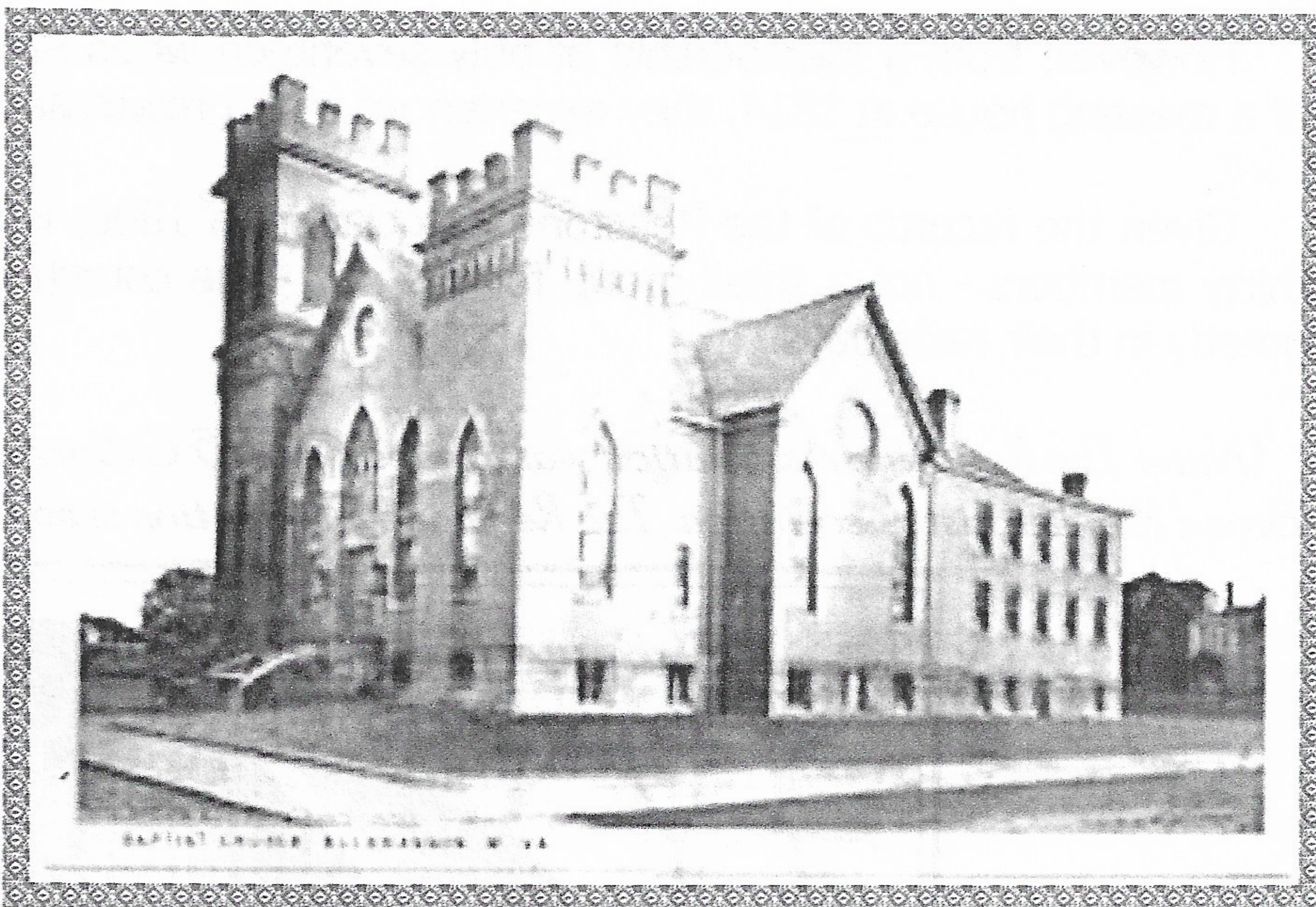


About the year 1850 the second Buckhannon Baptist Church was built on North Locust Street.



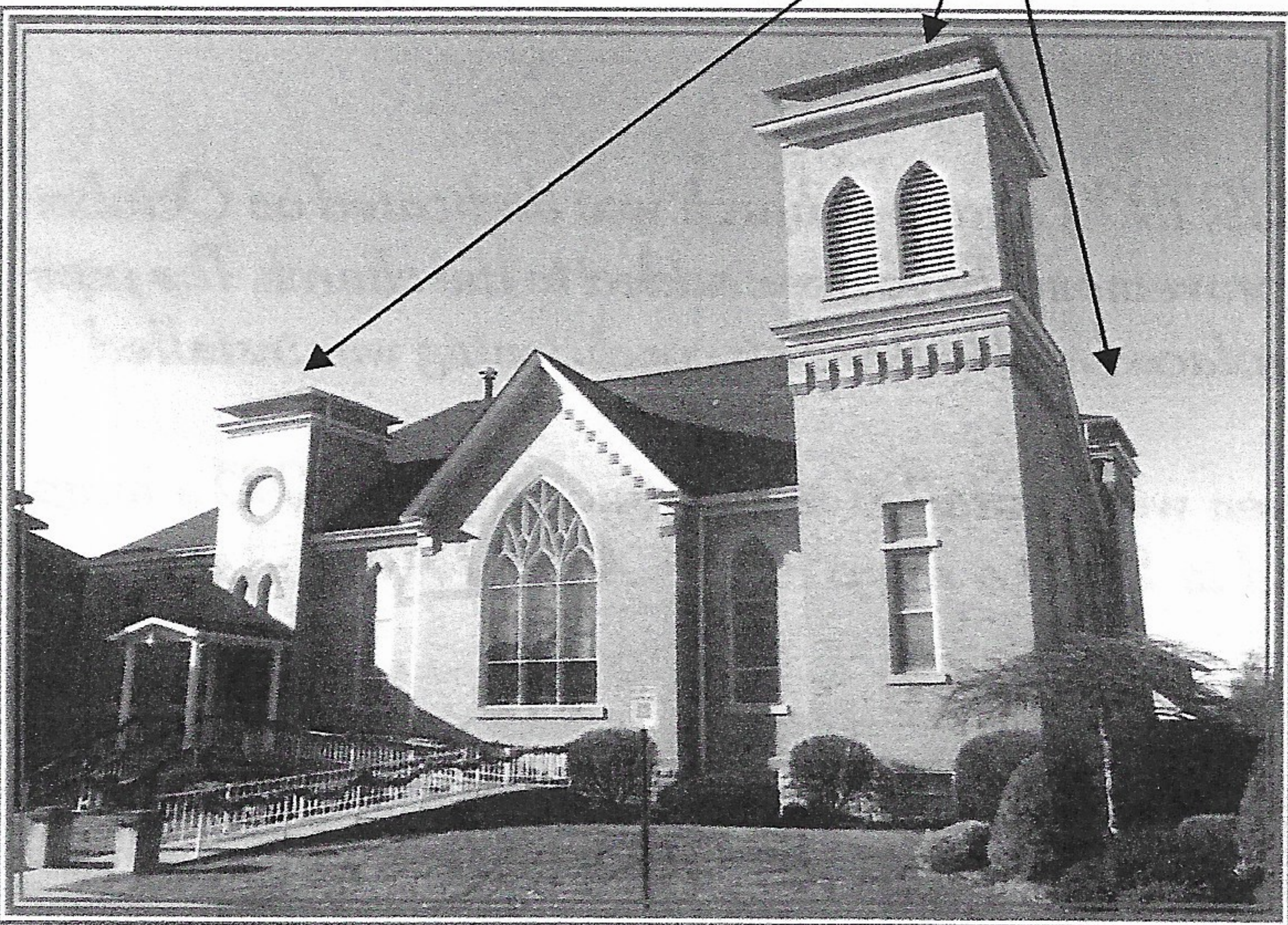
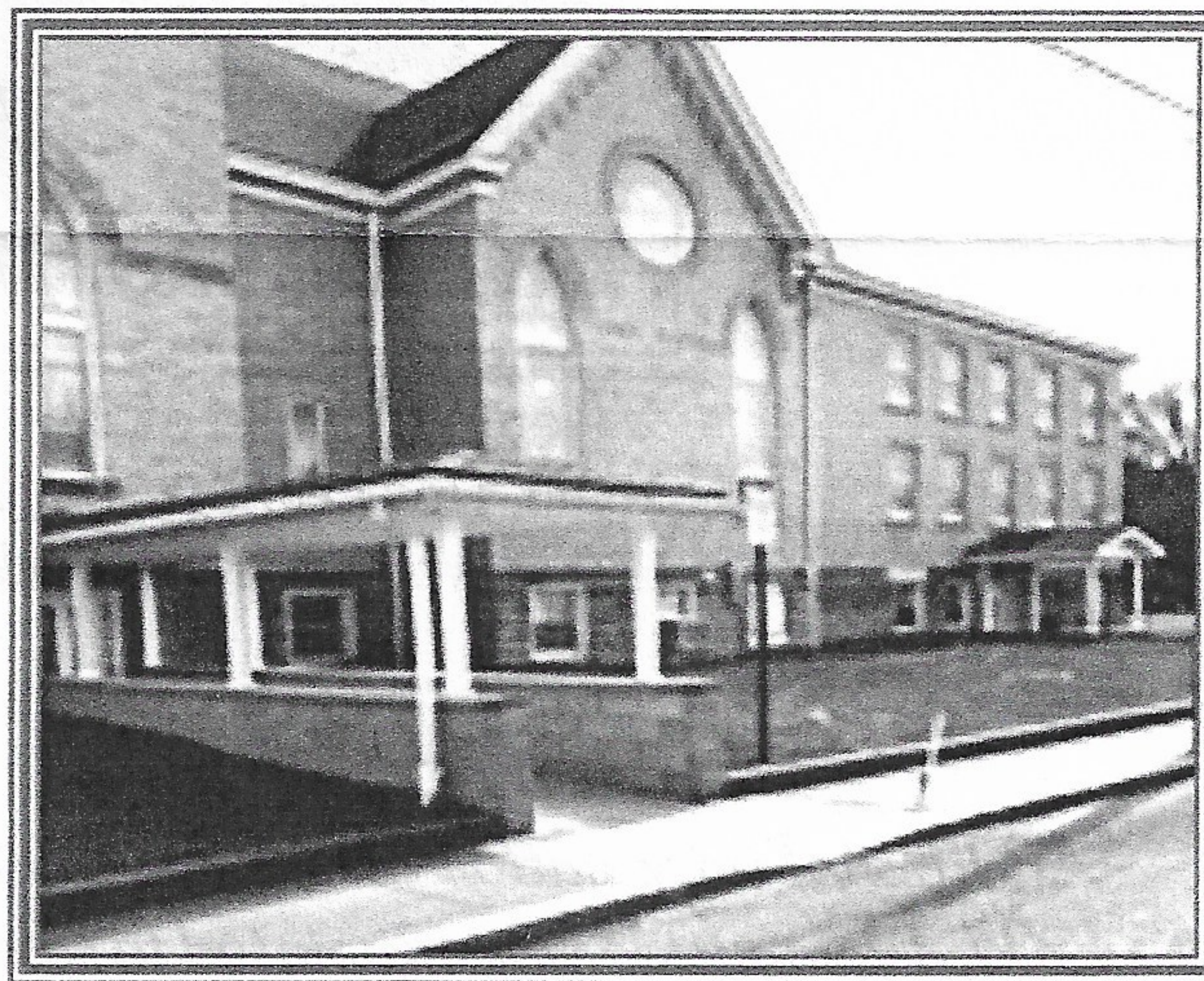
The First Baptist Church was built during 1909 and 1911. The post card above shows the church sometime after it was finished. Notice that the view is from the Arnold Avenue side of the church. It appears that Arnold Avenue is not paved.



Improvements to the church and parsonage have been made over the years. Some of the projects include: a ramp to Hart Avenue entrance, a ramp in back to the dining room, and a roof over the steps to the furnace room.

The sign in front of the church was placed in 2013 and the kitchen was remodeled in 2019. In 2019 the carpet in the 1st floor of the parsonage was removed to reveal the original wood floor.

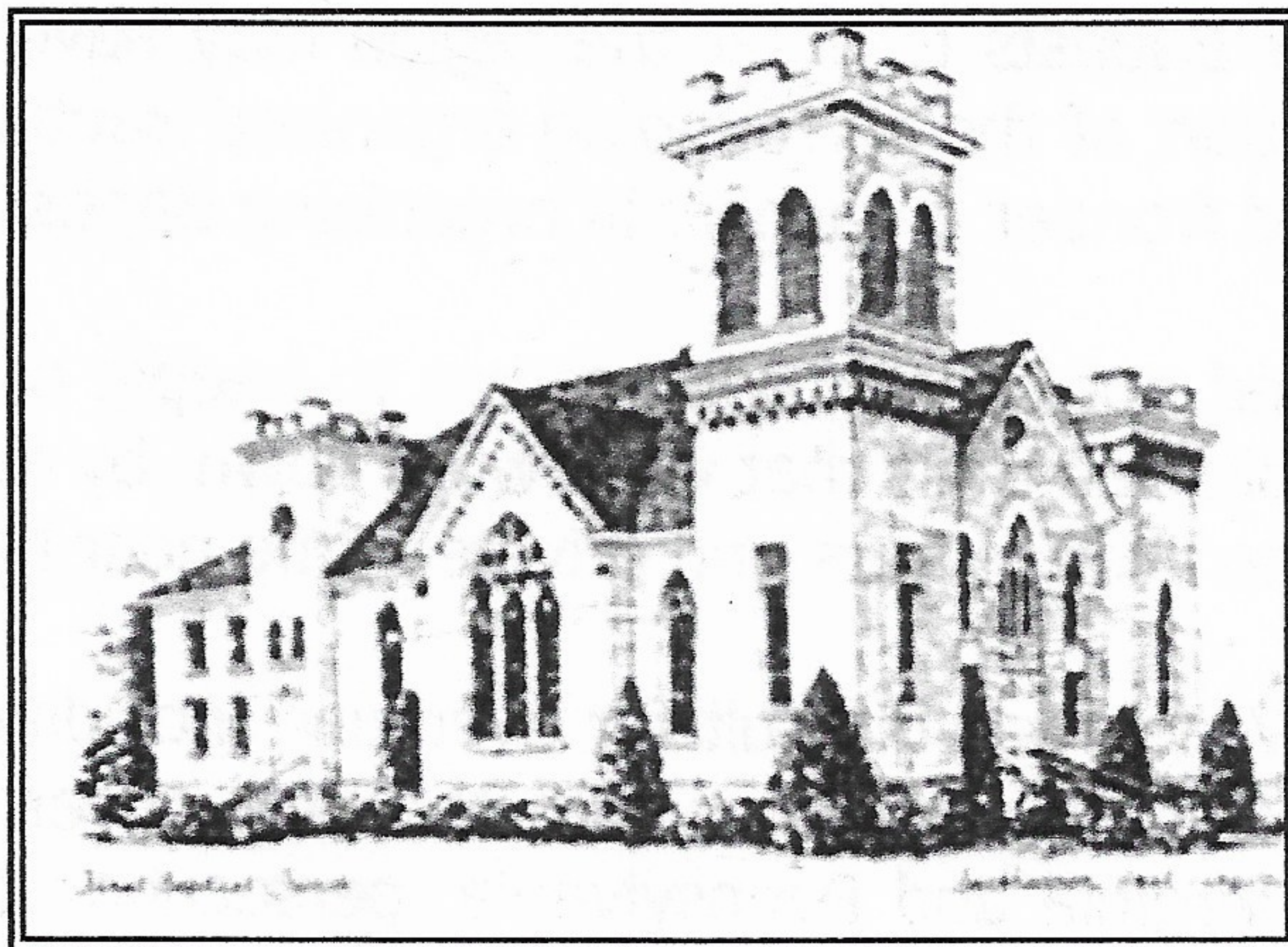
The towers were rebuilt due to water leakage.



**Historic
Buckhannon
First
Baptist Church**

*Everyday people growing in Jesus
Christ, growing together as God's family,
and sharing His love in and beyond Upshur
County.*

**A Short History of the
Buckhannon, West Virginia
First Baptist Church**



Historic booklet compiled
by John L. Puffenbarger
(JLP)
April 2020

The Baptists

Baptist Churches began appearing shortly after 1770. It would be interesting to explore the reasons for their organizing and to determine what kinds of people these early Baptists were. Furthermore, an attempt to discover what brought them into the area west of the Alleghenies would be worthy of note.

➤ First there was an evangelistic and missionary motivation on the part of individuals. One of the first Baptist ministers to visit the area was David Jones, a self-appointed missionary from the Philadelphia Association.

Jones wrote that his first concern was to "visit a Shawee Indian town ... with efforts to civilize the Heathens." At times he preached to them while sitting on deer-skin blankets, and he often spoke and traveled while writing in his diary of keen disappointments at the gospel's poor reception by the natives.



Rev. John Taylor was in the area of the Monongahela River at about the same time Jones was in the Ohio River area. Rev. Taylor visited the Tygarts Valley about 1772 to 1774 and found about 100 families near the source of the river (present Pocahontas County), but only one Baptist woman was among them.

➤ A second motivating reason bringing Baptists in the region was military service. For instance, Rev. Issac Van Bibber was from Virginia. In 1774 he traveled through the Kanawha Valley with General Andrew Lewis' army on the way to fight Chief Cornstalk and his braves at Point Pleasant. It is assumed that he was traveling as a "citizen chaplain" for the army. He was killed during the battle.

➤ A third motivation for Baptists to enter the region may have been an evangelistic and missionary impetus on the part of the surrounding organized Baptist associations. The associations had resources to aid frontier preachers in organizing Baptist work.

➤ A fourth reason applied not only to Baptists but to people of all walks of life who had the desire for land. They followed trails that were worn down by deer and buffalo. The people the Baptists ministered to lived in forts and private home near those trails.

Life in the Monongalia Valley was difficult for everyone including the Baptists in the 18th Century with scattered inhabitants, problems with the new government, controversies over state boundaries between Virginia and Pennsylvania, persecution by the established church and especially problems with Indians.

Being a Baptist in the 1770's was not an easy time. The State supported church in Virginia was the Anglican Church (present American Episcopal Church) and was supported by legal statute and taxation of all it's citizens.

*Source: "West Virginia Baptist History"
by Dr. Truett Rogers
Used by permission of the author*

A Short History of the Buckhannon, West Virginia First Baptist Church

Background

Rev. John Taylor was a life-long itinerant preacher who moved throughout the region of eastern West Virginia during 1773 to 1775. He preached in Buckhannon on his second tour of the area, probably in 1774. He wrote that *"he found about thirty families who were willing to worship."*

In 1784, the congregation in Buckhannon asked the Simpson Creek Baptist Church to supply preachers for their worship services.

(The Simpson Creek Church, which was located on the outskirts of Bridgeport, was organized in 1776. It was known as the oldest Baptist Church in this area.) In 1785 their pastor, Elder Edwards, made a trip to the settlement on the Buckhannon River.

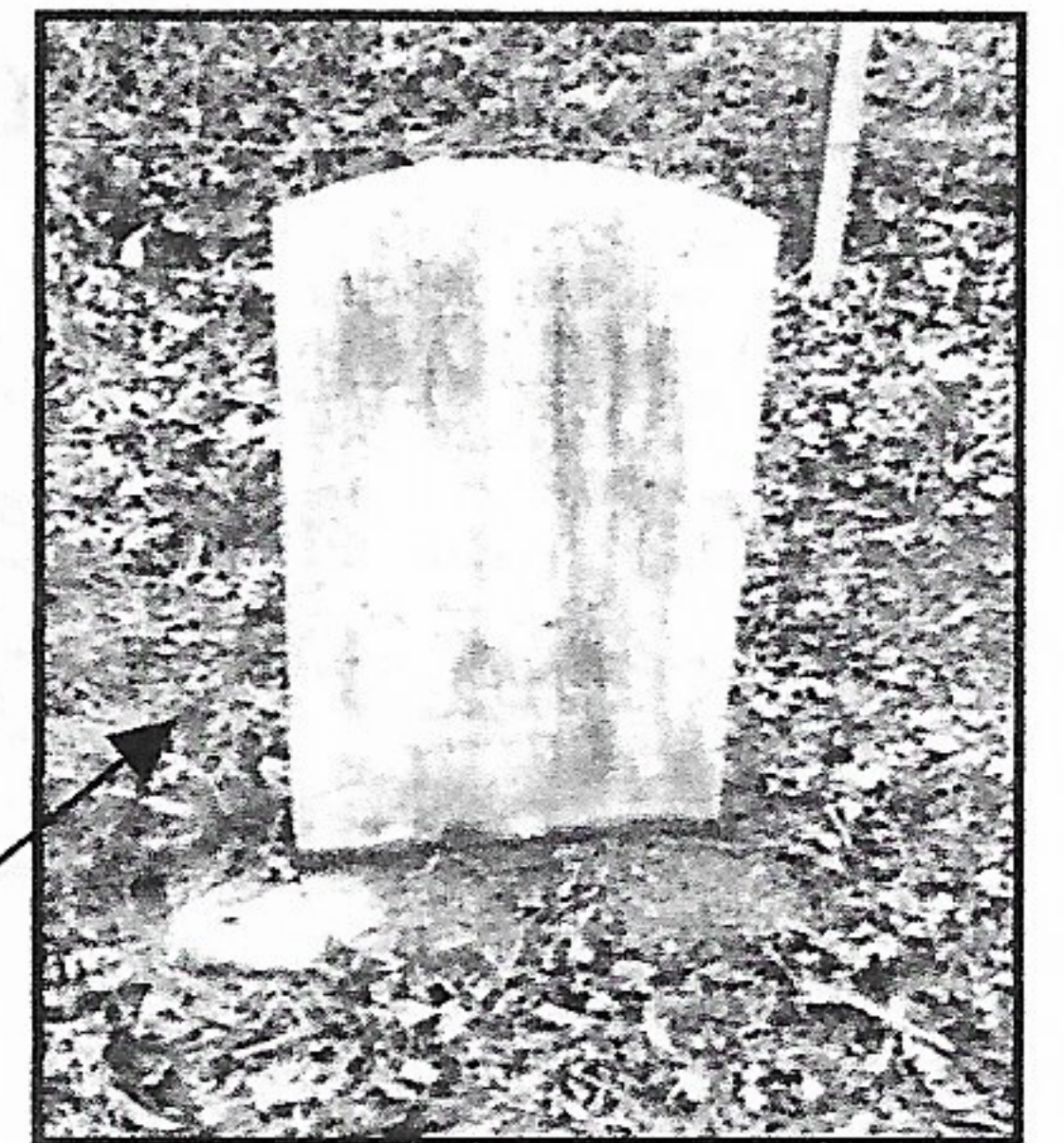
Sometime during 1786 Rev. Edwards organized a Baptist Church at Buckhannon, and preached the first sermon. The first pastor of the Buckhannon Church was the Rev. J. W. Loveberry.

There is no record as to their place of worship in the early years, but in 1814 they built the first church, a small log building near Finks Run in what is now known as the old Baptist Cemetery.

Where the congregation met before that is unknown, although they most likely met in the homes of members. The land on which this building was built was given by Jacob Brake and his wife, Mary. This seems to have been the regular meeting place for at least 35 years.

Mr. Albert Brake was not a member of the Baptist Church, but attended regularly and was always interested in the welfare of the church.

In 1939 he placed a marker at his own expense in the old cemetery or, graveyard as it was generally called, showing the location of the old log church. (Photo of the marker in the old Baptist Graveyard situated between Rt. 20 and the F. W. Eberle Technical Center in Upshur County.)

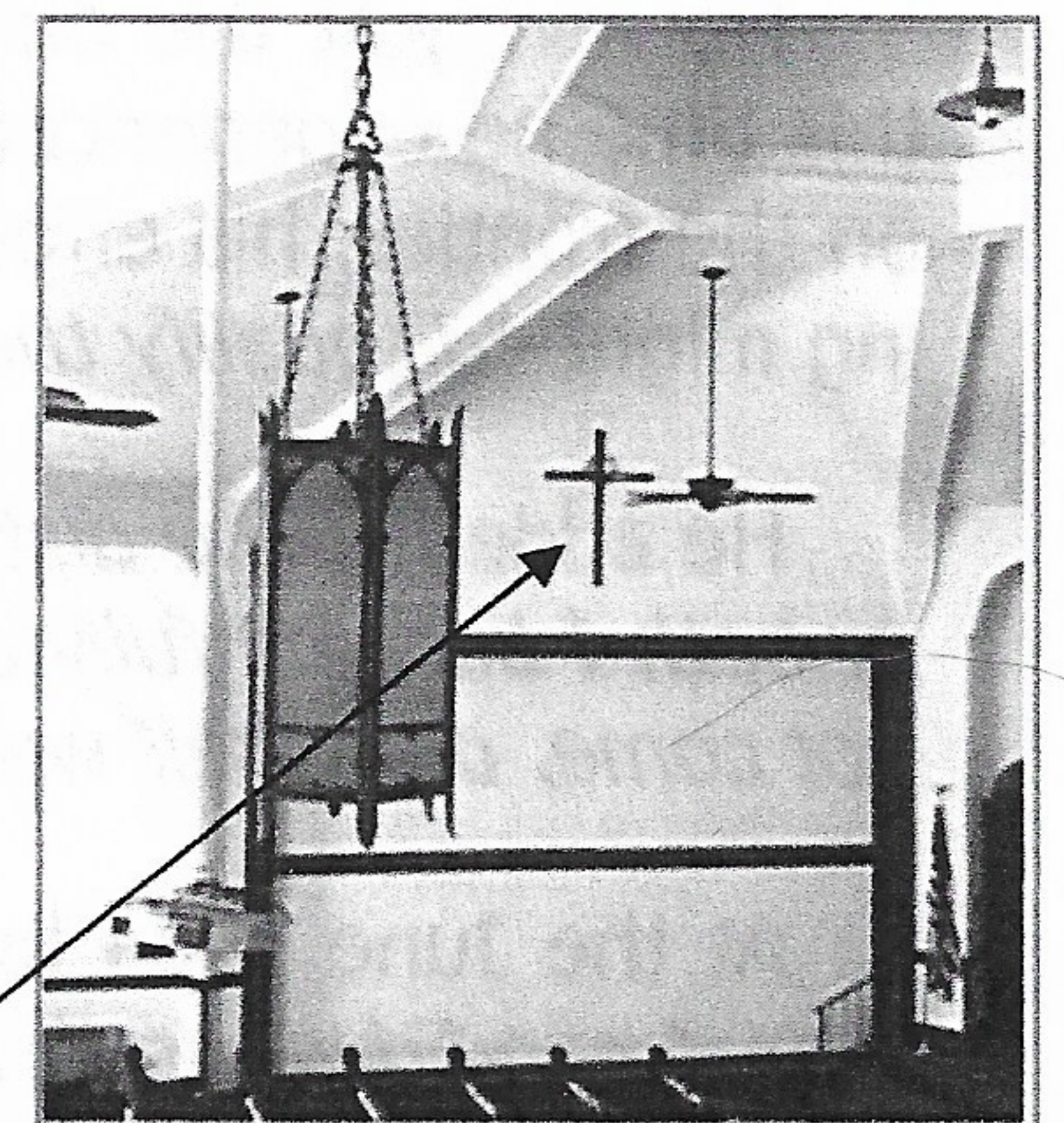


About the year 1814 the second Buckhannon Baptist Church was built on North Locust Street. This building was used for various activities.

In 1856 it was a court house, and after the War Between the States became a reality, it was used to house prisoners and as a commissary. The Rev. Mathew Maddox was pastor of this church in Buckhannon, and in some other churches, also.

Shortly after the war the old church building on Locust Street was reported to have been rebuilt due to the ill-treatment it had been given.

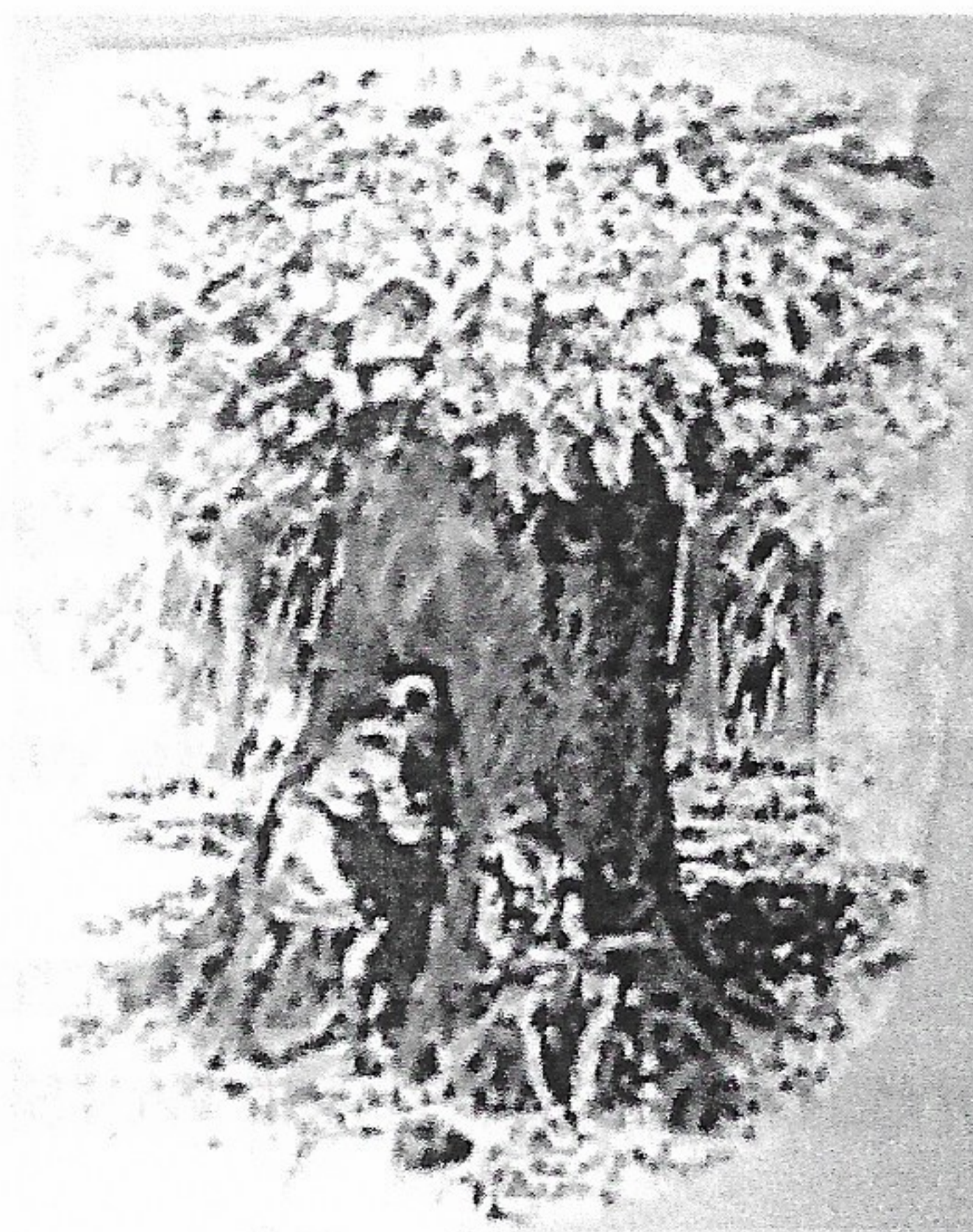
When the building was later demolished, a beam was secured and made into a cross, which is presently hanging in the sanctuary.



The cross was made from wood from the 1814 church.

The following is from
West Virginia Baptist History
The Early Years: 1770-1865

By Dr. Truett Rogers - Pages 5,6,7 and 23 to 25
(Printed by Permission of the Author)



Beginning in 1763 with the defeat of the Indians during "Pontiac's Uprising," Indian traders, trappers, farmers and land speculators moved across the Appalachians declaring their "Tomahawk Rights" - - the right to any and all land they could occupy and hold. During this time John and Samuel Pringle, for example, lived in a hollow sycamore tree and induced others to join them in the Buckhannon Valley.

Deserters from Ft. Pitt, they lived for about six years in their "Pringle Tree" attempting to occupy the Indian lands west of the mountains.

Thus Baptists, like so many others, came to occupy land; inexpensive land, free land, or captured land. But they were also motivated out of a sense of God's calling, a ministry to the Indians, however unsuccessful, and a care for the souls of their own people. They performed that ministry by forming cooperative churches and associations with their eastern Baptist kin.

One of the early churches in the northern area, the Buckhannon Baptist Church, is of special significance due to its early date (1786). Unfortunately, all records of the church were reputedly lost in a fire, leaving historical investigators with only the secondary sources of oral traditions and newspaper articles, sermons, and brief accounts written long after the events.

We are indebted to the travels of Rev. John Taylor who moved throughout the region of eastern West Virginia during the 1773-1775 period. His first mention of Buckhannon concerned his having preached there on his second tour of the area, probably in 1774.

He wrote that he found about thirty families, "... where I think preaching had never been before," ... and received a warm welcome and an evidence that people were willing to listen and worship. Having had less than positive results of his first tour of the area due to poor weather and even poorer reception on the part of the people, this attention to his preaching was most heartening.

However, at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he was back in the area preaching, and this time he experienced rather unfavorable results. Though he preached to the soldiers stationed on the frontier, his efforts were viewed with suspicion by the officers who feared that his preaching might "disqualify the men from fighting."

He added: "The distracted state of the people, by the war, or the barrenness of my preaching, or both I became fully convinced that if the Lord ever intended to bless that people, the time was not come, or myself was not to the instrument." (Note: *The Baptists*, page 130, Author - Sweet)

At the June 1784 business meeting at Simpson Creek it was "Resolved, that a fourth part of Rev. Issac Edwards time to attend Buckhannon and at *Booth's Creek equally divided." That is the earliest mention of the meetings of a congregation at Buckhannon, and by May 30, 1785 there is a mention in the same minute book, "Request from Buckhannon for a larger supply of preaching."

(*The first of John L. Puffenbarger's Notes - Booth's Creek is in Marion County.)

It is obvious, then, that the Buckhannon Baptists were requesting from Simpson Creek, the nearest established Baptist church, preachers for their worship experiences at least as early as the summer of 1784.

There is no evidence that they were an established church at that time, but they were, rather, a congregation meeting for worship as a prelude to formal organization.

Since we have records of Rev. John Taylor that he preached among them in about 1774 as well as written evidence that they had requested preachers by 1784, we can assume they began regular meeting during that time. Exactly when those meetings began cannot be established.

Writing in December of 1936, the pastor of the church, Rev. W. H. Barlow, noted that *"Sometime during the following year, 1786, Elder Edwards, pastor of the Simpson Creek Baptist Church organized a Baptist church in Buckhannon."* Pastor Barlow also noted that, *"The members of this organization were: Jacob Hyre, John Hyre, John Brake, Jacob Brake, and Major Jackson."*

Unfortunately, the writer did not document his information and leaves the reader with many questions about the people, the time of formation, and any statements of faith.



In 1814 the Baptists built the first church, a small log building near Finks Run in what is now known as the old Baptist Cemetery.

The location of the church is near the Fred W. Eberle Technical Center. When Corridor H was built, some of the graves were moved to the Buckhannon Cemetery.

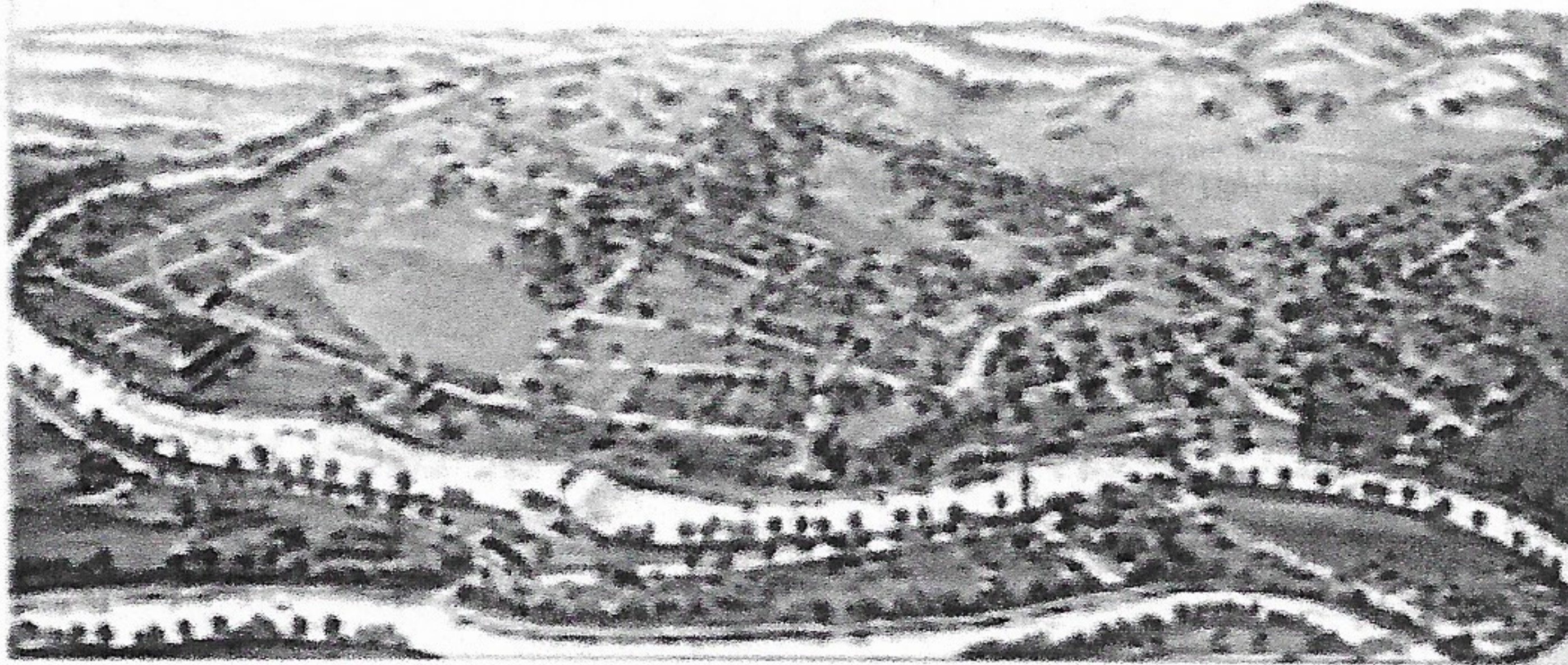
Corridor H can be seen in the upper left corner.

Another writer, however, agrees with the number of charter members, as J. Lee Heamer wrote in the *Buckhannon News* on March 9, 1934, *"... organization at Buckhannon was completed with a membership of five."*

(Note - Here is an interesting perspective: The American Revolutionary War was fought from 1763 to 1785.

From about 1764 to 1766 or more, John and Samuel Pringle lived in the hollow cavity of a sycamore tree near the joining of Turkey Run and the Buckhannon River. Ten years later the Buckhannon Baptist Church was formed. According to stories passed down, the tree was about 10-11 feet in diameter inside; a man could, one account said, swing a split rail in the space without striking either side of the tree.

The Pringle Tree is about 4 miles north of Finks Run where the Baptist Church was located.



A drawing of Buckhannon, West Virginia - probably in the last part of the 1800's..

The church may have been mentioned as being a part of the Redstone Association in as early as 1788. In that year a "Buckingham" Baptist Church is listed for the first time.

Since no other such "Buckingham" church appears, and since the next listings include various spellings of Buckhannon, it may be presumed that this is the Buckhannon Baptist Church. They are listed as having two baptisms and a total of seven members in 1788, figures that would parallel closely with the original five members listed by the later Rev. Barlow's source in 1936.

Strangely, Buckhannon is not mentioned among those forming the Union Association in 1804, though strong tradition persists that it was one of the constituting churches.

In 1810 Robert Baylor Stemple wrote that the Buckhannon church was organized in 1786 and that it was a part of the Union Association. There seems to be a consensus, then, that 1786 is the date for the formation of the church into an organized body.

The names of the original members cannot be verified, but they seem to be related families, because of the similarity of names and, if the use of the word "Major" is a term and not a name, perhaps the military, too, was represented in the charter members.

Very little is known of the progress of the church with the exception of one interesting statement by Stemple written in 1810. Stemple wrote: *"This church, at first very small, was revived soon after its constitution, and became larger and respectable. But by the constitution of other churches, they are reduced to seventeen."*

A later newspaper article concerning the church stated that *"Up to 1810 they were in a flourishing condition but other denominations established classes and consequently the Baptist class was reduced to seventeen."*

If those statements are accurate, the church must have served as a congregating point for many people moving into that part of the country where many of the new settlers became associated with the Buckhannon church.

However, as new geographical areas were investigated and settled, the Baptist settlers may have left Buckhannon to form new communities and churches. In addition, the mention of other "denominational classes" may indicate that competition from other churches provided a cause for the Baptist decline at that time.

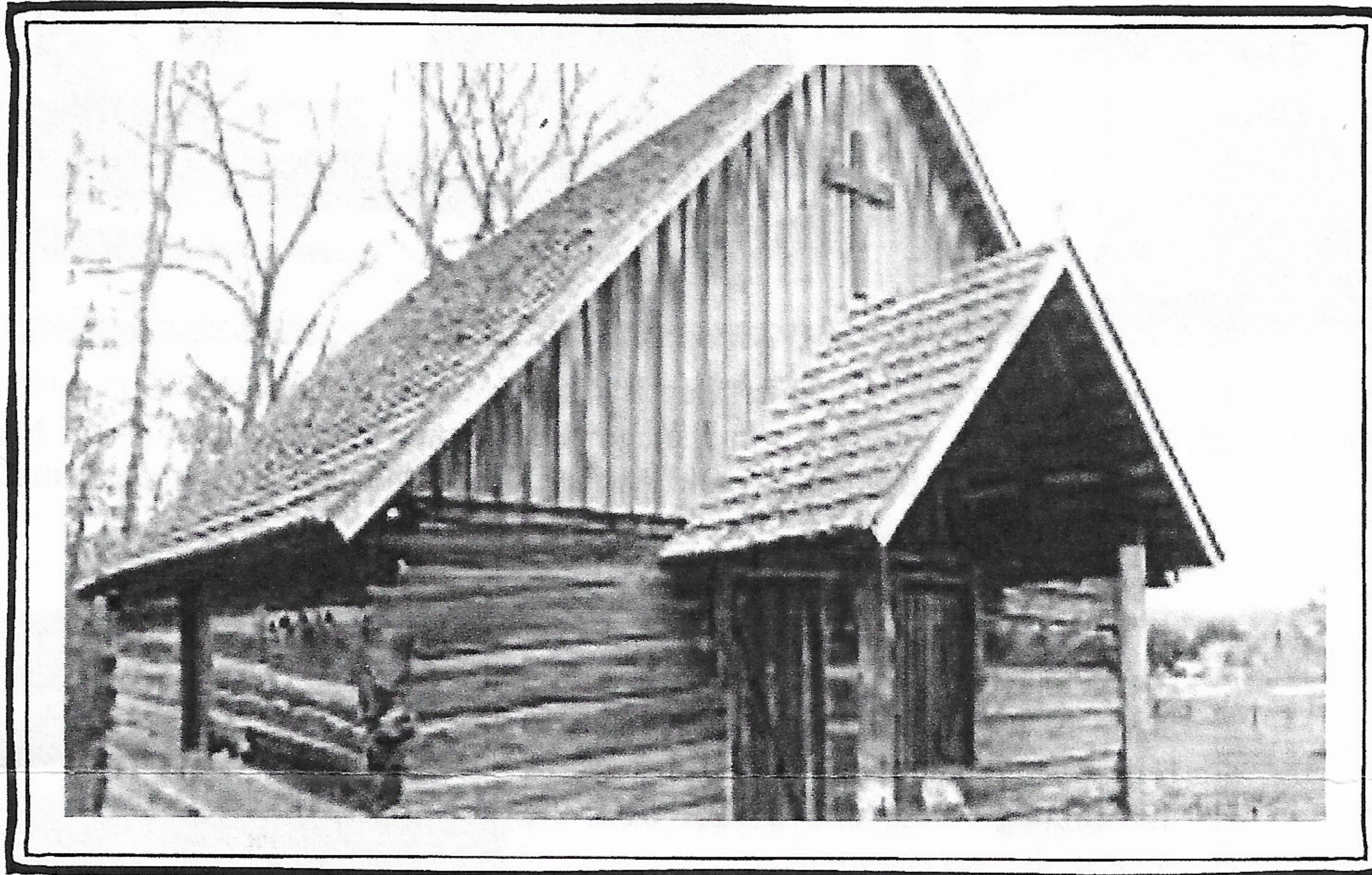
Where they worshipped prior to 1814 when they erected a meeting house is unknown, though they most likely met in the homes of members.

One source states that they met *"by the old cemetery on the bank just above the road,"* and that there was a *"school there, in the old church."* Whether that school and first church were on the original location or not is unclear. The distance from people's homes to church was a major problem everywhere when transportation was by foot or horse on the frontier.

However, from a membership of only seventeen when Stemple wrote in 1810, and the building of a meeting house in 1814, they experienced both growth and stability.

Given the records of the Redstone Association in 1800, which lists the Buckhannon Church with thirty members - not a small group for the day - the church membership roll apparently fluctuated greatly in their early days.

(Note: The Redstone Association was formed @ 1776. Other Associations grew out of it including the Broad Run Baptist Association. The Redstone Association is no longer in West Virginia.)



Note: No photo of the 1814 Buckhannon Baptist Church has been found. However the above photo is of a log cabin church that is typical of that type of church during the 1800's.



Additional information about the Buckhannon First Baptist Church: On Sunday morning, March 13, 1904, a committee was appointed to select a suitable lot for a new church and parsonage. On May 14, 1905, the committee reported they had a lot on Victoria Place, Florida Street, and recommended its purchase.

The cornerstone for the church was laid on April 19, 1909, and the church was dedicated on October 8, 1911. The parsonage was built in 1922. Several improvements have been added to the church. The pipe organ was installed in 1923. The coal furnace was replaced and in 1996 air conditioning was installed.

In 2004 a modern sound system and mobile screen were installed in the sanctuary. In 1995 a ramp was built to access the Hart Avenue entrance, and in 2005 a ramp on the Arnold Avenue side was added in order to access the dining room.

Faithfull members have kept the church alive and strong throughout the years. We continue caring for each other as fellow Christians with different skills and needs, but also with one Savior, Jesus Christ.