

## THE OLD BRICK CHURCH

One of the most historical structures in old Fairfield county is the Ebenezer Presbyterian church, otherwise known as "The Old Brick Church" which is located about twelve miles southwest of Winnsboro. The church itself is a small, dingy, red brick structure with towering cedar trees standing in the ample cemetery which surrounds the building.

Inside the church are a number of long straight-back pews, a slave gallery and an old fashioned pulpit which is merely a bible stand built into a railing. The building was erected by the people of the Little River section of Fairfield County as a labor of love. They moulded the bricks with their own hands and cut and trimmed timber to provide the woodwork--completing the building in 1788. The small church began making history when its first pastor, Rev. James Rogers, acting as the first moderator organized the Associate Reformed Synod of the Carolinas in 1803 from its humble pulpit. This group is now known as the Associate Reformed Synod of the South. Reverend Rogers' church grew in numbers and prosperity and soon became a force in the religious life of South Carolina. The church continued to go forward after the death of the Reverend Rogers in 1830 and its growth was without incident until the outbreak of the war between the States in 1860.

The young manhood of the congregation joined the Confederate army, almost in mass at the outbreak of hostilities and soon the casualty list returning from the battlefield made heavy the hearts of the folk of the Ebenezer church. However, the torch of war seemed far afield to the congregation and except for letters from the men at the front and troopers home on furlough life went on much the same as usual.

Crops were sown and reaped and the neighborhood's youth becoming of age packed their meager belongings and went off to war. However, all was not going well with the Confederacy and in 1864 the drums of war began to draw near.

Valuables were buried, livestock was hidden and many of the homes became places of shelter for refugees from the lowlands where war was present. Finally the hand of battle touched the church and the community. After the fall and burning of Columbia, Sherman's army swept northward burning, looting and destroying in a 40-mile swath as the Yankees pursued the battered remains of General Beauregard's retreating Confederate army.

Late in February 1865 Ebenezer church, located a few hundred yards from the swift moving Little River became the locale for one of those last moving little actions which though never recorded on the pages of history saddened the hearts of families on both sides. Sometime around February 21st, Kilpatrick's Union Cavalry and brigadier General Jeff Davis' 14th Corps arrived at the Little River. Here they found the Confederates had destroyed the bridge and were perched upon the high ground overlooking the crossing, planning to knock off a couple of "Yanks" before pulling out for Winnsboro. Davis' infantry swarmed through the shallows and moved on the double with bayonets fixed toward the positions occupied by the troublesome Confederates. Several Federals went down before their comrades routed the sharpshooters from the high ground. Engineer officers of the 14th Corps appeared and decided a crossing of the stream without some sort of bridge was an impossibility for the heavy guns and wagon trains which accompanied the Union Cavalry and infantry. In all probability some thirty-year-old second Lieutenant, as is the case of second Lieutenant since the beginning of history, spotted the church and desiring to be a first lieutenant before the conclusion of the war suggested tearing up the flooring and rafters to make a bridge. The engineering officer in charge had undoubtedly lost all his scruples after four bloody years of war and so out came the woodwork of the church.

The 14th Corps and Kilpatrick's army crossed, leaving the gutted church behind. However, a legend exists in Fairfield County, which we can substantiate in part, that a Union officer inscribed a pencil written apology on the doorway of the church for the desecration. This apology is written in old Apencerian handwriting and has been retraced and lacquered. The individual reader had best judge for himself as to authenticity. The inscription reads:

"To the citizens of this county--Please excuse us for desecrating your house of worship. It was absolutely necessary to effect a crossing over the creek." Signed "A Yankee."

So great was the blow from the war that the church declined and was declared disorganized without any formal act to that effect. In the graveyard of the church are the remains of several Confederate soldiers who belonged to the 12th South Carolina Infantry. We wonder if these men may be some of the men who strove to defend the Little River crossing and lost both it and their lives.