



Gateway to the West



Lee County Historical and Genealogical Society P. O Box 231 Jonesville, Virginia 24263

July 2019



President's Report....1

Keokee.....1

Aunt Rose.....2

*History of Pennington
Gap First United
Methodist Church.....5*

*Photos of "The Raid on
Martin's Station".....8*



President's Report

By Becky Jones

It seems like there has been a lot going on in 2019. Not enough time or energy to get it all done and here it is July and time for another newsletter.

Aaron Fee with the Committee Development is the new Tourism person for the County. He told us some of the plans they have to get the county more activity and draw tourists to the county. We know Lee County is a beautiful place with a lot to see and places to visit in the heart of Appalachia.

Bob McConnell was our speaker in February. He has been working with getting the new Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail Interpretive Center built and open for the last several years. The center is a satellite location of Natural Tunnel State Park at Duffield, VA at the foot of Powell Mountain coming in to Lee County. The mission of the facility is to educate us on the importance of the Wilderness Road (Boone's Trace) and the role it played in the westward movement. The museum tells the story of the brave men, women and children who traveled the Wilderness Road around 1775-1865 and the hardships they had to endure. The museum will have a resource library with documents, pictures and other items pertaining to the Wilderness Road from frontier America to the end of the Civil War. I took my grandchildren there last month and it is well worth your time to go see. For more information on the Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail Interpretive Center call 276-940-1643.

Continued on page 4

Keokee *by Libby Laforce*

In the mountains of Lee County, Virginia lies the small community of Keokee. In the early years it was called Crab Orchard. The name was changed because there were many communities within Virginia and other states using the same name and mail would be sent to the wrong place by accident. The name Keokee was chosen because there were no other places in the United States with that name.

Within the hills and hollows of Keokee were several communities Crest, Mohawk, Keokee, Newtown, Stoney Lonesome, Darnell, Rawhide, Bundy, Sigma, Delvale, Calvin, Shepherds Hill, Robbins Chapel, and the hollows such as Boggs Hollow, Holmes, Allen, Parsons, Craft, Whisman, Carroll, Brock and Collier's Cove.

The small community was once a bustling, thriving community, largely in part due to the Sawmills, Coal Companies and Railroad.

In the book "Leather Britches", written by Beulah D. Bobrosky who grew up in Sigma, the communities had: Barber shops, Ice Cream Parlor, schools, churches, stores, hotels, a hospital, doctors and a post office.

Calvin was one of the coal camps. During the early years passenger trains as well as coal cars came through the small community. It was said that the train

Continued on page 3

Aunt Rose*written by Edgar Cress in 1968*

A few weeks ago, my wife, Liz, and I drove up to Virginia from Oak Ridge, Tn. to visit Aunt Rose Minton. Along the way we passed through historic Cumberland Gap and between beautiful farms in the Powell Valley of Lee County, Virginia. At Jonesville, which is the county seat, we turned south and followed a narrow-paved road which soon became a dusty gravel road. The rutted road twisted and turned as we entered the ridge country. Here, the farms were well kept, many of them dotted by old, falling down houses and barns long deserted by the generation gone to the factories or into town to live.

After the final few bumps over the pitted road, we came out on top of Wallen's Ridge. On each side of the road are deep, overgrown hollows; seemingly turning to jungle again. At first, I couldn't find the road that went down into Aunt Rose's hollow. Finally, I found a faint trace that went down into a scraggly tobacco patch. After moving a light cultivator out of the way, I turned the car off the main road and drove through the tobacco patch into an almost impenetrable growth of bushes and briers. However, there was a road and with the briers scratching at the sides of the car we bounced over boulders, while I wondered where I would turn the car around. Finally, we came to a place in the road so steep that only a jeep could negotiate. Fortunately, there was a place where we could turn the car around.

Out of the car, we slapped the dust off of our clothes and started walking down the steep trail. After a short walk we came out of the trees at Aunt Rose's "cabin", as she called it. Actually, it is an old log house, over a hundred years old, that was originally build for a tenant farmer, but it has been Aunt Rose's home for over 30 years. Calling hello at the yard gate, in the way of mountain folks, brought Aunt Rose hobbling out onto the porch. I was shocked at her appearance. Her hair was now solid white, her figure stooped, and as we shook hands, I saw that hers were gnarled and knotted with arthritis. Only her eyes hadn't changed. The part humorous, part-mocking glint was still there. As we sat down and visited on her front porch, I looked around at the falling down out-buildings, the overgrown yard and garden, and my mind travelled back over the story that was Aunt Rose.

She is not really my aunt, but actually a second cousin. Her father and my maternal grandfather were brothers who came to these hollows and ridges in 1881 and bought a great deal of the cheap land. Farm labor was cheap and plentiful and they prospered from crops, hogs, sheep and cattle and eventually became gentlemen farmers. Many families of renters came to live and work on the farms for crop shares. This log house had been built for one of these families.

Out of this hollow, surrounded by rolling fields of

of grain and pasture, in the center of the farm, Aunt Rose's father built a fine country home for his bride. Rose was the oldest of three daughters and three sons. The family grew and prospered. The finest cattle breeding stock was bought from western ranches to improve the herd. The latest farming methods were used.

However, all of this was achieved at a price. Rose's father drove himself hard, and he drove his sons as hard as his tenant farmers. Then the empire declined. Hardly into middle age, Aunt Rose's father died, leaving all that he had achieved. The children, especially the sons, long chaffing under the iron drive of their father, proceeded to have all the fine things their father had denied them. Fast cars were bought that could only be used in town, so the sons moved to Jonesville and lived in style in the town's only hotel. They opened an office there to manage the farm. Big trips were taken. The daughters pawed delightedly over boxes of finery ordered from stores in Knoxville or Kingsport.

During this time, the second oldest daughter, Edna, married and moved to Florida to live. Then came disaster. Because of a pile of oily rags, the fine home burned to the ground, with nothing saved from the flames. There was still enough money left to build a rambling, comfortable farm house, but it was not as before, and most of the remaining money was soon gone. Left with little or no management the fine farm began to decline.

But the fine way of living was hard to give up and the debts began to accumulate. Soon there was a mortgage and later even a second mortgage on all of the land except that owned by Aunt Rose, who wisely kept her share free of debt. Most of the farm was sold for the debts. The rest of the family drifted away to make their way in the world as best they could. Their mother died. Then Edna died in Florida of diphtheria, leaving a bereaved husband and three small sons. Eventually, these three nephews came to the lonely farmhouse to live with Aunt Rose, while their father worked in a nearby town to help provide their support. I was the same age as these boys and grew up with them since we lived nearby on part of my grandfather's farm.

About this time, Aunt Rose's younger brother White Minton moved back to the farm with his family, and for several years they lived in the "cabin". By now, the responsibility of three children to raise and a farm to manage, had put steel into Aunt Rose's character. Some of the tenant farmers came back. Although the farm was a shadow of its former self, Aunt Rose did her best and it was enough to provide a comfortable income. The boys grew to high school age and moved to town to live with their father and go to school and Aunt Rose was once again more alone than ever on the farm.

Continued on page 3

Aunt Rose continued from page 2

Then more disasters occurred. First, her brother Frank, who was a policeman in Harlan, KY., was shot in the back and killed.

The second disaster came a few weeks later while she was visiting overnight at her brother's in Jonesville. Her home and outbuildings burned and once again, Aunt Rose lost everything. Now, there was only the old log cabin rotting at the head of the hollow. It was all that was left. Aunt Rose had no money to build another home. She came to live with us for several months. That summer her nephew, Guy Blakemore, my brother Bill and I helped Aunt Rose repair the old cabin as best we could to make it habitable. Aunt Rose lived there alone until 1966, eking out a living with a few cows, a rented tobacco crop, chickens and a garden. The area around the cabin was grown up and she listened to the barking of foxes and scream of wildcats at night. Several times she killed rattlesnakes in her yard. But through it all Aunt Rose clung to the land with unswerving courage.

In 1966 she cut her leg while crawling through a barbed wire fence. She ignored it as long as she could and when she went to the doctor, he promptly sent her and her

badly infected leg to a hospital in Knoxville. Surgery and skin grafts were required in addition to treatment for her arthritis that had grown worse through the years. I went over from Oak Ridge to visit her while she was in the hospital. Before it was over, she spent over a year in the hospitals at Knoxville and Kingsport. Partially crippled and requiring a stroller to get about, Aunt Rose had to move in with her nephew Guy in Appalachia, Va. But Aunt Rose was not happy. The long months in unfamiliar hospitals, the hubbub of her nephew's growing family, and the clatter of nearby trains made her long for the serenity of her cabin. Her nephew did his best to persuade her to stay with them, but finally out of the stroller, she made her way back to the cabin on Dec. 21, 1967.

Practically confined to the cabin and yard, she was able to exist through the kindness of a neighboring farmer, who brought her food from the rolling store, and the help of her nephew, who came as often as possible. She still rented her tobacco crop for a small income. A few years later, mother and I visited her in the hospital at Kingsport, but she was very ill and did not recognize us. She died a short time later.

Keokee continued from page 1

pulling the coal cars were so long that you could not see the beginning or the end of the train. In the 1940's Southern Railroad had 21,798 cars. Of those cars 17,941 were exclusively used for coal.

Life was hard, but the people were strong. They worked hard and wanted their families to have a better life. Everyday chores were tough. In the time before running water and inside bathrooms, their daily work was gathering water from a spring or creek to wash clothes, clean the house, take baths, cook. Ironing was done by using a flat iron and heating it on the stove. Everything was ironed. Flour sacks and feed sacks had different prints on them. When they were empty, women made dresses, shirts, undergarments, sleepwear, curtains and aprons out of them. Nothing went to waste.

Some people who were crafty made items and sold them. One such person was Colonel Kern Payne who made baskets. He gathered his material from the woods to make his basket which he sold for 75 cents to \$4.00. His baskets found homes in many states. They are as desirable today as they were years ago.

From these humble communities came: Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Lawyers, Engineers and many other professions. The coal mines closed as well as the schools and the trains stopped coming. Most communities by the early 1950's were gone. Little remains of some of their communities and in some cases, nothing remains except for the memories. The one common thread that runs thru these communities is the connection to the people who once called Keokee home. The people who became extended family. People who loved and cared about each other. People who helped each other and were there through the good times as well as the bad times.

The fond memories still linger in the minds and hearts of people who once called this home. And for the people whose families passed down those memories, it will continue to live on.

Information for this article came from the book "Leather Britches" written by Beulah Bobrosky as well as the internet. Also, from Gene Robbins from whose family Robbins Chapel got its name.



Amy Fannon



Scott Bowen



Tom Coker

President's Report *from page 1*

We have a very active Sons of the America Revolution Chapter here in Lee County. They meet at the Wilderness Road State Park in Ewing, VA. Their President, Tom Coker, was our speaker in March and was dressed in full gear and gun for that period. He talked about their chapter and the things they do. They help persons find their patriot, mark graves of Revolution War soldiers and take part in the reenactment of the Raid at Martin Station.

Amy Fannon was the 1st runner up in the America Farm Bureau young farmer of the year contest. She has a degree from VA Tech in Agriculture. Amy told us the history of farming in Lee County. There were very few records kept about farming in Virginia before 1880. At that time, you raised enough corn, wheat, vegetables, fruit trees and animals, etc. for your family. After the Civil War one half of the population lived on farms with the average size being 136 acres. Our first agriculture agent for Lee County was in 1925. He helped get cash crops started like tobacco and tomatoes. At the same time our coal mines were booming. We were using lime and fertilizer on our fields so our crop yield was up. Then the Great Depression came. Today Lee County farmers raise mostly cattle and hay. There is very little tobacco raised since there are no government supports. Many land owners still raise a big garden for their use and to sell.

Our people are good about sharing their fresh garden product with their neighbors. I made blackberry jam last night with berries given to me by one of our members.

The Raid at Martin's Station is held on the second Saturday in May. That is when LCH&GS has their meeting, so we decided to go to the Raid. I have visited the Park several times but not for the raid. There were more than 400 reenactors providing a glimpse of frontier battles between the militia at Martin's Station and the Native American reenactors. The Raid and a visit to new Cherokees camp was enjoyed by all.

Scott Bowen, a Lee County native, was our speaker

in June. He has been the ranger at Wilderness Road State Park since 2013. We were told that the starting of the Park was in 1993 with the purchase of the Karlan Mansion and 187 acres by a public bond referendum. The cultural, historical and abundance of natural resources make the park a very historical site. They reconstructed Martin' Station Fort, added a visitor Center, shop complex and staff residence and purchased more land. Today the park has 396 acres with picnic shelters, playground, amphitheater, camping area, trout fishing, hiking trails and many educational and historical programs. We are very proud to have Wilderness Road State Park in our county and it is well worth your time to visit the park. wildernessroad@dcr.virginia.gov email

We are meeting each month with an interesting speaker. We are trying to answer the queries we get and will open our building for anyone who wants to use resource room. The weekend of the Jonesville 50 + reunion we had our building open for anyone wanting to visit. We had Jonesville High School annuals from the first 1949 through the consolidation 1989. And early memorabilia from Jonesville High School was on display. We have the card catalog and newspaper rack from the school library in our museum.

Members, local and away we need your help. Our expenses such as electricity, phone, internet and insurance hits us hard in the winter time. Our membership fees and sale of books are no longer enough to cover our expenses. One of our local members is paying for our mowing and weed eating each month this summer and we greatly appreciate that, but we need monetary donations to help keep us going.

If anyone has family history or genealogical research, we would appreciate your information for our resource room.

Help us keep Lee County History and your genealogy alive.

History of the First United Methodist Church in Pennington Gap

A Brief History of First United Methodist Church Pennington Gap, Virginia

From the 1890's until 1938 there were two Methodist churches in Pennington Gap: The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was organized in 1891. It was located on West Morgan Avenue in the block east of the former Pennington Elementary School. The parsonage still stands at 506 West Morgan Avenue and is the home of the late Mrs. Pearl Goins. Reverend D.H. Carr was the first pastor. He was the grandfather of Reverend S.E. Bratton, former pastor of First Methodist Church.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1892 in the old school house on Reservoir Hill. This congregation worshiped there until their church was built near the pedestrian overpass on North Johnson Street. Reverend Noble C. Burkhart was the first pastor. Reverend J.T. Laningham was an outstanding leader in the organization and building of this church and served as pastor in 1895 and again in 1900 - 1901. He was the great-grandfather of J. Lee Laningham. In 1917, during the ministry of Reverend T. H. Crumley, this congregation built a new building on the lot where the Pennington Hardware Company is now located. Unfortunately, this building was destroyed by fire in 1924. In 1924-25 the present structure was built. It was dedicated on June 19, 1927. Reverend D. B. Cooper was the pastor.

In the meantime, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South erected a new church on the lot where the Farmers and Miner's Bank parking lot is located. It was started under the pastorate of Reverend S. A. McGee, who died before the church was completed. Reverend C. F. Watkins was sent to fill the vacancy. The formal opening of the church was June 1, 1930. The building was destroyed by fire in 1936 during the ministry of Reverend C. T. Miller. The First Methodist Episcopal Church invited this congregation to worship with them.

Since the merger of the denomination was to come in 1939, the two local churches voted to merge in late 1938. In this was the two Methodist Churches of Pennington Gap became First Methodist Church and were unified before the Unifying Conference of 1939. Reverend A. J. Murphy, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and Reverend Miller preached on alternate Sundays until the Conference in October, 1939.

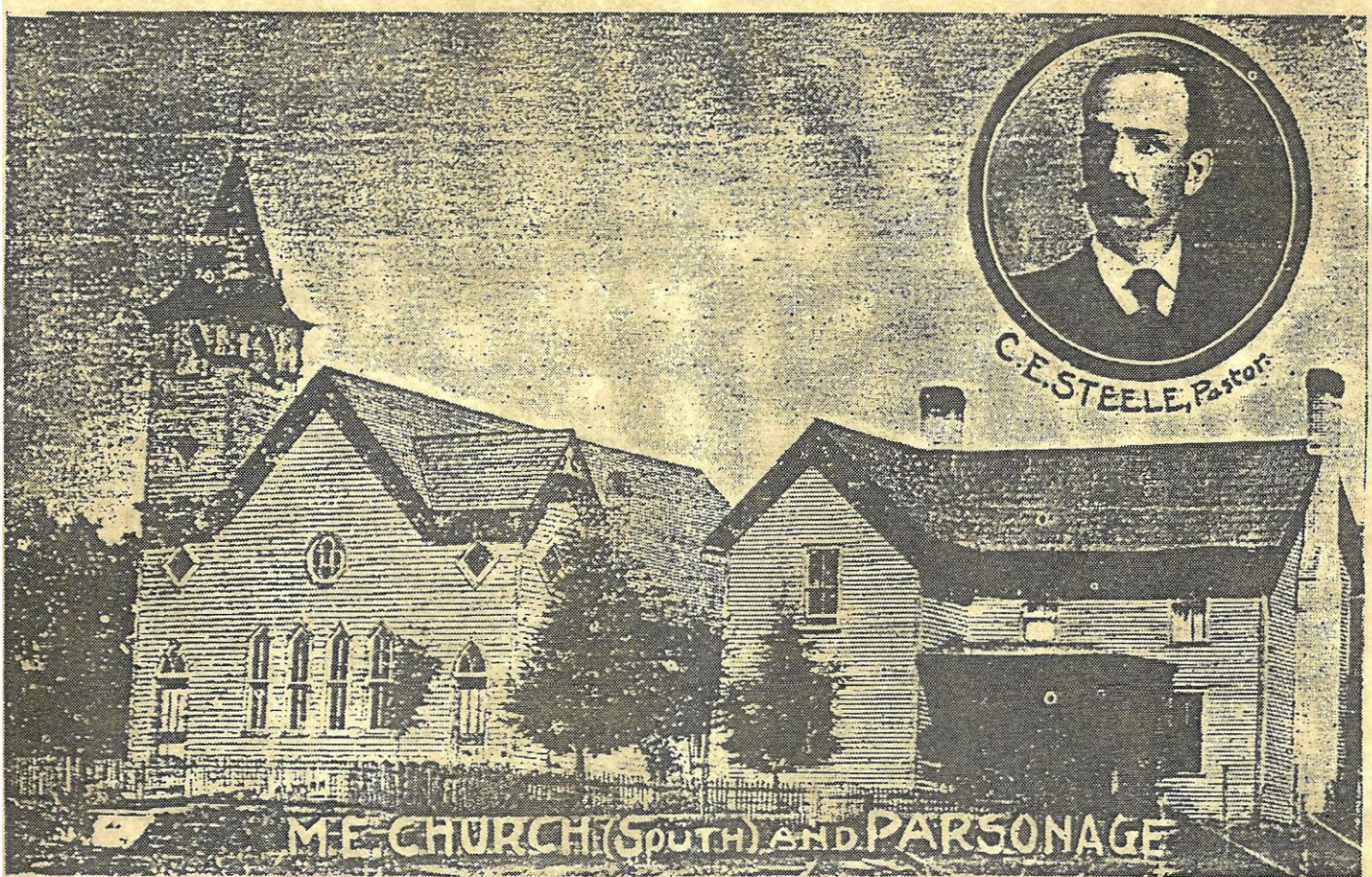
The word "united" was added to the name in 1968 at the Uniting Conference in Dallas, Texas of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church.

In 1951, during the pastorate of Reverend S. E. Bratton, the education wing was constructed. In 1985, during the pastorate of Reverend Kenneth M. Perkins, the Fellowship Hall and Sunday School rooms were renovated and on September 14, 1986 a service was held naming the Education Wing in honor of Reverend Bratton and in memory of Mrs. Irene Bratton.

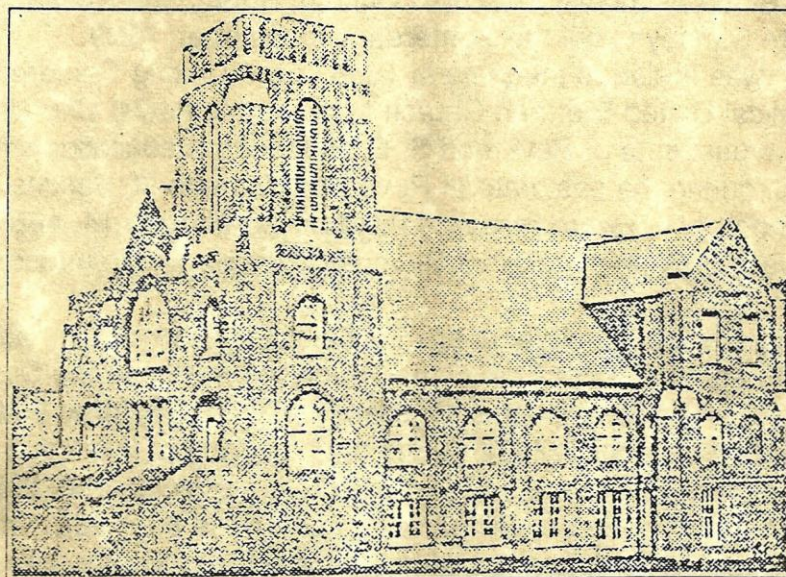
Other significant events of recent years are the building of the present parsonage at 1028 Leigh Avenue in 1973 and the restoration of the Fellowship Hall and the Sanctuary following a fire on June 13, 1974. Reverend Thomas C. Stanley was the pastor at this time. A service of dedication was held on October 7, 1979 during the pastorate of Reverend J. Ray Stuart.

In August, 1987, during the pastorate of Reverend Gerald McFarland, the church purchased the Tomlinson property adjoining the church on the east side. The land was paid for in 1988 and is now being developed as a memory garden and play area.

History of the First United Methodist Church in Pennington Gap *continued*



THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH AND PARSONAGE AS
APPEARED DURING THE YEARS 1905-1909
DURING THE PASTORATE OF REV. C.E. STEELE



THE NEW METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH
AS IT APPEARED ON JUNE 1, 1930

Pastors of the First Methodist Episcopal Church 1892-1938

N. C. Burkhart*	G. S. Bales
J. T. Laningham*	E. G. Gillespie
L. B. Giles	T.J. Crumley
I. B. Todd	G. A. Crowder
Robert Shuler	R. G. Osborne
R. L. Leslie	Howard C. Byrd
J. B. Spitzer	W. A. Graybeal
E. P. Catron	D. B. Cooper
R. E. Ayers	T. O. Marshall
W. D. Farmer	Mark M. Moore
C. F. Hunter	Mr. Carder
W. A. Bassett	A. J. Murphy

Pastors of The Methodist Episcopal Church, South 1891-1938

D. H. Carr	J. A. Ellison
E. L. Addington	E. H. Cole
J. R. Walker	W. H. Hicks
J. F. Jones	W. H. Troy
R. M. Walker*	R. A. Owen
M. J. Butcher	K. W. Cox
W. R. Snider	S. A. McGee
C. E. Steele	C. F. Watkins
E. M. Pippin	C. T. Miller

* these pastors served more than one appointment

Pastors of the First Methodist Church 1939 - Present Since 1968 First United Methodist Church

H. O. Troy	1939-40	James A. Shugart	1968-70
C. D. Mehaffey	1941-45	Thomas C. Stanley	1971-75
S. E. Bratton	1946-50	John A. Duvall	1976
B. H. Hampton	1951-52	J. Ray Stewart	1977-79
W. H. Lewis	1953-55	Kenneth M. Perkins	1980-86
W. E. Bishop	1956-57	Gerald H. McFarland	1986-89
Carl Bates	1958-64	Jerry Fleenor	1989
R. Gleaves Farmer	1965-67	Odell LaFon	1990-Present



Lee County
Historical and
Genealogical Association

P.O. Box 231
554 Old Friendship Rd.
Jonesville, Va. 24263-0231

*Located in the
Old Friendship Baptist Church*

Office Hours by Appointment

PHONE:
(276) 346-0005

E-MAIL:
leecovahistsociety@hotmail.com

President:

Becky Jones

Vice-President:

Ada Vandeventer

Secretary:

Libbie Laforce

Treasurer:

Greg Edwards

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Libbie Laforce

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Jean Martin
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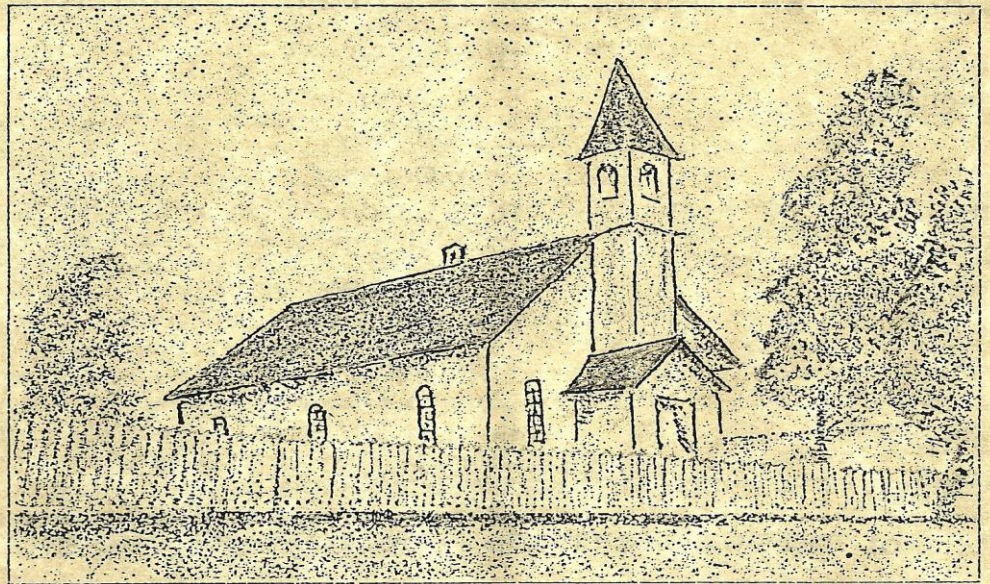
We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.leecountyvahistoricalsociety.org

contact us on our website or at:

leecovahistsociety@hotmail.com



THE FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
ERECTED IN 1896

**Photos from “The Raid on Martin’s Station”
at Wilderness Road State Park**

