

South Apalachin Baptist Church History - By Pastor James Walter

Preface

Any of the history I record here that took place before 1953 is second or sometimes third person history. Those incidents were told to me in the first five years I was the Pastor of the church (1969-1974). They were the most busy years of my life. You can read about those years in my book: *Fifty Years A Country Pastor (Shepherd)*, pages 119-134.

In the midst of all the things I was doing during the first two years I was pastor at South Apalachin I did the same thing I had done in Trumansburg ten years before. I visited nearly all the homes in the immediate area. I wanted to know the sheep in the flock my Heavenly Shepherd had commissioned me to lead and tend for Him. It was from the older ones I had visited I learned about many incidents that had transpired during the first half of the 20th century. That is incidents (good and bad) that affected the area and especially the Owego Free Baptist Church at South Apalachin. Among the older people who lived in the area during the first half of the 20th century were Henry Hall, Earl Darling, Mary Rider, Howard Stephens, Leland and Nettie Fox and Opal Linebaugh's mother Marjorie Chaffee (Mrs. Chaffee was also my daughter and Dan Crane's sixth grade teacher). Those older people were just like us older people today. That is we just love to talk about the past.

One other source of information that was destroyed several years ago along with other contents of the safe was the ancient records of the church. I did read through most of those record books (mostly notes of business meetings along with the facts and figures of Treasurers reports, plus a lot of names that were just that to me, just names, not faces).

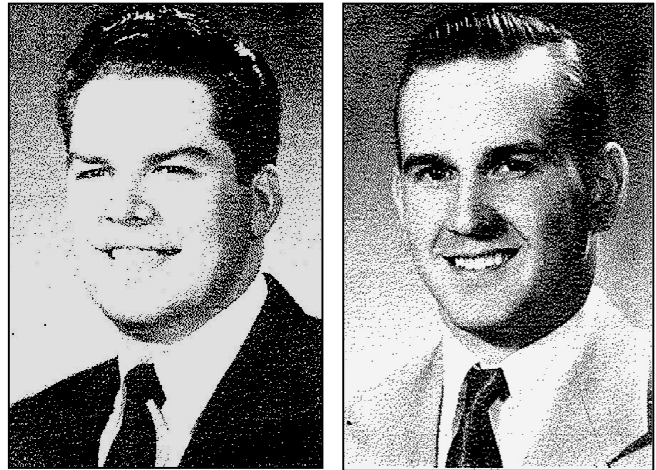
I remember one evening in 1970 when Elmer Storozow was cleaning the church and I was building the shelves and cupboards in the side room to start a library off the pulpit area. We opened the safe and began reading those old church records. We read for hours until midnight. Not much cleaning and not much building of the library got done that night but I still have a few memories of the things I read that night which I will mention later on.

For now though I will start with those incidents with which I have first-hand knowledge beginning in the spring of 1953.

My First Recollection of the Owego Free Baptist Church 1953

The name of the church was changed in 1957 to *South Apalachin Baptist Church*. I first heard of South Apalachin sixty years ago when Gordon Hay, my best friend, was asked to fill the pulpit between candidates as they were searching for a new pastor. He had no thoughts of being considered as a candidate, as we were only in the middle of our second year at Practical Bible School. But after he spoke that Sunday two things took place that Gordon told me about in class the next morning. First, the deacons ask if he would be in-

terested in having his name put in with the other two candidates they were considering. Secondly, was a remark made to him on the way out the door. Here is the way he described to me. *This lady, instead of shaking my hand, shook her finger in my face and said, "That was great preaching young man, but you better live it."*



Gordon Hay and James Walter
as they appeared in their yearbook.

Gordon and I recalled that incident many times over the years. The last time was five years ago on his 80th birthday when I gave him a devotional I had written some years before where I referred to that incident. We both had another big laugh. That lady was right, you know. She was giving good advice for all us preachers, young and old.

The church did put Gordon's name in with the other two candidates but they could not get enough votes for any one of the three so they threw Gordon's name out. They still could not get the vote needed for either of the other two. There were those who wanted to hear Gordon again and have him considered with the other two once more. They did do that. I remember that Sunday well. Gordon, his wife Dorothy and little one and a half year old son Dannie went out to the Sunday AM service but when it was time to go to the evening service their car (1946 Nash) would not start so they took our 1949 Ford coupe while we babysat little, *but very lively Dannie*. (Some of you older folks who were around back then know what I meant by that last statement).

At a special meeting the next week and several more votes, the Owego Free Baptist Church called Gordon Hay to be their pastor. He also took the pastorate of the South Owego Community Church as the two churches were sharing pastors at the time. More about this in the next segment of *My First Recollections of South Apalachin Baptist Church*

when I made my first trip out to the metropolis of South Apalachin. That was two months after Gordon Hay moved there as pastor.

It was a Saturday afternoon several months after Gordon Hay had moved to pastor the Owego Free Baptist at South Apalachin and the South Owego Community Church. I was on my way out to this “out in the middle of nowhere” place called Waits. (A picture of the Waits church appears on the front cover of my book *Fifty Years a Country Pastor*.) On my way I stopped at the metropolis of South Apalachin, which consisted of a little white church building, several homes, a little country store and post office, a bridge, and an old gray asphalt shingled building which was the parsonage. The whole metropolis covered no more than two or three acres nestled between two farms (Stephens and Cards).

Gordon then took me up to see the South Owego Community Church. That Saturday, a group of men were working on the church getting it ready for a wedding that would take place the following Saturday. Gordon introduced me to these men including the groom, his name was Bernard Holden. The bride-to-be was Frances Welch.

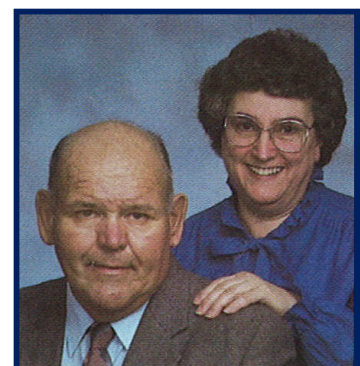
From there I went over to Waits, met with John and Edna Waite, and made arrangements to start services in the Waits church which had been closed for some time. Our first service was the day after Barney Holden and Frances Welch were married.

That was my first visit to these three places (South Apalachin, South Owego, and Waits). Since that day I have been to all three of these places hundreds of times. Little did I realize that lasting relationships were started that day that would continue the rest of my life.

Here I feel I must tell what came of the living relationships that started that day. First I mention John and Edna Waite. I held Bible studies in their homes, and their children’s and grandchildren’s homes until I retired from the pastorate in South Apalachin. Since that time I have had a part in both of their funeral services.

Secondly, I hardly need to say anything about my relationship with Barney Holden. A week I will never forget was that week more than 25 years ago when Barbara Roberts died suddenly on a Sunday morning, Barney Holden died suddenly on Monday and Myrtle Dunham died on Wednesday. I had all their funerals and as I

Barney and
Frances
Holden
1989



was speaking at Barney's funeral service my mind went back to that day I went out to South Apalachin, South Owego and Waite's for the first time where I first met Barney helping get things ready for his wedding the next week.

Over the next two years, 1953-55, while my wife and I were shepherding the people in Waits, we would also enter into a relationship with the Owego Free Baptist Church at South Apalachin.

Neither Gordon and Dorothy Hay nor my wife and I were baptized by immersion when the Owego Free Baptist Church called Gordon to be their pastor. Several weeks later, Gordon and Dorothy were baptized at the Christian Church in Endwell and sometime later Gordon baptized my wife and I up in Anderson's pond near the South Owego Church. We became members of the Owego Free Baptist Church at South Apalachin and were licensed to preach. The next fall on October 2, 1954 the church called for an ordination counsel where three of us (Gordon Hay, George Jatko, and I) were approved for ordination into the Gospel Ministry.



George Jatko 1946

In my next segment I will tell of that day and evening where the three of us were ordained, and also two other services in South Apalachin that had an effect on my future ministry.

Also over those two years I spoke many Sunday evenings at South Owego while Gordon spoke in South Apalachin. It was there I learned to know Edger Dodge and family, Bob and Ismay Anderson and daughter Cheryl, Irene Welch, Shirley Meade and daughter Mary Jane.

Ordination Day at South Apalachin

October 2, 1954 was a great day for The South Apalachin Baptist Church and three young pastors who were also members of the church. Gordon Hay had been South Apalachin's pastor for 1 ½ years. George Jatko had been pastoring two churches some ten miles south of the South Apalachin Baptist Church for five or six years. I had been pastoring a small flock some 10 miles west of the South Apalachin church for nearly one and one half years.

The church had called for an ordination council to convene on that day for the purpose of examining these three men the church was considering for ordination into the Gospel ministry. The council was made up of more than twenty men which included pastors

and delegates from area churches belonging to what was then called The Bystate Youthspiration plus several well known pastors in Binghamton and several professors at the Practical Bible Training School from which Gordon Hay and I had recently graduated.

After Leila Race, the church clerk read the letter the church had written to the various churches calling for the ordination council, the council was formed from the pastors and representatives that had responded to that invitation. Rev. Haggai, pastor of Calvary Baptist in Binghamton, was chosen to be the moderator of the council. Rev. Paul Griffiths, pastor of the Little White Church in Conklin, was elected to be the council secretary. After three hours the council voted unanimously to recommend the three of us to the church for ordination.

I could write many pages on the council time where each of us gave an account of our conversion and call to the ministry plus the question and answer time, but here I would like to just tell of the ordination service itself that followed that evening. Dr. Gordon Davis, president of Practical Bible Training School, was the speaker. I wish I had a copy of that hour long speech. That night he was the apostle Paul admonishing us three young Ephesian elders to remain faithful to the call the Holy Spirit had given to us. That was to tend the flock of God which He had purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:7-38 (especially verse. 28).

What an awesome call! "The privilege and responsibility of spending a lifetime tending (leading, feeding, and protecting) a flock of the Heavenly Shepherd's redeemed blood purchased people FOR HIM." That is Gods commission to His Undershepherds.

At the time of our ordination Bob Monell, a young man from the church, had just entered Practical Bible School to prepare for the ministry. He, along with Dale Linebaugh and Gordon Hay, were in the process of turning Bob's farm into a Christian Youth Camp that they would name El Rancho de Paz.

Bob Monel
1956



Over the next two years I learned to know Bob and Dale well, and have been associated with El Rancho de Paz in one way or another ever since that time through all the years that I was in the pastorate.

My relationship with Bob came about when Gordon Hay told him that I had worked in the woods cutting logs for two years before going to Practical. Bob immediately came to me and asked if I would like to cut logs with him. The logs were to be sawed into lumber to be used for the barn at the camp. We did work cutting logs on several Saturdays that winter and the next spring. On one of those evenings he and his wife Helen, (Art Andreassen's sister) invited us, my wife and I, for supper. Several months later Bob preached for me when we had to go home upon my father's sudden death.

I knew Bob as a humble, Godly caring Shepherd who spent a life time caring for several of Gods flocks. Dr. Gil Parker said these words from the pulpit here in South Apalachin, (this church has a very rich Godly heritage). Bob and Helen Monell are truly bright spots in that Heritage.