



BICENTENNIAL MOMENT

BEGINNINGS The first settlers in what was to become Rutherford County, began arriving with the Robertson and Donelson parties in 1780. In October 1803 Rutherford County was formed and in 1812 Murfreesboro was formed as county seat. "Rev. Robert Henderson settled among us and Commenced his Labours June first 1811." This inscription on the fly leaf of the first record book of the congregation indicates that Presbyterians were worshiping in the vicinity of Murfree Spring at least ten months before the formal organization of the congregation which is recorded April 1812. "A number of persons living in the neighborhood of Murfree Spring in Rutherford County, Tenn., being desirous that a church should be organized in that neighborhood of the Presbyterian order, met, and were accordingly organized into a church denominated the Murfree Spring Church, by Rev. Robert Henderson. . ." Robert Henderson gave half of his ministerial labors to the Murfree Spring Church and half to the Mt. Pisgah Church in Williamson County [1811-1814]. The site of the Church's first house of worship was in a log school house, "a little west of the Springs, on a hill side, at a crossing at the spring and road running west by this school house in the direction of Shelbyville." [Annals of Rutherford County by John C. Spence]. Today the place is near the Discovery Center on SE Broad on land granted to Col. Hardy Murfree. The family history of Elizabeth Kelton, a charter member of the church, reports that: "Elizabeth's four sons went into the woods to hew logs. . .for the building in which her church met, and this congregation did meet for several years in a log school house near Murfree Spring." The Kelton history goes on to say: "During the weekdays, the building also served as a schoolhouse. In school the bible and the Westminster Shorter Catechism were faithfully taught as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. In church, the Word of God was expounded by the minister as the only way to glorify God in this life and in the world to come." Later, they met in another log schoolhouse on the grocery store land next to the present St. Paul's Episcopal Church. John Spence in his Annals of Rutherford Co. states: "Since the Murfree Spring church was organized, preaching continued at the old school house, private families and at the courthouse, as suited convenience of the people, making arrangements for meetings. . . In good weather, meetings were held in the grove [Murfree Spring]." [1811-1820]. A description in Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States of a church of that period would perhaps apply in a measure to the schoolhouse in which the Murfree Spring Church held its services for a time: "It is of logs from 25 to 30 feet wide, 40 to 60 feet long. . . . The pews are un-planed benches of pine plank or slabs 8 to 16 feet long, mostly without backs. There is no fire-place and of course no stove. In winter weather a few of the well-to-do bring hot bricks wrapped in flannel and apply their feet to them, and thus make life endurable during the service. A broad aisle divides the church into two sections. The men sit on one side, the women on the other. The pulpit is narrow and boxed, and so high that the minister's head is 15 feet above the congregation. He reads the hymns and then hands the book (the only one in the house) to the precentor, who lines it and raises the tune. The prayer is from 15 to 20 minutes long, the sermon one and a half to two hours long. Back home there is a cold dinner and a cold supper. There is no levity, whistling is forbidden; loud laughter, secular reading or singing is prohibited. A solemn stillness, a holy atmosphere pervades the house." [Information researched by the late Ernest Hooper & Susan Daniel.]