

Beaver Dam Baptist Church

By Jerry Long
c.2025



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Historical marker erected in 1970 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways (marker number 1330). Marker is on South Main Street (U.S. 231), on the right when traveling north in Beaver Dam, Ohio County, KY.



**The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, Editor in Chief
(Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992) p.64:**

BEAVER DAM is a city in Ohio County at the intersection of U.S. 231 and U.S. 62, between owling Green and Owensboro. The town's name came from Beaver Dam Creek, which flows into Muddy Creek, a tributary of the Rough River. The creek was named by Martin Kohlmann (Coleman), a German immigrant, who was impressed by the numerous large beaver dams on the creek near his farm in 1795. Settlers from nearby Fort Hartford (now Hartford) came to the area for church services, and on March 5, 1798, they established the **Beaver Dam Baptist Church**. The church building was completed in 1807. The earthquakes in 1811-12 contributed to a wave of religious revivalism in western Kentucky that caused the Beaver Dam church to grow rapidly and led it to establish numerous other congregations.

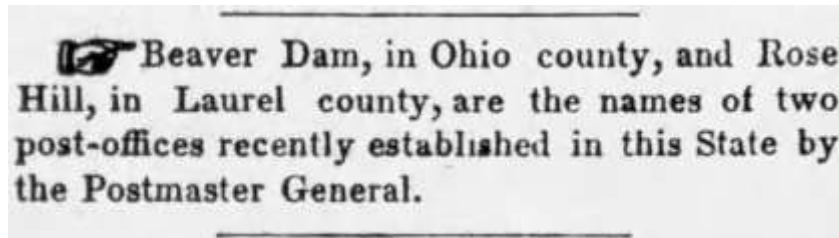
Around 1870 an east-west railroad, the Elizabethtown & Paducah (now Paducah & Louisville) Railroad was built through Beaver Dam, heralding an era of rapid growth. The railroad bypassed Hartford the county seat (whose citizens did not enthusiastically invest in the railroad) and the track was laid in the valley of Beaver Dam Creek because of the existence of coal reserves near Beaver Dam.

Beaver Dam was incorporated in 1873 and soon became a major trading center, with tobacco warehouses and stockyards supplementing coal mines and railroad as major industries. The city's location, near the junction of the Green River Parkway and the Western Kentucky

Parkway, has attracted several manufacturers, including Royal Crown Cola Bottling Company and Thomas Industries, which makes lighting fixtures. Other major employers include Young Manufacturing Company, makers of machinery parts, and the Greene Coal and Pyramid Coal surface mines. The population of the fourth-class city was 2,622 in 1970; 3,185 in 1980; and 2,904 in 1990.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 27 April 1852, p.3:



A History of Kentucky Baptists From 1769 to 1885
J. H. Spencer (Cincinnati, OH, Volume I, 1885) pp.403-413:

Beaver Dam Church

BEAVER DAM church is located in Ohio county, about four miles south of Hartford, the country-seat. It takes its name from a small tributary of Muddy creek, near which it is situated. It is, by several years, the oldest church between the Green and Ohio rivers, west of Elizabethtown, and is the mother of a large family of similar organizations in that region of the State. There was a very early settlement at Hartford, probably not far from the year 1780. Among these early settlers was a German family, bearing the name that is now spelt Coleman. After spending some time in the fort, near the present town of Hartford, Mr. Coleman moved his family about five miles south, and located on a small stream, to which he gave the name "Beaver Dam," in consequence of the beavers having built darns across it to raise the water over the entrance to their subterranean houses. "The first religious awakening of which we have any account," J. S. Coleman informs us, in his very interesting history of Beaver Dam church, "was produced in the mind of Mrs. Coleman through reading Luther's translation of the New Testament, a copy of which she had brought with her from Germany. After some time spent in reading, weeping and praying, this German woman found peace and great joy in trusting in Jesus for salvation. But now she saw that the same book, that had led her to the Savior, commanded her to be dipped in the name of the Holy Trinity; for such is the meaning of the word for baptism in Luther's translation. This much perplexed her, for there was no minister of the Gospel in all that region of country. Her conscience could not be at rest till she should have obeyed her beloved Lord. Finally, her course was resolved upon. She walked down to the little stream of Beaver Dam, and dipped herself beneath its waters. Coming up out of the water rejoicing, she met her little son who had followed her to the baptismal stream. He asked her why she dipped herself in the water. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, she preached Jesus to her little son. There the lad received his first religious impressions, and was afterwards,

for many years, a valuable member of old Beaver Dam church." This little boy was the grandfather of the widely known J. S. Coleman, long the efficient pastor of Beaver Dam church.

Beaver Dam church was constituted on the 5th of March, 1798, of the following five persons: John Atherton, Sr., and his wife Sally, Aaron Atherton and his wife Christina, and James Keel. The latter was a preacher, and for a short time served the young church as pastor. But, in 1803, moved back to Mercer county, from whence he had come to this region, and was succeeded in the pastoral office at Beaver Dam by the famous old pioneer Ben Talbot. Mr. Talbot served the church with great acceptance nearly thirty years. During the year 1804, the church enjoyed a precious revival, during which fifty-two were added to her membership by baptism. During this revival, Mrs. Coleman, who had baptized herself many years before, as related above, was baptized by Mr. Talbot and received into the church. Another incident occurred just at the beginning of this revival, which J. S. Coleman relates as follows:"

The preacher arrived at the water's edge a little in advance of the Dutchman, and began preparing for the baptismal service, when, hearing a splash in the water behind him, he looked just in time to see his candidate disappear under the wave, but momentarily emerging from the water, and facing the preacher, exclaimed, in the full use of his German brogue, 'Mr. Bracher, vill dot do?' Talbot, rather abashed, hesitated to reply for a moment, when plunge went his Dutchman under again. When coming again to a perpendicular, he exclaimed, with increasing vehemence, "Mr. Bracher, me shay vill dot do?" This time Mr. Talbot made haste to reply, and was just in time to save John Inglebright from the third plunge. Coming up out of the water, he stood shivering until Talbot sang a hymn and offered prayer, and then submitting himself into the hands of the administrator, received the ordinance in due form.

"The second revival which occurred in this church, was during the period of the alarming earthquakes which prevailed in the Mississippi Valley, in 1811-12. A large number was added to the church, 51 being approved for baptism, in a single day. At the close of this revival, the church numbered 175 members. She now began to establish "arms" at different points in her extensive territory. These "arms" were small bodies of brethren, belonging to the mother church, who met stately for worship, and were watched over by the pastor, and a committee of brethren appointed for the purpose. They exercised some of the functions of a church, but all their transactions were subject to revision by the mother church. When one of these arms was deemed competent "to keep house," or was "ripe for constitution," it was constituted in due form, and became an independent church. If an arm did not prosper, or failed to conduct itself properly, it was dissolved. The following record shows how the church dealt with an inefficient arm:

"Bro. R. Render and Henry Coleman met our arm at Vienna Falls, and found several of the members living scandalous lives. Whereupon they turned out the bad ones and brought the good ones home with them."

By this means of church extension, Beaver Dam dotted a large expanse of country with numerous churches, several of which are now among the largest and most efficient country churches in the State. This old church probably first joined Mero District Association, then Cumberland, then Union, then Green River, then Gasper River, and, finally, Daviess County Association. It continued to be a very prosperous church, until the last few years, when it fell into the pernicious habit of frequently changing pastors. Since which it has been unhappy, and appears to be in a decline. Of James Keel and Benjamin Talbot, the first and second pastors of this old mother church, something has been said elsewhere.

Alfred Taylor was a very distinguished minister of the gospel in his country, and generation. The Green river country had produced no such a man before him.

Joseph Taylor, his father, was a native of North Carolina. In early life he professed conversion and, with his wife, united with the Methodists, and, by them, was put into the ministry. After some years, he became convinced of the scripturalness of Baptist principles, and was baptized by Nathan Arnett of Tennessee. In September, 1804, he and his wife entered into the constitution of Providence church, in Warren county, Kentucky. He remained a minister in this church, till 1811, when he moved to Butler county, and united with Monticelo. Of this church he became pastor, and served it in that capacity till 1837. He was a preacher of small gifts, but is believed to have served his generation faithfully, and doubtless accomplished some good.

Alfred Taylor was born in Warren county, Kentucky, July 19, 1808. At three years old, he was taken by his parents to Butler county, where he was raised up. His opportunities for learning were so poor, that, at the age of twenty, he could barely read intelligently. After he entered the ministry, he was, for a time, under the tuition of David L. Mansfield, and, at a still later period, he studied under the renowned William Warder. He possessed a strong logical mind, and was an earnest student: so that in the end he was well educated, in the best sense of the term.

Notwithstanding young Taylor was raised by pious parents, he early fell in with evil associates, and by degrees, formed habits of dissipation, and finally became profanely wicked. But at length the Holy Spirit found way to his heart. In his journal, he says : " After laboring four years to recommend myself to God's favor, I was enabled, in my 22d year, October, 1829, to trust in Him whose blood speaketh better things than that of Abel, in whom believing, I was enabled to rejoice with joy unutterable and full of glory. In November following, I was baptized in Sandy creek, Butler county, Kentucky, by Benjamin Talbot." He soon began to exercise in public, and, on the 3d Saturday in May, 1831, was licensed to preach. He was extremely awkward in his early efforts, and so slow was his progress, that it began to be said freely: " That man had better quit." But his heart was in the matter, and he persevered.

After three years' probation, he was ordained at Sandy Creek church, in May, 1834, by Joseph Taylor, David J. Kelly, and William Childress. He was called to Pond Run church the same year, and to Sandy Creek, the year following. In 1835, he was married, and the next year moved to Ohio county, and took charge of old Beaver Dam church. By this time he had gained sufficient confidence and mental discipline to be able to express his thoughts, and he grew rapidly in popularity and usefulness. From this time he had many more calls than he could accept. His success in bringing the unconverted to the Savior was wholly unprecedented, in the lower Green River country. But his pastoral labors, which were faithful and efficient, in an eminent degree, formed but a small part of his work.

Between the time of Mr. Taylor's ordination, in 1834, and the close of the year 1836, the following eminent ministers left the harvest field, in Kentucky, and went to their home above : Walter Warder, William Warder, William C. Warfield, John S. Wilson, Benjamin Talbot, D. J. Kelley, David Thurman, and James H. L. Moorman. These were the leaders of God's hosts, in the State. All of them, except the first named, labored in the Green River country. Of all the preachers, of anything like prominence in the general work of the Denomination, in the lower Green River Valley, D. L. Mansfield was left alone, and his labors were confined to a comparatively narrow boundary. At the beginning of the great revival of 1837-40, Alfred Taylor became the leader, by common consent. And few men ever discharged the responsibility more worthily, or with greater success. The question of the propriety of " protracted meetings" was the first one he was called on to decide. Against much opposition, he determined in their favor. His first experiment was made at Walton's Creek in Ohio county. The Lord decided in his favor. Over 180 So people professed conversion. He now gave himself wholly to the work of the ministry, with great activity. From this

period, till his delicate frame became too much enfeebled to endure constant labor, near the close of his pilgrimage, he was the leading preacher of the lower Green River Valley. In preaching talent, he had no equal, except his intimate and steadfast friend, J. M. Pendleton, and as a successful preacher, he was without a rival. Besides the churches already named, a number of others, including the first church at Owensboro enjoyed his pastoral ministrations, for different periods of time.

Towards the close of his life, he suffered from disease of the lungs to such a degree, that he was compelled to desist from preaching, for a time. But, after a brief rest, he again entered the field of labor. In the fall of 1865, he went to the neighborhood of Providence church in Warren county, to preach a funeral discourse, and then aid his son, J. S. Taylor, in a series of meetings, at that church. He reached Charles Asher's, in the neighborhood of the church, on Friday night, and was so feeble that he had to be assisted to bed. He continued to sink till the 9th of October, 1865, when he went to his everlasting rest.

Mr. Taylor was three times married, and raised a large and respectable family. Three of his sons, Judson S., William C. and James P., are Baptist preachers, and, it is hoped, are worthy of so noble a father. W. C. Taylor has published a brief biography of his father, in a neat little volume of 123 pages.

David Ewing Burns, one of the most distinguished pulpit orators of the Mississippi Valley, succeeded Alfred Taylor in the pastoral care of Beaver Dam church, in 1845. He was a native of Indiana, and was born of poor, illiterate parents, a few miles up the Ohio river from Evansville. He was raised up to hard, rough labor and the rude sports and frolics of an essentially backwoods life. At the age of manhood, he could read with some fluency and write a little, very crudely. At this period he crossed over the Ohio river, with the hope of getting employment as a stage driver. Falling in at a meeting, conducted by Alfred Taylor, in the region of Owensboro', he remained some days, professed conversion, and was baptized by Mr. Taylor. Returning to his mother's, he engaged in prayer and exhortation, and there was soon a considerable revival in the little church near his home. A few months after this, he went to Hardinsburg, Kentucky, to attend a meeting, conducted by Thomas J. Fisher. During this meeting, he preached his first sermon. The people were astonished at his wonderful oratory. He was induced to go to Georgetown College. But remained there less than a month. He returned to the Green River country, and was ordained to the ministry, about 1845, by T. J. Fisher and Thomas L. Garrott. He was called to the care of Beaver Dam, and perhaps some other country churches, to which he preached but a few months, when he accepted a call to the church in the town of Henderson. The charms of his oratory drew admiring crowds wherever he preached. He read poetry and light literature, but had no taste, and perhaps very little capacity for study. After remaining a year at Henderson, he became pastor of the church in Russellville. He was wonderfully popular with the young, but he did not please the older members of the church. He remained there but six months, when he accepted a call to Paducah. Here he remained three years, preaching to large and admiring crowds to the last.

In 1850, Mr. Burns was called to the Beal Street church, in Memphis, Tennessee. He remained here a year, preaching to the largest congregation in the city. From Memphis he was called to Jackson, Mississippi. Here, at the age of thirty, he was married to Tallula Slaughter, an orphan, who possessed considerable property. By this means, he became proprietor of a valuable plantation near Canton, Mississippi. To this plantation he moved, and became pastor of the church at Canton. He succeeded well in business, and was popular as a preacher. But the calamities of the war fell heavily upon him, as upon thousands of others, and left him penniless. In 1866, he took charge of the Coliseum Place church in New Orleans. But the society did not suit him, and he was

uncomfortable. After a short and unsuccessful pastorate, he accepted a call to the First Church in Memphis. Here he enjoyed great popularity, the brief remainder of his days on earth. After a short illness, he died at his home in Memphis, in November, 1870. His last audible words were : "I have trusted in Jesus for thirty years. I can trust him still."

Mr. Burns was an orator by nature, and, with proper training, might have exercised an immense pulpit power. But destitute of this, he fascinated the multitudes, as few men could, without either instructing them, or reaching their hearts. He had very meager fruits of his ministry, notwithstanding the great crowds that attended his preaching, from first to last. As a Christian man, his character, as far as known, was spotless. He was a man of public spirit, and gave valuable aid to the Denominational enterprises of his time. He possessed a generous spirit, and a cheerful temper, and was much loved by those with whom he associated.

Rev. James Smith Coleman was long the pastor of Old Beaver Dam. His parents, grand parents, and great grand parents, were members of this church, and he united with it, when he was eleven years and ten days old. At nineteen years of age, he was chosen clerk of this church of his fathers, in which capacity, he served nine years, and then, in 1854, became its pastor. At a very early period his great grand parents emigrated from Germany to Pennsylvania, where they stopped only a few months, and then descended the Ohio river in a flatboat, aiming to land at Beargrass, the present site of Louisville, Ky. But on arriving at that point, they discovered Indians on the shore. Pulling out, to avoid danger, they floated over the Falls, and continued their journey to the Yellow Banks, the present site of Owensboro'. Here the young German couple buried all their possessions, which they could not carry with them, and walked 28 miles, to a little fort, near the present location of Hartford. In this little fort, their first child was born. This child was the grandfather of J. S. Coleman. They remained in the fort, till this child was about three years old, and then moved to the spot where the village of Beaver Dam is located, on the Elizabethtown and Paducah Rail Road. An account of the self-baptism of Mrs. Coleman was given in the history of Beaver Dam church. At this place, the little boy which was born in the fort, became the father of 23 children, all born of one mother. Of these, Elisha H. Coleman, born January 5, 1805, was the oldest.

J. S. Coleman, only child of Elisha H. and Susannah Coleman, was born in Ohio county, Ky., February 5, 1827. His father was of German, and his mother of Irish and Welsh extraction. His parents were in good circumstances, and gave him what was then regarded a good opportunity to get an education, viz. he labored on the farm during the summer, and went to school during the winter. When he grew up, he taught school, and attended school, alternately, till he acquired a fair English education, and probably some knowledge of some of the dead languages.

In the eleventh year of his age, he was suddenly awakened to a vivid sense of his sinful and ruined estate, before God, by reading the following stanza of a then popular old hymn:

"That awful day will surely come;
The appointed hour makes haste.
When I must stand before my Judge
And pass the solemn test."

Without any religious instruction, save that which he had previously received from his pious parents, he set about seeking the salvation of his soul. After seeking for sometime, he found peace in Jesus, and was afterwards baptized by Alfred Taylor. In his fifteenth year, he was strangely and powerfully impressed with a sense of duty to give his life to preaching the gospel. But thinking it impossible for one so ignorant as he deemed himself, ever to be able to engage in so holy and responsible a work, he strove to stifle his impressions, and succeeded, for the time. At

about the age of 20, he married Rachel Chapman, to whom, in after years, he acknowledges himself greatly indebted for what he has been enabled to accomplish in the work of the ministry.

Soon after he arrived at his majority, he was elected Sheriff of his county. After this he was elected Brigadier General of his Congressional district, which, under the then existing military laws of the state, gave him considerable prominence in the district. The way to a seat in Congress seemed opening before him. His ambition was greatly kindled. But now his religious duties, which had been much neglected, for several years, began to press upon his mind with force. Meanwhile, his early impression of duty to preach the gospel returned with great power. He again strove to throw off these impressions. To the proud, ambitious young man, with such bright worldly prospects before him, the thought of the poverty, self-denial, and reproach, attending the life of a preacher, was almost intolerable. The struggle was long and terrible, but the Spirit of God prevailed. "The strife went on," says he, "until humbled and subdued by God's grace, I at last submitted to be anything, or do anything, or, at least, to attempt anything that the Lord might require of me. This condition, and submission, was reached late one Sabbath evening — perhaps the last in April, 1854 — while on my knees, far out in the deep forest, where I was wrestling with God, duty, and self."

Mr. Coleman had already acquired considerable practice in public speaking, and, the following Sunday night, he commenced his ministry, at Old Beaver Dam church. This was in May, 1854. He took charge of Beaver Dam, and perhaps other churches, the same year. Within one year, he so disposed of his worldly affairs as to be able to give his whole time to the work of the ministry, which he has done to the present time (1885). He was ordained, in October, 1854, by Alfred Taylor and J. F. Austin. He was very soon pastor of four churches. From the beginning, his success was extraordinary, not only in the churches of which he was pastor, but in many revival meetings, which he engaged in. He served Buck Creek church, McLean county, as pastor, 24 years, Beaver Dam, 18 years. Green Brier, 14 years, Sugar Grove, 12 years, West Point, 9 years, and several others, shorter periods of time. He has assisted in constituting 11 churches, and in ordaining 20 preachers. He was Moderator of the General Association of Kentucky Baptists, from 1859 til 1872. He was editor and proprietor of the Green River Baptist, for a time during the war. He was also co-editor and part owner of the Western Recorder, one year. He was State Evangelist, under appointment of the Board of the General Association two or three years.

In 1877, he accepted a call to the First Baptist church in Owensboro'. During the first year of his pastorate there, 250 were added to the church. Walnut Street church was constituted in that city the same year, and Mr. Coleman subsequently became pastor of that organization. He is at present, pastor of some country churches near his birthplace.

Between the time he was ordained, in October, 1854 and the first of January, 1879, he baptized 3,415 persons (To the present, 1885, he has baptized over 4,000). About 700 of these were from other denominations — mostly from the Methodists which were, next to the Baptists, most numerous in his part of the State. Among those he has baptized from the Methodists may be named W. Pope Yeaman now of St. Louis.

Mr. Coleman has acquainted himself with the outlines of theology and religious literature, and is familiar with his text book; but he has studied men rather than books. He is much better acquainted with the human heart than with systematic theology. He has diligently studied effectiveness, and few men ever studied it to more advantage. Whatever may be said of his want of elegance of style, few men in Kentucky have ever been able to draw and hold together, from year to year, larger congregations or more deeply interested audiences. He holds his religious convictions intensely, and is always ready to advocate and defend them. He has proved himself a

skillful debater, but his best gift is that of a popular preacher. In this it would be difficult to point out his superior. But the best eulogium that can be passed on him as a preacher, is, that extraordinary success has attended his ministrations from first to last.



Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, Wednesday, 1 June 1898, p.3:

The centennial reunion at Beaver last Sunday was a grand affair. A large crowd was in attendance, notwithstanding the inclement weather in the forenoon. Dinner was spread on the grounds and there was plenty to eat and to spare. The one hundredth anniversary of Beaver Dam Baptist church was most fittingly celebrated. It was most enjoyable occasion, as will be attested by all who were in attendance.



Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, Wednesday, 17 January 1923, p.1:

BEAVER DAM BAPTISTS
CELEBRATE 125TH YEAR

in Van of Christian Work Since Pioneer Days,
Build Handsome New Church.

By W. R. Chapman

Sunday, January 7th. the Baptists of Beaver Dam met to worship in their new church for the first time. Perhaps a brief history of the old church would be interesting to some of the readers of the Herald.

The pioneer organization dates its beginning from the second Saturday in March 1798 when five Baptists Viz: James Keil, John Atherton, Aaron Atherton, Christina, his wife, and Sarah Atherton covenanted together to labor as a church for the Master's cause. James Keil became their first Undershepherd, and Aaron Atherton first clerk, he being followed by Massie Thomas and he by G. Render. They built a log house about the center of where the present cemetery is located, to worship in. Elder Ben Tolbert began pastoral preaching in 1803 and continued until 1833. They sometimes paid him \$36.00 a year.

Some Old Minutes Of The Church

The church met according to appointments on the fourth Saturday of April 1804. After divine service proceeded to business. Opened the door for the reception of members; received George Render, Robert Render, Joshua Render, John Maddox, Jacob Keil, Mary Shultz, Nancy Bays, Polly Atherton, Sarah Leach. Soon after this the Coleman family joined followed by Willis Chapman and John Davenport. That constituted the pioneer members.

Doctor J. S. Coleman said in his lecture on the history of the church at the Centennial of the church that it was the first organized in Kentucky south of Muldraughs Hill. The Gasper River association was organized in 1812. W. L. Chapman and Robert Render were the messengers to the organization which occurred at Providence in Warren County. Other churches organized by the old

church were Walton's Creek, Pond Run, West Providence, Cool Springs. Green River, Slaty Creek and Hartford. All took members from the old church.

The first house was burned from the woods being on fire. They built another log house near where the old one stood. About ten years before the Civil War they sold their old house and built a frame house. After Elder Tolbert resigned the care of the church D. J. Kelly was pastor two years then Elder Alfred Taylor, became pastor and continued a number of years. Many good people were added to the church during his pastorate.

As many as fifteen preachers have been ordained to preach the gospel. J. F. Austin, James Coleman and James P. Quay were among the men ordained. James Coleman was Moderator of the General Association of Kentucky longer than any other man in its history and Robert Render was Moderator of the Gasper River Association longer than any other man in its history.

The third Saturday in October 1868 Burl Chick made a fire in the Church for services on that day. While he was at home the house caught fire and burned down. James Coleman was the pastor. He immediately appointed Green Render, James Taylor and himself, a Building Committee. They set to work in 1869 and the house was completed, the finest meeting house in the county at the time. The Old Church has had many Undershepherds and has grown to nearly four hundred members and is still growing. They have for their pastor Rev. C. C. Daves. As the house was needing repairs the church decided by a vote to build new house. They have the house well on the way to completion. It a brick structure and when completed will be one of the finest church houses in the county. The building fund has been obtained by a free will offering so far.

[Note – Author of the preceding article is William Rumsey Chapman (1841-1925).]



Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, Wednesday, 28 May 1924, p.5:

BEAVER DAM BAPTIST
CHURCH NEARS COMPLETION

Through the appreciated courtesy of Mr. Carl M. Taylor the editor and his wife had the privilege of inspecting the interior of the new Beaver Dam Baptist Church Sunday afternoon. This is one of the finest church edifices in Western Kentucky, costing over \$30,000, and the funds for its construction were raised entirely by free-will offerings. Rev. C. C. Daves is the pastor. This handsome and convenient house. of worship is deservedly the pride of Beaver Dam, Ohio County and' the whole denomination. Only the; pews and heating plant remain to be installed. It will be completed and occupied, it is hoped, by mid summer.

[Note: The new Beaver Dam Baptist Church building was dedicated on Sunday, 4 January 1925.]



**A History of the Daviess - McLean Baptist Association in Kentucky, 1844-1943,
Wendell H. Rone (Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., Inc., 1943) pp.227-232:**

BEAVER DAM BAPTIST CHURCH

It is indeed a pleasure to sketch the history of an institution that has stood now for 145 years (1798-1943), and is only six years younger than the State of Kentucky, and only 22 years younger than the Declaration of Independence. Few Churches in the entire State of Kentucky have a heritage as glorious or a history as full as the Beaver Dam Baptist Church of Ohio County, Kentucky. The history of the beginning of this Church takes us back to the beginning of Baptist work in the lower Green River country. Hazel Creek Church, in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, has the distinction of being the oldest Church in Western Kentucky, having been organized just three months previous to the organization of the Beaver Dam Church, on December 3, 1797. From these two churches all the hosts of West Kentucky Baptists have come. One other church, Union in Warren County, was organized in 1796 but dissolved in 1855.

Beaver Dam Baptist Church was constituted on March 5, 1798, by Elder James Kiel, John Atherton, Sally Atherton, his wife, Aaron Atherton, and Christina Atherton, his wife. All the intervening history prior to this time is lost so that we will never know just what circumstances culminated in the final organization of the church. Nevertheless, from this date we begin a continuous history down to the present time. One of the greatest obstacles in writing this sketch is the fact that the records for over 100 years have, been destroyed. This sketch must of necessity be fragmentary and incomplete. We have consulted everything at hand on the subject and thus give Our findings. The materials at hand include a history of the Church written by Dr. J. S. Coleman and published in the minutes of the Daviess County Association in 1876. The Gasper River Associational record, written by Elder F. M. Welborn, in 1876, also gives much information. Added to the above is the information gathered from minor sources. In all the materials at hand a careful check has been made as far as possible to ascertain their trustworthiness. We may rest assured that any information published before 1900 is correct, for the record books were not destroyed until after that time.

There was no great increase in the membership of the church, except by letter, for several years. In the year 1804 a great revival broke out under the labors of Elder Benjamin Tolbert, who succeeded Elder Kid in the pastorate in 1803. The records show that at one regular meeting in 1804 fifty-two persons were received into the church by experience and baptism. In those early times protracted meetings were unknown, but frequent meetings were carried on from house to house at all times and under varying circumstances by consecrated laymen, without the assistance of a minister. When a member had been brought to Christ, their preacher would come among them, conduct the examination of the grounds of their faith and hope, which was uniformly rigid and deeply searching, extending to every Bible evidence, of spiritual renewing; he would then administer the ordinance of baptism, and remain in the settlement several days, teaching and preaching from house to house, exhorting and rebuking as needs required; and thus the spirit of the young believers were established, their hopes confirmed, and their souls strengthened in the love of the Gospel. Among the numbers baptized in the revival of 1804 are to be found the names of the pioneers who made religious history in this and other churches for generations, in fact, many until this day trace their descent from those men and women. Among the most prominent names may be mentioned the Renders, Maddoxes, Colemans, Wards, Lees, Taylors, Haynes, Athertons, Fulkersons, Leaches, and many others upon whose foundations this cause has been built.

A second great revival was enjoyed by the church in the years 1811-1812, during those, wonderful earthquakes, when almost everyone seemed awakened upon, the subject of a preparation for the eternity which many believed was just at hand. Over 130 persons were received into the membership of the church in this period, fifty-one being received at a single church meeting. Thus in a short period of time the church numbered her members by the hundreds and

she very soon began the work of church extension. Her members were now scattered over a territory fifty miles square with many of the members traveling on foot as far as fifteen to twenty-five miles to attend the church services. Both men and women were in this number as a public explanation or acknowledgment was required from everyone who failed to attend.

With the necessity of expansion came the establishment of "Arms" of the church. An arm was made up of a group of the members living in a given territory far from the church. These members were given some of the powers of a regularly organized church, with some exceptions. This arm was watched over by the pastor or a committee appointed by the church for that purpose. After giving satisfactory proofs of possessing sufficient strength and efficiency to justify the conclusion that it would be self-sustaining; then the arm became a church, but not until then. In the meantime, if an arm proved to be ineffective or inactive, the said committee would abolish it, and require its members to report back to the parent body for duty. The old records show, for instance, an attempt on several occasions, to plant an arm at Vienna Falls (Calhoun), which proved unsuccessful; and in this connection we find one of those unique reports made by the supervising committee of which we have spoken. It runs thus: "Bro. R. Render, George Render and Henry Coleman met our arm at Vienna Falls and found several of the members living scandalous lives. Whereupon they turned out the bad ones and brought the good ones home with them."

Tanner's Meeting House (now Buck Creek Church, McLean County) was one of the earliest arms of the church, and was finally organized into a church in August, 1812. From this church we now have Green Brier, Utica, Woodward's Valley, Red Hill, and a number of other younger churches.

The next arm that became a church was Walton's Creek, in Ohio County, in 1814, from which New Hope, West Point, and West Providence have descended, besides a number of younger churches.

In 1815, Mt. Pleasant Church, at Fordsville, in Ohio County, was organized principally by persons who held their membership at Beaver Dam. Among this number may be mentioned the old patriarch Josiah Haynes, who for many years promptly filled his seat at Beaver Dam, notwithstanding the fact that he resided over twenty-five miles distant, often performing the route on foot. He was a patriarch because of his deep-toned piety and exalted character. His remarkably numerous progeny are found all over Ohio County and other neighboring counties and are counted among the best citizens. Elder Frederick Tanner held membership with Beaver Dam before going to Buck Creek Church in 1812. Elder John G. Howard, who later became the first moderator of Daviess County Association and an outstanding pastor in this body, was once a member of Beaver Dam in her early days.

In 1817, Beaver Dam organized an emigrant colony church, which located in Southern Illinois, it being the first church organized in that great State. By far the majority of those composing this colony were Athertons, among whom was Aaron Atherton Sr., whose wife was also a constituent member of Beaver Dam with her husband. Here he was licensed to preach, but never accepted ordination, only feeling it his duty to exhort and admonish the brethren in the absence of one better able to instruct them. After settling in Illinois, one of his sons, Martin Atherton, and one of his son-in-laws, Thomas Howard, both became useful ministers of the Gospel in planting the Baptist standard in that territory. It would be interesting to trace the history of his moving portable church, and show what has been the result of her influence in planting still other churches in that region of the country.

Beaver Dam Baptist Church has held membership in seven Baptist Associations during her 145 years of history. She, with Hazel Creek Church, first united with the old Mero District

Association in north-central Tennessee in 1798, remaining until the year 1803. At this time she became a constituent member of the Cumberland Association, located in north-central Tennessee and west-central by south in Kentucky. In 1806 the Cumberland Association became so large that it divided. The western section took the name of Union Association. Beaver Dam became a constituent member of this new body. In 1811 the Green River Association was organized. Beaver Dam united with that Association. Finally in 1812 the Gasper River Association, which was nearer to the church, was organized. Beaver Dam accepted an invitation to membership in that fraternity. She continued as one of the most active members of that body until the year 1866 when she united with the Daviess County Association. After a few years she went out of this body with other churches in Ohio County to organize the Ohio County Association, this was in 1901. She is still a member of that body and is now the largest and most influential church to be found in its group of churches. In the early days of her Associational connection her messengers were never known to fail representing her because of the distance they often had to travel in order to meet the associational conventions, while her representatives were everywhere recognized as among the most learned in the Scriptures, and the wisest in disciplinary order,—grave difficulties often being referred to Beaver Dam for adjustment.

We now come to a list of the pastors who have served the church during her long history. For want of space we list them and give the dates in which they served the church: James Kiel, 1798-1803; Benjamin Tolbert, 1804-1832; David Jarrell Kelley, 1833-1834; Thomas Taylor, 1835; Alfred Taylor, 1836-1844; David Ewing Burns, 1845; Alfred Taylor, 1846; Richard Jones, 1847; Alfred Taylor, 1848; James F. Austin, 1849; Alfred Taylor, 1850; Hardin Haynes Ellis, 1851; Alfred Taylor, 1852; A. B. Smith, 1853; James Smith Coleman, 1854-1870; A. B. Smith, 1871; J. S. Coleman, 1872; L. C. Tichenor, 1873; A. B. Smith, 1874-1876; James F. Austin, 1877-1878; David Jarrell Kelley Maddox, 1879-1887; James S. Coleman, 1888-1890; J. T. Casebier, 1891-1897; B. F. Jenkins, 1898-1900; E. W. Coakley, 1901-1905; A. B. Gardner, 1906-1914; R. L. Creel, 1915-1916; D. Edgar Allen, 1917-1920; C. C. Daves, 1921-1932; James L. Sullivan, 1933-1938; Evans Taylor Moseley, 1939-1940; Supply, 1941; Carroll Hubbard, 1942-1943.

For the first several years after her organization the church met and worshipped either in the homes of her members or in barns and forests. There was no attempt to build a house of worship for the first nine years of the church's history. It was in 1807 that the first crude log cabin was erected for public worship, but was not so much as floored, nor was there any arrangement for warming it, up to 1812, for we find that during the great revival that prevailed in the winter of 1811-1812, that they built their fires in the center of the spaces included by the log walls, and the congregations sat and stood around and warmed themselves as best they could.

The second house was a large, well finished log house, and was built in 1839. This house served the church until the year 1868, when a commodious frame building burned down accidentally, shortly after being finished. The fourth house was built in 1869 and housed the church until the early 1920's when the present beautiful brick house of worship was completed and dedicated free of all indebtedness. The church has been worshipping in the last mentioned building since 1924.

This Church has been the mother and home of more preachers than any other in the entire Western part of the State. The number and names of all who have been licensed or ordained or have held membership with this grand old church are numerous and even now several hold membership with her. Some of the ministers licensed and ordained by this church became the most influential preachers in this state and in other states.

The following clerks have served this church during the over 145 year period of her existence: Aaron Atherton, 1798-1801; Massey Thomas, 1802-1805; George Render, 1806-1814; Joshua Render, 1815-1816; William Rogers, 1817-1822; Willis O'Neal, 1823-1827; Jonathan Rogers, 1828-1836; J. W. Leach, 1837-1844; J. S. Coleman, 1845-1853; D. D. Fulkerson, 1854; W. C. Chapman, 1855-1860; T. M. Ross 1861; Q. B. Coleman, 1862; R. N. Hood, 1863; J. H. Taylor, 1864; P. P. Walker, 1865; J. S. Williams, 1866-1879; P. P. Walker, 1880-1906; H. Baldwin, 1907; C. D. Chick, 1908-1911; S. W. Taylor, 1912-1914; J. M. Porter, 1915-1918; S. W. Taylor, 1919; Carl M. Taylor, 1920-1938; H. H. Render, 1939-1943.

In the early part of March, 1898, the church observed 100 years of existence. This event was one of the most important in the history of the church. Messengers from sister churches gathered for miles around. The history of the church was read by Dr. Coleman. If this was preserved we have never been able to find it, and in consequence, since the records have been destroyed, we have had to piece our information together as best we could.

In all her existence the church has always occupied consistent, high and uncompromising grounds in relation to Baptist doctrine, practice and discipline; hence, she has never suffered a schism or any serious strife, but on the contrary, has ever maintained the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, amid all the excitements and strifes. both religious and political, which have convulsed this country during the last 145 years. May this grand old mother of churches occupy her ground until Jesus comes again. Her greatest gift to Baptists was Dr. J. S. Coleman, the greatest Baptist preacher, perhaps, ever produced in the Green River Country.

[Note: Rev. Wendell H. Rone in his book, A History of the Daviess – McLean Baptist Association in Kentucky (Owensboro, KY, 1943) has biographical sketches of the following pastors of the Beaver Dam Baptist Church: James Keel (p.272); Benjamin Tolbert (pp.280-283); David Jarrell Kelley (pp.273-274); Alfred Taylor (pp.278-280); David Ewing Burns (pp.295-296); Richard Jones (pp.271-272); James F. Austin (pp.285-286); Hardin Haynes Ellis (pp.262-263); A. B. Smith (pp.347); James Smith Coleman (pp.300-305); Lewis C. Tichenor (pp.353-354); David Jarrell Kelley Maddox (pp.332-333); John Thomas Casebier (pp.296-297); Benjamin Fulton Jenkins (pp.326-327); Elijah Walter Coakley (pp.299-300); and Allison Bryan Gardner (pp.317-318).]



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 7 March 1948, p.5B:

Editorial and Current Comment

Beaver Dam Baptists' 150th Anniversary

A student of church history in Kentucky would find an interesting chapter today in Beaver Dam. Standing serenely on east of side Highway 71 that is a main road through Beaver Dam is a pillared edifice dedicated to worship. It is a lineal descendant of those other buildings that for a century and 50 years have housed devotees of the Baptist faith in Beaver Dam and community. But when the primal structure's doors, first opened there was no town of a thousand more to be influenced by the beams of religious light radiating from its interior; no twin steel rails within a short distance which heavy trains travel; no deeply gashed earth beyond to the south from which the mechanics of modern industry extract uncounted tons of coal. One hundred years is a long time

in the history of any settlement, any church in Kentucky, only six years less than the age of the commonwealth.

Today in Beaver Dam – south Beaver Dam local residents call it – the hospitable doors of the latest model Baptist church there will stand ajar in welcoming gesture to all who would behold the result of those dreams years ago – 150 years to be exact – when men of stout hearts and strong arms, who feared no man or beast, to whom the storms were challenges with their elemental fury that man defied, met in solemn conclave to lift their voices in supplication and thanks, that a place had been prepared for the assembly of those who in an orderly fashion would worship God. The whole state contained only a few counties then, broad in area from which in time 120 units of government were carved. Those who would preach and the others who prayed must be concerned with their marksmanship with the rifle in self defense. Primitive was the way of living then, but promising.

Happy are those who may lift the eyes and bend the knees, as they would see God and bow adoration to Him, where their ancestors 150 years before repented of their sins and sought forgiveness for wrong doing. The lofty front porch is an example of classic thoughts ennobled by the deftness of the builder; the site above the highway presents the passerby – stranger and native – an invitation to pause participate today and other days when religious services are held. From the high steps meditation is in order as you would enter the church and commune in filial attitude, as ancestors in another building – more than one – made obeisance. There is cultivated beauty around and within, an atmosphere of sanctity pervading as the soft shadows enfold you, and a softness in the words of preacher and the sound of music combined in sacred enthrallment.

There are other churches Kentucky as old as the Baptist in Beaver Dam – a few of them – and wherever found they stand like lighthouses to point the mariner on life's turbulent seas to a safe port in the storms. They are a haven in the midst of danger, a place of refuge when perils portend. And poor in spirit is the worshipper who fails to find peace for his troubled soul when he lingers in the vestibule of a sanctuarized place set apart, as were the original temples in forests and rude communal halls, where there was an exultant freedom from fears, and from which communicants would depart with joy and thanksgiving. Such must have been that first Baptist church at Beaver Dam 150 years ago. Today with reverent words and religious demeanor the way is retraced to the starting point, and then back to realize how the route was traveled to the beginning of the last half of the second century.



Fogle's Papers: A History of Ohio County, Kentucky,
McDowell A. Fogle (Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, 1981) pp.69-70:

Beaver Dam Baptists Have Had 5 Church Homes

As heretofore recounted herein, the local Baptists, like pioneer Christians of all faiths throughout the frontier settlements, at first met and worshiped in the homes of the church members, in barns or even, during suitable weather, in the primeval groves which were available on every hand in the vicinity.

And so, it was not until 1807 that the first log church building was constructed on a knoll near Beaver Dam Creek, during the pastorate of the illustrious "founding father", Rev. Benjamin Tolbert, probably the first minister of the gospel to settle in the Green River country and who had

been instrumental in the evangelism which led to the founding of the Beaver Dam Church, which he served as pastor for 28 years, 1803 through 1831.

The second house of worship was built in 1839, when Rev. Alfred Taylor, another outstanding "founding father" was pastor of the flock which he shepherded five times for a total of 12 years. It was much larger than its predecessor and showed a higher degree of craftsmanship. This church edifice served the congregation until 1868 when "a commodious frame building" was constructed but was destroyed by fire shortly after its dedication. The pastor at that time was Dr. James S. Coleman, described by Rev. Rone as "perhaps the greatest Baptist preacher ever produced in the Green River country . The following year the fourth church home was finished, still under the pastorate of Dr. Coleman, who served this, his home church a total of nineteen years. This edifice, also a large frame structure and, in appearance and utility, commensurate with the houses of worship of comparable congregations of the time and this section of the state, housed the Beaver Dam membership's services and was the center of its activities for a little half a century.

Succeeding "the old Beaver Dam Baptist Church", on the same site, the present large, beautiful and unusually utilitarian house of worship was completed in 1924, under the pastorate of Rev. C. C. Daves, 1921-1932, its construction having financed entirely by free-will offerings.



The History of Bells Run Baptist Church, 1820-1990, Wendell H. Rone
(Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, 1990) pp.12-13;

On June 1, 1792, the Commonwealth of Kentucky became an integral part of our Federal Union as the fifteenth state. At that time Nelson County (1785) covered the vast territory south of Salt River and west of the eastern border of the present Washington (1792) and Marion (1834) Counties to the mouth of Green River, as well as the territory found north of Green River to the Ohio River. Also, Lincoln County (1780) covered all the territory south of Green River and west to the Tennessee River and northwest to the Ohio River, as well as south to the old North Carolina line (now Tennessee line). But this, too, would soon change.

On June 28, 1792, the first Kentucky Legislature voted to organize a new county south of Green River out of Lincoln County. It was named Logan County, after General Benjamin Logan, the builder of Logan's Fort. It became effective on September 1, 1792, with Logan Court House (now Russellville) as the county seat. It covered the entire southwestern part of the state south and west of the Green River from the present Barren (1799), Hart (1819), and Monroe (1820) Counties toward the west. Also, on December 15, 1792, during the Kentucky Legislature's second session, all of that part of Nelson County south of the Salt River and its Rolling Fork to the Ohio River and south to Green River became Hardin County by Legislative Act. it took effect on February 20, 1793.

By this time, there was but one Regular Baptist church in all of Hardin County – Severns Valley (1781) – and one Separate Baptist church in the same area – South Fork (1782), with not one church in Logan County of the Baptist faith. But this was to change soon, too; because, from 1795 to 1800 the first "Baptist Wave" into the lower Green River Valley took place. During that time the two oldest Baptist churches in the state west of Severns Valley at Elizabethtown and in the Green River Valley were organized.

The first, Hazel Creek Baptist Church, initially called "The Regular Baptist Church of Jesus Christ on the Hazel Fork of Muddy River," was gathered by Baptist minister Benjamin Tolbert, on

December 3, 1797, on five members, including himself. It was located in Logan County (1792) when founded, but the area became Muhlenberg County by Legislative Act on December 14, 1798, and went into effect on May 15, 1799. It is still in that county.

The second was Beaver Dam Baptist Church in Hardin County (1793), now Ohio County. Prior to the event., and after Kentucky had become a state in 1792, the tax records for Nelson County in 1793 and Hardin County in 1793-1798 contain the names of many persons who later became members of the Beaver Dam Baptist body and had moved into the western part of Hardin County. They were: Aaron Atherton, John Atherton Sr., John Atherton Jr., Martin Coleman, Chesley Callaway, the Revolutionary War veterans – Benjamin Taylor and Phillip Taylor, as well as the pioneer Baptist. ministers Benjamin Tolbert (in Hardin County in 1797) and James Keel at the same time. Benjamin Tolbert moved to the south side of Green River into Logan County (1792) to found the Hazel Creek Church, already noted. James Keel was in place to organize the next Baptist church, to the north of Green River – Beaver Dam Baptist Church – founded on March 5, 1798, and composed of five members, including Brother Keel. The other four members were: John Atherton Sr., and his wife Salley Atherton, Aaron Atherton, and his wife Christina Atherton. It is the oldest Baptist church north of the Green River and west of Severns Valley Baptist Church at Elizabethtown in the state. Beaver Dam, located originally in Hardin County (1793), saw the area soon become Ohio County by Legislative Act on December 17, 1798, which became effective on July 1, 1799 as a functioning county.

Beaver Dam Baptist Church. 1798-1820. This historic church stood alone among the Baptists in Ohio County for over a decade, maintaining a faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But, soon after the loss of some territory on its extreme northwestern border between the Green and Ohio Rivers, in 1810, and some additional territory to help form both Butler and Grayson Counties, the same year; the Church exercised her faithfulness to the Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) by establishing "Arms" or Mission outreaches, which later grew into self-sustaining churches. This will be enlarged upon later on in this history.

In the period 1798-1820, Beaver Dam had but two pastors. They were: James Keel (c. 1745-1820), in 1793-1803 and Benjamin Tolbert (1760-1834) in 1803-1832. One notes that Brother Tolbert, continued to serve until two years before his death – a period of twenty-nine years, the longest in the church's 192-year history. He was a Revolutionary War veteran.



The Herald-News, Hardinsburg, KY,
Ohio Valley News Magazine, February 1998, pp.7-8 & 28:

Beaver Dam Baptist:
Established in 1798

By Tracy S. Combs, The Herald-News staff

BEAVER DAM - Some time in 1798, Beaver Dam baptized its first member – a woman named Mrs. Coleman.

Coleman, a young German immigrant, accompanied by her husband and son, toured along the banks of the Ohio from Yellow Banks, present day Owensboro, via Native American paths. They set their sights on an area inhabited by beavers.

When Coleman first laid her eyes upon the area she and her family were settling, she noticed beavers had dammed the creek and she rightfully named the area "Beaver Dam."

After spending many hours alone at "Beaver Dam" Coleman read her Bible for comfort. And it was from reading her Bible that she learned of baptism.

Coleman baptized herself in the waters of Beaver Dam by submersing herself in the water three times. And from her act the church began.

The First Pioneers – In March of 1798, five Baptist pioneers: James Keel, Aaron Atherton, A. Atherton's wife Christina, John Atherton, and J. Atherton's wife Salle signed a covenant on the second Saturday in March of 1798 to labor together as a church.

James Keel became the church's first Undershepherd and Aaron Atherton the church's first clerk.

The History – The tradition of Beaver Dam Baptist precedes much of area's founding history. In fact, the establishment of the church predates the establishment of Ohio County and only trails the establishment of the state of Kentucky by six years.

According to the church's pastor, Brother Glen Armstrong, "Beaver Dam Baptist is the oldest church west of E-town. . . . The town of Beaver Dam has, you could say, built up around the church."

During this time the Beaver Dam area was actually included in Nelson County.

As was the custom of most congregations of the time, members met in their homes – and, according to church records – some members traveled as far as 25 miles, by foot, to attend church services.

The Revivals – Benjamin Tolbert helped the church acquire 52 members after holding a revival in 1804. As was also the custom of these trying times, many individuals of a community ventured out to revivals in an effort to make contact with others. America was a much more rural place than it is today.

Settlers could be isolated from the rest of the world for months, even years, at a time. According to the church's records, Elder Tolbert spent 30 years forging through the area, crossing the Green River on a saddle made of corn shucks to keep his clothing dry.

The land was wild and few white settlers had made their ways to the area now known as Beaver Dam.

Varying tribes of Native Americans occupied territory in and around the county – travel was dangerous and many pioneers didn't make it home after long ventures in the woods.

A second revival was held due to the natural occurrence of earthquakes from 1811-1812. After this second revival sparked by the New Madrid Fault's activity, the church increased its membership by 130 members.

In 1900 another revival was held under Undershepherd B. F. Jenkins who, according to records, "labored for 23 days." Forty-two individuals were converted and baptized in Sam Sowder's pond (a local fanner) near the Beaver Dam Seminary.

The "Arms" – The roots of the church maybe traced back to "arms" – groups of members who lived near each other in a particular area and gathered when unable to accomplish a trek to the central church location.

After the revival of 1811-1812, new "arms" were added to the church. After an "arm" acquired enough members to sufficiently stand independently, the "arm" was given the power to become a church.

The first of these arms to become an independent entity was Tanner's Meeting House in 1812. Successive churches followed Tanner's, branches out from Tanner's and establishing

independent churches. According to Beaver Dam Baptist's historical records, every Baptist church from Elizabethtown to the Green River, from Bowling Green to the Ohio River and a few in Southern Illinois and Indiana are descendants of this church.

In 1812 Beaver Dam became a member of the Gasper River Association.

In 1908 another arm was established. The creation of a Mission in the mining community of Taylor Mines brought ministry to the area's miners.

In 1961 this mission at Taylor Mines was relocated to Ridgecrest Drive in Beaver Dam and was dedicated as the Daves Memorial Baptist.

In 1964 it became an independent church and was renamed the Ridgecrest Baptist Church.

The Church's Establishment – On March 13, 1811 land for the establishment of Tanner's Meeting House was deeded to the church's members by Philip Fulkerson for 50 cents. But, the trying times of this period once again tested the faith of the Beaver Dam Baptists.

In 1839 fire broke out in the surrounding wooded area of the church and the building was destroyed, but not the congregation's faith.

The second building of the church was rustic, like the first, made of logs and stood from 1839 until 1850.

Alfred Taylor served as the Undershepherd in this second accommodation, as well as many other circuted churches.

This second building was sold in 1850 and a third frame-structured building was erected and adopted by the church.

This structure had two entrances – one for women and one for men.

Times were trying for the church during the Civil War, but members set their political beliefs aside and joined for worship.

And in 1866 Beaver Dam joined the newly formed Daviess County Association.

In 1869 the same fate which had taken the previous church building also robbed the congregation of its framed structure – the building was accidentally burned and the congregation was forced, once again, to search for new worshipping grounds.

Yet, in 1869, a legacy of the church's beginning, James S. Coleman – the great grandson of Mrs. Coleman – collected monies from the congregation's members in an effort to erect a fourth building.

This fourth building, like the third, was also of framed structure.

J. S. Coleman, the Undershepherd, guided the congregation and established the church's first Sunday School class in 1872. Twenty members were enrolled in the class.

In 1887, to the liking of some and the dislike of others, the church acquired its first organ.

Services were held one Sunday a month. The church's membership was 160.

The fourth church, under Coleman, was redecorated in 1901. Money raised by the Ladies Aid Society (the forerunner to the Women Missionary Union), through oyster suppers, ice cream suppers, and candy pulling, paid for the remodeling.

After the remodeling, services were held two Sundays, rather than one, every month.

In 1904 Brother E.W. Coakley held the first Vacation Bible School in the school building.

Missionaries – Missionary work was always an important facet to the faithful of Beaver Dam Baptist, and is still true today. Mission work was offered to Native Americans and settlers conquering the new frontiers of the West.

In 1926 the congregation voted to divide the church's money – 50 percent would be used for the church's expenses and 50 percent would support mission work.

In 1925 the church began supporting Charles Culpepper on his mission to China and Formosa. The Church continued funding Culpepper until his retirement 40 years later, in 1965.

The First Parsonage – Beaver Dams first parsonage was purchased in 1910 for \$1,800. A. B. Gardner was the Undershepherd at the time.

By 1912 the membership of the church had grown to 400.

In 1920 the first full-time preacher joined the congregation, offering services every Sunday. Brother C. C. Daves was hired to be Beaver Dam's Undershepherd.

And it was under Daves that a fifth church was constructed, this time made of brick. Construction took two years to complete. On January 7, 1923 services were held in the basement and on January 4, 1925 the building was dedicated.

The old frame building was sold and torn down.

This new brick building was paid in full by free-will offerings. And after the construction and payment of this fifth church, it was decided by the congregation that all additional structures should be paid by such free-will offerings.

Approaching Modernity – Electric lights were installed in 1915.

Under the ministry of Reverend Tom Dunlap the church's morning broadcast was aired for the first time on the Beaver Dam radio station WOMI - Owensboro AM Radio.

Under Dunlap the congregation outgrew its facility and the need for an additional building was apparent.

In 1954 an Educational Building was dedicated, adding 46 rooms "as an adjoining structure to the original brick church building," according to the church's history.

On May 21, 1967 Brother Glen Armstrong joined the leadership of Beaver Dam Baptist.



Beaver Dam Baptist Church has changed a great deal since its original, rustic log structure. Today the church has an athletic center, an educational wing and a sanctuary.

Under Armstrong a new sanctuary, added more available space for the ever-growing congregation, was completed in 1973. Brother Armstrong also oversaw the addition of educational rooms, for which the ground was broken on September 17, 1972.

The first minister of education joined the church in 1979.

In 1990 the first Radical Impact On Teenagers (RIOT) group was created, sponsored by the Youth Ministry of the church.

According to Armstrong, the event is "extremely large."

"Around 500 teens attend, . . . it is a non-denominational event. They meet every evening in April," Armstrong said.

The Christian Activity Center was also added under Armstrong. On September 19, 1993 the action center was dedicated.

"Our primary mission is to preach Christ and to extend a loving outreach to the community," Armstrong said.

The membership of the church is 1,308. And, according to Armstrong, approximately 50 percent of Ohio County is Baptist. "(Many) members of the church come from Beaver Dam, but we draw members from other areas," Armstrong said.

Since Armstrong's ministry with the church the church has experienced a gradual growth of about 500-550 members.

Membership branches from Butler, Daviess and Ohio counties and some members venture from Pleasant Ridge on Sunday mornings for service.

Brother Armstrong has been with the church 31 years. Armstrong graduated from seminary school in Louisville and, upon graduation, preached in a small church in Mt. Vernon.

Armstrong and his wife, Elaine, have four children, Glenna, Gwen, Mark, and Amy. And the Armstrongs have, collectively, six grandchildren.



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Beaver Dam Baptist Church celebrates its bicentennial

By Karen Owen, Messenger-Inquirer

One of the region's oldest and largest churches is having a 200th birthday this weekend.

Beaver Dam Baptist Church reached that mark by surviving fires, earthquakes and the Civil War, but amazingly, no splits. It remains the largest church in Ohio County and is one of only two Baptist churches in Beaver Dam.

The congregation was organized by five settlers in 1798. But the Rev. Glenn Armstrong, the pastor there now, traces the church's spiritual beginnings back even further – to a German immigrant woman who came down the Ohio River and eventually to Beaver Dam with her husband in the late 1700s in search of 1,000 acres of good land.

The woman, whose last name was Kohlman, experienced a conversion while reading her German Bible alone and baptized herself in a nearby creek dammed by beavers, Armstrong said.

When her young son questioned her odd behavior, she immediately started preaching the gospel to him, Armstrong said.

The woman would later be officially baptized by the fledgling Beaver Dam Baptist Church, which didn't recognize her first immersion. And her great-grandson eventually would become one of church's most influential pastors.

But first, members would spend several years meeting in homes or barns, often traveling 25 miles to attend services, according to a church history.

The group's first house of worship, a log cabin with dirt floors and a hole in the roof for smoke, was built in 1807.

The New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-12 brought Beaver Dam Baptist a great revival and 130 new members, and the congregation soon established several missions. The church's descendants include "every Baptist church from Elizabethtown to the Green River and from Bowling Green to the Ohio River and a few in southern Illinois and Indiana," the church's history states.

A forest fire wiped out the church building in 1839, though, and this time members erected a log church with a real fireplace, which could hold logs up to 10 feet long.

A frame building with two front doors – one for the women and one for the men – was finally built in 1850.

James S. Coleman, the self-baptizing woman's descendant whose family name had become Anglicized, led the church through the Civil War period. It was an era when the Gasper River Association cautioned member churches like Beaver Dam not to let political beliefs become a basis for church membership.

In the decades that followed, the church added Sunday school (1872), organ music (1887) and vacation Bible school (1904).

Missions have always been a favorite cause at Beaver Dam Baptist, and at one point this century, the church was giving 50 percent of its offerings to missionary efforts, according to Armstrong.

For several years the congregation paid the entire salary of Charles Culpepper of Texas, a foreign missionary to China and Formosa, when the Southern Baptist Convention was having difficulty raising money for such work, said Armstrong.

Today Beaver Dam Baptist averages 400 to 500 people in worship on Sunday and has more than 900 resident members. It has a full-time minister of music and minister of youth and activities, plus a part-time minister of education.

The church has an annual budget of \$400,000, and ranks 23rd in the state in donations to the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' program for unified giving.

The church's new Christian activity center, built in 1993, features a gym, walking track, handball court and fitness room. The \$200,000-\$300,000 building was paid for without taking on any debt, said Armstrong.

These days his church is known for its youth ministry, with 75 to 100 teens grades 7-12 at the church on Wednesday nights. Annual R.I.O.T. (Radical Impact on Teens) youth crusades draw about 500 young people, he said.

Beaver Dam Baptist has managed to stay so large because of the quality of past leaders and because it has managed to avoid turmoil and division, said Armstrong, who has been pastor there for 30 years now.

Coleman, the former pastor, commented that in the church's first 100 years, the congregation never had "any schism or serious strife in the fellowship." It's a record Armstrong wants to continue.

The congregation's bicentennial celebration this weekend includes a birthday party for children this afternoon. At 6 tonight, former pastors and staff members, plus the Culpeppers' daughter, will lead an informal program, followed by an old-fashioned pie social.

Former pastors will also be in the worship service at 10:30 a.m. Sunday, which will include music and drama about the church's history. The celebration will end at 6 p.m. Sunday with a youth choir performance and Communion service.



Beaver Dam Baptist Church in 1911 – built in 1869 and torn down after the new brick church was dedicated in 1925.



Beaver Dam Baptist Church – built in 1869; cemetery is on the left, oldest death year found on monuments in the cemetery is 1831



Beaver Dam Baptist Church – building completed in 1924 and dedicated on 4 January 1925



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