

A History of Long Creek Presbyterian Church, 1780-1980

Long Creek Presbyterian Church sits on a hill in Gaston County, North Carolina, in a rural area between Bessemer City and Kings Mountain. A rock wall wraps around the church yard and another frames the cemetery across the road. In front of the wrought iron gates of the cemetery are three large rocks which reflect part of the history of the church. These old "upping blocks" helped the ladies maintain their dignity as they climbed in and out of horse drawn vehicles and mounted the sidesaddles on their horses. In bygone days, there were several sets of upping blocks, and for all day meetings, families tied up their horses and parked their surreys and wagons near their set of blocks. Then, when the noon hour came, they would spread their lunches with the family groups nearby. This is a fragment from the history of Long Creek Presbyterian Church - two hundred years old in this year of 1980.

By the middle 1700's settlers had moved into this area, inhabited by the Catawba Indians at that time. Most of the Indians moved on, and the pioneers applied to the British Crown for formal grants to the land they had settled. These grants were usually for four hundred acres, and required a yearly tax to be paid to King George II of England. Many of these pioneers were Scotch-Irish who had a strong faith in God, and brought with them the Westminster "Form of Presbyterian Church Government", the "Westminster Confession of Faith", and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government" was revised in 1788 in order to adjust to conditions in America. The new book was called "The Form of Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America". Presently, we know it as our "Book of Church Order" which, though it has gone through several revisions, is still basically the same, and contains many of the same paragraphs adopted in 1788.

The generally accepted date for an organized church at Long Creek is 1780, the year the Battle of Kings Mountain was fought. The earliest marked grave in the cemetery here is that of Joseph Blackwood, dated October 22, 1780. Tradition says that he was wounded in that battle of October 7, and died a few days later.

Land for the church was given by Benjamin Ormand, whose Grandfather, James had received a land grant from King George II in 1754. The earliest recorded deed is dated March 6, 1838 by Benjamin Ormand and Henry Fulenwider to Drewy Arrowood, James Oates, and Isaac White, Trustees of Long Creek Church. There are other deeds on record for adjoining parcels, dated 1906, and 1966 from descendents of Benjamin Ormand. Some of his descendents still live in the community and are members of the church.

This area was in Lincoln County, formed from Tryon County in 1779, and remained in Lincoln until 1846, when Gaston County was formed. There were no towns, and few settlements. A round trip to Charlottetown was three or four days by wagon over dusty trails, fording creeks, and the South Fork and Catawba Rivers. Lincolnton was established by 1785.

Prior to the organization of Long Creek Church, tradition says that services were held at the home of a Mr. Blackwood, who lived near where the church was later built. The first building was made of logs and was located below where the present structure stands, near a spring. There

were slab seats, and no heat. Having water nearby was important, for they often had all day meetings.

The following are the only known to have been charter members: William Oates and family, James White and family, and Benjamin Ormand and family. Long Creek Church was evidently organized by Orange Presbytery of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. From 1770 Orange Presbytery covered most of the area of North Carolina and southward, until in 1785 the Presbytery of South Carolina was set off. In 1788 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was formed from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and the Synod of the Carolinas, composed of the Presbyteries of Orange, South Carolina, and Abington (Tennessee), was formed.

Fire destroyed early records of Orange Presbytery, and fire at the home of Mr. L. Ragan Ormand destroyed early Long Creek records in 1915. General Assembly minutes of 1789 list Long Creek as vacant (having no pastor) in Orange Presbytery. George Washington was elected the first president of the United States that year. The following year, 1790, the first U. S. census showed Lincoln County having a population of 9,235, of which 935 were Negro slaves.

Ministers were scarce, and preaching was had whenever one of the missionaries sent out by Synod was in the area, or Presbytery could send a minister. One member of presbytery wrote in 1793 that European rejects should not be licked up by America as preachers, in all the vigor of her youth in church and state. The churches would be much better as vacancies than committed to stewards who would feed them with poison, or dry husks at best. Members would meet between preaching times to study the scriptures, the catechism, and the Confession of Faith, and when a minister came, he would call on them for public examination.

The late Dr. E. E. Boyce gives an interesting bit of information on this period of Long Creek's history in his history of Pisgah Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. He says, "The reason for the rupture in Long Creek Church, causing the secession, was that in 1793, Long Creek introduced 'Dr. Watts Hymns'. Prior to this time, all Presbyterians in this part of the country sang Psalms exclusively in their worship. To many this was distasteful, and after many years of strife and contention, a number of them seceded. Tradition says that some of the 'precentors' who led the singing would refuse to sing when the hymns were given out, and sometimes a part of the congregation would arise and walk out." Some of these "seceders" helped form Pisgah A.R.P. Church, organized in 1796.

The Presbytery of Concord was formed from Orange for the western half of North Carolina in 1795, and its minutes mention Long Creek frequently. Presbytery had stated meetings twice a year, spring and fall, lasting several days. Meetings would begin the first afternoon, then adjourn to meet "at early candlelight" which would be at 6:30 that evening.

In 1796 the minutes of Concord Presbytery listed stringent requirements for becoming a minister. In addition to presenting testimony as to his character and motives for wishing to become a minister, a man had to pass an examination on languages and sciences (including astronomy, trigonometry, and geography) or have a college diploma. Then over the next two

years he would be examined on the Confession of Faith and the history of the Christian Church, preach several types of sermons on assigned subjects, write a paper in Latin, and be examined on English grammar, criticism, and other rules of oratory. On passing all requirements, he would be licensed to preach. On being called by a church, he would be ordained a minister and would become a member of Presbytery. These requirements are little changed today, the main difference being that now we depend more on our colleges and theological seminaries to assure us our ministers are trained.

Each minister and licentiate was ordered to supply a vacant congregation at least twice between stated meetings of presbytery. Sometimes they were assigned to supply "one Sabbath" at a particular vacancy, and sometimes "at their discretion." From 1798-1802 Rev. Win. C. Davis was assigned to preach one Sabbath at Long Creek four times; Rev. Humphrey Hunter twice; and Rev. John Carrigan once. Perhaps they or others preached here at other times at their discretion.

One reason for the large number of vacancies - about half the churches -was that the congregations could not, or would not, pay a minister. It was said, half in jest, that they seemed to feel the gospel should be free.

A somewhat rare but big event in the life of the churches with no regular pastor or supply was "communion season." More than one minister would be sent at this time, and people would begin to gather on Friday, or earlier, when preaching would begin. On Saturday, members wishing to take communion would be examined, and those passing the questioning would be given a small lead token with the initials of their church molded in it, permitting them to partake of the Lord's Supper on Sunday. Communicants would gather around a long communion table, breaking bread from a common loaf and drinking from a common cup. (In 1793 Synod had recommended that "members of the church transgressing the rules thereof, be called on as soon as convenient to account for their conduct, and not wait until they may ask the privileges of the church.")

About 1802 a great spiritual revival began in the Carolinas, and people in anticipation of spiritual renewal came in great crowds to revival meetings lasting several days and nights. Accompanying the revival for a time was a manifestation known as "bodily exercises" which affected some people with loss of strength, swoons, outcries, sobs and groans, and violent spasmodic jerkings of the body. There was much debate as to whether these exercises were the work of the Holy Spirit, or were accidental. At any rate, they drew thousands of people to the revival meetings for a time, though they finally lost their hold on people as being part of a religious experience. However, there were a few, known as Shakers, whose influence in a few neighborhoods caused irregularities which required censure. Long Creek was evidently one of these, along with Knobb Creek in Rutherford County.

At the meeting of Concord Presbytery on September 4, 1804, the minutes state: "A memorial from the Session of Olhey was brought in and read, stating certain particulars as grievances arising from the conduct of a Society in the neighborhood of that place ... doing things under the pretext of divine direction, very disorderly ... Laymen administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper ..."

[Source: *The History of Long Creek Presbyterian Church*, church printed history found in the Bessemer City branch of the Lincoln-Gaston Library System]