

History of High Springs Church of Christ

Alachua is where the Lord's church would be established prior to the church in High Springs. As time would pass, the congregation in High Springs would be made up of Christians as they ventured forth from Alachua in their zeal for and faith in the strength of our Lord. The church in High Springs was founded by several members of the church in Alachua, who although members of the Alachua church, lived in High Springs and traveled there for worship and fellowship. These same members wished to expand the kingdom of God to their own town of High Springs. The members who lived in High Springs but worshipped in Alachua, wanted to start a congregation at home to help reach their neighbors with the gospel.¹ The seed had been planted and soon it would grow.

The first gospel meetings in High Springs were conducted in a tent about 1935 by John Pearl Prevatt. The meetings were successful, and several people were baptized². It took place downtown High Springs where Dr. J. H. Dowdy's office is today. Those new converts to the Lord's church as well as the previous members from High Springs continued to meet with the church in Alachua for approximately two more years until the decision was made to establish the church in High Springs.

After venturing forth from the Alachua church, The High Springs church first met in a log building on

fourth Avenue that was owned by the American Legion. It met there until the building burned that same year. The American Legion without a meeting place, secured one just off Main Street behind the current Western Auto store. Once again, they offered its use to the young church and the church accepted and met there several years. When the church had grown to the point of being able to finance and support itself, and in need of a building of its own, it would make plans to build its own place for worship. On an ironic note, the meeting place of the church from 1937 to 1942, that is, the building behind the Western Auto Store, was a building that had housed a saloon from the early 1900's and the saloon sign on the building could still be seen and read. It is clear to those who know of the church in High Springs, its early leaders, and its dedicated members, that they were responsible for replacing the spirit(s) of the Devil in that old saloon building, with a Holy Spirit that could be seen and heard in their everyday lives and in the heartfelt worship of the disciples that met there.

The first elders to shepherd the flock in High Springs were James Paul (Jim) Douglas, Alvis S. Lindsey, and Alexander Lee (Sandy) McLeod. Jim Douglas, a car-dealer, against the wishes of his partner, Milas Wynn moved to High Springs. Wynn believed High Springs to be a terrible place but despite that, Jim Douglas went there and the church there is better off for his contributions. Alvis Lindsey was a

family man and an example to all. The service he gave and that of his family members since have been extremely valuable to the church. Sandy Mcleod, a dry goods merchant in town was a well-respected individual known for charitable actions to others. He was a great asset to the church there as was his family for many years. It is a wonderful testimony to the lives and examples of these godly men, to their faith, and to their families when one notices these many years removed several children, grand-children, great grand-children and even fourth generation family who still work and serve the Lord as members of His church in High Springs.

T. J. Hunton was the first preacher for the High Springs church, and was an excellent Bible teacher³, preaching in High Springs from 1939 until 1941. Houston Itin began his work with the church in 1941. Itin's time of work enveloped the time of the first building's construction. Aubrey Mercer followed him and worked with the church until 1945.

In 1941 construction began on first Avenue on the first of two buildings that the church in High Springs would use in the ensuing years. Construction had begun and progress was being made, for the most part, as funds were available. As diligent businessmen and good managers of the blessings which God had entrusted to them, the leaders felt that the church would be better served if the building project were paid for as it was being instead of going in debt. The land had

been secured by Jim Douglas and a few others who were able to aid the church in this way. The building process was completed under the oversight of the contractors, brother Ted Gainey (member of the High Springs church) and brother Herman H. Henderson (brother to sister Hazel Vera and father of Parker Henderson.) The building was completed as a testimony to the foresight, planning, desire, hard work, and faith of the leaders and members of the congregation. The corner stone of the building is dated "July 1942". The building at this point was completed at the cost of approximately \$9000.00. However, it wasn't long before the church would need more room. Six years later in 1948 an addition to the existing building was constructed at the cost of about \$8700.00. This addition included six classrooms, a preacher's study, and anew baptistry. A preacher's house was built in 1945 just behind the church building at the cost of approximately \$6000.00. As one nears the current "downtown" area of High Springs from the South-East, that same building stands at the corner of First Street and North East Second Avenue and is today a community theater.

The High Springs church met on first Avenue for forty-one years and in March of 1983 the congregation moved to their present location on Santa Fe Blvd (HWY 441) where a new facility had recently been completed. The overseers of the church at that time having good business knowledge and being good stewards of God's

resources had raised much of the needed funds for this construction in advance through Fifth Sunday collections for several years. In addition to these special contributions, members were given the opportunity to give to the pew fund in memory or in honor of a family member or loved one.⁴ Once again, as was the case of the construction of the first church building, many members stepped up and contributed their time energy, and means in building the present building under the supervision of Jack McMath (a longtime friend to the church in High Springs and a member of the St Johns Avenue church of Christ, Palatka, Florida).⁵

Since its establishment other Godly men who have served the church as elders are Wyndell Everett, Tom Crawford, Baxter Forrester, C.A. (Junior) Johns, Joe Spivy, Sr, Bill Vickory, Howard Walker, Warren Buck, Jim Forrester, Jerry Swilley, Larry Hood and Danny DeLoach.

Preachers who have served the church in High Springs include John Pearl Prevatt, T.J. Hunton, Houston Itin, Fred Walker, Aubrey Mercer, Clarence Dailey, Harold Dowdy, Thurston Lee, Joe Spivy, Sr, Larry O. Williams, John Thomaston, Kerureth Jones, Gene Burgett, Wayne Rogers, Cori Lewis and Tim Spivy.

EVANGELISTIC AND BENEVOLENT WORKS OF THE CHURCH

The church in High Springs has been extremely helpful in many good and notable works throughout the years. One such work is the Florida Bible Camp which is located seven to eight miles north of High Springs. The camp was begun in 1947 when Christians from High Springs hosted the first camp session near Keystone Heights, FL. The next year it was moved to O'leno State Park which borders the current camp grounds and was conducted there until 1971. The present site of Florida Bible Camp is situated on two hundred acres of towering Oak and pine trees and surrounded by the wilderness that North Central Florida has to offer. The purchase of this property was the result of efforts led by John Hale, a member of the High Springs church. He and others like him, saw the potential for a great camp and realized the need for the spiritual teaching and fellowship of young Christians in the area. Through the years the camp has been greatly served by the work, time, energy, expertise, and generous contributions of many members of the Lord's church in Florida. But no one church has been more instrumental and supportive of the Florida Bible Camp than the High Springs church. Another mission taken on by the High Springs church has been the support, both financial and moral, of the Christian Home and Bible School in Mt Dora Florida. Through the years' countless children have

been helped and staff and teachers aided by the contributions, donations, and fellowships given and hosted by the High Springs church.

Georgia Christian School, formerly, Dasher Bible School, at one time had a very close relationship with the High Springs church due to members of the church having roots in Southern Georgia. I remember back to 1970, soon after arriving in High Springs, a family of Copelands that were members there. If the reader knows anything about the church in Valdosta and dasher Bible School, they will draw a strong connection between them and the name Copeland. Georgia Christian School has been the object of charity and the subject of many prayers offered up by many members of the High Springs.

Countless missionary efforts have been supported by the High Springs church over the years. To my recollection, possibly the best-known missionary to be supported by the High Springs church is Parker Henderson, who has spent many years in the islands.

Brotherhood schools and colleges have been recipients of support over the years in various forms: students being sent, and tuition underwritten; donations to Bible Departments of such institutions of learning; the very fact that students from the High Springs church over the years have attended these schools; and many members have attended lectureships, conferences, and workshops at the various schools. These schools

include Faulkner University, Heritage Christian University, Freed-Hardeman University, David Lipscomb University, Memphis School of Preaching, Florida School of Preaching as well as others.

The High Springs church of Christ is a light to the world and lamp to those seeking the Way. They have been a loving compassionate church family for many years now and many souls have been led to the Lord and strengthened through their efforts. God has truly blessed the church in High Springs.

The family of God in High Springs has long enjoyed the love that is shared between brothers and sisters who love the father and one another deeply.

God Bless the Lord's church in High Springs, Florida.

Submitted by
Timothy Bastell Spivy, Sr.

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