

RAFTING CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH



2020 IN REVIEW



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8-30-38

Lollie H. Boykin

(Worker's full name)



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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
SURVEY OF STATE AND LOCAL HISTORICAL RECORDS: 1936

South Carolina HISTORICAL RECORDS SURVEY
(Name of State)

CHURCH RECORDS FORM

Waters Association, L.D.

1. County Sumter City or town Rural
2. Name of church Rafting Creek Street address 3 mi S. Rembert,
3. Denomination Negro Baptist Date organized 1871
Rev. P. D. Johnson, Winsboro, S. C.
4. Date of lapse, if now defunct No lapse
5. Information as to previous buildings 1871 brush arbor; 1871 small frame church
razed 1890; larger church erected 1890 was destroyed by high water
1930, and the organization moved across the road.
6. Date present building dedicated or consecrated 1930 Rebuilt 1930
Opened for services
7. Architecture, bells, inscriptions, special features of building Frame, 40 x 60, steeple on
roof, bell, capacity 300, no markings, val \$700. Cemetery across
road on old site is still used. Land valued at \$200. 2 acres.
8. First settled clergyman Rev. Theodore Diggs 1871-1915
Feature
Educational background Could read and write.
9. Minute books 1900-20; 1921--, also baptisms, members, deaths, fi-
(By year, volume, etc.)
nances, 2 vols. Earlier records lost.
Clerk; D. H. Winkins, Rembert, S. C.
10. Register books of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, members, deaths No separate re-
ords--in minute book.
Original members 25
Present membership, 250

11. Record books of Sunday School or other organization No permanent records.

1938--, 5 class books. Marion Mc Lester has them

12. Financial records, if separate No separate records--in minute book

13. Unpublished historical sketches: (give author, title, date when written, and note if written in one of the record books) Ellerbe, Helen. History of Rafting Creek Church. 1930. h/w. in her possession.

14. Published histories or historical sketches or directories, etc.: (give author, title, place and date of publication)

15. Other records, miscellaneous manuscript material, etc. Land deed.

16. Indicate by check condition of records: Excellent () Good () Poor () Very poor ()

17. Other information, particularly as to the origins, history, and previous names of the church Church organized because there was not another Baptist for them to attend.

SUMTER CO

9() RAFTING CREEK (Negro Baptist), 1871--. 3 mi S Wambert, S. C.

Organized under a brush arbor, 1871, with 25 members. Rev. Theodore Wiggs was pastor 1871-1915. A small frame building was erected 1871 to be razed 1890 to give place for a larger rectangular frame building. It was destroyed by high water 1930. The organization then bought a lot across the road and rebuilt. The church is frame, 40 x 60, steeple on roof, bell, no markings, value \$700. The cemetery across the road is still used. 2 acres in all. Val. \$100. Rev. F. D. Johnson Wainsboro, S. C. is pastor; D. H. Dinkins is clerk. Membership is 250.

Records: Minute books, also containing baptisms, members, deaths, finances, 1900-20; 1921-- , 2 vols. Others lost.

S. S. record books, 1938-, 5 class books. Marion Mc Lester is in charge of the S. S.

Bibliography: Old Members.

Clerk.

Elcorbe, Helen. History of Rafting Creek Church. 1930 hdw--in her possession.

RAFTING CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

A BRIEF HISTORY

Developing a comprehensive written history of the early years of Rafting Creek Baptist Church is an ongoing project. We continue to search for written documentation and to gather oral histories; because “[a]n inventory made of church records in 1930–1935 indicates that early records of the church were lost. Some records such as baptism records, death records and finance records were available from 1900, again in 1920 until 1930” (149th-anniversary bulletin).

“BUSH” OR “BRUSH” ARBOR YEARS

Rafting Creek Baptist Church began in a “bush” or “brush” arbor in 1864 when the Reverend Theodore Diggs (abt. 1835–1928) (1) organized the church. “In 1864, we were, as a people, just emerging from the darkness of physical bondage, unorganized as Christians. There was among us a devout and true disciple of Christ who offered himself as our leader” (100th-anniversary bulletin, 1964). Among the 25 founding members were “Adam Dinkins, Collin Alston, and Robert Chestnut.” Mrs. Minerva L. Diggs (abt. 1935–1941) was our first “First Lady.”

LAND PURCHASES:

Land purchases were made to accommodate the needs of a growing church (137th-anniversary bulletin, 2001). Those purchases were for a cemetery, as well as for church buildings.

- *July 1, 1874:* From William Crawford Sanders Ellerby and George W. Brown (1 acre). This was the site of the brush/bush arbor (144th-anniversary bulletin, 2008).
- *June 9, 1891:* From the heirs of John M. James and Theresa James. The land was to be used as a cemetery only (1 acre).
- *June 11, 1929:* From the estate of Thomas B. Wright (1.27 acres).
- *June 3, 1946:* From the estate of Thomas B. Wright (1/2 acre).
- *October 22, 1976:* From M. W. McLester (1 acre, donated).
- *October 29, 1993:* From William R. McLeod (13.33 acres).

CHURCH STRUCTURES

The “bush” or “brush” arbor was used until 1871 when a “small frame building” was completed. According to the *Survey of State and Local Historical Records: 1936*, the “church was organized because there was not another Baptist [church] for them to attend.”

A “large” church erected during 1890 was destroyed in 1930 by high water. Stones are remnants of the second church structure. These stones served as steps of the structure and remain in their original location. “These stones paid homage to the sweat and struggles of our fore-parents and founder, Reverend Theodore Diggs. Weary, worn, and wounded, [church members were lifted] into a worship place that offered peace, tranquility, and relief, if only for a little while. There in that ‘house of prayer,’ they would talk with God about the troubles of their time. . . . These stones lifted our ancestors to liberty in the Spirit of the Lord and gave them hope in spite of hopeless circumstances and situations. These stones testify to the rich history of Rafting Creek Baptist Church and its ‘strong people’ who, with God’s grace and determination to sustain them, came through times more perilous than these. These stones are the historical landmark of a ‘Bethel spot’ that ought to be sacred to us, [said the committee guiding the 143rd-church anniversary, 2007]. The footsteps of our ancestors are embedded within these stones,” the committee reflected.

The 2007 anniversary committee believed strongly in the significance of these stones and the story they have to tell future generations: “As the historians compile the history of this great church, the fortitude of these stones, having stood the test of time for more than 140 decades, will tell the story of a great people in the ‘City Church’ by the side of the road.”

A BRIEF HISTORY

Almost 20 years later (1930), the third church building was completed. It was described as a “40 x 60 building” with a steeple and bell “on the roof” and having the capacity to seat 300 parishioners. This structure was built across the road from the previous church and opened for worship. The bell, which is now memorialized on-site, was not ornamental; it was rung to let the community know that the church was open.

Our current building was completed in 1952. Included were stained-glass windows; two rectangular, flat-top belfries on both sides of the front anteroom; and a “baptismal pool” located beneath the pulpit. Prior to the construction of this pool, converts were baptized in Rafting Creek. The last converts baptized in the creek were Catherine Grant Dinkins and Laura Dinkins Harris(2). Photos of the early 1952 building show that the steeple was removed. Later changes to the 1952 building included major renovations, another steeple, new stained-glass windows, an office wing, and a fellowship hall. The baptismal pool was relocated to an alcove behind the choir loft.

AND THEY SHALL EQUIP HIS PEOPLE FOR WORKS OF SERVICE

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Rafting Creek Baptist Church grew and changed in other significant ways. Ministries flourished under pastoral leadership and members’ discipleship. Whether pastors ministered to 25 or 300, their service was one of equipping Rafting Creek Baptist Church parishioners for works of service—“so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12). From the leadership of our founding pastor to the current pastor, the Reverend Melvin Mack, Rafting Creek Church continued its journey of bringing to life members’ calling to liberate and empower the lives of others. These pastors “heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8). In our 2001 anniversary bulletin (137th), the Reverend Charles Davis said: “The church is on a mission for the cause of Christ. In the gospel of John 17:18, the following words are recorded: ‘as thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world’ To accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to affirm and embrace the concept of mission engagement. As Jesus was sent by the Father, he sent believers on the mission of making the Father known through precepts, proclamation and participation.”

Later, the church received this message about building and growth: “Rafting Creek Baptist Church, like any other church that claims Jesus as its Lord and Head, is a living, breathing, dynamic place of worship. It is a place where its own identity affirms us as ‘sisters and brothers’ in the Lord. It is a place where we gather to seek his presence and to praise his name. More than a structure that requires occasional maintenance or renovation, we are to always be engaged in Building A Life; Growing A Church. Not all building, of course, is done with bricks and mortar. Not all growing is about making more room or creating more space.

“The building and growing we must be about help create methods and resources that will bring to life our calling and mission of liberating and empowering the lives of others. It is about Rafting Creek Baptist Church doing all that we can to help ready others for a better life and a greater glory” (Rev. Mack, 149th-anniversary bulletin, 2013).

The following shepherds served in this corner of God’s territory: Reverends—

Theodore Diggs

J.R. Reed

B.J. Johnson

B.F. Weston

C.H. Bolger

James. S. Hall

J.A. Peters

Bert D. Lewis Sr.

Marvin McAllister

___ Dawkins, Assistant Pastor; Acting Pastor

N.R. Harrison

Herman Smalls (Acting Pastor)

W.J. McIlwain

Larry Jasper (Acting Pastor)

Douglas E. Franklin

R.E. Bennett (Acting Pastor)

Charles H. Davis

Burdell Hill (Acting Pastor)

Melvin Mack (2006 to Present)

A BRIEF HISTORY

MINISTRIES ENGAGED IN GOOD WORK

The 1964 anniversary program celebrated the centennial growth of the church's ministries. Some examples of that God-breathed growth follow: "In 1939, the Sunday School, with Mr. James Diggs as the leader, brought many young people to Christ; the Missionary Society, with Mrs. Helen E. Clarkson, Mrs. Wilhelmenia Wilson, Mrs. Lottie Atkinson, and Mrs. Alice Dinkins, took on new life and played a vital role in the educational and missionary program[s] of the church. Perhaps the greatest of our accomplishments was the erection of a new sanctuary. In June of 1952, when the membership marched from the old structure to the new singing (with Rev. Weston leading the procession) 'We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder,' it was truly a grand and glorious occasion for a people who had worked untiringly to achieve their goal."

Brother Billy Cohens was the first superintendent of the Sunday School. Some others were Carolina Mayrant Wright, Robert Mayrant, Queen Osborne, James Diggs, J. L. Clarkson, Harrison Mayrant, Beatrice G. Sanders, Frank McLeod, Hampton Gardner Sr., Marie Sanders Jordon, Peggy Sanders, and Ora M. Spann (Bland Wade, assistant superintendent). Our current superintendent is Carol Sanders (Min.); assistant superintendent, Johnnie Dinkins (3).

The purpose of the Sunday Church School (144th-anniversary bulletin, 2008) was described this way: "The teaching of the Bible is the central task of the church school, religion plain and simple, as it is found in the Bible. To this end, the teaching of the church school should be evangelistic and the atmosphere spiritual." The overarching vision and mission, as stated in the 148th-anniversary program (2012) centered on "the continual growth of a Bible Teaching Ministry that provides a Christian educational foundation for all ages, . . . teaching the scriptures and engag[ing] in discussions for understanding with the saved, unsaved and lost." The current mission "is to foster the continual growth of transformed lives based on God's redemptive purpose for the saved, unsaved, and lost through the teaching of God's Holy words" (July 2021 Newsletter).

There was evidence of a robust Sunday Church School. The 2008 administrative staff consisted of the following leaders:

Hampton Gardner Sr., Superintendent	Ora M. Spann, Assistant Superintendent and Teacher
Esther W. Gardner, Secretary; Teacher	Myra C. Wright, Assistant Secretary; Teacher
Maggie Osborne, Teacher	Dianne Herrington, Teacher
Peggy Sanders, Teacher	Bernice S. Hill, Teacher
Bennie Williams, Teacher	Margaret W. Davis, Teacher
Beatrice G. Sanders, Teacher	Juliette Bradford, Teacher
Thelma Laborn, Teacher	Carol Sanders (Min.), Teacher
Sharyn Boyd (Rev.), Teacher	Willie Sanders, Teacher
William Sanders, Teacher	Wallace E. Dinkins, Teacher
Melvin Mack (Pastor), Teacher	Ministerial Team, Teachers (Names are listed below.)

The Sunday School Ministry extended to a Summer School Institute (June-August 2013), where the theme was "Love Is Lived" (John 14:21; John 15:9-13). The overarching message of the institute was that "[o]ur lives are our reflections; our fruit is our witness. How we treat others is our legacy. Our love that we give is our extensions of the love that has been given to us." Vacation Bible School (VBS), another extension of the Sunday School Ministry, was organized and directed for many years by Marion W. McLester. Its purpose was to minister to children, create outreach to community members, and create evangelistic opportunities. Over the years, VBS broadened its audience to include adult learners. Dr. McLester's leadership laid the foundation for a thriving ministry. It continued to grow under the leadership of Ora M. Spann and Maggie G. Osborne. Today, VBS is led ably by Myra C. Wright and Jean Gardner, our current directors.

Members of other church ministries met the needs of the congregation and the larger community. The Ministerial Team of 2008, led by the Reverend Melvin Mack, consisted of Reverends Sharyn Boyd, Burdell Hill, John F. Kennedy, Henry Boyd, Lillian Reynolds, and Ministers LaKeanya McNeil and Carol Sanders (144th-anniversary bulletin). Later, Ministers Clayonka Boyd and Javon Wesley joined the team.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Another leadership ministry was the Deacon Board (now, Deacon Ministry). Many names of those serving during the early years are lost to history. Thus far, we have been able to identify these servant-leaders:

Beauregard Alston?(4)	Robert L. Dinkins	Marion Osborne (4)	John William Sanders
Willie Alston	Ollie Dinkins Jr.	Marshall Osborne Sr.(4)	Willie Sanders Sr.
Jimmie Brooks	Robert Gardner	James W. Padgett	John Singleton
Harvey Brooks	Hampton Gardner Sr.	David Robinson	Bobby Spann Sr.
Manning Crim	Robert E. James	Henry T. Russell	Bland Wade
Johnnie Dinkins	Edward W. Lewis (Chairman) (4)	George Sanders	Frank Williams Jr. (4)
Edgar Dinkins (Chairman)	Harrison Mayrant (or Morant) (4)	William Sanders (Chairman)	James Elbert Williams
Willie Dinkins	Frank McLeod	William B. Sanders Sr.	Thomas Boston Wright
Wallace E. Dinkins	Jimmie Nichelson Sr.	James Dury Sanders	

The Trustee Board (later, Trustee Ministry) started when the Reverend J. S. Hall was pastor. Some of the first members were John Benjamin, William B. Sanders, John Sanders, and Herbert L. Dinkins. By 1983, the first women joined the ministry: Stella Dinkins and Margaret W. Davis. These leaders, and the many who followed, managed all physical and financial aspects of church growth and maintenance, such as finance, property, and buildings. In addition to these responsibilities, the 1983 Trustee Ministry initiated a historical project and a memorial honor roll plaque. In 1993, trustees published the first *Rafting Creek Baptist Church Membership Directory*, followed by a second one in 1998 (5).

Other ministries served the church body. This listing is from the 143rd- and 148th-anniversary bulletins:

Audio/Sound/Tape	Couples	Morris College Alumni	Step Team
Black History Observance	Deacons	Nurses	Sunday Church School
Boy Scout & Girl Scout Troops	Deacons/Ministers Wives	Pastor's Aide	Trustee
Brotherhood Ministry	Fellowship & Outreach	Public Relations	Ushers
Christian Education	Mime/Praise Dancers/Team	Senior Missionary Ministry	Veteran

Choirs: Adult, Children/Youth, Gospel, Gospel-Ettes, Male, Mass, Musical, Senior
 Young Women's Auxiliary
 Youth Inspiration Moment

CONTINUING TO GROW AS A CHURCH WITH A REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE

Buildings may change, congregations may change, but the work of the Church remains unchanged. Through it all, Rafting Creek Baptist Church continues to grow as a church with a redemptive purpose. This continual work is purposeful. It is redemptive. It is LOVE-inspired. Rev. Mack best characterized the work of Rafting Creek Baptist Church in this 2007 message: "As Rafting Creek Baptist Church celebrates its 143rd Anniversary, there are troubles arising out of the human nature of people. Innumerable is the throng who makes their journey, day in and day out, bewildered by failure and bound down by ego or habit. Greater still are unsatisfied souls out of harmony with life.

"Yet, for those broken in spirit and character, there is the Lord's healing power. For the defeated, there is a way of deliverance. The Church of Jesus Christ has been endowed with the creative resources to empower those in need. What we do, as the body of Christ, is not for the purpose of uplifting or making a name for ourselves. Rather, the purpose is a redemptive one. 'For we are GOD's masterpiece,' says the Apostle Paul. 'He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago'—**Ephesians 2:10**. The 'redemptive purpose' of the work we are called to do is appropriated 'through faith' in the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of redemption GOD intends for us to do. It comes about not by our own doing, 'but is a gift of GOD.'

A BRIEF HISTORY

“As we celebrate another anniversary, might our purpose for doing what we do become a more redeemed purpose of loving service to others with works that truly please GOD. Might we see ourselves as we truly are—which is far from what we ought to be. . . . I pray that this year’s anniversary will jump-start, within us, a life of renewed faith and sincere love for the Lord and others” (143rd-anniversary bulletin, 2007).

In 2020, how most churches shared the Word changed significantly. Sunday devotions were conducted on social media platforms only. Church buildings were closed once the COVID-19 pandemic was detected in the United States and “non-essential” buildings/services were closed by governmental decree. Rafting Creek transitioned nimbly to a virtual environment. The Public Relations Committee (organized in 2018) had been working diligently to increase the church’s virtual outreach. Thus, Rafting Creek Baptist Church was able to welcome anyone—worldwide—to Sunday devotions, special programs, and Sunday Church School.

Whether we meet face-to-face or use social media platforms to spread the Word, Rafting Creek Baptist Church will continue its redemptive purpose. “COVID-19, like devastating pandemics before it, has left humanity, as someone has well stated, 'bundles of brittle nerves, brimming over with reactions.' GOD is allowing us to live up to the honor of having been made in the image of GOD. Let’s seize it and claim the victory in the name of Jesus” (Rev. Mack, Rafting Creek Baptist Church Newsletter, April-June, 2020).

To God be the glory for what He has done, is doing, and will continue to do so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.

ENDNOTES:

1. Rev. Diggs's death certificate (#015386) clearly indicates his profession. His name is listed as "Rev. Theodore Diggs." The birth is listed as 1835; the death, 9 Aug 1928. His mother was Ellen Bracey Diggs; his father, Alexander Diggs. Rev. Diggs was buried 13 Aug 1928 in the Rafting Creek Baptist Church cemetery. In the 1870 United States Federal Census, the Diggs household is enumerated as follows: Theodore Diggs (head of household, age 33), Minerva Diggs, spouse, age 33); children Ransom (9 years), Lindsay [or Lindsey] (7 years), William (6 years), Theodocia (2 years), and Theodore (age 6/12). William Cranford Diggs's (1866-2 Apr 1958) death certificate indicated he was a minister. Minerva's name was spelled differently from one document to another (as was the case with other family names). Her death certificate (#003329) indicates her maiden name was Lunza; her birth, 1835; her death, 1941. William Diggs reported her death. *Please note that census enumerators and others completing official documents may not have asked people to spell their/others' names. Assumptions were made about the spellings. Mrs. Diggs's maiden name, for example, may just as well been Lindsey.* The research was conducted by Julia M. Dinkins, May-June 2021.
2. Information was provided by Catherine Grant Dinkins. The interview was conducted by Julia M. Dinkins, 2000.
3. Information about the later superintendents was gathered from various anniversary bulletins and verified by interviews or text messages with Pastor Marie Sanders of Anointed Word Christian Worship Center and Church Clerk Peggy Sanders and Deacon Wallace Dinkins, both of Rafting Creek Baptist Church. The verifier was Julia M. Dinkins, May-June 2021.
4. Information was provided by Deacon Hampton Gardner Sr. The interview was conducted by Deacon Wallace Dinkins, 19 May 2021. Deacon Gardner indicated that Beaugard Alston may have been a deacon.
5. Dianne Herrington (Trustee). 2020. *Rafting Creek Baptist Church Trustee Ministry History*, unpublished paper.