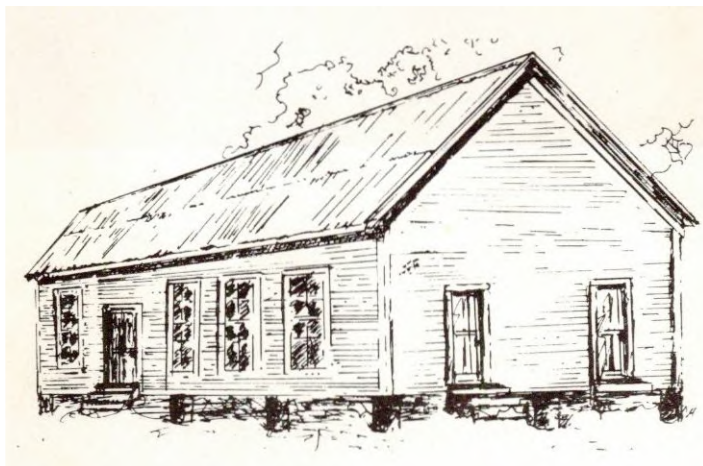


# **A History of Smyrna Baptist Church 1873—2008**



**135 years  
in three southern  
Rusk County communities**



**A History  
of  
Smyrna Baptist  
Church**

**1873—2008**

**135 years  
in three  
southern  
Rusk County  
communities**

Chinquapin \* Redland \* Oak Flat

Smyrna Missionary Baptist Church  
FM 2496  
Mount Enterprise, Texas  
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### ***DEDICATION***

Smyrna Baptist Church happily dedicates this history to Brother and Sister John F. Vaughn. Bro. John became a member of Smyrna Church in 1907, was ordained a deacon in 1931, and has never been a member of any other church. His father, W. T. Vaughn, was a faithful deacon of the church before him. Sister Helen has been a member of the church for over sixty years, and has served faithfully alongside her husband. Her grandfather, William M. Pruitt, was the second pastor of the church. Her father, James A. Pruitt, was a faithful church member for many years. They lived to bless and inspire our lives as a Church and as individuals. May the Lord God be praised for their ministry!

## PREFACE

When Bro. J. W. Griffith compiled and published *Centennial + 5* in 1978, he performed a great service for the Smyrna Church and Oak Flat community. The church possessed all its conference minutes from organization to that time. We would not know the extent of that service until 1980, when the church clerk's home burned, destroying the records. Though copies had been made of the early records, 1873—1891, it would be Bro. Griffith's book that would preserve the historical record of the church from 1891—1980. 30 years have passed and the book is now out of print.

This book is an attempt to build upon the work of Bro. Griffith. His work is presented as originally, with corrections of any typographical or other errors that might have entered into the first printing. Other additions are enclosed in blocks or presented as footnotes in order to keep Bro. Griffith's work intact. This new work also updates the historical record of Smyrna Baptist Church for the 30 years after Bro. Griffith's history was written. A few pictures of pastors have been located since the original publication and have been added. A few congregational photos have been included as well.

What someone said of another church is true of Smyrna, "This church has a rich and wonderful history that continues to be written today."

Robert Vaughn  
Mt. Enterprise, TX  
May 6, 2009

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

J. W. Griffith for preserving Smyrna's history  
in his original work; Odis & Peggy Chapman for their  
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Jill Jobe for her untiring effort searching for a picture of  
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Zion Hill MBC for allowing us to scan pictures  
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Pastor Joe Brooks and the membership of Smyrna Church  
for the vote of approval to proceed  
and the finances to publish;  
And to all who provided suggestions, support, criticisms,  
encouragement and all things necessary  
to make this new volume possible—  
The accomplishment is yours:  
Any mistakes are mine.

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## *Georgia heritage*

The Smyrna Church has a solid Georgia heritage through its earliest members. The first two pastors and over half of the charter members were born in Georgia – John Sparkman, W. M. Pruitt, E. S. Parker, Rebecca Parker, Jasper Parker, M. T. Wells, William J. Parker, C. A. E. Parker, J. F. M. Reid, Robert P. Goldsberry, and Nannie E. Goldsberry. Two other families – Gallaways and McNews – spent time in Georgia before coming to Texas. Edwin S. Parker is currently the only charter member whose time and place of baptism has been determined. He joined White Plains Baptist Church (Greene Co., GA) by faith 27 Aug 1843 and was dismissed by letter 26 Oct 1853 – about the time he moved to Texas. White Plains was constituted in 1806, probably from members of Powelton Baptist Church and other area churches. Edwin S. Parker's great-grandparents – Richard and Ann Parker – were charter members of Powelton Church, then called Powell's Creek, in 1786. Powell's Creek was organized by Silas Mercer, who was baptized by the Kiokee Baptist Church, the first Baptist church constituted in Georgia. Kiokee's lineage traces back to the Sandy Creek Baptist Church in North Carolina, a "mother" of many southern churches. With a little effort we might find more of the background of Smyrna's charter members.

There is fascination in looking into the history of people, places, and institutions. Such is true of the century plus history of the Smyrna Baptist Church, of Oak Flat Community in southern Rusk County. Long hours of research into the old records of the church have shown the present church the trials, hardships, joys and victories of the church which have come to them as a precious and valuable heritage of men and women like them. They were human, they erred often, and the church dealt with error then as the Word prescribed. They were honored when occasion justified it, as the Bible warranted. There is much to be learned in these things and many examples, positive

and negative, to be followed. These pages are penned, not for mere entertainment of the reader, but for the teaching and admonition of those who remain today, to the honor and glory of the God and Savior of all men in every century.

### *The Old Mt. Carmel Church*

In a very real sense the Smyrna Baptist Church is the offspring of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church. This old church, which was dissolved in 1871, furnished part of the members who entered the membership of the Smyrna Baptist Church when it was organized in 1873.<sup>1</sup> The Smyrna Church came into possession of the Mt. Carmel Church minutes for the years 1867-1871 (partial). Though the originals have been lost, the church has copies – thanks to the handwritten copy made by Mrs. H. B. Woolverton in 1947.

From examination of the Mt. Zion Baptist Association minutes, it has been found that Mt. Carmel Church was organized before Oct. 30, 1857. The church's letter to the Association in 1858 reported that Bro. N. Conner was the pastor (he was also first clerk of the Mt. Zion Association). She sent as "delegates" Brethren Joel Elam, B. F. Stamps (second clerk of the association), and William Howerton. She met on fourth weekends of each month; had baptized 7, received 6 by letter, accepted 2 by voucher, dismissed 8 by letter, excluded 1, lost 1 by death. They reported a total of 65 members, gave \$5.00 for

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<sup>1</sup> At least 15 members of Mt. Carmel are known to have united with Smyrna, including 6 of her charter members. This number from Mt. Carmel that joined Smyrna is roughly equivalent to half of the members that were left when Mt. Carmel disbanded in November 1871. It is possible that charter members F. O. Gallaway, C. M. Holleman, M. T. Wells and others were baptized by Mt. Carmel, though records do not remain to confirm this. It is quite likely that the Elizabeth Wells who joined Mt. Carmel by experience in September of 1869 is the same E. Wells who was a charter member of Smyrna. (Mt. Carmel membership list, page 5). Allen Hart Gallaway, brother of charter member F. O. Gallaway, was baptized by John Sparkman circa 1867 and was a member of Mt. Carmel.

Domestic Missions, \$2.50 for minutes. The 1859 session of the Association was to meet with Mt. Carmel, "18 miles south of Henderson."

At that time Mt. Carmel Church listed as her post office New Salem, and there is some evidence that it was located in the area of the old Devereaux Plantation. However, there is no Associational minute to indicate where it was meeting by 1867, the date of the earliest extant minutes of the Church. It appears that the Church had "no certain dwelling place." The records show that committees were constantly being set up to secure building sites, make building plans, etc. At that time Bro. John Sparkman was the pastor of the Church, and his family were members. He lived at Minden, and it is believed that attempts were being made to re-establish the church in that area.<sup>2</sup> At one time the committee chose "John Sparkman's well" as a building site, and the church approved it. A number of members withdrew their letters at that time because there was another church meeting nearer to them. Plans to build evidently never materialized.

In 1868 the Zion Hill Church had been organized under the leadership of Bro. Sparkman, and his family moved their membership there around 1870. Bro. W. W. Albritton of Mt. Enterprise had become pastor of Mt. Carmel, and the church still had only temporary meeting places. For a time the church met at the Garland Schoolhouse, the location of which is now unknown. Building committees were still finding building sites, seeking titles to land, etc., but nothing seems to have come of it and the membership must have despaired. Many had withdrawn their membership, and the remainder met on Saturday before the first Sunday of November, 1871, appointed Joseph Brandon moderator and R. P. Goldsberry church clerk. The only business recorded was, "On motion the church agreed to dissolve and granted letters to all who call(ed) for them."

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<sup>2</sup> Recent research into land deeds indicate that up until around 1870 John Sparkman had not yet moved to Minden, but lived southwest of Laneville in the Maria Sophronia Gonzales league.

### Organization minutes

"Sat. before the 3rd Sun. in Aug. 16, 1873. A number of Brethren and Sisters met at Chinquapin for the purpose of organizing a Missionary Baptist Church. After divine service by Elder John Sparkman. Solicited brethren called for, none present. On motion Bro. John Deason was called to preside with Eld. John Sparkman, Bro. F. O. Galloway to act as clerk protem. Opportunity then extended to those wishing to unite whereupon 17 came forward with letters of recommendation and were received. Namely E. S. Parker, Rebecca Parker, Jasper Parker, G. A. Parker, M. T. Wells, E. Wells, W. J. Parker, C. A. E. Parker, Martha Moore, J. F. M. Reid, Mary V. Reid, Robert P. Goldsberry, Nannie E. Goldsberry, G. W. McNew, Martha McNew, C. M. Holleman, F. O. Galloway. After letters being read, fellowship for each other called for and was granted, then we extended to each other the right hand of Christian and church fellowship. Prayer being offered by Eld. John Sparkman for the preservation and the unity of the church. We then proceeded in conference, elected J. F. M. Reid church clerk. On motion the meeting was protracted. No farther business. Conference adjourned, Conference approved. John Sparkman Mod. J. F. M. Reid C. C."

### *Organization of Smyrna Church*

Almost two years after the dissolution of Mt. Carmel Church, on August 16, 1873, a group met at Chinquapin Spring, about three miles east of Laneville, Texas, off current Farm Road 1798. Here was erected a small log church house, which seems to have been shared with the Methodists. The Baptist Church constructed a baptistery in the spring, walling and flooring it with heart lumber. This old framework has not rotted through the decades and may still be seen on the DeWitt McCune Farm.

The organizational presbytery consisted of Brethren John Sparkman, moderator, John Deason, and F. O. Galloway, clerk. Seventeen persons, including six who were former members of the Mt. Carmel Church, made up the charter membership. Bro. J. F. M. Reid was elected church clerk, and the church voted to "protract" the meeting for several days. During the protracted meeting ten more members were received.<sup>3</sup> Of these were three more former members of Mt. Carmel. The first two deacons of the church, Bro. W. M. Pruitt and Bro. James Chapman, were also among the ten. A total of 34 persons were members of Smyrna Church her first year. During the next year Bro. M. T. Wells was elected as the third deacon.



Old baptistery at Chinquapin Spring, first location of Smyrna Church, as it appeared in 1978.

At the end of the meeting Bro. John Sparkman was elected pastor,<sup>4</sup> and he agreed to serve for the remainder of the year. In November he was called again for the ensuing year and agreed to serve "for a time." On August 31, 1873, the church elected messengers and sent a petitionary letter to the Mt. Zion Association meeting at New Prospect. Smyrna Church has subsequently represented in

this association for 105 years [now 135 years in 2008].

### *John Sparkman Pastorate*

The church records seem to imply a reluctance on the part of Bro. Sparkman to assume the pastorate in the beginning of Smyrna's history. However, it appears that the

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<sup>3</sup> James Chapman, Martha Frazier, Mary Galloway, Pernila Lyles, Mary E. Pruitt, Mary J. Pruitt, Sarah Pruitt, W. M. Pruitt, Tululah V. Reid, Isbell Roberts

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 11.

church was well pleased with him, and they called him over and over, year by year, as long as his health permitted him to pastor the church. In 1876, the minutes record that Bro. Sparkman was elected pastor "by acclamation which resulted by one consenting voice"; 1877, "unanimously"; 1878, "by unanimous vote"; 1879, "chosen pastor unanimously"; 1880, "chose Bro. John Sparkman pastor another year unanimously". Bro. Sparkman was recalled in 1881, but Bro. W. M. Pruitt was also chosen to preach one Sunday each month. In the minute of March, 1882 is recorded, "As our former pastor, Bro. Sparkman, is afflicted and not able to serve us, moved and seconded that we choose another pastor, which resulted in the choice of Bro. W. M. Pruitt unanimously." Bro. Sparkman died in October of that year and is buried in Zion Hill Cemetery.

Bro. W. M. Pruitt became a member of Smyrna Church three days after its organization, and may have already been a licensed preacher. He was ordained by the church, August 28, 1875. Bro. Pruitt often filled the pulpit during the years of Bro. Sparkman's pastorate, especially when Bro. Sparkman had fallen into ill health. Others who filled his pulpit during those years, from sister churches, included Bro. John Deason, Zion Hill; J. F. M. Reid, who was licensed by the church July 14, 1877; Bro. A. A. King; E. W. H. Parker; E. P. Spivey; John Neely.

Different brethren were called from time to time to assist in a "protracted meeting". In the meeting of August, 1876, five brethren were invited as co-laborers in the effort, in addition to Bro. Sparkman: W. M. Gaddy, W. H. H. Hays, W. W. Albritton, E. W. H. Parker, and W. M. Pruitt. Results of the meeting were not recorded.

Smyrna Church started off very co-operative with her sister churches. In addition to faithful attendance at the local association, district meetings, fifth Sunday meetings, state meetings, the custom of inviting visiting brethren to their business meeting each month, were regular things of the early days. Smyrna regularly exchanged visiting brethren with sister churches, the most often being the

churches at Zion Hill, Shiloh, Holly Springs, Cool Springs, Locklin and Antioch.

Matters of inter-church fellowship were frequently the discussion in the district meetings and fifth Sunday meetings. Messengers were consistently referred to as delegates in the early minutes. These carried a query to the district meeting at Zion Hill in April, 1879, as follows, "Is it scriptural to call a minister without the consent of the church to which he belongs? And is it scriptural to call a minister from another church when they have a minister with their church?" Disposition of the question is not recorded. However, it appears the church believed the first question should be answered negatively, for on several occasions she voted to grant Bro. W. M. Pruitt the privilege of pastoring the Antioch Church. On the other hand she continued to call her pastor, though he was a member of another congregation.

Questions of boardism (which led to the Convention Baptist churches of the area) were arising. In February, 1878, brethren were elected to meet with others at the Holly Springs church "in consultation whether the Mt. Zion Association and East Texas General Association would cooperate together or not." Again records do not reveal the outcome. Delegates to the district meeting at Harmony in May, or June, 1880, were instructed to vote against a division of the Mt. Zion Association. In June delegates were elected to a meeting of the General Association at Ennis, Texas, in July.

Strict discipline of the membership was practiced by the Smyrna Church during her early history. One of the orders of business adopted in her organization was to call for acknowledgements. Hardly a monthly business meeting passed without a case of discipline being presented. Members made acknowledgements for using profane language, being intoxicated, misconduct, having a quarrel with a neighbor, nonattendance. Committees were appointed to investigate such charges as "being intoxicated with ardion (sic) spirits", "reasons for absence", "certain reports" of fellowshiping with those of other faiths, "being in disorder", which usually meant a man and wife

were having marital difficulties, "unchristian conduct", "dancing and drinking", "committing fornication", "some complaint that is against him", which turned out to be leaving another brother security for his debt, "not giving satisfaction in regard to it." People were often excluded for these charges upon the report of the committee appointed.

The church had problems with hardshellism. In the business meeting of May 18, 1877, it was recorded, "The church agreed to wash feet when it is convenient."<sup>5</sup> Evidently the foot-washing was not done,<sup>6</sup> and the case of one brother became the subject of discussion for several months' business meeting until, finally, in October, he was excluded "for departing from the faith by joining the so called Primitive Baptist church." Others were excluded for "departing from the faith of the gospel", "departing from the baptist faith and attaching herself to the so called Campbellite church", "departing from the faith by joining the Methodist society."

Financial matters did not occupy much space in the early history of the church. Acts of benevolence occurred from time to time. One such interesting act occurred in May of 1878, when the church voted to "give to Sister Francis Allen and Sister (Minerva?) Allen 50 lbs. bacon and 10 gallons syrup that is in her treasure." The pastor appears to have been on freewill offering, receiving amounts as large as \$10.00 from time to time. In these days before formal organization of the Baptist convention system in

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<sup>5</sup> One might relate the washing of feet to problems with "hardshellism" in the church. But external factors indicate that washing the saints' feet was not uncommon in the Mt. Zion Association. G. P. Birdwell (first president of the East Texas Baptist Convention, later known as the B.M.A. of Texas) wrote, "...at one time 38 out of 42 churches in old Mt. Zion Association practiced 'Foot-washing'." (*Materials*, p. 141). In 1870, the Mt. Zion Association resolved, "That we do not regard the observance, or non-observance, of feet washing a test of fellowship; but is open to conviction of each church and each individual member." (*Minutes*, 1870, p. 3)

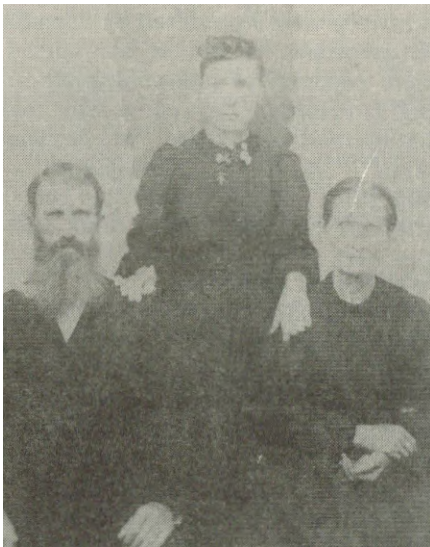
<sup>6</sup> The Smyrna minutes often do not record the completion of certain votes. That, with the fact that washing feet was practiced by Mt. Zion churches, makes it unlikely that the foot-washing was not done.



Texas, the Smyrna Church responded to requests of the "executive board", by making up offerings for missions. Such a request in November, 1879, netted \$10.25. Some pledged certain amounts for missions for the year. Offerings were also taken on occasion for old and needy ministers of the gospel.

### *The Pruitt and Hays Years*

Bro. W. M. Pruitt served as Smyrna's pastor from March, 1882 to November 1883. He was recalled only once besides finishing out Bro. Sparkman's year. Bro. Pruitt was ordained by the Smyrna Church, and it may be that some thought it more scriptural to call a man from their own midst. However, there does not seem to be the unanimity in his call to the pastorate which existed in the case of Bro. Sparkman. The Pruitt family is still represented in the membership of Smyrna Church in the person of Mrs. John Vaughn, who is his granddaughter.



W. M. Pruitt, second pastor of Smyrna (1882-1884), with wife and daughter.

Bro. W. H. H. Hays was elected pastor of Smyrna Church on November 17, 1883 and was present for the business meeting in December. However, he is not noted as present again until May, 1884, Bro. Pruitt having moderated the intervening conferences. By this time Bro. Hays was a quite popular preacher, his services in

considerable demand. On examination of the Smyrna records it is

apparent that Bro. Hays' services were either beyond the reach of the Smyrna Church, or else exceeded their willingness to pay.

Bro. Hays was a very fine evangelist, and the records reveal many baptisms during his pastorate. Lists of those received in the church upon profession of faith are found each summer for the several years of his pastorate. This pastor favored the move to boardism among Baptists, and he promoted it in the churches he pastored. Frequent missions offerings were taken and the funds turned over to him for distribution. He was also a zealous supporter of Sunday Schools in the churches.

Many of Bro. Hays' frequent absences from the church may have been due to his many other evangelistic activities. Permission was sometimes granted him to be absent from his appointment at Smyrna to visit some other church. The matter of his wages for pastoring was a concern of the business meetings. In February, 1886, the Smyrna Church voted to give Bro. Hays \$100 for the associational year. There is a list of 39 names who



William Henry Harrison Hays

pledged a total contribution for this purpose of \$74.75, in amounts varying from 25[¢] to \$5.00. Of these pledges a total of \$64.65 was collected. When Bro. Hays was reelected as pastor in October, it appears that he asked for a reckoning concerning his past year's salary. In December the church voted to "settle with Bro. Hays for his service last year." Then, in January 1887, there was another vote to have Bro. William Parker "inform Bro. Hays that we under the present circumstances can not accept his proposition which was to serve us this associational year for one hundred dollars."

Bro. W. M. Pruitt was elected moderator pro tem. for the remainder of the year. Bro. M. L. Vaughn was elected to "see Bro. (C. H.) Gibson and invite him to meet with us at our next meeting." The report on this invitation indicated the decline of Bro. Gibson to pastor the church. Things went on with, usually, Bro. Pruitt moderating until October, when Bro. Hays was again elected pastor. Nothing more is said of the "salary settlement," but Bro. Hays was present as regular moderator in the meeting of January, 1888.

The final stint in the pastorate of W. H. H. Hays seems to have ended fairly soon, for records after March show other brethren serving as moderator in the business meetings. The church elected Bro. J. M. Mizzell, New Salem, as pastor in October, but he declined to accept. In February, 1889, Bro. John Isbell, of Mt. Enterprise, was elected pastor, and he accepted the call. Bro. Hays went on to become prominent in the work of the "board-party" (Convention) Baptists, and was the first moderator of their Rusk County Baptist Association, organized in 1901.<sup>7</sup>

Smyrna's interest in associational co-operation continued in these years. The Mt. Zion Association met with Smyrna Church for the first recorded district meeting in 1882. This was not the regular meeting, but one of those special ones held from time to time. This was October, and there were other such meetings in February and April of 1883 at other churches. Smyrna delegates to the April meeting at New Salem were to get an answer to the query, "Was the funds that was collected when the Savior was on earth, for the support of the poor, or the support of the gospel?" The answer is not recorded, but one might detect a bit of anti-mission spirit in the wording of the query.

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<sup>7</sup> A split from the Mt. Zion Association over "church party"-"board party", or Hayden, controversy within the Baptist General Convention of Texas. William Henry Harrison Hays (1840-1906) was raised a Presbyterian. He joined Macedonia MBC in Panola County and was baptized by John Sparkman in 1865; ordained in 1866. Hays organized Ebenezer (Rusk Co.) in 1884 and Minden (Rusk Co.) in 1891.

Smyrna Church received a program in November, 1883, concerning missions, recommended by the Mt. Zion Association. She voted to adopt "the plan for raising funds for missionary purposes," and appointed Bro. W. J. Parker collector for Smyrna Church. He was instructed "to prepare a roll of the members of Smyrna church and solicit said funds." Mass meetings continued to be held among the churches through the years, with the result not noted in the church records.<sup>8</sup>

Church discipline continued to be stern. The membership list begun January 16, 1883, contained 106 names, of whom twelve were excluded for various reasons and many others made acknowledgement to the church to escape exclusion. On September 15, 1883, Bro. Stephen Yates was "liberated to exercise in public in any way the spirit of God direct him." Bro. Yates subsequently conducted "divine services" prior to the business meetings of the church on several occasions. It appears, however, that the church decided Bro. Yates was preaching some things in a way the spirit of God did not direct him, for in the wake of the hardshell trouble, he was excluded for "departure from the faith as we teach and practice."

The church was concerned for the behavior of its membership and tried to exercise positive as well as negative discipline. On July 15, 1882, she voted to have the church covenant, articles of faith, rules of decorum, and membership list read in the next conference.<sup>9</sup> On July 18, 1885, there was a vote that each member of the church act as a "committee to look after those who have absented themselves from the church." On March 17, 1888, a committee was appointed to notify a certain brother "that the church is dissatisfied in regard to him drinking too much whisky (sic)" and to report to the next

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<sup>8</sup> A number of things are not noted in the church records. I think the simple explanation is this: the votes, queries, instructions to messengers were all a matter in conference. The dispensing of such often was not.

<sup>9</sup> The church covenant and articles of faith are not preserved in any existing record.