

**Talk to the Church Women United group  
Brief History of the Buckhannon First Baptist Church  
Friday March 4, 2022**

**by John Puffenbarger**

Cathy Vance asked me to give a brief history of the Buckhannon First Baptist Church.

First, let me start by giving a little background about Baptists in this part of the country.

Baptists got an early start west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

There are four motivations that brought Baptists into our state.

First, there was an evangelistic and missionary motivation on the part of individuals. For instance, Rev. John Taylor visited the Tygart Valley about 1773 and found about 100 families near the source of the river (present Pocahontas County), but only one Baptist woman was among them.

Second was military service. For example, of the 12 members of the Forks of Cheat church, four were connected with the military as either soldiers or scouts of the nearby fort.

A third motivation for Baptists to enter the region was to organize Baptist associations. The former Redstone Association was formed in 1776.

The fourth reason was the desire for land. About 1783, Baptists from other areas came into our state to acquire free land.

The Bridgeport Simpson Creek Baptist Church was the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church west of the Allegany Mountains. It was organized about 1770. The site of the original church is marked with a large stone near the entrance of the Bridgeport Cemetery.

Rev. John Taylor was a traveling pastor. He traveled around the Buckhannon area and in 1774 he found about 30 families that he preached to. He said he received a warm welcome and found that the people were willing to listen and worship.

The Simpson Creek Baptist Church sent Elder Issac Edwards to Buckhannon to hold services there. This led to the organization of the "Old Baptist Church" in Buckhannon in 1786. About 5 people became the first members of the church.

Unfortunately, all records of the Buckhannon Baptist church were lost in a fire, so the only records we have about the church are oral traditions and newspaper articles.

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.

There was a cemetery behind the church.

By the way, many, many people were buried in the cemetery. The cemetery went up the hill in back of the church. If you happen to drive by the Sand Run Baptist church, the cemetery looks similar to what the old Baptist cemetery would have looked like.

Then the Department of Highways built Corridor H, they moved about 1,200 graves from the old Baptist cemetery to Hevener Cemetery. The graves were placed at the end of the cemetery. Many of the graves were marked "Unknown".

Where the congregation met before 1814 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.

The church was probably built of logs. This seems to have been the regular meeting place for at least 35 years.

About the year 1850 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.

It was reported that soldiers using the church destroyed a lot of the furnishings inside the building. The church asked the federal government for funds to fix the church. There is no record that the government helped.

Shortly after the Civil War the old church building on Locust Street was reported to have been rebuilt due to the misuse and abuse it had been given.

After about 40 years or so, the building had served its purpose. 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 new church was laid on April 19, 1909, and the church was dedicated on October 8, 1911. The parsonage was built in 1922.

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

Several improvements have been added to the church. The pipe organ was installed in 1923. The coal furnace was replaced with hot water heat, and later with a heat pump. 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.

Recently, the parsonage kitchen was remolded – the carpet in the downstairs was removed and the wood floor was sanded and treated. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor was repaired and painted.

About 3 years ago the kitchen was remolded. A new improved sound system was installed in order to deliver worship services on Facebook and YouTube. A couple of months ago a chair lift from the main floor to the basement was approved and will be installed soon.

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