

History of the Eddyville United Methodist Church

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Information for this article came from the following sources as well as my own memory: *Aunt Leanna, or Early Scenes in Kentucky*, pub. 1855, and *Recollections of Frontier Life*, pub. 1885, both by Elizabeth A. Roe, and both courtesy of Marjorie Orr; *Eddyville Was Settled One Hundred Years Ago* by E.F. McNeill and W.W. Martin, *Courier Journal*, March 19, 1899; *History of the Eddyville Methodist Church* by C. L. Baccus, *The Lakeside Ledger*, November 29, 1963; *The Kentucky Encyclopedia; Letter Number 48* by John C. Espie, *Lyon County Herald*, circa. 1955; Francis Baccus; Mary Weldon DuLaney; B. C. Harrell; George H. McCarty; Ambrus Miller.

There were few sounds from Eddyville of the 1930s that gave me greater pleasure than the Sunday morning tolling of the bell from the old Eddyville Methodist Episcopal Church, South. That marvelous, fully-rounded intonation could be heard in every part of town except perhaps the "over-the-hill" section. It was a reminder that church or Sunday school would begin in thirty minutes for those many families who still did not have a clock in the house.

Pat Murray, the janitor for the church during the 1930s, like the town crier of old, was the reliable ringer of the bell on Sunday mornings.

I missed few of the sessions of Sunday school until I left home in 1943. I was in every class except the last one, the adult class. I had as teachers such fine old citizens of the town as Mrs. F. D. Jolly, Mrs. Christman, and Mrs. Shelby Hodge.

I remember the preachers in those days: Litchfield, Nichols, Cox, and Ashby, but they left little impression in my memory—except by their children with whom I went to school—since I seldom stayed for church. To sit still for longer than the hour for Sunday school was asking too much of a young boy.

It was the superintendents of Sunday school that made the most lasting impression. R. S. Mason was superintendent for 48 years. George H. McCarty recently recalled how Mason often substituted at Saratoga Church when the Eddyville minister was sick or out of town. (Saratoga was one of four churches that comprised the circuit that included the Eddyville church (more on that below)). Mason was invariably upbeat, with many interesting stories and jokes to tell. When he retired in the 1940s, Jim Lester took his place. He was another fine leader.

Pianists for the church, from the 1920s until the building of the last church in 1963, were Miss Marie Boyd, Miss Ruth Martin (later Philpott), Miss Loraine Lyon, Miss Mary Henson, Maurice Luckett, and Miss Mary Weldon Bales (later DuLaney) in that order.

Something of the old circuit system remained in the various Methodist churches scattered about the county until the early 1940s. Before that date the minister at Eddyville served four churches: Eddyville, Saratoga, Friendship, and Molton. The following are the preaching schedules for the churches before the early 1940s: Eddyville, 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month at 11:00 a.m. and every Sunday for the evening service; Saratoga, 2nd and 4th Sunday at 11:00 a.m.; Friendship, 2nd and 4th Sundays for afternoon services;

Molton, 1st and 3rd Sundays for afternoon services. Early in 1939 Friendship and Molton became associated with another church. In 1963, when the Eddyville church moved to the new town, Saratoga became associated with a Princeton church. (George H. McCarty, treasurer for the Saratoga Methodist Church for over 40 years, supplied the above information.)

The Eddyville United Methodist Church, the oldest church in Eddyville, has a long history. It can trace its congregation back to approximately 1809 if we accept a black preacher as the church's first minister.

The earliest known preaching place in Eddyville was the summer kitchen of Mathew Lyon's home, which was built on the hill above Big Spring. The summer kitchen was located near the present day parking area of Barnett's Apartments in old Eddyville.

A remarkable, charismatic, black man named Richard was the local minister. A slave of Mathew Lyon, he was to buy his freedom and that of his family, thanks to help given him by Lyon.

The story of this man has come down to us through Mrs. Elizabeth A. Roe's book, *Recollections of Frontier Life*, published in 1855. Mrs. Roe was the youngest daughter of Mathew Lyon.

We can calculate from information in Mrs. Roe's book that the first preaching at Eddyville, by this black man, took place before 1810 and possibly as early as 1808. This early black minister was the leaven that prepared the way for the first church that was built on the bluff above Big Spring in 1815. His story is told in more detail below.

The first recognized Methodist church in Eddyville was built on a plot of ground that the first settlers had reserved for a fort. Since the Indians did not prove troublesome, Chittenden Lyon deeded the land to the town as the location of a combined church and public meeting hall.

There are two versions of the subsequent history of the church above Big Spring:

The first says that there was a single church that was used until the 1870s. It was first used as a Methodist church and public meeting hall. Later after the Methodists moved to their new church in 1854, it was taken over by the Episcopal church.

The second version states that two churches occupied that spot. The first structure, built about 1815, was a combined church for all Protestant denominations and a public meeting hall. It is likely that this structure was made of logs. In 1854, when the Methodists moved into their new brick church on Franklin Street, the second church, an Episcopal church, was built on the site. This was the church that was destroyed by fire in the 1870s, leaving only the stone bell tower.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was first organized in Baltimore in 1784 as a denomination separate from the Church of England. Until about 1800 it grew in membership in Kentucky at about the same rate as the other Protestant churches, such as the Baptists and Presbyterians. However, as a result of a series of revivals that began in Kentucky, known as the Great Revival (1800-1805), the Methodist Episcopal Church began a period of growth that greatly increased its membership in Kentucky, especially in the western parts of the state where the increase was ten fold.

Its first expression in west Kentucky, where the population density was very low, was the circuit riding preacher. There were few churches in that virtually empty quarter of the state and most of the early preaching was done in the homes of elders of the church who had emigrated from other areas.

J. W. Blythe tells of cabin preaching during his early missionary tours, before a formal circuit was organized:

I would be directed from one neighborhood to another and told to inquire for such or such a man—usually an elder from Kentucky or somewhere else. At his house I would arrive sometime during the afternoon. Upon alighting the first question asked would be Aren't you a Preacher---The second was sure to follow---Will you preach tonight. And while a Supper was gotten for me and the faithful horse cared for, notice was given. This notice was generally by blast of horn. They all knew by the number of blasts that it meant preaching and by previous arrangement when it was to be held. I would have from twenty to fifty hearers. It was not a sermon if it occupied less than an hour in delivering.

In Rudolph's *Housier Zion*, J. D. Connor described the early cabin meetings. This was in Indiana, but the same system was applied as was used in early Kentucky. Most of the successful early preachers in Indiana came from Kentucky.

First the worship was conducted in members' cabins. ---The cabin meetings were often a real adventure. In one case the pulpit was a chair and the preacher stood behind it. If he should get emphatic and thump the pulpit on the floor, all the geese, pigs, and dogs under the house would answer in chorus. Meetings were subject to interruption at any time when a neighbor burst in with the universal greetings, "Well who keeps house?"

The first known preaching circuit in what is now Lyon County, the Livingston Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was organized in 1803, during the Great Revival. It extended from Bainbridge, ten miles west of Hopkinsville to the Ohio River and from the Tennessee River to Tradewater. There were 27 preaching places on the circuit listed as follows: Young's, Ainsworth's, Goode's, Brown's, Hail's, Nicholl's, Speller's, Nealey's, Thompson's, Ezels, Minner's, Hosick's Brush Meeting House, Reed's, Cochran's, Mitchell's, Ross's, White's, Adams', Smithland, Ratcliff's, Lewis', Duncan's, James', Jarrett's, and Messer's.

Many preaching locations in the Livingston Circuit, were cabins of early settlers similar to those mentioned above. From *Recollections of Frontier Life*, we know that Reed's cabin, mentioned above, was five miles from Eddyville and White's cabin was at Eddygrove (Princeton). Also mentioned in the book was that Peter Cartwright visited Eddyville (This would have been in 1810-11. See list of preachers on Livingstone Circuit, below.) and formed a sort of Sunday school. When he left the Livingston Circuit after 1811, he left a Brother Rider in charge of the class, but he moved away and there was no more preaching for years, if we ignore the black preacher Richard who was known to be preaching in Aunt Leanna's summer kitchen in December 1812 (see below). Just how the first church came to be built (circa. 1815) is not mentioned in the book.

Below is a list of the preachers on the Livingstone Circuit from 1803 to 1844: 1803, Jesse Walker (members: 101 white, 2 colored); 1806, William Houston; 1807, David Young; 1808, Abraham Long and Thomas Scillwell; 1809, Thomas Kerman; 1810-11, Peter Cartwright (458 white and 45 colored reported); 1812, John Travis; 1813, John Manley; 1814, John Johnson and Francis Travis; 1815, Jesse Hale; 1816, Benjamin Edge; 1817-18, John Johnson; 1819, Edward Ashley; 1820, Johsua Btacher and Allen Elliott; 1822, Edward Ashley and Thomas Atterbury; 1822-23, George Brown and G.W. Robbins; 1825, Allen Elliott and Thomas Reece; 1826, George Richardson; 1827, Clement

Clifton and John Redman and William Cundiff; 1828, Issac Malone and W. .S. McMurray (probably an ancestor of Bishop W. F. McMurray); 1831, Robert Y. McReynolds and W. S. Evans; 1832, Alex. H. Stemmons; 1833, W.B. Landrum; 1834, Abraham Long and J. D. Barnett; 1835, R. F. Turner and H. Edmonson. In 1836 Livingston Circuit disappears. Princeton and Smithland Circuit appears for the first time: J. J. Harrison, George Switzer and David H. Davis assigned. Lewis Marshall P.C. (407 white and 32 colored reported). Livingston Circuit appears again after being absent for 8 years. Also Princeton and Empire Iron Works appear as appointments. 1845-51, Eddyville appears with James H. Owen as P.C.

In 1830 reformers who had long demanded a more democratic polity in American Methodism broke off to form the Methodist Protestant (MP) Church. However, the largest single break in Methodist Episcopal Church unity came at the troubled General Conference of 1844, over disagreement as to whether a bishop should exercise the Episcopal office while he owned slaves. The Kentucky Conference of the church voted to side with the South and establish a separate denomination. In May 1845 the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was inaugurated in Louisville. This denomination ultimately became the present day Eddyville United Methodist Church.

The Eddyville Methodist Episcopal Church, South completed a new church in 1854, leaving the old site for the Episcopal Church. According to which version of the early history of this church is true, either the Episcopal Church occupied the old church until it burned, or they built a new church on the site which they used until it burned in the 1870s.

The Eddyville Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in its new church, prospered. This is the list of preachers appointed to Eddyville from 1852 to the 1964: 1852, Artemus Brown; 1854, William Randolph; 1855-56, Allison Akin; 1857, Robert B. McGown; 1858, H.T. Burges; 1859-60, William Childress; 1861, James A. Lewis; 1862, Thomas D. Lewis; 1864, George Crumbaugh; 1865-67, W. T. Reid; 1868, William Alexander; 1869, W. L. King; 1870, George Crumbaugh; 1871, W. T. Reid; 1873, R. B. McGown; 1875, M. M. Hunter; 1876, G. W. Lyon; 1877, E. R. Harrison; 1878-79, P. A. Edwards; 1880-82, E. E. Pate; 1883-86, J. L. Edrington; 1887, J. G. Freeman; 1889, R. C. Love; 1893 (ed.), J. S. Chandler; 1895, W. W. Prince; 1896, L. W. Browder; 1898, S. L. Coward; 1899, L. M. Russell; 1900, W. F. Hogard; 1901, U. S. Tabor; 1903, T. C. Peters; 1904, J. W. Crowe; 1906, J. L. Kilgore; 1909, W. F. Cashman; 1911, P. C. Duval; 1914, A. L. Mell; 1917, V. Elgin; 1918, Robert Johnson; 1919, R. L. Talley (Pastor for 6 yrs. Pastor in appointment when new Eddyville Church was built (1923).); 1925, M. M. Murrell and Pat Davis (Church was dedicated and the parsonage was built beside the church.); 1927, W. I. Munday; 1928, R. L. Sleamaker; 1932, V. B. Wheatley; 1933, A. D. Litchfield; 1936, O. T. Nichols; 1937, J. H. Cox; (In 1939 Eddyville Methodist Episcopal Church, South became Eddyville Methodist Church.); 1940, Elmer Ashby; 1944, I. W. Napier; 1946, R. K. Hulse; 1947, T. G. Hackley; 1948, J. A. Collier; 1949, Alvis Lee; 1950, R. E. Melton; 1952, T. C. Brinkley, 1953, Elmer Pursley; 1955, H. A. Pullen Sr.; 1958, F. M. Glover.

The church was forced, in 1964, to move to new Eddyville by impoundment of Barkley Lake. The following is a list of the ministers who have served at the new Eddyville church from 1964: 1964, M. L. Roeder; (In 1968 Eddyville Methodist Church became Eddyville United Methodist Church.); 1968, Oda Wright; 1973, William Dodson; 1980, Jack Eller; 1985, George Hobbs; 1986 Calvin Cornelius; 1992, Stephen McVay.

Until about 1870, the Methodist church in Eddyville had a mixed black and white congregation, each race having a section of the church reserved for its use. Sometime after 1870, the black members built a church on the south side of Second Street, between Main and Shelby Street.

In the 1930s there was Sunday school every Sunday, with Superintendent Harry Crump in charge, and preaching every other Sunday from an out-of-town minister. On the preaching Sundays many times the congregation brought food that was served after the morning service. Then followed a period of socializing and another service in the afternoon. During both services Jack Blue was at the piano, pounding out fine old religious songs. (He was blind from birth but he had attended a special school in Louisville where he learned to play the piano by ear. He could not only play all the hymns, but at the Dunn Hotel, where he occasionally played, he would play any song you requested if you could hum or whistle a few bars. He knew them all.)

On hot summer days the windows of the church would be open for ventilation and the old hymns could be heard though-out that part of town. On those occasions many times white folks would gather in the vacant lot across the street to listen. Most of the hymns were the same as those sung in the white Methodist church but with a different beat. When the spirit moved the congregation it was like attending a concert of professional gospel singers. A solo voice would come and go, some times alone and other times with the congregation.

(Harry Crump, along with Sheridan Steele, built all the concrete block structures in Eddyville in the early years of the century. Harry was also an expert chimney builder. "Any chimney Harry Crump built or repaired will draw," was a common saying. He went to his maker in 1947.)

First Methodist Minister in Eddyville

It seems likely, from evidence presented by Mrs. Elizabeth Roe in her *Aunt Leanna or Early Scenes in Kentucky*, (This is an extremely rare book that is one of two written by Elizabeth Roe on the settlement and development of Eddyville, Kentucky. Marjorie Orr, who owns the book, sent me photo copies of the pertinent pages that record Richard's story.) that a slave owned by Mathew Lyon, named Richard, was the first Methodist minister to preach over an extended period of time in Eddyville and he used Mathew Lyon's summer kitchen as his meeting place.

This is a story of a slave who, using his natural gifts and some luck, acquired an education and practiced a vocation that was largely banned for his race at the time. It is also a story with a happy ending, where the hero gets everything he wants and lives out his long life doing what he thinks is important. All of this from a man without a surname. We only know him as Richard.

Richard was born a slave in the Carolinas about the year 1774. He was owned by a planter of the Methodist persuasion that took note of his intelligence and religious bent when he was still very young. His owner made an effort to see that he was taught to read the bible and was indoctrinated in Methodist beliefs. At some time in his early life he went beyond merely reading the bible and started preaching.

Richard was married but still a young man when his owner died or went into bankruptcy. Richard and his wife were sold, at auction, to a Mr. Micheson who carried them with him when he immigrated to the neighborhood of Eddyville, Kentucky.

By 1800, Richard, now with several children, worked as a farm manager-laborer on Mr. Micheson's property. Already a preacher of sorts, he may have caught the religious fervor of the time as the result of the Great Revival of 1800-1805. At any rate he became a most successful evangelical preacher, zealously preaching and disseminating the Methodist persuasion among the black folks on his owners farm.

His owner, Mr. Micheson, began to oppose his preaching efforts, claiming the Sunday evenings meeting lasted too long and the laborers were not fit to work the following day. Mr. Micheson began to put more and more obstacles in his way but to no avail. Richard continued to preach until an exasperated Micheson felt his authority was in danger and banned preaching completely. When Richard continued to preach, Micheson threatened him with punishment. This also did not stop the preaching. At his wits end, Micheson decided to sell the "trouble-maker".

Mathew Lyon was approached. After some thought, and consulting with Richard, Lyon proposed the following: He would buy Richard with the understanding that he would work for a credit of \$15 a month until the purchase price (\$900) was paid. At that time he would be freed and Lyon would help him get up a subscription to buy his wife and two children. In the five years it would take to repay Lyon, Richard would be free for half a day on Saturday and all Sunday to do as he chose. A horse would be available to him for use every Saturday afternoon and night so he could spend time with his family on Micheson's farm.

Micheson agreed to the arrangements, glad to get rid of his "trouble-maker". The bill of sale was written, with three witnesses to verify the conditions. These included visitation rights and the willingness of Micheson to sell Richard's family at some future date at a reasonable price. Micheson was known as a man of his word but the conditions written on the bill of sale were in the event of Micheson's death and new owners of Richard's family.

Mathew Lyon had at this time a black woman named Aunt Chloe that he hired, by a yearly contract from her owner, to manage his kitchen. Aunt Chloe was also an ardent Christian.

There quickly developed between Richard and Aunt Chloe an arrangement whereby Aunt Chloe's summer kitchen—an old cabin set some distance from the main house because of the fear of fire—would be used as a meeting house. Aunt Chloe's husband, George, was a carpenter. Within a short time he and Richard built benches for the kitchen that would be used when it was set-up as a meeting house.

From information in Mrs. Roe's book, it can be estimated that Richard started his meeting house about 1809. Aunt Chloe may have held prayer meeting in the kitchen some years before. Also in the book it is stated that Richard was a recognized Methodist preacher, but from what authority is not noted. If it was the same authority that recognized the white Methodist ministers then we must put Richard as the first Methodist minister to maintain a combined congregation of both whites and blacks in Eddyville, and Aunt Chloe's summer kitchen was the first Methodist meeting house in Eddyville that is known.

Richard, while still technically a slave, was now treated by his new friends as a gentleman. For the next five years, he spent every Saturday afternoon and night with his family, and every Sunday he conducted a Methodist service in Aunt Chloe's kitchen, temporarily turned into a meeting house. (Mrs. Roe states that it was in this meeting house she and her mother received the fundamentals of their Christian beliefs.) When this arrangement began, Richard was about thirty-five.

Using the meeting house as his base of operations, Richard began to win converts to the Methodist persuasion. His influence was not limited to the black population but included many white visitors, including Mrs. Lyon and others. Even Mr. Micheson was influenced, at a distance, by the charismatic Richard. He stopped opposing Richard.

After five years, his debt paid to Lyon, Richard was a free man. Just when this debt was paid is unknown, but in *Recollections of Frontier Life* it is mentioned that Richard was still in the Lyon household as late as December 1812 when the earthquake shook Eddyville.

After he was paid, Lyon provided him with free papers and had them recorded in the courthouse. He also presented him with a serviceable horse, forty dollars, and wrote him a subscription to solicit money to buy his family. He also gave him a recommendation to some of the most influential men in the largest towns in the state.

The money he needed was fourteen hundred dollars: seven hundred for his wife, four hundred for the boy, and three hundred for the girl. That was an enormous sum in a day when a quality skilled worker could be hired for fifteen dollars a month.

We can imagine how Richard set out to reach his goal. The letter of recommendation to leading men of a town gave him access to local meeting places. There, after he had aroused his audience with one of his spellbinding sermons, he would present his case for freeing his family. Contributions of cash would follow. Mrs. Roe tells us that in a short time (months?) he returned home with the necessary money.

Richard and his family left Kentucky for the free state of Illinois, circa 1814, probably crossing the Ohio at Cave-in-Rock. He eventually settled on Silver Creek, a stream that enters the Mississippi River on the Illinois side just below St. Louis. He was about forty years old.

Mrs. Roe reports that in his new life he continued to be useful and active as a gospel minister, did much good work for his fellow man by assisting needy emigrants, and lived to a ripe old age.

Story of the Church Bell

A Mr. Stacker (probably John Stacker Jr. who was married to a local girl, Mary Gracey, and in the iron smelting business in Lyon County) purchased the bell in Pittsburgh, for the Episcopal Church, and boated it down the Ohio and up the Cumberland to Eddyville. This must have been in the early 1870s. When the bell arrived it was hung in a tree in the janitor's yard. Perhaps the bell was too big for the tower or too heavy. Or it was winter and they were waiting for good weather to undertake the bell hanging. At any rate the church burned while it was still hanging in the tree and was saved. Until it could be decided what to do with the bell it was placed in the center of town on a post and used to call the faithful of all denominations to church and as a fire alarm. There it remained for some years until it was decided that the Episcopal Church would not be rebuilt and the bell was either donated or sold to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South on Franklin Street. At that location it remained for more than forty years. When the new Methodist church was built in 1923—also on Franklin Street but half a block south and on the other side of the street—the old bell was hung in its tower, to call the faithful from that location for another forty-one years. When the bell made its third move, this time to new Eddyville in 1963, it was relegated to the furnace room of the new Methodist church to wait for its own little tower that was planned for, but not constructed. The old bell has been silent for thirty-three years.

Tower from first Methodist Church in Eddyville. Fire destroyed the church in the early 1870s. Photo from Julian and Georgette Beatty.

Second Methodist Church was built, circa. 1854, on Franklin Street between 1st and 2nd Street. Photo from Julian and Georgette Beatty.

Third Methodist Church was built on SW corner of 1st and Franklin Street in 1923. The last service was Easter Sunday, 1963. Photo from Julian and Georgette Beatty.

Eddyville United Methodist Church, 1997. Photo from Tom Prince