

History of South Apalachin Baptist Church Gym/Ed Building

By Pastor Walter

When I came to South Apalachin Baptist Church one thing that was in great working order which helped promote unity and community within families and homes was the youth programs (Boy's Brigade and Pioneer Girls at that time) operated by parents in the church. The old church building that was being used as a gym since the new church building was built several years before played a large part in these programs, especially for the boys and their fathers. From the time I first became acquainted with South Apalachin in 1953, sports has been a major part of church related fellowship activities; hunting, a gun club, softball, and basketball plus the sporting activities associated with the Youth Programs.

In order to play softball and basketball the churches who had ball teams and had no facilities were constantly seeking the use of school gyms and ball fields. There were few schools left who would allow churches to use their facilities, citing the "separation of church and state" as their reason for not allowing church groups to use their gyms and ball fields. They would consider allowing the use of their facilities for community activities but not church related activities. On several occasions we did get the use of the Apalachin School Gym by calling ourselves a South Apalachin Community Group, not the South Apalachin Baptist Church. The only gym that South Apalachin was able to use on a regular basis was Ross Corner's Christian Academy. Several families from South Apalachin were sending their children to that school and several of us men from South Apalachin were helping the school in various ways (carpentry work, driving the church bus, coaching and attending Parent/ Teacher Fellowships).

At that time, shortly after we had completed the parsonage, Abe Card who owned the field south of the church building offered to sell that field to the church at a very reasonable price. The church did buy that field and it was not long before the church had its own softball field. During that time the idea of a gym was mentioned, but little more was in the plans until these things took place.

1. The Fellowship Hall was no longer large enough to hold the entire church body suppers.
2. Several church weddings receptions more than packed the Fellowship Hall.
3. Five local churches of which South Apalachin was one started a young boy's league and only Ross Corners had a gym we could use. I remember our first game. We had only three players; Jerry Holden, Keith Stephens and Jimmy, my son. Ross Corners had extra players so they loaned us two of them, Lance Gregory and Paul Price. After that the SABC members soon grew to as many as 15.
4. It was getting harder and harder to find school gyms for the Baptist Church League of which South Apalachin had become a member.

I was not at the meeting where the final decision was made to build a gym. I think that decision was made the summer I went back to college (1975). I do know the main advocate for building

the gym was Barney Holden who coached our main church team for many years. I also remember that Ed Harrison worked with the trustees in drawing up plans for the building. The only suggestion I made was for the fireplace room at the east end of the gym. I had visions of that room being used as a fellowship room for young parents as their children played in the gym. It did work on a number of occasions, but to get whole families together at the same time in this culture is near an impossibility. *Together* with the communication lines open is the only way to have unity in the home or in the local church (eating together, worshipping together, working together, serving together, praying together and playing together). The first and the last in this list is where the church gym enters in. The goal, *together* not only geographically and bodily presence but *together* in our love for Jesus Christ and one another wherever we are and what we do. Please read I Corinthians 10:31, Titus 2:11-15, and Hebrews 10:24, 25. The gym and the fireplace room were the main places I used to meet with families, couples, Bible Study groups, Pre-marital counseling groups and couples, individuals who are described in Galatians 6:1, and individuals in need (Timothy 3:16). Other than in homes this was the best place, I, as a brother in Christ could find to Biblically counsel other brothers in Christ. God, through His Word, made many good changes in many of our lives in that gym and that fireplace room.

I also remember so many of these happy, fun times playing basketball, attending wedding receptions, suppers, etc. we experienced in the gym. To this day I can see Kelly sitting at the score table and remember her faithfulness to the Youth Programs from the time she was a young girl in Pioneer Girls. To this day, I can see Albert Welch who, as with the church building 12 years earlier, was the general contractor for the gym building. And can see Bob Strobe and his men doing the masonry work. It was the whole church working in unity that made such a building possible way out here in South Apalachin. As I write this we are looking forward to our church's 200th anniversary. I am sure the Gym/Ed Building will play an important part in that celebration.



