



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHULUOTA

## Chuluota 1st Baptist Church: 104 and still growing

When the First Baptist Church of Chuluota dedicates its new recreational building next Sunday, it will be the latest in the development of a church whose history spans 104 years.

In fact, the history of Chuluota and the history of the First Baptist Church are virtually one in the same.

It all started shortly after the Civil War, when several families residing in Whiteville, N.C., left their homes by boat and journeyed to Mellonville, Fla., (now Sanford). From there, they made their way to Solary's Wharf on Lake Jessup and completed their long journey to

the north side of Lake Pickett by oxen and cart.

Dependant on faith in God to sustain them through the hard times that usually befell settlers of untamed lands, these nine men and their wives immediately joined together to form a church. The charter members were W.C. Jacobs and wife Dorcas; G.M. Jacobs and wife Pollyanna; J.F. Harrell and wife Martha; Albert Roberts and wife Ann; P.J. Jacobs and wife Mary; T.P. Long and wife Prudence; D.F. Simmons and wife Mary Ann; Dave Mizelle and wife Angeline; and William Taylor and wife Mary.

The first church meetings were held in the log cabin home of W.C. Jacobs. Soon, however, the men began to cut logs and start a church building. Thick boards called "puncheons," hewn from logs by a broad ax, were used for flooring. Since nails and spikes weren't available, these early settlers made wooden pegs and bored holes in the floor and sills to accommodate them. Benches were also constructed by hand from logs.

Finally, the new structure was covered with home-made shingles fashioned from cypress trees

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH RECREATIONAL BUILDING

## Church

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that were found to be in such abundance, and the building was ready for its first services.

Some time later, the little church was abandoned and a new church was erected on the east side of the site the church is located on today, near the intersection of SR 419 and Lake Mills Rd. The new building served a dual purpose...school five days a week, six months out of the year, and church services once a month.

Several years later, a man named Machon came to Chuluota and built a sawmill. For the first time, machine sawed lumber became available. Consequently, a new church was begun...this one to actually have glass windows...a Chuluota first.

Church members had to be very careful of their behavior in the early days, all the more so because in such a small community it was difficult to hide anything. Those whose conduct was in question would be brought up before the church council, and if he didn't acknowledge his sin and repent, church members would withdraw fellowship.

During this period, "Uncle Hamp" Bradford taught singing by utilizing the only musical instrument available...a tuning fork. Uncle Hamp would read one line of a song and the congregation would sing it repetitiously until the song was learned. W.C. Jacobs, who by then was known as "Grandpappy," called the meetings to order by ringing a small hand bell. The congregation was seated under the flickering light of small kerosene lamps attached to the wall by swinging brackets.

There were several unusual things about the services at the First Baptist Church of Chuluota in those early years. For one, the men and the women weren't allowed to sit together. As families entered the front door, the men would file to the right side and the women to the left. The "nursery" consisted of homemade quilts stretched out in the back of the church, the youngsters kept quiet by being fed homemade molasses cookies.

Further growth soon necessi-

tated the building of a new structure, a much larger building located adjacent to the present church. In that building, for the first time, organ music was heard in the form of an old fashioned pedal organ played by Mrs. Frank Phillips, the first church musician. Sunday school classes were held under the spreading oaks outside. It had then become a custom to hold services twice a month and join together for "dinner on the ground." A long table with benches and a shelter was erected on the grounds, and families would come from all around with baskets full of homemade goodies and dishes of wild game that abounded in the countryside.

Until the present building was completed, baptisms were held in a nearby lake. But as the mid-fifties approached and Chuluota began to experience something of a building boom, the old building became inadequate.

So in 1955, the present white and green concrete block First Baptist Church was started with the congregation and five pioneer members present. At 84 years of age, the ground was broken by Mrs. Maggie Bentley. Other longtime members present were Mrs. Priscilla Hodges, Mrs. William Jacobs, Mrs. Josie Prevatt and Mrs. Annie Jacobs. Walter Routh was the pastor.

George Maurice Jacobs brought the blocks and other building materials in by truck, and the materials for the inside of the structure were cut from pine timber donated by Annie Jacobs. Much of the interior construction was done by Mr. J.C. Barrington, then 75 years of age. The building was completed and dedicated one year later, in 1956. In 1961, the educational wing was started under the leadership of Rev. Charles Swaggerty. Rev. Swaggerty then left the Chuluota church to complete his education, but returned in 1965 and has been pastor of the church ever since.

Rev. Swaggerty said the new, screen-enclosed building behind the church will be used primarily for recreation and cookouts, and will be dedicated with a barbecue lunch next Sunday, May 29.