

The Steeple Still Stands

First Baptist Church, Cowpens was totally destroyed by a fire on Saturday, December 26th, 2020. The flames and smoke were visible from six miles away. The steeple that stands on its own foundation still stands, the communion table with the words, "Do this in remembrance of me," and the brass cross on the back wall was saved. As far as they now know, nothing else was saved from the fire. A congregation that started under a brush arbor in 1878 met the very next Sunday at a local school and the transitional pastor, Rev. Kermit Morris said: "there was somewhat of a peace, God is going to raise this church up and we're going to be a light for the community is what I feel." We can continue to have a positive outlook looking to the future and not looking back. Looking ahead to what God has in store," He asked for prayers. He said the church did have insurance on the building and they have set up a Fund entitled Cowpens First Baptist Church Disaster Relief Fund, Box 1818, Cowpens, and S. C. 29330.

Because of increased attendance and growth of the town in the 1950s, the church voted to tear down the old structure and build a new sanctuary and educational building. Construction was completed in 1956.

In 1952 the church agreed to sponsor the Oakdale Mission located east of Cowpens. Eventually, this became Oakdale Baptist Church in 1973.

In 1972, a Spanish Outreach Ministry was begun for seasonal workers and resident Spanish speaking people in the area. The Broad River Baptist and the Spartanburg County Baptist Association now sponsor this work known as the Hispanic Ministry of Cherokee and Spartanburg County.

The need for an educational annex, fellowship hall, kitchen and more Sunday school classrooms was completed in 1978.

In 1987, the church caught fire, the steeple, balcony and much of the sanctuary interior were severely damaged. It was decided to renovate and extend the sanctuary for increased capacity. The building was dedicated in Sept of 1989. In 2012 a family life center was completed. The sanctuary underwent another renovation in 2016.

Cowpens First Baptist was the home of the late missionary Miss Bertha Smith. She devoted her life to mission work. She spent forty years as a missionary to China and Taiwan and was instrumental in the Shantung Revival. The church had her portrait in the prayer room with some things from China.

If you are standing in front of the church today, you see the four ornate columns and high in the sky, you see the tall steeple standing on its foundation with the cross at the top. During the uncontrollable fire a beautiful rainbow was seen on the side of the building.

Yes the tall beautiful steeple still stands, God sends a rainbow and isn't it a

"God blessing" that a fire cannot extinguish or erase the service, memories and love that has been given to Him through years of ministry at First Baptist in Cowpens.

Why did I write about this church? This is my home church, I was raised in Cowpens, I was baptized in this church and had my wedding in this church. My daddy was chairman of the building committee when the church was built. My Mom played the piano there for thirty or more years my aunt played the organ. I was youth director there one summer. I felt so strongly to do this. I had the last directory they printed that had most of the historical facts in it that I printed in this article, plus I interviewed many people that are members there now and I asked them if anything had been written about the church within the last couple of years. One of them told me that with the covid that they had only about 100 to 120 members coming now and they did not know of anything that had been written lately. They sent me pictures of the church burning. One lady that had been a member in the past said, I want to send you a picture of the church when it was burning and in the smoke you can see the devil's head and above the devil's head you can see a cross.

So visible now is that beautiful steeple and they are planning to save it. When I was driving to Cowpens to see the church after it had burned, when we were about a mile from the church the lady in the car with me said, "Oh Martha the steeple is still standing" and she started clapping her hands and to that church I would say stand tall, like that steeple and be a witness in that community and around the world and let everyone

know we serve a mighty God and He will direct and see you through in such a time as this.

Written by: Martha Moore Axmann