

“A LABOR OF LOVE”

**A Brief History
of
The Roosevelt Memorial Inter-Denominational Church
Pine Mountain Valley, Harris County, Georgia**



**by
B. J. Baxley
Emily W. Minton**

May 1997

Our Valley of Dreams Come True
Written by Mrs. Pearl G. Riley on the 40th Homecoming of Roosevelt Memorial
Inter-Denominational Church

*Tired and weary of seeking to find
something to give me a lift –
strength to bear the burden that's mine,
that I might not have to drift.*

*No work, no money, a family to keep,
the burdens seemed too hard to bear,
and then, like a dream, a beautiful dream,
this Valley of Dreams should appear.*

*We found this valley of Dreams come true,
the land of beginning again,
where the heartaches and tears,
disappointments and fears,
have faded away like the rain.*

*For clouds that were heavy,
and skies that were gray,
cast shadows that should be blue –
but looking away to the dawn's new day,
we started out lives anew.*

*Not easy the task of building again,
the lives that were burdened and sad,
for the years take their toll while seeking the goal,
and it's hard to find time to be glad.*

*But years have rolled on and heartaches have passed –
and gray skies have turned to blue,
for we've striven and won
Out place in the sun
in our Valley of Dreams come true!*



Mrs. Pearl G. Riley

Written by Mrs. Pearl G. Riley on the 40th
Homecoming of Roosevelt Memorial Inter-
Denominational Church

On November 27, 1938 ground was broken for the Pine Mountain Valley Community Church. Mrs. Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor under President Franklin Roosevelt, attended the ground breaking. As a site for the church, the corporation furnished a beautiful corner lot located in a pine grove in a central location. The corporation also helped with plans and materials, but the settlers furnished the labor.

In the 1930's, the idea of a non-denominational, theologically neutral community church was exceedingly popular. Approved by President Roosevelt, the church provided a sure link between the early plans and later reality. Community spirit and cooperation were both present in this venture.

A colonial church was designed by President Roosevelt's architect, Henry Toombs. The beautiful architecturally-perfect church was a challenge to the church people who would do the actual construction. Civil Engineer, C. M. Smith was instrumental in laying out the church and served as a consultant for the construction of the church.



Much has been published about the lumber used in construction of the church and it has been determined that some of the lumber for the church was sawed by President Roosevelt's Warm Springs farm and donated by the President. The exterior of the church was made of pine, and poplar was used throughout the interior.

For a cost of about \$15,000 for materials, the church was projected to take four months to build. By August 9, 1940, the pastor, Reverend B. M. Ketchersid observed the work still going on daily. The settlers had to work during their spare time and work made slow progress. The completed church accommodated 350 to 400 people and included 14 classrooms.



We were able to find only two interior pictures of the original church. Pictured left is Sololist Billye Joyce Jones with Kaysteen Prophet at the piano.



A picture taken at the wedding of Miss Carolyn Lee and James (Jimp) Jones. We are indebted to Carolyn Jones for the use of these pictures.

The following is a page copied from the Pine Mountain Valley newspaper *The Echo* which was published weekly. The progress of the church was reported each week to keep the congregation advised of the work being done. Each copy of *The Echo* had a full page of religious activities.

Church

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT N.S. Hardin

The New Year is a new road. We are to journey over it. Can we know the way? Over the entire continent there is a road marked with red, white, and blue signs. It is called the "Lincoln Highway." It is easy to follow if we watch the signs. The Spiritual Road of Life is just as clearly marked. In every page of God's word we find its guide-posts. Verke after verke says, "This is the way, walk ye in it", but the red, white, and blue signs of the Lincoln Highway are of little use to men who fail to look at them or heed them. Some people are strangely blind, or else hoodless, in spiritual things. Prayer and the open Book, with careful heed will make certain stops through the coming year. So let us walk the great highway of truth and righteousness. Then the New Year will be a very happy and blessed one.

CHURCH

With the passing of 1938 and the arrival of 1939 we believe that we can say that we had the greatest year in the history of the church work in Pine Mountain Valley. We are now face to face with a New Year and a New Challenge, to make 1939 the greatest year of all years. We can not go backward, we must go forward and in so doing we are bound to do greater work. This challenge is for every one in the Valley to give the best that is in them. So let's pause long enough to take stock of last year and see where you can help us make 1939 a greater year.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S GROUP

The young people are making great progress in the training group. The attendance and programs are much better. Meet with us every Sunday night at 8:30 and you will not regret coming.

CHURCH BUILDING

The work on the new Church is still progressing. Just before Christmas we announced that the basement was finished but since that time it was decided to make it larger, however, we are glad to announce that this work is completed and we are ready to begin the foundation. Until this time we have not needed so many men as the type of work that we were doing did not

require so many but from now on we are going to need every man that we can get. We are urging every man to look over the list of work days and see when we are expecting them and plan to be at the Church building site on that day. You may have a lot to do at home but remember that it is going to take some sacrifices to build this church and be willing to make your part of the sacrifice.

Listed below will be found the day that each man is supposed to work. Also the name and the number of days that each man has worked or donated so far on the church.

Monday, B, K ----- Thursday, F, S, G & O
Tuesday, S, L, N, & E -- Friday, M, L & J
Wednesday, C, D, & A Girelo -- Saturday, I
and those who can not work any other day.

NAME	DAYS WORKED	NAME	DAYS WORKED
H.L. Riley	8	Roseco Babanks	13
John Coloman	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	D.H. Partain	1
Bill Coloman	2	R.H. Stripling	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
J.E. Craft	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	Ira Walker	1
N.S. Hardin	13	Horman McBrayer	1
Shack Jones	2 hrs.	Raymond Campbell	2
Tom Tumlin	4	Lewis Young	2
E.W. Brannon	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	R.O. Cain	2
Tim Baxley	2	D.E. Barnes	2
H.A. Gokor	3	A.H. Hancock	1
D.T. Shepard	3	Wilbur Toddor	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
E.F. Rowe	3	H.H. Chappeloar	1
H.L. Walton	4	Milos Barnott	1
John Lipp	4	Glover Brown	1
Carl Lodon	4	John Duffoy	4
E.J. Snodgrass	1	Roy Swinnoy	1
W.J. Hahn	2	Walter Howard	1
T.A. Barnott	2	T.L. McCurry	1
Grady Mobley	2	T.L. Mosley	1
H.W. Trapp	1	D.C. Arnold	1
Otis Boynton	1	A.W. Halloway	1
W.H. Baxley	1	H.L. West	1
W.H. West	1	Sam Baxley	1
Edgar Gallops	1	Charlie Ragsdale	1
D.J. Lambert	1	Hughie Bowon	1

In addition to the number of days worked the following have furnished mules for the following number of days: H.L. Riley, 1; John Coloman, 1; Bill Coloman, 1; J.E. Craft, 1; E.W. Brannon, 1; D.T. Shepard, 1; H.L. Walton, 1; E.J. Snodgrass, 1; T.A. Barnott, 2; Grady Mobley, 2; Otis Boynton, 1; Charlie Saoro, 1; Roseco Babanks, 2; R.H. Stripling, 1; Ira Walker, 1; Raymond Campbell, 1; Lewis Young, 1; R.O. Cain, 2; C.E. Barnes, 1; A.H. Hancock, 1; Wilbur Toddor, 1; Glover Brown, 1; Roy Swinnoy, 1; T.L. McCurry, 1; D.C. Arnold, 1; Joel Williams, 10; Geo. Wilkie, 1.

If there are any errors in the building committee list please notify Mr. Duck.

Many of the ladies interviewed reminisced about their husbands utilizing most of their free time to work on the church. The wives would cook their meals and take them to the building site. It soon became evident how much togetherness, talent and determination was present to provide a permanent place of worship for the families that were now living in the community.

The church was built in the shape of a cross. Wings were extended on each side to form the horizontal piece. This was the sanctuary. The long back end and the front comprised the vertical piece which made the Sunday School rooms. There was a fellowship center and more Sunday School rooms in the basement. The tall steeple of the church housed the bell which was rung each Sunday morning. Mr. Tom Tumlin rang this bell for many years.

Reverend Ketchersid supervised the construction of the church. He was not only the young pastor and supervisor of construction, but he was also very busy helping with the actual construction. A fall from a wall of the church to the basement caused a very serious back injury. Not to be stopped, as soon as Reverend Ketchersid was able, he was back with the other dedicated workers helping reach completion of the church.



Reverend and Mrs. B. M. Ketchersid are pictured at right. Rev. Ketchersid was called to preach in late 1938. He was overseer of the church construction at which time he suffered a painful fall.

The eager congregation began use of the church as soon as the walls were up and the top was on. At that time, there were 14 denominations in the church.

A long, wood burning heater provided heat. Straight chairs were used until they could be replaced by benches. Nearer completion, attic fans and space heaters were added. The women of the church conducted bake sales and barbecue dinners to fund the purchase of a Hammond organ and a piano.

While the church was under construction, the members thought it very fitting to name the church in honor of President Roosevelt. Mr. W. T. Bennett, the Pine Mountain Valley Project Manager, wrote to President Roosevelt requesting permission to use his name. A very gracious letter granting his permission was received from the President in 1938. A copy of the letter was hung in the church. The original letter is housed in the museum at the Little White House in Warm Springs. The church name was changed from Pine Mountain Valley Community Church to Roosevelt Community Church when it was dedicated in 1942. After President Roosevelt's death at his beloved "Little White House" in Warm Springs in April 1945, the church became the Roosevelt Memorial Inter-Denominational Church.

A copy of President Roosevelt's letter granting permission to name the church in his name is shown below:

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 19, 1933

My dear Mr. Bennett:

Thank you ever so much for that grand little note you sent me on May thirteenth, advising me of the desire of the congregation of the new Community Church of Pine Mountain Valley to name their new church in my honor.

I am deeply touched by the thoughtfulness of the members of the congregation and shall feel greatly honored to have the new Community Church bear my name.

With all good wishes,

Very sincerely yours,

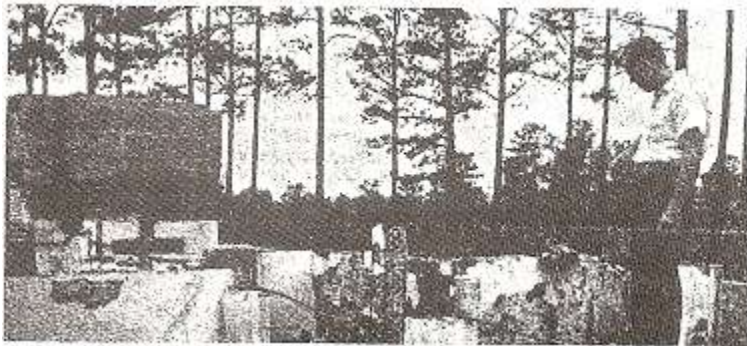
A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Franklin D. Roosevelt". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed closing of the letter.

W. T. Bennett, Esq.,
Project Manager,
Georgia Pine Mountain Valley
Rural Community Corporation,
Hamilton,
Georgia.

Mrs. Ellis (Jewell) Brannon, Sr. was the first church pianist. Many other talented members so graciously gave of their time and talent. Among them, Dr. Bill Chambliss, Mrs. Kaysteen Prophet, Ramona Brown, Mary George Ragan, Daisye Jean Smith, Regina Johnson, Gail Allen, Wendell Ebbett, and Grace Riley. A quartet comprised of Bob Hulse, Elvin Johnson, Sam Brown, and Herbert Ross was well known in the area.

This picturesque little church, sitting on a knoll in the heart of Pine Mountain Valley had been a place of worship and fellowship for people from all over the world. As Mrs. O. T. Smith commented during the construction, "each plank nailed and each rock laid was a labor of love and dedicated to the glory of a loving God."

During the night of April 13, 1967, the original Roosevelt Memorial Inter-Denominational Church burned to the ground. All the church records and the registry with the names of worldwide visitors were lost in the fire. It has been reported that all that was saved from the fire was the cast iron bell and the pastor's bible. Reverend Harold Bennett was pastor at the time of the fire.



Reverend Harold Bennett surveying the remains of the original Roosevelt Memorial Church that was destroyed by fire in April 1967.

Before the fire, the congregation had purchased a building across the street which was formerly a Nazarene Church to use for overflowing Sunday School use. After the fire, the members moved into this building for their church services. Later, a large fellowship hall and more Sunday School rooms were added.

In recent years, the church has been remodeled and a steeple, a baptistery, central heart and air, and stained glass windows have been added.

The membership cherishes the bell that was salvaged from the fire and will soon have a feeling of warmth when this bell once again becomes a part of the Roosevelt Memorial Inter-Denominational Church.



The bell that was salvaged from the fire that destroyed the original church in 1967.

The present Roosevelt Memorial Church

