

Evergreen Baptist Church, Whitney-Ashville, Alabama—133 years

By Joe Whitten

Nestled near the railroad track to the right of the US 231 North and at a distance below the railroad overpass, sits a modest white-painted church, probably unnoticed by the rushing traffic. However, this church, Evergreen Baptist, celebrated its 133rd anniversary on September 22, 2019.

As with most African-American churches, early history depends on oral history that has been passed down, for no organizational minutes exist for churches established by freed slaves after the Civil War. However, for this church, Pastor Elder Paul Jones' grandmother, Rene Blunt, near the end of her life, wrote down the history of the church as she remembered it. Stating that the church was established by a Rev. Gales and Rev. Green Neeley, she listed pastors and deacons with their dates of service from the early 1900s onward.

This building is at least the third one for the church. The first one was near the original railroad junction, where the Great Southern Railroad and the Ashville Railroad met and added the name "Junction" to the 1872 Whitney Post Office. Whitney Junction thrived in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, with a number of stores, post office, railroad station, and café. The US 231 railroad overpass took traffic out of Whitney

causing businesses to decline, cease operation, and the buildings to disappear as well at the tracks.

But Evergreen Baptist did not decline and disappear. Sometime in the early to mid-20th Century, the church relocated to where today's BP Service Station is just off I-59. When the interstate was under construction, Evergreen moved back to old Whitney Junction to its present location. Elder Jones recalls being told years ago that the church once had a building on US 11, but was not told where it was located. However the name has been Evergreen Baptist from its beginning.

On Anniversary Sunday, the day began with the church's regular Sunday school classes and worship service. There followed the morning service a lunchtime in the fellowship hall.

The afternoon celebration started at 3:00 p.m. with Minister Jerry Williams as Pulpit Coordinator. The Harvest Praise Team brought the devotion followed by a welcome given by Sister Kristy Brewster, with Sister Zerlene Verges giving a response to the welcome. There followed remarks on the occasion by Sister Effie Brewster, musical selections by Antioch Ministries.

After the collection of a Love Offering, Sister Pinkie Brewster and Brother Sam Blunt lighted candles in memory of loved ones who had passed. This ceremony was followed by musical selections by Harvest Outreach.

Minister Jerry Williams introduced Elder Michael Verges who preach the Word and gave the altar call. After his closing remarks, he prayed the benediction and the day's services ended.

After this service, there followed more fellowship time among members and visitors. Elder Jones summed up the day by telling this interviewer, "We put the big pot in the little one." For those unfamiliar with that Southern expression, it simply means it was a humdinger of a day of celebration.

Evergreen—what a lovely name for a church, for it reminds one of Psalm 23 and the peaceful picture of being in lush green meadows of safety and loving relationships in God's family. Let us rejoice with Evergreen Baptist and their 133 years of serving Christ in St. Clair County. If you're looking for a church home, come visit here—all races are welcomed.