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GEORGIA SOUTHERN COLLEGE

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF
BARK CAMP BAPTIST CHURCH

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED IN
HISTORIOGRAPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

DWAYNE DAVIS

DECEMBER 4, 1989

The study of American history is vast. Even though the United States is one of the younger nations in the world, it still has a rich and fascinating tradition. Throughout the years, the United States has undergone much change which may be difficult to understand. But in order to comprehend the wider scope of American history, one must study the small community. This is important because the United States wasn't founded as a country of metropolises. Instead, it began as a nation of small towns. One of the best ways to understand the facets of a small community is to explore the history of its churches. Through the study of a local church, we can glean insights into the prosperity, attitudes and social structure of a small community, because the growth of a church is linked to the growth of its community. Also, the attitudes of a church are reflective of the community itself. Therefore, Bark Camp Baptist Church, in Burke County, Georgia, is the focus of this evaluation. Not only will a general history of the church be addressed, but an investigation of the major social aspects in the church's history will be fathomed.

Bark Camp Baptist Church was established on April 12, 1788.¹ Much of the livelihood of the residents in Burke County depended on open farming and livestock. Many of the charter members of the church were large plantation owners with slaves. In the church records, the following persons were listed as charter members: Miles Scarborough, who became the first pastor, William Parker, William Wood, Zebulon Cocks, Francis Spivey, Johnathan Coleman, Stephan Powell, Henry Summerlin, Patience Hutchins, Rachel Scarborough, John Allen, Lydia Wood, Sarah Cocks, Christian Fitzgerald, Sarah Summerlin, Sarah Parker, Esther Wood, Susannah Stephens, Johnathan Holly, George Hendry, John Holly, McQuin Belcher, Mary Holly, Chloe Snell, Syntha Barber, Martha Hinson

and Sarah Belcher.² Of these members it is generally recognized that Zebulon Cocks was one of the largest land owners in the county and that his son John Cocks contributed the land on which the church site is located.³ Of the charter members, William Parker and William Wood are listed as its first deacons.⁴ Also, it is noted that Johnathan Coleman was a Revolutionary War veteran. Coleman served under General Wayne as a Georgia Line soldier.⁵ Some sources list Silas Scarborough and Milly Pittman (wife of Johnathan Coleman) as charter members, but this cannot be confirmed by the church records.

It is uncertain how the church came to be named Bark Camp. One possible explanation is that the church is named after the Barkcamp District in which it is located. This area stretches along Barkcamp Creek. The church could possibly have taken its name from the creek itself. But the most popular explanation is that the site of the church was, at first, a "bark camp." The phrase "bark camp" refers to a structure built of round logs with the bark attached, stakes and poles, and a roof of bark.⁶

The first pastor of Bark Camp was Miles Scarborough. When Scarborough died in 1789, he was succeeded by David McCullers, who was licensed to preach by Botsford Church in the same county.⁷ An essential part of understanding church history involves the way local ministers worked. First, ministers were licensed by individual churches and could only be confirmed by another licensed pastor. Also, one minister usually preached in several different churches in the area. For this reason, almost all of the early churches only had one meeting Sunday per month and one communion service per year. Of all the pastors of Bark Camp, William M. Maund was the only minister called from the fellowship (see Appendix 1 for a list of Bark Camp pastors). Maund was ordained at Bark Camp in April 1830 by J. H. T. Kilpatrick and Joshua Key.⁸

To solidify the ties of churches in a general area, churches usually belonged to a larger association of churches. Bark Camp originally belonged to the Georgia Baptist Association. This association was the first of such in Georgia and was established in October of 1784.⁹ But later, Bark Camp left this association in order to become a charter member of the Hephzibah Association which was formed at Big Buckhead Church in Burke County on September 27, 1794.¹⁰ Church associations, like ministers, kept regulations as to their operations. The first and foremost of these regulations being that no church was accepted into an association unless it had been constituted with an ordained pastor among its fellowship or that it had been a member in good standing of another association.

Church members were also regulated to a degree. There were several ways to become a member of a Baptist fellowship. The first was that one was a new convert and was baptised into the church. Secondly, one could join if he had been a member in good standing of another fellowship. But few petitioners into a church were taken in upon their own word. Instead, a writ of good standing dismissal was usually required. Also, churches were quick to spread the word among its association about persons who tried to bend the rules. This can be seen in an incident recorded in the Hephzibah Association minutes regarding a man named William H. Jackson who had submitted false names and papers stating that he was a member in good standing of Buckhead Church in Burke County. The association warned its members that "Jackson is no member of that or any other Baptist church" and that he was a "base imposter."¹¹ The main device which churches used to encourage their members to keep high moral standards was the threat of excommunication. Members who were dismissed in such a manner were prevented from uniting with other fellowships. Also, it was favorable (but not absolutely required) for members to attend the

annual communion service in order to maintain their good standing (this seems to be a carry-over from the Catholic faith, where one was required to attend one communion a year to remain a member of the Catholic Church). Overall, in the early period, church society seems very stringent. Although it cannot be considered a closed society, churches were very careful about who was allowed to be a part of their fellowship.

Much of the growth of a community is reflected in the growth of the church as well. In the case of Bark Camp, we see varied periods of membership fluctuation. The most dramatic fluctuation occurred between the years 1843 and 1844 in which eighty-four members were added to the total fellowship.¹² Such a large increase in membership can most likely be attributed to a new land owner (or several new land owners) joining the fellowship and bringing in his slaves to unite also. Membership in Bark Camp gradually grew through the 1840's and 50's and reached its height in 1867 with a total of six-hundred and fifteen members before many of the black members were dismissed in order to form their own church. Generally, it can be said that the community prospered much throughout the mid-1800's. It is important to remember that the Bark Camp fellowship was constituted for the needs of an agricultural community. We can note also that much of Bark Camp's growth occurs as the "King Cotton" economy was prevailing in the South during the 1800's.

Now that much of the early history of the church has been established, it is necessary to address a few of the social issues faced by the church. One of the emerging social issues of the 1800's was that of education. Regular schools as we think of them today were scarce in Georgia during its early period. A state university was not established until 1801. Much of a child's education was dependent upon his parents and some responsibility went to the church as well. What was the attitude of the churches towards

education? Perhaps we can gather some insight with an incident which occurred in 1805. The General Committee of the Georgia Baptist Association sent a circular to all the Baptist associations within the state. The circular proposed that a "Baptist College of Georgia" be established in Richmond County for the training of young ministers. When the Hephzibah Association addressed the subject, an objection was made to the proposal and it was voted down by a large margin.¹³ Does this mean that churches in the Hephzibah Association were opposed to education? Not necessarily. W. L. Kilpatrick, author of the Hephzibah Association Centennial, notes that the leading ministry was wary of an educated ministry rather than education in general. Kilpatrick states that ministers wanted to maintain the "purity of the ministry" and keep out those people from the presbytery who were not called by God.¹⁴

But how concerned was Bark Camp about education? Very much it seems, especially during the 1840's. In that period, the church began what was called Sabbath School. In this religiously oriented school, children were taught through Bible lessons and were introduced to elementary reading and grammar. Through the years, more churches established Sabbath Schools and the schools themselves became more formal. Finally, in 1852, the Hephzibah Association resolved to encourage all churches to establish Sabbath Schools and Bible classes and that funds for books would be collected also.¹⁵

Bark Camp also called for the establishment of an Association High School during the latter part of the 1850's. The first such call came in a letter to the association which is generally believed to have been inspired by Jeremiah Inman. Though the association recognized the apparent "necessity of such a school", it voted down the idea because at that time raising funds was impracticable.¹⁶ Bark Camp reintroduced the proposal in 1859 and this time

the association accepted the petition. The denominational high school was then built in Brothersville, Richmond County and was called Hephzibah High School. The school opened with thirty-four pupils consisting of both boys and girls. Although there was a tuition, poor children were not excluded from an education because the school articles provided that the Board of Trustees would make provision for those unable to afford tuition.¹⁷ It appears that even though the Bark Camp Church was based in a primarily agricultural community, its members were very much concerned for the need of education.

In regards to the consumption of liquors, much can be said as to the outlook of the church community and the evolution of prevailing attitudes. The subject of temperance is an intriguing inquiry of society's views on human shortcomings. In all other areas of life, church members were expected to abide by strict moral codes. Of course, members found committing fornication, adultery, lying and stealing were almost instantly disinherited by the church. But control of the church also extended into its members social lives as well. For instance, it was grounds for excommunication for members to be found participating in card playing and the attending of functions where there was dancing. In Bark Camp alone, it can be said that between the years of 1808 and 1830 that no less than thirty members were dismissed by excommunication; the highest number of excommunications in a single year being seven in 1808.¹⁸ It is clear that churches were serious about their members maintaining high standards. But in regards to drinking as a moral shortcoming it can be said that liquor was more socially acceptable within the community prior to the 1830's. Many of the early church ministers and members saw little wrong with occasional drinks. In fact, many early ministers themselves would take a glass of liquor before and after church services.¹⁹ Even instances of public drunkenness were sometimes allowed. This can be seen

in an incident recorded in the church minutes in which a Richard Sconers became drunk at a public gathering. But when he "came forth as his own accuser and acknowledged his wrong" the church forgave him.²⁰ This account should not be taken as to mean that all persons who became publicly drunk were always forgiven. The individual merits of each case were always taken into consideration, with the only exception being that anyone found drunk on Sunday was usually always dismissed from the fellowship. But on a whole, few ministers were advocates of the idea of abstinence from all liquors prior to the 1830's.

But as the years passed, the attitudes of the church community began to change. Among the early advocates of abstinence from ardent spirits in the Hephzibah Association was J. H. T. Kilpatrick, who led the Bark Camp fellowship in 1855. It is generally recognized that Kilpatrick was the first public advocate of complete abstinence in the association. Through his efforts, the association resolved in 1831 to encourage its member churches to disapprove of liquor consumption because of possible injury "to the community at large, and especially to the Church of Christ."²¹ The following year, the association encouraged the entire disuse of liquor within its churches.²²

In the years that followed, the Hephzibah Association continued its resolutions against the use of alcohol, but organized effort in the formation of church temperance societies did not come along until the 1840's. In 1844, Bark Camp, along with eight other churches in the association, reported the existence of a formal temperance society.²³ As these societies flourished, they soon tried to flex their political muscle. Throughout the latter half of the 1800's, temperance societies pushed for legislation in their communities in favor of prohibition; a growing idea that would reach its culmination nation-wide in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The evaluation of the temperance movement shows how the attitudes of a

community can change. It is interesting to note that the Hephzibah Association's first resolution against liquors is strongly worded and that the resolution of the following year called for the complete disuse of liquors. This indicates a quick overall change in the outlook of the churches towards liquors. It is most likely that before the temperance movement really got started, the use of alcohol was considered more of a social norm. People knew that the consumption of liquors had possible ill effects but were slow to condemn it because many, at one time or another, did participate in its use. But when the first advocates of temperance, especially ministers, began to publicize their opinions, much of the church community was quick to follow in their footsteps. But even though church attitudes had undergone a change, most certainly the use of alcohol still continued in the area.

Another social question that concerned churches in the mid 1800's was the status of the Negroes. In the South, though Negroes weren't considered socially equal to whites, they were encouraged to join churches. Still, blacks were kept separate from the whites. In the churches, certain areas were designated for the blacks. Sometimes special services were held for the blacks by the pastor. But there was no conscientious effort to exclude blacks from Christianity. In fact, the Hephzibah Association resolved in 1838 to recommend to its ministers that they should "preach purposely to the colored people as often as practicable."²⁴

During the 1830's, 40's and 50's, the membership of Negroes in the churches increased dramatically. Much of this increase can be attributed to the South's need for slave manpower to gear the region toward its growing cotton economy. By 1847, more than half of the Hephzibah Association's members were black.²⁵ During the 1850's and 60's the black membership of Bark Camp usually

doubled and sometimes tripled the white membership. When blacks were accepted into the fellowship, they were acknowledged in the minutes along with their owners, as shown by the records of 1864 which names one slave named Ellis being accepted and stating that he belonged to Jeremiah Inman.²⁶

Despite the large number of Negroes in the association, only two black churches ever belonged to the association. The first was Green Branch, which was constituted in Burke County in 1815. This church was a relatively short lived fellowship which dissolved in 1831.²⁷ The second was the Franklin Covenant, established in Richmond County in 1849. This church was a more lasting fellowship in which the first pastor was J. H. T. Kilpatrick (a white minister). Kilpatrick was succeeded in 1860 by a black minister named Joe Walker.²⁸

After the Civil War, the blacks were free. How were churches to react to the new status of blacks? This was the exact question that Bark Camp posed to the association in 1865. The association stated that politically blacks were to be recognized as freedmen; socially blacks' status was the same as during slavery, and that ecclesiastically blacks were still considered brethren in Christ.²⁹ It is clear that whites still considered blacks socially inferior even though they were now freemen. Moreover, it would seem, whites still wanted to maintain some control over blacks. In the same resolution, the association recommended that since Negroes were unacquainted with the procedures involved in constituting a church, white pastors and brethren should assist in their organization and to advise blacks in other areas as well.³⁰ At the very least, whites took the view that blacks would be unable to manage themselves. But in spite these reservations, blacks were allowed to leave and form their own fellowships. In 1867, Bark Camp Church records state that a petition was considered from the blacks of the fellowship who

wished to be dismissed in order to form their own church. On December 8, 1867, the church granted a "general letter of dismissal" to the blacks.³¹ Therefore, most of the black members left the church to form what is commonly called "Black Bark Camp" located just slightly north of the original Bark Camp site.

Through much of its first century of existence, Bark Camp was a leading church in the Hephzibah Association. Its vibrant history and tradition earned the church the nickname of "the Grand Old Church." But the legacy of its past history could not save the church from decline. Through the latter 1800's and early 1900's, the church was able to maintain a strong, steady membership. But as the agricultural way of life declined in Georgia during the mid 1900's, so did the church. When the church was dissolved in 1959, it had an active resident membership of twenty-three people.³² But still, the tradition of Bark Camp lives on in the churches it fathered. Two of these churches are in Burke County; Rosier and Midville Baptist (located five miles east of the Bark Camp site). A third is named Hines Baptist and is located in Emanuel County.

APPENDIX 1

Pastors of Bark Camp Baptist Church

Pastor	Years Served
Miles Scarborough	1788-89
David McCullers	1790-99
Edmund Talbot	1800-08
George Franklin	1808-16
John Stanford	1816-27
Joshua Key	1828-32
William M. Maund	1832-39
W. L. Tucker	1839-54, 57
J. H. T. Kilpatrick	1855
W. M. Verdery	1856
William H. Davis	1859-69
W. L. Kilpatrick	1870-71
E. R. Carswell	1872-84
J. J. Hyman	1885-88
B. A. Geiger	1889-90
B. A. Slater	1891
Thomas J. Beck	1892-94
M. R. Little	1895-99
W. J. Stockman	1902-05
J. H. Carpenter	1906-09
William Young	1911
Norman W. Cox	1912-13
R. H. Dudley	1914

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Pastor	Years Served
W. M. Ivey	1916-17
W. J. Stockton	1918-19, 33
O. B. Newsome	1920-22
H. M. Cannon	1924-27
J. Calvin Smith	1929-32
J. B. Livey	1934-38
Floyd T. Jenkins	1939-41
J. W. Gains	1942
Thad Persons	1943
T. A. Burrell	1948
Charles F. Mathews	1950
Harry P. Chaffin	1951-52
James V. Wilkinson	1953
Olin Sizemore	1955
A. M. Dychess	1957

APPENDIX 2

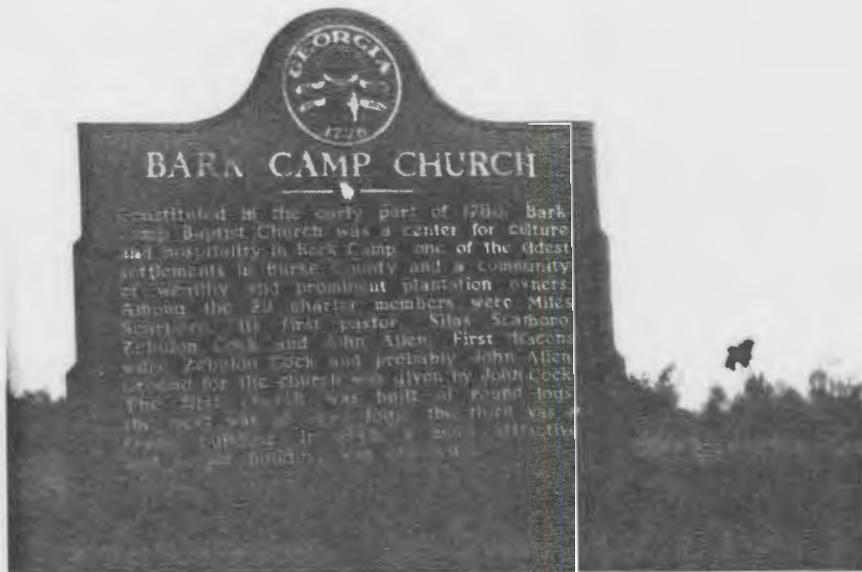
Black Membership in Relation to
Total Membership 1858-1867

Year	Total Membership	Black	%
1858	298	220	74
1859	266	188	71
1860	240	176	73
1861	257	183	71
1862	268	189	71
1864	248	176	71
1865	287	195	70
1866	359	268	75
1867	615	524	85

Record not available for 1863



The church building as it is today



Georgia Historical Marker on Hwy 56



Interior veiw of the church



Overveiw of the cemetery



Marker of Jeremiah Inman;
prominent member in church's history



View of Inman family plot



Marker in honor of Johnathan Coleman
erected in the 1930's which notes the
year in which the church was established



Marker of James C. Burton who was killed
at the Battle of Gettysburg
Caption reads, "Another name added to
Georgia's Roll of Honor"

NOTES

¹Albert M. Hillhouse, A History of Burke County, Georgia 1777-1950 (Swainsboro, Ga.: Magnolia Press and Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Company, 1985), 256.

²Bark Camp Baptist Church Records, 1790.

³William Lafayette Kilpatrick, The Hephzibah Baptist Association Centennial 1794-1894 (Richards and Shavers, Printers, 1894), 274.

⁴Bark Camp Records, 1790.

⁵Mrs. Howard H. McCall, ed., Roster of Revolutionary Soldiers in Georgia (Baltimore: Geneological Publishing, 1969), 57.

⁶John H. Goff, Placenames of Georgia, Francis Lee Utley and Marion R. Hemperley, eds (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 7.

⁷Kilpatrick, 273.

⁸Ibid, 277

⁹Ibid, 12.

¹⁰Ibid, 13.

¹¹Hephzibah Baptist Association Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1833

¹²Ibid, 1843-1844

¹³Kilpatrick, 22.

¹⁴Ibid, 23.

¹⁵Ibid, 141-142

¹⁶Ibid, 90-91

¹⁷Ibid, 93.

¹⁸Hephzibah Baptist Minutes, 1808.

¹⁹Kilpatrick, 49.

²⁰Bark Camp Records, 1824.

²¹Kilpatrick, 49.

²²Ibid, 49.

²³Ibid, 85.

²⁴Ibid, 108.

²⁵Ibid, 109.

²⁶Bark Camp Records, 1864.

²⁷Kilpatrick, 110.

²⁸Ibid, 111.

²⁹Ibid, 112.

³⁰Ibid, 113.

³¹Bark Camp Records, 1867.

³²Hephzibah Baptist Minutes, 1958.