

Short History of the Church

McConnell Memorial Baptist Church came into existence on the fifth Saturday of July in 1882. A three man committee from Macedonia Baptist Church met and chartered the new Baptist church in Hiawassee. That committee was called a *presbytery*, and the three men were *elders* of the Macedonia church - Elijah Kimsey, Elisha Hedden and Joseph Burch. The new church was chartered as the Baptist Church of Christ at Hiawassee, though for fifty years it was commonly called the Hiawassee Baptist Church. There were eleven charter members:

Males

Elder E. Hedden
W. R. Cloer
W.L. Sutton
W. G. Blackwell

Females

Caroline Hedden
Margaret G. Cloer
Julia Sutton
A.C. Blackwell
Elizabeth Burch
M.C. Standridge
Nannie Hedden

The church had no meeting house to begin with. They met once a month in one of the member's homes. The monthly meeting began with a business meeting on Saturday, then the preaching service was held on Sunday. To begin with Elijah Kimsey and Elisha Hedden served as co-pastors, probably alternating the preaching duties.

After a few years a small frame building was erected on River Street utilizing a city lot that had been set aside for a Baptist church on the original City of Hiawassee plat. That remained the "meeting house" for about thirty-five years until the early 1920s when the congregation grew too large for the little building. Many attempts were made to raise funds for a new building, but money was scarce. Instead of building, the church began meeting in the auditorium of the high school, called Hiawassee Academy.

There had always been a close relationship between Hiawassee Academy and the church. The school was affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, and most of the students and many of the teachers were church members. Several of the teachers also served as the church's pastor from time to time. Pastors were elected every year, and many served only one year.

Due to some unfortunate events in 1928, the Southern Baptist Convention (actually the Home Mission Board) had to give up the school, selling the property to Towns County. That left

the church with a problem. To continue to function, they were forced to build a separate “meeting house”. Due to hard financial times during the Great Depression, it took almost ten years to complete the building. That building still stands between the Family Life Center and the new worship center.

It was in 1933, during construction, that the name was changed to McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in honor of Dr. F.C. McConnell. Dr. McConnell was never a pastor of the church. A subsequent article will relate who he was and why the change was made.

That brick building served as the sanctuary until 2007 when the new worship center was completed. Membership has grown from that original eleven members to approximately 1200 members at present. McConnell is not the oldest Baptist church in Towns County, but it is the largest.