

The Long Run Baptist Church

BY ELLA PORTER GRIFFITH

One day in the spring of 1817, a farmer stood in the door-yard of his Indiana home looking out over his clearing. Only the Christmas before, he and his family had eaten their first dinner in their new log cabin and he was now busily making plans for the future—plans, one might assume for the material comfort of his family, but, since he was of Welsh descent, this probably included religious and educational opportunities for his family. As he stood thus, his attention was attracted by the sound of moving horses followed by the appearance of six riders. The strangers had much to do to keep from being brushed from their horses by the low branches of the heavy forest trees. They rode up to the settler, and, after the customary greetings, one of them stated their errand—to ask permission to hold religious services on the north-west corner of his farm. To this the settler replied: "If it is for religious services, you may use every corner of my farm."

Among the visitors who made this request were William Lock and William Turner. Soon meetings were held in the homes of the neighborhood and thus was started the Long Run Baptist Church, an organization that has had an uplifting influence on the community and that has sent into other communities young men and women of solid worth. The formal organization of this church was effected in 1818 with seven of the following as constituent members: Thomas and Nancy Wright, Joel and Ellen Higgins, Nathaniel and Susan Girard, William J. and Catherine Griffith, William and Nancy Lock. This was the first group of any denomination to build a church in Switzerland County which has had a continuous existence.

The first building was erected on ground given by William J. Griffith. Roads at that time were little more than trails, but the site was in Craig Township, Switzerland County, about seven miles from Vevay. The church was on what was afterwards known as the Vevay and Moorefield Pike, now state road 129. The building was a log structure with a gallery across one end. At the various services, this gallery was appropriated by young lads in their teens, and thereby hangs a tale.

Here is the story as told to the writer by one present: When young enough to occupy the family pew with his parents, the boy most concerned would gaze longingly at the larger boys in the gallery who seemed of great importance. Then came a proud Sunday when the youngster gained a reluctant consent from his father to take his place among these larger boys. During the service there were audible titters to be heard from this direction, but the older people who craned their necks to detect the cause of the disturbance, could see only the bright, beaming faces of the lads behind the protecting rail. However, the newest occupant of the gallery when questioned at home said that one of the larger boys had dared two of the smaller boys to swap pantaloons with one another. The dare was taken and the exchange of garments was made then and there. The immediate result was that next church-day, the latest gallery recruit again sat in the family pew.

Pastors serving this church were: Elder John Pavy, Elder Jessie Miles, Elder Henry D. Banta, Elder Daniel Palmer, the Rev. Johnnie Graham, and the Rev. Archie Smith. The writer remembers hearing in her childhood the older people still speaking affectionately of Johnnie Graham and Archie Smith. The services held in this church were undoubtedly marked by a zealous spirit while the sermons were replete with doctrine.

In the year 1843, the congregation, grown stronger numerically, erected a new brick building across the road from the old church on ground given by a good Methodist friend, Mr. John F. Cotton. Henceforth, the ground occupied by the older church together with additional ground given by the Rev. Joshua D. Griffith was used for a cemetery. The second building was of ample size to hold the large congregations which gathered on every "meeting" day, and while plain it had a kind of solid dignity. Beginning in 1843, the Rev. Griffith served as pastor of the Church for forty-five consecutive years. He later served about five years more in this capacity in the present building.

A typical "meeting day" was described by one of the older members. Standing in the yard of the Church, he saw the faithful gathering from all directions. There came the horse-back riders, young blood these, among whom were to be seen young women with long flowing skirts who rode up

to the stile-block and dismounted, each with the assistance of one of the young gallants. There is a legend to the effect that on one occasion, a young lady, who had ridden a mare, followed by its foal, undertook to dismount before she reached the stile in order to avoid the help of an unwelcome swain awaiting her. Unfortunately, as she sprang from her mount, the colt ran under her and trotted away with her astride its back making its way through the crowd. It is unreasonable to imagine that the flouted youth tried to suppress his grins at her discomfiture. Families came in wagons containing chairs for the elder members and a liberal amount of straw sprinkled on the bottom of the wagon bed for the younger ones. Back of these walked a merry group of boys and girls who lived only comparatively short distances away. Here and there were "shoo-fly" buggies carrying young couples, or perhaps a single man, older or younger, who hoped that some young lady would permit him to "see her home." Along one road there came one or two families in spring-wagons. These vehicles were new and considered very "smart" at that time, but one had scarcely time to remark their beauty, till his attention was distracted by the arrival of two equipages that merit special mention. These were the carriages of Harry Rogers and David Blunk which were very handsome and expensive—reputed to have cost six or seven hundred dollars each. Roads were often bad and travel slow, but it was an invariable custom to whip up when in sight of the church and arrive in a blaze of glory.

After pausing to chat with each other for a while, the women and some of the older men entered the church, the women passing to the left and occupying the seats on that side of the building. Many of the younger matrons carried babies dressed in very long and very elaborately tucked and embroidered dresses. One of the writer's sisters still speaks of a dress worn by Dr. Augustus Hatton when an infant. If her memory serves her correctly, the garment surpassed all others in length and beauty. The mothers were followed by the children of the family, to the more responsible of whom was entrusted the inevitable black basket filled with apples, cookies, a bottle of water and other necessities.

The songs were started by means of a tuning-fork in the hands of a song-leader. An early leader was John Leap. Much later this office fell to John G. Sigmon. The singing

of the first song was, the signal for the young men to enter the church, which they did with proper decorum and seated themselves behind the older men on the right of the room. When the services were at night, many of the young men as they walked down the aisle, carried with them their buggy-whips for it was whispered that there were some wild young fellows from adjoining neighborhoods who were not above stealing these articles—a crime which has died out with the coming of automobiles.

After the usual opening of the service with Scripture reading and prayer, the minister began his sermon. His style was quiet and persuasive, as far removed from the sing-song delivery ascribed to pioneer ministers as it was from the bombastic oratory of the succeeding generation. The sermon, logical and showing familiarity with the scriptures, may have been a trifle long, but there were those in the congregation who listened eagerly to the end.

Until 1849 the church was a member of the Laughery Association, and in the minutes of this body are found the names of the following people who were sent as delegates at various times from 1822 to 1849 to represent the Long Run Baptist Church in the councils of the embracing organization: William Lock, Nathaniel Girard, Thomas Wright, Joel Higgins, William Turner, Wilson Crandell, John Sigmon, J. Hockensmith, I. Hockensmith, O. Hockensworth, John Graham, William J. Griffith, E. Herrick, William Hannis, Steven Rogers, William Lewis, J. Stickman, B. Edwards, N. Rittenhouse, J. D. Griffith, B. Cole, A. Hankins, Henry Rogers, Samuel Lock, Thomas Sigmon, David H. Todd, John Leap and John Orr.

During these years, a question arose as to whether the churches in this Association should cease correspondence with the churches in Kentucky, on account of the attitude of the latter churches on the question of slavery. The decision reached was that although the Laughery Association had no fellowship with slavery, its churches should continue correspondence with the Kentucky churches as the members of these churches were godly men. However this problem seemed still to rankle in the minds of some of the brethren, for at a meeting a few years later this query was made: "Is it in good order to invite to our communion, the members

of those churches that refuse to correspond with us on account of our correspondence with the Kentucky Association?"

Another subject of doubt is revealed in this decision handed down by the Association: "Although we as a denomination believe that much good has been done by the various institutions called benevolent—such as Sunday Schools, Bible Societies, Missions, etc., yet in many places there are different opinions among us on these subjects; we, therefore recommend to all our churches and brethren to allow liberty to conscience on all subjects and not allow them to break our fellowship."

On September 1, 1849, a letter of dismissal was granted to the Long Run Baptist Church from the Laughery Association. This group comprised all of the Baptist Churches in Switzerland County with some others from Jefferson County.

The annual meeting of this Association was to any church that entertained the delegates an event long to be remembered. The earlier meetings were three days in length and were attended by the membership of the local church, delegates and interested members from other churches, and by the Baptist State Officers—many of them men of reputation and strength. The feeding of this throng required several days of preparation. The author can well remember the delightful feeling of excitement and upheaval in her own family when Long Run Church entertained this body. Her mother, a woman of not inconsiderable skill as a housewife, was taxed to the limit to meet the unusual demand. In her preparations she was ably assisted by the writer's older sisters. Great quantities of beef were roasted, chickens fried, pies and cakes baked and recipes searched out for the making of choice jellies, pickles and preserves. Did this food go a-begging? Not a bit of it, as on occasion the family had as many as forty guests at one time.

At night those delegates living closest to the community went home, to return next day, but even so there remained many to be sheltered. At such times the writer's brothers would help to ease the situation by going to the barn to sleep in the hay, while the girls in the family had their own method of contriving extra beds. Our mother must have felt weary after these occasions, but she always had a welcome left for the next time.

The first Sabbath School of the Church was held on a beautiful spring morning, the first Sunday in May of 1861 or 1862. The writer's sister Carrie claims the proud distinction of being the first to arrive. She and her brother Tom (Dr. Thomas J. Griffith) are probably the only people of all those present that morning, who are still living.

At that time there was no organ in the church but a number of the mature people were good singers, some having learned to sing from the old Missouri Harmony. In the year 1867, Harry Girard taught a singing school at the church and this gave a great impetus in the realm of music. Mr. Enoch Adams who had a beautiful tenor voice also taught a singing school at the church. Favorite songs were: "I Think when I Read the Sweet Story of Old"; "I'll Away to the Sunday School"; "I'm Trying to Climb up Zion's Hill". Sometimes when the last song was started by a high soprano voice without the aid of a tuning-fork, the men of the congregation were left struggling at the foot of the hill while the women swarmed over the top.

Each summer the members of the Sabbath School were asked to "march" in the procession of the Moorefield (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church) Celebration. In the year 1868, the Long Run Sabbath School paid \$35 for a handsome new banner in Cincinnati to carry in this procession. The banner was made of white satin trimmed in gilt fringe. On it was this inscription: "In God We Trust" and "We Honor Robert Raikes". Hannah Crandell and Stella Griffith were the streamer carriers. They wore white organdy dresses with five tucks in the skirt of each. The sashes were scarlet. The School bought wreaths with green and white predominating. The song for the occasion, "Jesus the Water of Life will Give", was taught to the school by Ann Marie Griffith, a talented pupil of the Indiana School for the Blind.

Protracted meetings of several weeks were held each year at which time a visiting minister was called in to assist the resident pastor. Some of these ministers were men of power. The impressions made by such men as Robert Stevenson, Louis Salin, a converted Jew, Albert Ogle, W. Y. Monroe, Judson Willett and P. O. Duncan will long remain.

The ministers serving as pastors of the Long Run Church from 1843 to 1912 were the following reverend gentle-

men: J. D. Griffith, Robert Stevenson (who exchanged pulpits with Mr. Griffith for one year), William E. Morris, J. J. Willett, George Jain, — Faris, Chesley Holmes, Frank Jones, — Johnson and Thomas Seburn. The Sunday School superintendents who served were: Jimmie Ward, an Englishman, Andrew Sigmon, Anna Stewart, Mattie Bersot, Irvin Roberts, Armington Culver, Hannah Scott, and various members of the Brown and Crandell families.

A time arrived when some of the younger and more daring members allowed a desire for an organ to creep into their minds, not willingly at first, because the wish for an organ was a vanity to be suppressed. But with each return of the idea, the urge became more insistent and the feeling grew that a plan to this end might not be impossible to carry out. When the subject was broached to the more conservative element of the congregation, there was found to be surprisingly little objection to it. So in good time an organ was purchased and the writer became the first organist, having been exalted to this office, she verily believes, by her own father and mother. As for her part, she played conscientiously if not skillfully and finished each stanza not too far behind the singers. Other young women who succeeded to this position were: Afra Hatton, Hattie Taylor, Pearl Brindley, Lillie Cooper and Maud Crandell.

The third church building occupied by this congregation was erected about 1894 on the lot where the second church had stood. This structure still stands. It is an attractive brick building of ample size to seat comfortably the large congregation made up of the families of the thrifty farmers who attended the services.

There can be found in this congregation persons who are better fitted than the author to write the history of the Church from 1912 to the present. However, the writer knows that in this community as elsewhere, changes extraordinary have taken place since the days of the two older churches. Gone are the old ways of travel and with them have disappeared the long riding skirt, the side-saddle, and the stile-block. Gone too, is the procession of young men carrying buggy-whips. The new church has no central aisle so that it easily came about that the separation of men and women in the church was discontinued. If one should pass

this church on a fair Sunday morning, he would see a few dozen cars, some of them probably very handsome but none more distinctive for this generation than were the Blunk and Rogers carriages of the sixties.

When last the writer worshipped in the Long Run Church, there were some new families who had affiliated with the organization, among them the Hickmans. Nevertheless, a large part of the membership consisted of the descendants of the founders and early members of the church. Others have gone from this congregation to become well known in the profession: education, law, medicine, engineering, etc. The men who became famous included an engineer, whose work called him to three continents, a statesman, and a most distinguished advocate of the city manager form of municipal government.

It is of the second church that the writer thinks most often. She recalls the odor that greeted her on entering the building. Later experience tells her that this was a musty odor peculiar to rooms and buildings that have been closed a great deal. However, to her youthful fancy, it was an odor at once mystical and elegant—mystical because it was associated with her highest thoughts, but elegant too, for was it not also associated with Sunday garments? She imagines the people coming into the church, stepping up on the door sill, and then, because the floor was somewhat sunken, stepping down into the room. She pictures the families in their pews: Frank Stewart and wife in their pew with their pink-cheeked, immaculately clean children; positive John Crandell and his beautiful wife, who would have graced any company; Augustus Hatton, Sr., a hospitable little man fond of his jest with Mrs. Hatton, his wife, but grave, intellectual and possessed of astuteness in financial matters; musical John G. Sigmon, his modest wife and musical children; Mrs. Cowan (who reminded one of Queen Victoria) and her prosperous descendants. Besides these there were the John Todds, the Albert Brindleys, the C. W. Browns, the John Browns, and the James Crandells. Then there were the families of Josuha Coleman, John and Henry Lock, Keziah Hannis, Irvin and Evaline Tilley, and various branches of the Leap, Taylor, Reed, Orr, Worstell, Clements and Cooper families. There were also some of the MacKenzies one of

whom is associated with bag-pipe playing, which accomplishment always seemed to give tone to the whole community.

All these the writer loves to remember, for, as she recalls the faces of the women, some beautiful and some plain, and of the men, rugged and kindly, she feels that they have the look of those who have built soundly—of those who “know on whom they have believed”. Such a memory is a valued possession, for out of it grows strength and courage.