meeting according to church spokesman Luther Vaughter.¹

The building, constructed in 1927, boasted a handsome design with modern conveniences. According to the newspaper, "Powell's Chapel church was one of the most attractive and best equipped country churches in the county. The congregation took an active interest in keeping the building and grounds in first-class shape." Furnished with electric lights, the building was more modern than most rural churches of the time. Along with the destruction of the building, the church suffered a significant financial loss from the fire because the building was not insured.²

Despite overwhelming obstacles, the congregation kept its commitment to Powell's Chapel. One week after the fire on March 17 the Sunday school met at the Powell's Chapel School for its regular session. Spencer Dillion Short, the Sunday school

¹"Powell's Chapel is Destroyed by Fire," *The Home Journal* (Murfreesboro, TN), March 12, 1929, 1.

²Ibid.

superintendent, read a letter sent to the congregation the day after the fire from the Jerusalem Cumberland Presbyterian Church located a mile away. The letter stated that “The session of Jerusalem Church representing the membership wishes to express to the membership of Powell’s Chapel Church through me their sincere sorrow in the loss of your church and offers to you our building to be used as you desire and as much as you like.” This gesture from the neighboring church greatly moved the congregation, which “Resolved . . . with grateful hearts the kind expressions of sorrow and sympathy with us by the membership of Jerusalem Church and also to express as best we can in our feeble way the heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our neighbor church for their kind offer of their building for our use as long as we need it.” The deacons then announced that the preacher would preach at Jerusalem the next Sunday.³

On the fourth Sunday of March, the members of Powell’s Chapel gathered at Jerusalem Church for an emotional service. Pastor S. P. DeVault delivered a sermon based on Nehemiah, chapters four through six, which detail the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. One key verse in the chapters included the following encouragement to the congregation, “So we rebuilt the wall until the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had the will to keep working.”⁴ Throughout the next two decades, Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church answered the call from Nehemiah as they kept working despite the effects of the Great Depression and the hardships of World War II. The church’s rural location as well as the dedication and economic status of its members

³ Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of March 17, 1929, Minutes Book, 1928-1929.

⁴Nehemiah 4:6 (Holman Christian Standard).

helped sustain the country church despite ongoing challenges. It rose to the height of its membership in the early 1940s.

On August 19, 1929, the church began to immediately rise from the ashes of the fire by starting construction on a new brick building that was completed on December 17 at a cost of \$5,135.02.⁵ For the next several months, the church worked on furnishing the building. On October 5, 1930, Powell's Chapel held a dedication ceremony for the new building. The congregation invited all past living pastors to participate in the day-long ceremony, although most could not attend due to illness or prior commitments. The day included a dedication sermon by Dr. J. D. Freeman of Nashville and a reading of the church's history by Luther Vaughter. Several hundred attended the service, followed by a picnic lunch on the church grounds. In the afternoon, Spencer Dillon read letters from former pastors, and P. W. Carney, one of those former pastors, delivered the afternoon sermon. The grand day capped off a year and a half of hard work by the congregation to restore the building.⁶

In the 1920s, the Southern Baptist Convention advocated a movement to strengthen rural churches. Numerous publications contributed to this effort, including Victor I. Masters's *Country Church in the South, One Hundred Successful Rural Churches* by Dr. I. J. Van Ness, and *The Country Preacher* by Dr. Jeff Ray (for training

⁵Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of March 17, 1929, Minutes Book, 1928-1929. Despite impressive fund raising efforts, the church borrowed \$574.85 in January 1930 to finish paying for the building.

⁶Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of November 1930, Minutes Book, 1930-1932; "Church Building Dedicated Sunday," *The Home Journal* (Murfreesboro, TN), October 7, 1930, 1.

rural pastors) are among the prescriptive books that appeared between 1916 and 1925. Although this movement waned during the lean years of the Great Depression, advocates for the improvement of the rural church, such as Masters, Van Ness, Ray, and L. G. Frey, business manager of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, continued to encourage rural churches to improve in order to reach more souls. As Frey wrote in *Romance of Rural Churches* (1947), “Nothing recommends a community more to a home-maker than an attractive country church regularly painted with grounds and driveways well kept. It makes cold shivers chase up and down a Christian’s spine to see a New Testament church building with grounds grown up in weeds and bushes, window glass out, doors off the hinges, steps broken.” He may have had Powell’s Chapel in mind when he wrote, “Rural electrification is meaning much already and will mean more for it is making available to country people all of the labor-saving devices, conveniences, and comforts of the city with none of its disadvantages. Lighting, heating, ventilating, and even cooling systems are now available in the remotest rural community because of electricity.”⁷ Compared to the other rural churches profiled by Frey and Masters, Powell’s Chapel entered the 1930s as a fairly modern congregation with a fully electrified, new church building that was well maintained by a paid janitor.⁸

⁷Gary Farley, “Celebrating the Jubilee Year of the Rural Church Program,” *Review and Expositor* 93 (2004): 8-11, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://ruralchurch.us/wp-filez/SOCS/rcjubilee.pdf>; L.G. Frey, *Romance of Rural Churches* (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1947), 29, 34. accessed January 3, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/romanceofruralch011954mbp>.

⁸ Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of February 1930, Minutes Book, 1930-1932.

The economic crisis for farm families did not start with the stock market crash in October 1929. The collapse of farm prices after World War I started the struggle for farmers in the South. Melissa Walker writes, in *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941*, that “In the years after World War I, change pummeled upcountry folk. The postwar plunge in farm prices stretched into a twenty-year agricultural depression for the people of the upcountry South.” As a result, the stock market crash had little effect on areas already dealing with dismally low farm prices.⁹ Southern farmers already averaged much lower incomes from their crops than farmers in other parts of the country. *The Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, published by the National Emergency Council in 1938, reported that even in 1929 when times were “prosperous” the southern farmer averaged \$186 in gross income compared with \$528 for farmers in other regions of the United States.¹⁰

Rutherford County in the 1930s exemplified rural Tennessee. More than two-thirds of the population of the South lived in rural areas, and the economic divide was pronounced with 42 percent working as hired hands, tenants, or sharecroppers. In Rutherford County most people lived in rural areas. The only town was Murfreesboro. Smyrna and Eagleville, while growing, were just villages. Industry was largely tied to agriculture, such as the Rutherford County Creamery and the Carnation Milk Plant, both

⁹Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 34, 5.

¹⁰David L. Carlton and Peter A. Coclanis, *Confronting Southern Poverty in the Great Depression* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996), 54.

located in Murfreesboro. A cedar bucket factory and a couple of small textile mills provided the only other means of industrial employment in the county.¹¹

The people of Powell's Chapel also remained tied to agriculture in the 1930s. The majority of residents of the Fifth District of Rutherford County listed "farmer" as their employment in the 1930 census. The area was characterized by a large number of landholders and few, if any, commercial farming operations. The 1930 census reveals 175 total households surrounding the church in District Five. Of that number, ninety-six, or 55 percent, owned their own land. Seventy-nine, or 45 percent, rented their homes and labored on other farms. Most of the members of Powell's Chapel owned their land, continuing to represent the more prosperous residents of the district.¹²

While little data exists on the impact of the depression years on rural Rutherford County residents, the Nashville area fared well during the early years. As late as September 1930, the *Nashville Tennessean* proclaimed there was no depression in Nashville. By 1931, however, opinions had changed. According to historian Robert Spinney, "One survey of white working-class neighborhoods revealed that 32 percent of the area's families were on relief rolls." Still, Nashville and other southern cities did not suffer as badly during the depression as northern cities dependent on industry. Spinney

¹¹Kenneth J. Bindas, *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 15; Fred Rolater, "Padlocking the Door, Releasing the Spirit: Concord Baptist Association, 1930-1950," *Tennessee Baptist History* (Fall 1999): 54.

¹²1930 United States Census.

writes that “while Nashville’s unemployment rate in the 1930s was much higher than it had been in the 1920s, it still stood at only half the national unemployment rate.”¹³

The experience of the depression in rural areas, like the Powell’s Chapel community, differed from those in southern cities like Nashville. Kenneth J. Bindas, who collected oral histories about the depression years from people born before 1920, discovered that rural southerners relied on themselves and their neighbors even as they accepted help from the government and other social services agencies. They made their own decisions about involvement in New Deal relief programs despite the guilt of not finding steady work. He writes, “When the economy collapsed in the latter part of the 1920s and flattened out in the early 1930s, the initial response called upon individuals to take care of themselves, with private agencies seen as the last resort. As the crisis deepened, it remained incumbent on each individual to solve the larger economic problem; failure to do so resided within the individual rather than the state and the new modernist ideas.” Communities came together to help one another through the crisis, even providing assistance for dealing with the government.¹⁴

The community of Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church illustrates this pattern. They came together in many ways to help neighbors who struggled during the hard economic times. The assistance provided one of the founding members of the church, now widowed, demonstrates one instance of such community support. In 1927, Callie Jones, a founding member of the church, filed a Confederate Widow’s Indigent Pension

¹³Robert G. Spinney, *World War II in Nashville: Transformation of the Homefront* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 1-2, 4.

¹⁴Bindas, 2-3.

application based on the service of her husband. Members of the church, including R. H. Henderson and R. H. Ward, served as witnesses for her application. She received the pension and served the church until her death in the 1940s.¹⁵

Other church members told stories of hardship and neighborly kindness during the depression years. Anna Arnold Jones who played the piano and organ at Powell's Chapel in the 1930s, wrote a memoir of her life, including the years of the Great Depression. In 1930 Jones and her husband bought a farm in the Powell's Chapel community. They financed the purchase through the Federal Land Bank. To pay the mortgage, Robert, Anna's husband, worked the farm and did odd jobs for other farms using his equipment. He did enough business in Rutherford and Wilson counties to employ several African-American neighbors, whom he paid fifty cents a day. He also collected eggs to take to Mona, the closest store, where he would get a nickel or trade them for coal oil for light. At the time, bread at the store cost five cents. Jones wrote, "The first three or four years were rough. I guess the thing that bothered us most was would we ever be able to hold on to the place." They did, however, manage to keep their farm through the crisis.¹⁶

Farm families rarely lacked food and basic supplies as they grew or made what they needed. Luxuries, however, were scarce. As Kenneth J. Bindas wrote, "One hears or reads repeatedly in oral histories that the family learned to do without or did not have

¹⁵Application No. 8877, Lydia C. Jones, October 28, 1927, "Tennessee, Confederate Pension Applications, Soldiers and Widows, 1891-1965," Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Library and Archives.

¹⁶Anna Arnold Jones, "How We Lived," Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Archives, Murfreesboro, TN (Mrs. Jones typed a memoir of her life for her family sometime prior to her death in February of 2000; her family donated a copy to the church.); 1940 United States Census.

enough money for this or that, but that this was the way it always was and there was some form of nobility behind it—that they were at least self-reliant and thus, by their definition, American.”¹⁷ Anna Jones illustrates the reliance of the farm wife. She writes, “We had to be very, very saving on what we had to eat. In the spring wild greens (sallet) came up in our yard, I would gather it and it was real good but had lots of stems. If I broke off all the stems that would be wasting too much. I tell you in times like these there has to be lots of true love.”¹⁸

Bruce Short, a member of Powell’s Chapel, also recalls the resourcefulness of families during the depression. His family, particularly hard hit by the economic downturn, lost their home near Jefferson and moved to a relative’s farm closer to the church where they lived as tenants. “Daddy and Mama lost everything they had,” said Mr. Short. “And here, you could not find a job, he went to Florida. It was when they started building a lot, carpenter work in Florida. And he went to Florida and got him a job, Daddy did, he left the boys, well myself and my two sisters, together with Mama. He would send her back some money. We got by pretty good while he was in Florida.” Other men in the community left their homes for work. Anna Jones recalls, “Our neighbor, Alma Mann, came one day to see if I had enough pennies for her to buy a stamp and I happened to have enough. Her husband was working away somewhere and she wanted to write him.”¹⁹

¹⁷Bindas, 64, 14-15.

¹⁸Jones, “How We Lived.”

¹⁹ Bruce and Mary Alice Short, Interview by Author, Smyrna, TN, December 20, 2013; Jones, “How We Lived.”

For women like Bruce Short's mother and Alma Mann, their roles in the home changed drastically during the depression. For the first time, many women worked outside of the home or their farm work became critical to the family economy. As Susan Hartmann writes in *The Home Front and Beyond*, "As family income declined, wives had to substitute their own labor for goods and services which they had formerly purchased. Home canning, baking, and sewing for family consumption increased, and women also endeavored to supplement family income by taking in laundry or boarders or preparing food and clothing to sell." They also worked the land alongside their children to keep a roof over their head and food on the table.²⁰

While Bruce Short's father was in Florida, the family lived as tenants and sharecropped corn and cotton. They had two or three cows for milk for their own use and raised their own meat for killing. "We never did go hungry," Mr. Short said. The church helped the Short family as well by holding a special offering in March of 1938 to assist the family through some particular need. The church members greatly supported each other during the early 1930s. Bruce Short recalls members bringing wagons of produce or other goods to Sunday meetings. George Spain brought a load of watermelons every week to sell and if he did not sell them at the end of the service, he gave them to the children. Mr. Short recalled the weekly barter sessions outside the church, "People would

²⁰Bindas, 21-22; Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 16-17.

come in there and bring vegetables, chickens, eggs, and we'd swap out. I'd swap you a dozen eggs for a chicken or whatever, a dozen ears of corn." ²¹

Along with its members, Powell's Chapel struggled financially during the depression years. Fred Rolater tells of the difficulties faced by churches in the area. He writes, "Concord's history indicates that the churches and their families were distinctly affected. The 1931 Minutes reported a 43 percent decline in local church expenditures, a 29 percent decline in Cooperative Program funds, and a 19 percent decline in total mission expenditures. Pastors' salaries, by comparison, held fairly steady, dropping only from \$13,825 to \$12,142 in total." By the same time in 1932, pastors' salaries had fallen to \$9,333. By 1933, total church expenditures in the Concord Association bottomed out at \$10,442 or 27 percent of the 1930 figure. Most of those funds paid the pastors' salary. ²²

Powell's Chapel, like many of its sister churches, struggled to pay its pastor during the years between 1932 and 1936. For 1932, the congregation elected Bro. J. C. Miles as pastor at an annual salary of \$250. In this year, the church also began to struggle to cover its expenses. Bro. S. P. DeVault, pastor from 1923-1931, sent the church a letter stating they owed him \$100 in back salary. On February 22, 1932, the church opened a ten-day revival with guest evangelist Rev. Paul Hodge of South Pittsburgh. At the end of the revival, the church collected an offering of \$22.06 "besides a large amount of canned fruits and other produce" for Rev. Hodge's services. After two years of service, J. C. Miles resigned his pastorate in December 1933 and also gave deferred salary as the

²¹ Bruce and Mary Alice Short interview; Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of March 1938, Minutes Book, 1936-1951.

²² Rolater, "Padlocking the Door," 55-56.

reason. According to his resignation letter, he declined to preach a final sermon to the congregation due to hard feelings over finances. However, despite a few years of difficult times, Powell's Chapel kept a good record of its debts and paid all pastors the salary due them by the end of the decade.²³

Church members also found creative ways to help support the church financially. Those who could not contribute cash regularly to the church tithed with produce and other farm products. Beginning in the late 1930s, the church also dedicated an acre of its land for farming cotton. They called it "God's Acre." E. W. Phillips oversaw the venture. The church picked the cotton and used the proceeds for church maintenance and programs. In 1940, the cotton fund paid off all outstanding claims and left the church debt free. Similar programs across Southern Baptist churches encouraged members to set aside an acre of their own land as the Lord's Acre. L. G. Frey described the program at one church: "Several [members] agreed to plant plots in cotton, for that was the money crop, and give the proceeds to the church for the year. One man who had pledged \$10.00 to the church for the year, turned in a check on his plot for \$37.50, the biggest single annual church gift of his life."²⁴

Other churches in Rutherford County fared much worse during the lean years. Murfreesboro Baptist Church, now First Baptist Church, suffered more than any church in Concord Association. They built a new building in 1920, but floated a bond to pay for the construction. As fortunes disappeared in the early 1930s, the church could not meet

²³Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of 1932, Minutes Book, 1930-1932; Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of 1936-1937, Minutes Book, 1936-1951.

²⁴Frey, 78-79.

its financial obligation. In the fall of 1936, the court auctioned the church building on the courthouse steps. Rolater writes of the sad scene on the Sunday morning following the auction: “The depths of the depression were exhibited the next morning as the church met at the Tennessee College for Women chapel. Most members wept and there was no inclination for singing and preaching.” The church continued meeting in the college chapel until an agreement was made with the bondholders thirteen months later and they finally returned to their building.²⁵

Despite the financial struggles, Powell’s Chapel still made great strides in its ministry during the 1930s. One of the most significant decisions made during this era was the election of Reverend B. B. Powers as pastor. Powers began his ministerial career at Powell’s Chapel starting in January 1936. In February 1936, the church, under his leadership, voted to move from a one-week-a-month preaching service to a half-time schedule with two worship services per month.²⁶ The decision also brought Powers an increase in salary to \$30 per month or \$360 annually. Within a year, the church voted again to hold full-time preaching at the church starting in January 1937 and raised the preacher’s salary to \$720 per year. This decision, made without a dissenting vote, greatly improved the ability of the church to minister to its flock and the surrounding community. The congregation voted to increase the pastor’s salary despite debts owed to previous pastors; however, the change to full-time services allowed them to increase income through more offerings and expanded membership. They quickly settled

²⁵Rolater, “Padlocking the Door,” 56-57.

²⁶Although the church met for preaching once a month, they held Sunday school, B.Y.P.U., and other programs the other Sundays.

outstanding debts. L. G. Frey wrote, "It is bad to have only a monthly preaching program, but the absence from the preacher from the field 29 out of 30 days is worse. No business on earth could long exist under similar circumstances."²⁷ A full-time preacher greatly contributed to the growth of the membership and programs of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church. Powers's resignation in September 1937 delayed progress slightly, but growth continued under Reverend Woodrow Medlock, who took the pulpit full-time in November 1937 and led the congregation until November 1940.²⁸

Powell's Chapel started its first bus ministry during this time. In March 1937, the church appointed a committee to investigate the feasibility and cost of obtaining a bus to transport pupils to and from Sunday school. After months of investigation, the committee announced that bus service would begin the second week of August 1938. Jordan Dillon furnished the bus, Andrew Wrather drove it, and the church paid for gasoline. Sunday school attendance increased from sixty-eight in March 1937 to 113 in October 1938, but records are unclear how much the bus contributed to the increase. Nonetheless, the church, pleased with the bus ministry, purchased its own bus in 1939.²⁹

The dawning of the 1940s brought Powell's Chapel Baptist Church into a decade that saw the congregation reach the height of its membership and achieve financial stability. According to church records, the summer of 1941 provided a number of records

²⁷Frey, 41.

²⁸Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of September 1951, Minutes Book, 1936-1951; Donald A. McRae, *Centennial History: Our Glorious Past Challenges the Future* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), 23; Frey, 41.

²⁹Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of April 1939, Minutes Book, 1936-1951.

for the church. The church averaged 146 in Sunday school for May; in June they averaged 181; in July 207. In August 1941, the church held a series of revivals led by its new pastor, Luther Joe Thompson. Following the two-week meeting, forty-four people were baptized in nearby Stones River, a record for the number of people baptized by the church in one day.³⁰ Church documents tout the records but do not speculate as to the reason church attendance grew so quickly during that summer. It is worth noting, however, that the neighbor church, Jerusalem Cumberland Presbyterian, struggled during this time, closing for five years in the early 1940s due to lack of attendance.³¹

L. G. Frey attributed the success of churches like Powell's Chapel to their full-time status and commitment to winning souls for the Lord. He wrote, "Any country church reaching, teaching, training its members and leading them in worship, in winning the lost, and financially supporting a full-time program, should be considered successful." By 1946, he added,

More than 303 quarter-time churches have moved up to half, or full-time preaching. It means more than 25 percent of Tennessee's quarter-time churches became dissatisfied with their way of serving the Lord and improved it greatly. It means more lost people will be won to Christ, more money will be given to missions and benevolences, more Christians will be matured, and more interest in those communities will be Christ-centered than ever before.³²

³⁰McRae, 89.

³¹Nell Blankenship, *Rutherford County Tennessee History and Families* (Paducah, KY: Rutherford County Historical Society, 2002), 53.

³²Frey, 120, 17.



Figure 3. Powell's Chapel Church members posing with the new bus in 1939. Courtesy of Rutherford County Archives.



Figure 4. Powell's Chapel Baptism in Stones River, August 1941. Courtesy of Donna Carroll.

Another reason for the increase in church attendance could be linked to the outbreak of World War II. Although the United States was not yet involved in the conflict in Europe, the country was preparing for war. The summer of 1941 marked the start of the Tennessee Maneuvers, a campaign of training the United States Army for possible war in Europe. According to Ann Toplovich:

From the summer of 1941 until January 1945, twenty-eight military divisions and many detached units and corps trained in twenty-one counties in Middle Tennessee. The Tennessee Maneuvers spanned the fight of General Patton's Second Army Division along the Duck River to the final 'battle' in the state by the Twentieth Army Division. For the main portion of the maneuvers, field headquarters were at Cumberland University in Lebanon.³³

One group of soldiers camped on the Malone/Henderson farm adjacent to Powell's Chapel.³⁴ In 1944, the church minutes reported that the treasurer signed papers to receive pay for damage to the church roads, probably from troop movements. With respect to the damage these exercises inflicted on the Middle Tennessee landscape, "It is estimated that 800,000 servicemen passed through training in the Tennessee Maneuvers. The impact of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and heavy equipment on the small towns and countryside was substantial. Claims by civilians for damage numbered 29,319 amounting to \$2,619,603."³⁵ The maneuvers kept the war at the forefront of the minds of Tennesseans. June Oakley Gonzalez lived in Lebanon during the war. She said, "I guess

³³Ann Toplovich, "The Tennessean's War: Life on the Home Front," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March 1992): 26.

³⁴Caneta Skelley Hankins, *Hearthstones: The Story of Rutherford County Homes* (Murfreesboro, TN: Oaklands Association, Inc. and Center for Historic Preservation at MTSU, 1993), 18.

³⁵Toplovich, 27.

we Middle Tennesseans had a closer look at what was happening in the war; our soldiers were a daily reminder.”³⁶



Figure 5. Children’s Training Union class at Powell’s Chapel, September 1948.
Courtesy of Bruce and Mary Alice Short.

Others who were children during the early 1940s, remembered vividly the soldiers who passed through the area during the maneuvers. Mary Ruth Phillips, a member of Powell’s Chapel, lived in the Dillon community in Rutherford County at the time and recalls how the soldiers camped on her grandmother’s farm. She remembers that they gave candy to the children. Cora Ella Wrather Price attended Powell’s Chapel as a child, and her family lived just across the Wilson County line. She remembers going to the one-room schoolhouse and seeing soldiers camped all around it. The soldiers asked the teacher if they could invite the children down to their camp for a wiener roast. Mrs. Price

³⁶ As quoted in Toplovich, 28.

said, “We were so excited. They carried all of us not too far from the school, down on the river, and we had a wiener roast. None of us had ever been to a wiener roast before.”

Eleanor Dowdy heard stories about the maneuvers from her mother. Mrs. Dowdy said that her little brother was about three years old when soldiers camped on their farm on Fall Creek and they threw money over the yard fence for him.³⁷

Soldiers also received warm welcomes from many of the local residents even as the armies tore up farmlands and destroyed fences. “Women outdid each other cooking homemade food for the men on maneuvers and taking it to them in the field,” wrote Susan L. Gordon in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*. “Families often invited soldiers into their homes for meals, conversation, and a place to relax.”³⁸ Soldiers asked Cora Ella Wrather Price’s mother to cook for them even though it was against regulations. Mrs. Price recalled her mother, Blanche, starting to cook a meal at 10:00 p.m. and soldiers slipping into the house to eat around midnight. She fixed ham, blackberry jam, biscuits, and other staples from the farm.³⁹

The maneuvers also brought tragedy to the nearby Walter Hill community. On July 16, 1943, the 101st Airborne arrived in Walter Hill in trucks to prepare for a simulated parachute drop. After vacation bible school, the pastor of Holly Grove Baptist Church drove up to the crossroad between Walter Hill and Lascassas to drop off nine-

³⁷Mary Ruth Phillips, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, January 5, 2014; Larry and Donna Wrather, Cora Ella Wrather Price, and Naomi Wrather Todd, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, January 14, 2014; Eleanor Eades Dowdy, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, January 8, 2014.

³⁸Susan L. Gordon, "Home Front Tennessee: The World War II Experience," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 51 (1992): 8, 9-10.

³⁹Wrather, Price, and Todd Interview.

year old Eleanor Doris Barrett and her brother. As she stepped from the car, an army jeep hit and killed her. The accident cast a lasting pall over the maneuvers in the area.

Powell's Chapel was indirectly affected as several siblings of Eleanor's father, Horace, were very active in Powell's Chapel.⁴⁰

While the people of Powell's Chapel experienced a taste of war with the Tennessee Maneuvers, twenty-nine of the young men of the church served in various branches of military service during the war. Three were killed: Marvin Parker, James Baskin, and Hoyt Estes. Bruce Short served as a combat medic in the China-Burma-India Theater. He clearly remembers arriving for church on December 7, 1941, and learning of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. His family did not have a radio and received most of their news at the church. When Bruce arrived that morning, he saw a group of men clustered in front of the building. They broke the news of the bombing. Then, he recalls, "Here come Mr. John Jones. He lived right down below us there. And he walked up to me and said, 'Bruce, how old are you?' And I told him [nineteen]. He just turned around and walked off. That's the last thing I ever heard that man say. He passed away before I came home." As a veteran of World War I, Jones knew the hardship Bruce and other young men of the church faced during wartime. Short registered for the draft immediately and went into the army in 1942.⁴¹

⁴⁰Woody McMillin, *In the Presence of Soldiers: The 2nd Army Maneuvers & Other World War II Activity in Tennessee* (Nashville, TN: Horton Heights Press, 2010), 305. McMillan's book provides a good overview of the military action in Tennessee; 1930 United States Census.

⁴¹Bruce and Mary Alice Short interview.

Powell's Chapel reacted to the declaration of war by forming a support system for its boys who were fighting and for their families. As early as April 1941, before the United States entered the war, the congregation voted to purchase and present or mail Bibles to all boys who were or would be in training camp. At Christmas in 1944, the church sent presents to fifty-five men from the community who were then serving in the war. Perhaps more important, however, was the support offered to the families at home. Waiting on word from a loved one proved the hardest task for those left behind. Mary Alice and Bruce Short were engaged when he left for service, and she recalls waiting seven weeks for word from Bruce. Eleanor Dowdy also remembers hearing stories of the pain her family felt while waiting on word about her two uncles, Clayton and James Sullivan. Her grandparents lived on Fall Creek without a telephone and had difficulty getting news about Clayton. After he received a serious wound in France, "a cab driver brought us the telegram, to her [Eleanor's grandmother], and told her, and it said that he had been critically wounded, and it was a month before they knew whether he was dead or alive." One saving grace for the families waiting on word from overseas was Allen Barrett. Barrett, a deacon at Powell's Chapel, visited each family with a serviceman every week. He also delivered reports to the church on Sunday with the status of "their boys." This support system helped many of the families in the Powell's Chapel community through the dark days of war.⁴²

⁴²Allen C. Barrett, *Reflections: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1875-1975* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), March 16, 1975; Bruce and Mary Alice Short interview; Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of December 1944, Minutes Book, 1936-1951; Dowdy interview.

Following the United States' entry into World War II through the end of the decade, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church experienced unprecedented growth. The farmers in the area saw their incomes increase as cotton prices more than doubled during the war. Powell's Chapel experienced economic growth as its members prospered. As Dewey W. Grantham wrote in *The South in Modern America*, "Changes in the South's agricultural economy were momentous. Prosperity came to the southern countryside in a rush."⁴³ Post-war prosperity allowed the region to move further from its rural roots and closer to mainstream economic and social life. Similarly, Susan M. Hartmann observed that "Their wartime savings enabled most Americans to participate in the postwar boom and to enjoy a vastly higher standard of living. Between 1946 and 1950 they purchased 21.4 million automobiles, more than 20 million refrigerators, 5.5 million electric stoves, and 11.5 million television sets." Powell's Chapel began its own material expansion with a flurry of activity.⁴⁴

In May 1941, the church started making major improvements to its building and programs. The congregation voted to build a new Sunday school and recreation building and buy new chairs. In August 1941, average Sunday school attendance reached its peak of 207, and the church voted to dig a basement under the new addition. By October 1941, the basement was dug and construction had begun on an addition to the rear of the sanctuary. In November, the congregation voted to purchase a furnace to replace the coal-burning stove. Despite the war, the church kept moving forward, purchasing a new bus in

⁴³Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 176, 178.

⁴⁴Hartmann, 8.

September 1942 at a cost of \$450 and hiring a bus driver for \$1.00 a week. The congregation also improved the church interior with wallpaper and a rug. In June 1945, they took a huge step for a rural church and voted to develop a plan to build a parsonage for the pastor. While this proved to be a daunting task, after almost three years of plans, fundraising, and bickering, the church finally voted in May 1948 to purchase the Herbert Phillips farm for \$12,000. It sold the farmland surrounding the house at auction, resulting in a balance of \$6,850 on the original purchase price of the farm. The church took out a loan for the remaining balance and paid \$900 every ninety days until the note was paid in full in June 1949.⁴⁵

In addition to improvements to the church building and the purchase of a parsonage, the congregation renewed its commitment to missions and other charitable giving. They donated special offerings to the Tennessee College, flood victims, the Tennessee Baptist Orphanage, and the American Red Cross. The church also dedicated special offerings to Christian education and paid to have the *Baptist and Reflector*, the newspaper for Tennessee Baptists, mailed to every church member's home. In December 1946, the church also began sponsoring half of the cost of a religious program on the new Murfreesboro radio station (WGNS). Program growth also included vacation bible school and other religious instruction for all ages.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of May 1948, Minutes Book, 1936-1951.

⁴⁶Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of December 1946, Minutes Book, 1936-1951.



Figure 6. Original Parsonage for Powell's Chapel. Photograph by author, 2014.

The decades of the 1930s and 1940s brought tragedy and triumph to Powell's Chapel Baptist Church. From a devastating fire to the crippling Great Depression to the uncertainties of the war years, members of the church supported one another during years of hardship. They shared whatever they had to help their neighbors, from vegetables to stamps to a church building. They also provided support for families waiting for soldiers to come home from war. These decades also offered opportunity as Americans turned to religion in the face of war. The church celebrated as it welcomed record numbers of new members in the early 1940s. For Powell's Chapel Baptist Church and much of the United States, however, the end of the 1940s brought great changes. The provincial nature of the rural community surrounding the church began to change as automobiles brought new opportunities and radio and television introduced the world to the area. Other outside challenges to the status quo lurked around the corner as Powell's Chapel and its community moved into the post-war modern era.

CHAPTER IV

RURAL NO MORE, 1950-1975

Following the tumultuous years of the Great Depression and World War II, the members of Powell's Chapel Baptist Church entered the last quarter of its first century as a church poised to continue the growth it experienced in the 1940s. In the post-war years, the church maintained a steady membership and expanded its offerings to the community through Women's Missionary Union, Brotherhood, Baptist Young People's Union, Vacation Bible School, and more. The community surrounding the church, however, experienced a great deal of change during the 1950s and 1960s, creating new challenges for the church, along with new opportunities. In many ways, Powell's Chapel embraced these changes, but resisted or ignored others.

Major economic and social changes started in northern Rutherford County as early as the 1940s. As America entered World War II, the federal government began expanding its military capacity by opening more bases on the homefront, many of them in the rural heartland. A disruption in tradition and a profound change in the size and economic base of small towns resulted from the development of these rural areas. The United States Army Air Corps came to Smyrna, six miles from Powell's Chapel, in 1941, scouting a location for a new flight training facility for pilots who had completed advanced flying school. The government officially selected the site in December, and preparations began to secure the land and start construction immediately.¹

¹Adeline King, "The Air Force Base," *Rutherford County Historical Society* 12 (Winter 1979): 2-6, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://digital.mtsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/rchs/id/139>.

While the location enticed the military leaders and politicians eager to secure federal funds, the residents of the town differed in their opinions of the coming base. Many townspeople, especially the residents displaced by the development, did not welcome the intrusion on their land and town. The War Department forced many long-time Smyrna families to relinquish their land to the government despite their strident objections. If they did not sell willingly, the government used the right of eminent domain to condemn their property.²

The quiet town of Smyrna along with the surrounding communities of Jefferson, Mona, and Powell's Chapel, changed with the arrival of the airfield, which resulted in an overnight boom in the local economy. Construction offered new opportunities for prosperity to the area as builders constructed the military base and new homes to house the servicemen. Smyrna historian Walter King Hoover recalled that "Every single sleeping place in town was used. Construction men worked 24 hours a day for a year or two."³

The Smyrna Army Airfield took on permanence in 1950 when it became Sewart's Air Force Base. On March 25, 1950, the newly formed Air Force dedicated the base in memory of Major Allen J. Sewart, Jr., a Nashville native killed in November 1942 while fighting the Japanese in the Solomon Islands. Airmen from Sewart's represented some of

²"Families Surrender Homes for Air Base to Enact Saddest Story Since Civil War," (undated), unidentified newspaper article in Walter King Hoover Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Murfreesboro, TN.

³Ralph Dawson, "Sewart and Smyrna Face to Future," *Tennessean*, December 12, 1965.

the most elite groups in the Air Force. They distinguished themselves in Korea and later in Vietnam. By 1955, the base housed the most versatile carrier groups in the Air Force.

The growth of the air base helped change the town of Smyrna and the surrounding area from rural farmland to suburban communities. Before the Civil War, Smyrna supported thirty active businesses. At the end of the war, only six remained. From 1880-1930, Smyrna attempted to recover from the devastating losses of the Civil War. It incorporated in 1915; however, the Great Depression hit the town hard. Smyrna in the 1940s offered few opportunities for its long-time residents. Despite limited modern conveniences, it remained very provincial. Its population according to the 1940 census, just before work started on the Smyrna Air field, totaled 492. In 1940, one school held all the students in the town. In 1941, the town added natural gas service but did not provide full sewer services until 1956. Only five new businesses opened in 1941, but twenty years later, in 1961, thirty-three opened in one year including a drive-in movie theater, building supply company, and a newspaper.⁴ By 1965 Smyrna had six public schools, a sewer system, natural gas, a hospital, and a modern city hall. The coming of the Army Air Field and the subsequent establishment of a permanent Air Force base in 1950 created a whole new feel to the town as well as nearby hamlets. By 1963, the population of officers, airmen, and civilians at Sewart's totaled 5,004 with 637 living on base.⁵

Like the town of Smyrna, Powell's Chapel experienced lasting change due to the arrival of the Air Force base. For the first time in its history, Powell's Chapel welcomed a

⁴Walter King Hoover, *A History of the Town of Smyrna, Tenn.* (Nashville, TN: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1968), 27-28, 374-377, 439-445.

⁵King, 30-33; Hoover, 559.

steady stream of members who were not related to families in the surrounding community. Soldiers stationed at Sewart's and their families united with Powell's Chapel during their time at the base and moved on to new churches around the country when their tour in Smyrna ended. For example, Sgt. and Mrs. Johnny Smith joined in 1951 and moved their membership to Gravel Hill Baptist Church in Selmer, Tennessee, in 1954. In one month, February 1953, three military families joined the church from various areas of the country. Likewise, the church experienced ethnic diversity due to the influence of Sewart's, although it was very minimal. In April 1957, Johnny Chavez, Jr., a Latino soldier stationed at the base, joined the church. He also married a local girl, Martha Alice Adkerson. Other members moved into the community and then away to states like California and New Mexico, expanding the meaning of "community" to the members of Powell's Chapel as they connected with families from outside the local community.⁶

Members of Powell's Chapel also helped to build a new church on the outer edges of the base, Stones River Baptist Church. First Baptist Church, Smyrna, organized the new church in May 1952 to assist in ministry to the airmen and their families. It called on men and boys from other local churches to come on Saturday, October 25, to start construction on the new building, located just outside the base gates. Fifty men and boys answered the call and "by bed time, the frame work, windows, roof and floor decking

⁶Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of March 7, 1954, April 17, 1957, and October 14, 1959, Minutes Book, 1952-1962; Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Historical Information. This book contains a list of members alphabetically. At least one soldier, Sgt. Everett Hill, retired while at Sewart's and remained an active member and deacon of Powell's Chapel until his death.

were done and the first service was held the next day.”⁷ Given its close proximity to Powell’s Chapel, men from the congregation most certainly participated in the “church raising.” Powell’s Chapel also supported the new congregation financially with a special offering on Sunday evening, January 4, 1953, and a designated donation of one hundred dollars in February.⁸

The closing of Sewart’s Air Force Base in the late 1960s did not affect Powell’s Chapel in a significant manner, although it did greatly change the town of Smyrna. The process of closing the base started in 1965, but the base did not officially close until 1970. By 1969, Smyrna Mayor Sam Ridley wanted the military to leave the area so the economy could start its transition to an industrial base. “We used to have cotton fields out where the base is located and people were working for sixty cents a day. I think we can beat that today,” Ridley said. “If they’ll just get out and stay out and let us have the base, we’ll be alright.” Ridley was eventually correct in his predictions as preparations made by local politicians and business leaders, under his leadership, created an environment for success for the region after the economic blow of the base closing.⁹

As the coming (and going) of Sewart’s Air Force Base expanded the reach of Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, the end of World War II and the dawn of the Cold War

⁷Stones River Baptist Church, “Our History,” accessed April 12, 2014. <http://stonesriverbaptist.com/history>; Fred Rolater, *Concord 200: The Story of Concord Baptist Association, 1810-2010 Including Its Churches and People* (Murfreesboro, TN: Concord Baptist Association, 2010), 184-185.

⁸Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of January 4, 1953 and February 1, 1953, Minutes Book, 1952-1962.

⁹“AF Sets Major Sewart Shift,” *Nashville Tennessean*, April 30, 1969.

era changed the way its members lived. Robert Wuthnow argues, in *The Restructuring of American Religion*, that American religion after the 1940s was changed by larger forces at work in American society:

The period since World War II has, after all, been a time of momentous social change. New developments in technology, the changing character of international relations, shifts in the composition of the population, the tremendous expansion of higher education . . . all attest to the seriousness of these changes. To the extent that American religion is a social institution, embedded in and always exposed to the broader social environment, it could not help but be affected by these changes.¹⁰

These social changes greatly affected rural America. Many rural southerners, emboldened by their experiences in the military during the war, looked for new opportunities for their families.

Following World War II, members of the church began looking for employment off the farm. Veterans, such as Bruce Short, took jobs in manufacturing plants and commuted into Nashville. Short worked as a foreman for AVCO Corporation in Nashville building B-1 bomber airplanes. By 1963, most of the seniors graduating from Walter Hill School, where Powell's Chapel members attended school, went to work for local corporations in Murfreesboro such as General Electric and State Farm Insurance. Eleanor Dowdy recalls working for State Farm immediately after her graduation in 1963 and earning \$35 a week, an impressive salary for a young adult accustomed to farm wages. Out of the twenty-four students in her graduation class, almost all joined the workforce instead of staying on the farm or working in agriculture.¹¹ Wuthnow writes of

¹⁰Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 5.

the change, “At one time, people were residents of their communities; now they are commuters.”¹²

The move away from the farm marked a significant change in the rural South during the 1950s and 1960s. Factories brought a new prosperity—workers with a steady paycheck were not tied to the weather or crop yields—as well as a more regimented way of life ordered by the time clock rather than the sun. As Dewey Grantham wrote, “The number of farmers in the ex-Confederate states shrank from 2.1 million in 1950 to 720,000 in 1975, while the average size of the region’s farms increased from 93 acres to 216 acres during this period. . . . By 1960, only 10 percent of the southern population was still working in agriculture.”¹³ In the mid-1960s, Powell’s Chapel adjusted its revival meeting times in response, changing from two-week revivals with 10:00 a.m. services each day to one-week meetings with evening services to accommodate new work schedules.¹⁴

The decline in farms also affected the character of the local country church. According to historian Ted Ownby, rural church life changed in the last half of the twentieth century in four ways. First, areas grew wealthier resulting in richer churches. Second, economic crisis and the exodus from rural areas to the city forced many churches

¹¹ Bruce and Mary Alice Short, Interview by Author, Smyrna, TN, December 20, 2013; Eleanor Eades Dowdy, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, January 8, 2014.

¹² Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

¹³ Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1995), 260.

¹⁴ Gerald Short, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, December 22, 2013.

to close. Third, African American and white churches both increased their participation in politics. Finally, a rise in Pentecostal churches changed the evangelical landscape. Similarly, Karen Aaron Stone states that “New mobility strained all rural institutions, especially churches. The great out-migrations left churches empty and traditional methods did not reach non-farm immigrants. . . . Many churches lost track of their constituency. They did not know if those failing to attend services had left the community or where potential members could be reached.”¹⁵

While many of the members of Powell’s Chapel no longer worked on their farms full-time, they remained in the community and maintained a rural lifestyle at home. Thus, unlike many rural churches during this time, Powell’s Chapel did not experience a significant drop in membership. Church membership totaled 355 in 1945, 338 in 1950, 313 in 1955, 318 in 1960, and 323 in 1965. While membership did decline in the twenty-year period, the drop did not mirror the catastrophic change felt by many other rural churches.¹⁶ Many factors contributed to the stability in church membership. Sewart’s Air Force Base, State Farm Insurance, General Electric and other companies provided good jobs within close proximity, keeping young people in the community. The church also provided many programs to encourage new members, including bus service, youth activities, and regular services. Finally, the leadership of the church remained strong,

¹⁵Ted Ownby, “Struggling to Be Old-Fashioned: Evangelical Religion in the Modern Rural South,” in *The Rural South since World War II*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 124; Karen Allen Stone, “Rescue the Perishing: The Southern Baptist Convention and the Rural Church Movement,” (PhD diss., Auburn University, 1998), 197.

¹⁶Donald A. McRae, *Centennial History: Our Glorious Past Challenges the Future* (Murfreesboro, TN: Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, 1975), 81.

especially Harry F. Nichols, who served as pastor from 1951-1957, the longest pastorate during this era.

Although many rural congregations struggled following World War II, religious life as a whole increased in America during the 1950s. As Joanne Beckman at Duke University said, “At midcentury, Americans streamed back to church in unprecedented numbers. The baby boom (those born between 1946 and 1965) had begun, and parents of the first baby boomers moved into the suburbs and filled the pews, establishing church and family as the twin pillars of security and respectability.”¹⁷ The 1950s was an ideal time as the nation prospered financially and optimism reigned. The prosperity and security of the Eisenhower decade prompted a religious revival and faith in American progress. Fear also factored into the growth of religion during the Cold War era. America maintained an ever-ready military force during the 1950s and 1960s, as evidenced by Sewart’s Air Force Base in Smyrna. The threat of World War III and a nuclear holocaust was a very real possibility.¹⁸ Robert Wuthnow writes that “If Levittown symbolized the new spate of homebuilding in the suburbs, the Cold War symbolized Americans’ concern to have a safe nation in which to live, and the growth of churches and synagogues supplied a similar emphasis in spirituality.”¹⁹

¹⁷Joanne Beckman, “Religion in Post-World War II America,” National Humanities Center, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/trelww2.htm>.

¹⁸ Stone, 219; William G. McLaughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 184.

¹⁹Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 12-13.

Following World War II, Southern Baptists capitalized on the nation's growing interest in religion by focusing on the development of the country churches, which struggled as members moved to the suburbs. The desire to help save rural churches prompted the Southern Baptist Convention to create a department within the Home Mission Board to assist local churches with standardizing finances and programs. The convention also formed a long-range planning committee to further develop the program. While church leaders like Victor I. Masters and L. G. Frey championed the rural church during the 1920s, the decade of the 1940s transformed the Rural Church Movement. New leaders brought a new optimism to the program. Stone writes that "The new generation moved beyond endless discussions of the needs of rural churches and mobilized denominational energies to address specific programmatic changes in formal, centralized ways." Their efforts virtually eliminated the annual call for pastors, part-time services, and an abundance of uneducated ministers in the rural church field.²⁰

The Southern Baptist Convention held a Rural Life Conference in 1954. It identified four goals for a twenty-five year program to improve the lot of the rural church. First, every church would be led by an educated, full-time pastor. Second, every church would have grounds and facilities to meet community needs. Third, rural churches should strive to improve the life of all the people in their communities. Finally, every church should teach biblical stewardship and contribute to the Cooperative Program. The program, founded in 1925, encouraged local churches to give a percentage of their regular offerings to the Southern Baptist Convention for missions work. The Sunday

²⁰Stone, 2, 194.

School Board offered assistance to churches interested in building programs and “advocated church consolidation so that modern, well-equipped buildings could be centers of community activity.”²¹

While Powell’s Chapel had been a progressive rural church for decades, it participated in the Rural Church Movement in the late 1950s, resulting in many improvements to the building and for the congregation. After a representative from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board presented the program to the church in the winter of 1958, the church elected a committee of six to serve as the Church Development Committee.²² The committee returned an initial report to the church on February 19 with the following recommendations, which the church approved: “landscape church lawn, ask repair committee to start needed repairs, and get price for drilling well for adequate water system—including pump, pump house and inside drinking fountain.” In March, they reported a cost on the water system components of \$690 and scheduled a clean-up day at the church for later in the month. Work continued through the summer as the church dug a well with a well house and installed an inside water fountain.²³

Following the committee’s recommendations, other changes to the church building included adding folding doors to partition the auditorium for additional Sunday school space, placing locks on all doors and windows, and installing a new gas tank, a furnace, and room heaters. The committee also met with an architect from the Baptist

²¹Ibid., 236-7, 198.

²²The committee consisted of Patrick Barrett, Mary Alice Short, Mrs. Wendell Price, James Sullivan, Hollis Vaughan, and Overton Perry.

²³Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of April 10, 1958-July 16, 1958, Minutes Book, 1952-1962.

Sunday School Board to talk about the best way to expand the building. In October 1959, the church accepted plans for new Sunday school rooms and started construction on a block addition to the church building. During the early 1960s, the church continued improvements by adding sidewalks, improving lighting, purchasing new nursery equipment, and installing a new baptistery and choir loft. In May 1962, the church commissioned the committee to refurbish the church building, including “painting the exterior; all necessary work around windows, painting walls in sanctuary, installing acoustical ceiling in sanctuary, and refurnishing floors in Intermediate, Primary, and Junior Sunday School rooms, and to tile floors in rooms leading off from sanctuary on either side of the choir loft.” In 1965, the church appointed a new building committee to continue the work started by the Church Development Committee, which included adding stained glass windows and purchasing new pews and pulpit furniture.²⁴

The momentum started in 1958 with the Rural Church Movement meeting continued through the 1960s at Powell’s Chapel. The congregation modernized the building and solidified its position as one of the most progressive rural churches in the Concord Association. In the fall of 1965, the church formed a committee to develop a constitution and by-laws for the church, which officially incorporated in January 1969. They also paid medical insurance and retirement for the pastor and built a new, ranch-style parsonage next to the church building in 1963 on land donated by the Henderson family, heirs of Mariah Malone, who donated the original land for the church. The church also modernized the sanctuary in the summer of 1966 with the addition of air

²⁴ Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of August 1958-July 1965, Minutes Book, 1952-1962.

conditioning. The work of the Church Development Committee, the Building Committee, and the deacons played a great role in updating the church building and stimulated the changes that would continue to transform the church from a typical country church into a modern congregation.²⁵



Figure 7. 1963 Parsonage. It is currently used as a ministry house for the church with a food pantry and clothes closet. Photograph by Author, 2014.

While the Powell’s Chapel made many strides in the 1950s and 1960s, it stumbled, like many white congregations, with the main social issue of the day—civil rights. Years earlier, the Southern Baptist Convention spoke out clearly on race relations. In May 1947, the convention adopted a charter on race relations which told Baptists to “protest against injustices and indignities against Negroes, as we do in the case of people of our own race.” By the 1960s, however, the organization took a different stand. It

²⁵Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of October 28, 1963, January 15, 1969, October 16, 1965, May 25, 1966, Minutes Books, October 16, 1962-December 13, 1967.

remained largely silent on the issue of civil rights. It did not completely ignore the situation, but any statements issued by the convention remained “vague and vacuous platitudes.” Tennessee Baptists also remained quiet on the issue of civil rights in an official capacity; however, a debate on the issue did take place in the editorial pages of the *Baptist and Reflector* throughout the 1960s.²⁶

From the early beginnings of the Social Gospel movement, Southern Baptist churches focused on salvation of society through personal conversion rather than social change. Despite the call for action among white Christians by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders, many Southern Baptist congregations preferred to stay removed from social issues as they had in past decades. As Samuel Hill wrote,

The Southern Baptist Convention had not lived with much of a sense of ministry to the region’s social structures. It had always expended its major energies in evangelism and building up congregations; in the ethical area, it had typically confined itself to teaching personal and interpersonal moral righteousness. Thus when the desegregation order became the law of the land, the Southern Baptist Convention apparently stood to lose little.²⁷

Most Southern Baptist Churches did not espouse hate or violence toward African Americans. They simply wanted to maintain the status quo. John Hayes takes a harsher view of the white evangelical silence. Speaking of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s

²⁶Tim Boyd, “The Sounds of Silence: Tennessee Baptists and Civil Rights,” *Tennessee Baptist History* (Fall 2004): 39, 43, and 47; Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Black and White Baptists and Civil Rights, 1947-1957* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 102.

²⁷Samuel S. Hill, “The Story Before the Story: Southern Baptists Since World War II,” in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination*, ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 40-41.

disappointment with his white brothers and sisters in Christ, “One could read in his eloquent ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’ Martin Luther King’s deep disappointment with white churches—‘arch-defender(s) of the status quo,’ he lamented—as they sanctioned violence through notable silence and timidity, or perhaps even actively through ideas of God-ordained racial purity.”²⁸

Despite their desire to remain silent on the issue of race, leaders of the civil rights movement attempted to force the Southern Baptist Convention to take a stand on the issue. At a White House meeting, President Lyndon B. Johnson encouraged them to support the Civil Rights Act, which prompted a protracted discussion on the floor of the 1964 Southern Baptist Convention. However, leaders voted to leave the response to the race problem up to local congregations. As a result, subtle resistance arose on the local level. “Most Southern Baptists saw the civil rights movement and its goal of integration as a symbol of ultimate threat,” wrote Andrew Manis.²⁹

The issue of integration guided the response of many Southern Baptists churches to the civil rights movement. Manis wrote that “Calls for racial justice and the possible acceptance of black Christians into white churches were weakened by a concern to hold

²⁸Norman L. Rosenberg, Emily S. Rosenberg, and James R. Moore, *In Our Times: America Since World War II* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 197; John Hayes, “Hard, Hard Religion: The Invisible Institution of the New South,” *The Journal of Southern Religion*, X (2007): 3.

²⁹ John Lee Eighny, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 192-193; Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46; Andrew M. Manis, “‘Dying From the Neck Up:’ Southern Baptist Resistance to the Civil Rights Movement,” *Baptist History and Heritage* (January 1, 1999), accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-94160905.html>.

together a denomination largely dominated by cultural conservatism, theological fundamentalism, and unreconstructed segregationism. Further, the more local the responses, the more likely Southern Baptists were to reject the civil rights movement.”³⁰ While a great many churches integrated peacefully, many white Baptists showed their true feelings towards integration as they turned away African Americans who attempted to unite with their congregations. While most African Americans preferred to worship in their own churches and showed no interest in uniting with white congregations, small groups of civil rights activists tried to integrate white congregations. These churches, however, typically developed subtle, indirect methods to prevent integration.³¹

Like many other churches, Powell’s Chapel reacted indirectly to the perceived threat of integration. In 1963, prior to the March on Washington, the church voted that, for the first time, prospective new members must go through an interview process with the pastor. Following the interview, the church would grant membership to those who met the following qualifications:

1. Profess a saving faith in Jesus Christ and request Baptism.
2. Make a statement of previous Christian experience while in another denomination and request Baptism.
3. Promise receipt of a letter of recommendation from a church of like faith and order.
4. Make a statement of previous Christian experience and New Testament Baptism in another denomination or another Baptist body.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Eighny, 195; Charles P. Roland, *The Improbable Era: The South Since World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 134-135.

While race was not listed as a criterion for membership, the addition of the pastor interview allowed the church to deny membership to anyone whom the pastor did not recommend.³²

Eleanor Dowdy recalled the church developing this system as a plan to keep African Americans from joining the church. Despite being a life-long member of the church, Dowdy and her husband learned first-hand of the new church requirement when they returned from military service in Germany. When they came forward during the service to rejoin the congregation by letter, the church refused to accept them until they submitted to the interview process. “It still upsets me,” said Dowdy. “That’s not really the right way to do things.”³³

Despite its active opposition to integration, Powell’s Chapel actively supported the local African American church, Hickory Grove Baptist Church. Founded by former enslaved peoples during the Reconstruction era, Hickory Grove served the main African American settlement in the Powell’s Chapel community. Powell’s Chapel periodically received special offerings for the congregation and donated its old pulpit and chairs along with other supplies to Hickory Grove. Powell’s Chapel proudly supported the African American church, albeit in a paternalistic manner that maintained the traditional role of the white benefactor.³⁴

³² Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of April 17, 1963, Minutes Book, October 16, 1962-December 13, 1967.

³³ Dowdy interview.

³⁴ Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of July 4, 1954, Minutes Book, 1953-1954; Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of August 10, 1966, Minutes Book, October 16, 1962-December 13, 1967. Powell’s Chapel and Hickory Grove still enjoy a

Most members of Powell's Chapel did not allow the civil rights movement to intrude on their daily lives. Many of them viewed the movement as something they watched on television. Gerry Short said, "I can remember the civil unrest with the things down in Alabama and in the South and the segregation and George Wallace and some of those. Those are things that I remember as far as being on the news during that time."³⁵ For members of Powell's Chapel, the civil rights movement happened somewhere else. They viewed it on television and failed to connect personally. Television brought the only images many in the rural community remembered about the era. They only recalled the national stories, like Birmingham or the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Even Eleanor Dowdy who worked in downtown Nashville during the era recalled little about the movement in a city crucial to its success: "I was working [in downtown Nashville] when Martin Luther King was assassinated. I just remember that it was a shock that it took place in Memphis, and then, you know, you could just feel the tension in the air, you know, going to work, into Nashville and coming out."³⁶ By contrast, all interviewees retained vivid memories of the Kennedy assassination. The activities of African Americans during the 1960s, however, made little impact on them.

The other main national news story of the era touched many lives around Powell's Chapel—the war in Vietnam. Gerry Short recalls the tumult and uncertainty of the war.

friendly relationship and join with Jerusalem Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Walter Hill Baptist Church each year for an Easter Sunrise Service.

³⁵Gerald Short interview.

³⁶Dowdy interview.

I remember in the 60s and 70s the Vietnam War a lot. That was kind of the thing for me at that time because I was in the teens, but my brother, who was five years older, and that age group and all, a lot of them were going to war at that time. The draft was still going on, and so I know some of them would go into the Guard because they were also going to college at the time too. . . .And then I do remember that seemed like it got news all the time, was the unrest on the campuses, the college campuses because you know, a lot of protests and things going on during that time. And of course the war was not, at that time, was not a popular war, and thank goodness now there's a lot of respect for people that went, that like didn't get it during that time.³⁷

The only active member of Powell's Chapel who fought in Vietnam was Ronald Dowdy, although Sewart's Air Force Base regularly deployed large numbers of soldiers to the war from the area. Ronald and Eleanor Dowdy had been married only about two and a half years when he was drafted. He served in the 608th Military Airlift Support Squadron, a helicopter maintenance unit. Eleanor recalled watching the war unfold on television, including the Tet Offensive in which Ronald participated. While Ronald served overseas, Powell's Chapel supported him through prayer and provided emotional support for Eleanor, who worked at the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville during the war.³⁸

Like the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War elicited little response from the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1966, it passed a resolution encouraging all Baptists to pray for American soldiers in the field and for lasting peace. The Tennessee Baptist Convention raised the issue of the war only once. In 1967, the pastor of Stones River Baptist Church, located on the boundary of the Air Force base, asked the statewide group to pass the following resolution: "Whereas American men are fighting and dying at this

³⁷Gerald Short interview.

³⁸Dowdy interview.

hour in Vietnam and, whereas, these men are in many instances Tennesseans or men trained in one of three military installations of our state, be it resolved that we affirm our faith and support in their (our) fight against tyranny.” The resolution passed.³⁹

The turmoil of the 1960s with its monumental changes in race relations, the Vietnam War, and other social changes challenged the conservative religious establishment which Powell’s Chapel represented. The challenges, however, did not weaken the church or its sister evangelical congregations. Evangelical churches encouraged their members to make their homes and churches fortresses to protect their lives from outside spiritual threats so that they could maintain control amidst change. Many southern evangelicals looked for churches that focused on old-fashioned values.⁴⁰ Charles P. Roland writes that “The nationwide social turmoil of the late 1960s, including the race riots in the cities, protest demonstrations against the Vietnam war, and the drug, sex, and hair counterculture all provoked a reaction that stimulated the growth of the nation’s conservative churches, most of which were either of southern origin or were chiefly concentrated in the South.”⁴¹

Like many southern rural areas, the 1970s represented the end of an era for the Powell’s Chapel community as population finally shifted for good from rural to suburban. Between 1960 and 1970, the population of Rutherford County grew by 12 percent. In the next decade, the population would explode with an increase of almost

³⁹W. Terry Lindley, “Tennessee Baptists and the Vietnam War,” *Tennessee Baptist History* (Fall 2006): 55, 58.

⁴⁰Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 38; Ownby, 123.

⁴¹Roland, 127.

25,000 people. Roland wrote that “The South by the mid-1970s was obviously approaching the close of an economic, political, and social era.” By 1970, almost 65 percent of the population of the South lived in urban areas. While more than 35 percent still lived in rural areas, 80 percent worked in urban areas instead of on the farm. By the mid-1970s, the traditional South with its rural farms had been replaced by factories, highways, and pollution. Air conditioning made the heat bearable for northerners who brought manufacturing to the region in droves.⁴²

Powell’s Chapel looked to its past during the 1970s as the congregation focused on celebrating 100 years as a church body. In November 1973, the church appointed a Historical Committee to plan for the centennial celebration in July 1975. Like many churches that regularly celebrated the past through annual homecoming celebrations, Powell’s Chapel prepared to honor the “glorious past” of the church with a day-long homecoming celebration. As Ted Ownby wrote, “In yearly homecoming services and in many other ways, evangelicals try to keep alive the old metaphor of a church family in which people call each other brother and sister, strive to avoid sustained conflicts, and hope, through conversions, to bring ‘new births’ into the family.”⁴³ Powell’s Chapel designed its centennial homecoming celebration as a major event for the church and community, the largest event in the church’s history.⁴⁴

⁴²United States Census, Tennessee, Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/tn190090.txt>; Roland, 171 and 185; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, NY: DeCapo Press, 2002), 102.

⁴³Ownby, 124.

The pastor during the centennial celebration, Dr. Donald A. McRae, embraced his role as historian, authoring the official centennial history book and overseeing the planning for the event. The Historical Committee, led by Dr. McRae, reported regularly during church business meetings as the celebration neared. The church also completed several projects in preparation for the celebration, including painting the church and parsonage, installing closed-circuit television, equipping the nursery, purchasing new hymnals, and installing a choir rail.

The centennial celebration took place on July 27, 1975, exactly one hundred years and two days after the first meeting of Powell's Chapel at the abandoned Shady Grove Methodist Church. Eleanor Dowdy recalls the day was very hot. "We all tried to dress in period dress, like long dresses and hats. I remember I wore a long dress and a big picture hat and it was really a big to-do."⁴⁵ The church hosted a dinner for past pastors, their wives, and the local clergy on Saturday and a dinner on the grounds on Sunday. Mary Alice Short served on the food committee and recalls feeding almost five hundred people on Sunday without a kitchen on site. The women of the church brought the food with them. So many people attended that all the windows were opened and chairs set outside around the sanctuary so people could hear the proceedings. Even the choir loft was overcrowded that day. Both Mary Alice and her son Gerry Short recalled that Mary Alice's younger son Duane tumbled out of the choir loft and landed outside in the hall

⁴⁴ Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Minutes of November 7, 1973, Minutes Book, 1968-1979.

⁴⁵Dowdy interview.

when his folding chair got too close to the edge. The church and community enjoyed celebrating a century of successes.⁴⁶



Figure 8. Women dressed up for the Centennial Celebration, July 1975. Centennial Photos, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church Archives.

The Centennial Celebration marked the end of a great era for the church and a turning point for the community. Powell's Chapel Baptist Church ended its first hundred years with 314 members. It owned property worth \$90,000 including the church building and parsonage. One hundred forty-seven people were enrolled in Sunday school and 106 in Church Training. The church maintained active Women's Missionary Union and

⁴⁶ Bruce and Mary Alice Short interview; Gerald Short interview.

Brotherhood programs along with a growing music program. It closed the year by forming a long-range planning committee to move toward the future.⁴⁷

In 1975, the congregation of Powell's Chapel celebrated the milestones of one hundred years as a beacon in the rural community in northern Rutherford County. While the people of the church focused on the nostalgic aspects of the centennial by dressing in old-fashioned clothing and telling stories of beloved members who passed away, the century they celebrated included many significant accomplishments for the church that transformed Powell's Chapel from a group of ten individual Baptists looking for a meeting place into a vibrant congregation that served as a leader in the local community and the Concord Baptist Association. From the founding of the church in 1875 at the end of Reconstruction to the role of the church in the community during the Great Depression and World War II to the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church survived massive changes during its first hundred years by holding fast to its fundamental beliefs while changing its traditions when necessary to become a more effective agent for spiritual change in its community.

After its founding in 1875, Powell's Chapel struggled to find its place in its community. Members rallied after the malicious destruction of their original meetinghouse to build a permanent home for the church which grew into a successful congregation of 134 members by 1900. The leadership of pioneers such as William and Betty Short, Mariah Malone, and Callie Jones built a strong foundation for the congregation. The life experiences of these founding members of the church shaped the fundamental beliefs of the congregation. The devastation of the Civil War and

⁴⁷Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 1975 Annual Report.

Reconstruction directly affected these families. Also, as members of the upper class and slaveholders before the war, the dramatic changes in the southern way of life during the late 1800s influenced their desire to create a successful church to bring stability to their community. Their continued affluence, despite a significant decrease in wealth after the war, contributed to the success of the church as well. The economic status of the early members of the church placed the congregation on firm footing as it moved into the new century.

In the early twentieth century, Powell's Chapel continued to serve as a social outlet for the community and strengthened kinship ties among its members. The congregation also stepped outside its walls for the first time by supporting larger social issues like the Tennessee Baptist Orphan's Home and rallying support for the troops in World War I. The members reacted to prohibition and the Scopes Trial of 1925 by strengthening the religious instruction offered by the church founding the church's Baptist Young People's Union and Women's Missionary Union during this time to provide Christian education to the community, which they believed was a key role of the church.

The role of women in the church also challenged the church during this time. The women of Powell's Chapel historically played significant roles in the church. For example, the first church treasurer was a woman. During the fight for women's suffrage, however, women struggled to find a new place in the church where they could assert a greater leadership role. In 1914, a woman wanted to speak from the pulpit at Powell's Chapel, creating a great rift in the congregation that culminated in a revival during a

business meeting. The woman did not get to preach; however, the church appointed its first female messengers to the Concord Baptist Association during this time.

During the decades of 1929-1950, Powell's Chapel faced overwhelming obstacles with the loss of the church building to fire. Despite the loss, the church rallied and built a new, modern building dedicated in October 1930. The years of the depression proved challenging for the church. Instead of collapsing under the weight of financial hardship, Powell's Chapel made significant changes during this era that led to it reaching the height of its membership in the early 1940s. The church, under the leadership of pastor B.B. Powers changed to a full-time preaching schedule in February 1936. This step of faith allowed the church to pay off debts, begin a bus ministry, and significantly expand its membership. This decision also placed Powell's Chapel far above most rural Southern Baptist churches, which struggled into the 1960s with quarter-time services, uneducated itinerant ministers, and declining membership.

World War II also significantly changed the congregation. The Tennessee Maneuvers surrounded the church property bringing the war to the community. The men from Powell's Chapel who fought in the war returned with a different view of the world that expanded their horizons from the rural farmland of their boyhoods. After the war, the community changed as men and women sought work off of the farm in Nashville, Murfreesboro, and Lebanon. The growth of Sewart's Air Force Base in Smyrna brought new members to Powell's Chapel who did not have the community ties that traditionally served as the backbone for the church, thus expanding the concept of community for the congregation. The rural nature of the community changed, but Powell's Chapel adapted to address the new lifestyles of its members and continued to grow into the Cold War era.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Powell's Chapel failed to react to the massive social changes of the era. The church instituted a policy designed to avoid integration; however, members of the congregation ignored the movement as a whole or viewed it as something that did not affect them. It also did not engage the counter culture movement or Vietnam protests. It supported the soldiers from the community, but failed to engage in larger issues surrounding the war and youth upheavals of the era. The church did, however, embrace the Rural Church Movement from the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1950s and 1960s. It significantly changed the church building to attract new members and expand its capacity to serve the community. By 1975, the church and community bore little resemblance to the country church founded in 1875. The area was no longer rural and the church membership no longer relied on local families as members drove in from throughout Rutherford and Wilson counties to worship at the church. The fundamental beliefs, however, remained unchanged and the church history provided the foundation on which the church would continue to grow and expand for the next forty years.

The role of rural churches, like Powell's Chapel, in telling the story of rural Rutherford County has been largely overlooked. Historians who write about the county focus on the large towns of Murfreesboro and Smyrna and, to a lesser extent, Eagleville and LaVergne, ignoring the rich contributions of the rest of the county. The rural sections of the county hold innumerable stories about the development of the area and how average people have lived during the last two hundred years. While the resources may be scant, church records provide a perfect starting point for researching community history. Many churches, like Powell's Chapel, hold their own archives, which contain a treasure of information for researchers. While many amateur historians write the histories of their

congregations, the increasing number of rural churches closing their doors provides great motivation for researchers to capture the history of these congregations before the historical records disappear.



Figure 9. Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, 2014. Photograph by Author.

EPILOGUE

Powell's Chapel Baptist Church is representative of hundreds of small, rural Southern Baptist churches across the southern United States. In a time where megachurches dot the landscape, these older rural churches look to their history to connect to their community.

In the years since the church celebrated its centennial, the community around the church has changed drastically. What once was farmland with generations of the same families living next to one another has slowly become subdivisions full of commuters driving out of the community to jobs in Murfreesboro, Nashville, or other business centers. The community surrounding Powell's Chapel is now filled with affluent subdivisions, a golf course, and elementary school. While many descendants of the founding families still attend the church regularly and serve in leadership positions, new residents continue to join and bring changes to the once-country church.

The church continued to expand physically during the years after the centennial adding additional Sunday school classrooms, a fellowship hall, a picnic pavilion, and updated restrooms. Attendance has declined since the 1970s, however, with an average of 129 regular attendees on Sunday morning.¹ The church struggles to reach its new community as thousands of new families pour into the surrounding subdivisions. Despite these changes, Powell's Chapel Baptist Church still serves the community. For instance, the church converted the parsonage into a Ministry House that offers free clothing and

¹Powell's Chapel Baptist Church, Annual Church Profile, 2013. Membership was reported in 2013 as 400 members; however, the member roles are not purged and include non-resident members and possibly deceased individuals who moved away from the area years ago.

food monthly to its neighbors in need. As Larry Wrather said, “I think God has blessed Powell’s Chapel as a result of [our] giving, the giving church that we are. And still now, when there is a need in the community we always respond.”²

When asked why Powell’s Chapel Baptist Church has survived for so long, Gerry Short said that the connection to the past helps the church survive. Eleanor Dowdy also agreed that the rich history is important to the future of the church: “We’re standing on the shoulders of people who worked hard in that church to develop and to make it what it was. So we’re standing on their shoulders and, hopefully, somebody will stand on ours.”³

²Larry Wrather, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, January 6, 2014.

³Gerald Short, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, December 22, 2013; Eleanor Eades Dowdy, Interview by Author, Murfreesboro, TN, January 8, 2014.

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October 28, 2013

Bethany Hawkins, Rebecca Conard
Public History
jbethawk@bellsouth.net, rebecca.conard@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: "Powell's Chapel: A Church and Community"

Protocol Number: 14-122

Dear Investigator(s),

The MTSU Institutional Review Board, or a representative of the IRB, has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRB or its representative has determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants and qualifies for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for 15 participants.

Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research located on the IRB website. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. **Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date.** Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will not be able to use any data and/or collect any data. Your study expires **October 28, 2014**.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. **If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.**

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely,

Kellie Hilker
Compliance Officer/ MTSU Institutional Review Board Member