



Salem Baptist Church
Celebrating our 175 Anniversary

May 5th 1832 – 2007

The first permanent Baptist Church in Ralls County
Organized by Elder Jeremiah Vardeman



Rev. Jeremiah Vardeman

Born in Wythe County Virginia, he was ordained in 1801.

In 1830 he moved to Ralls County where he died May 1842.

**He founded the Jeremiah Vardeman School of Theology
in Liberty, Missouri, which is now a part of William Jewel College.**

**In 1834, he presided in a meeting, convened for the purpose of
organizing a system of domestic mission in the State.**

**The organization grew in to the
General Association of Missouri Baptist.**

**Salem Baptist Church
History**



**175th Anniversary
May 5, 1832-2007**

History of Salem Baptist Church Center, Missouri

Compiled by Pastor B. Earl Lett

Only twenty-nine years after the Louisiana Purchase and twenty years after the War of 1812 in which our National Capital was burned by the British and our National Anthem written by Francis Scott Key, in the early history of our Country when our young nation with a population of 13,000,000 was only 56 years old, when the State Of Missouri had not yet reached its twelfth birthday and Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States was at the head of our government, back in the specific year of 1832, important events were happening.

This was only two years after Peter Cooper made a trial run with his steam railway engine on the tracks of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad carrying twenty-four courageous passengers at the "dangerous" speed of four miles per hour, one year before the Oberlin College, first coeducational institution in the U.S. was established: the first opera house opened its doors in New York City, and the first public library in the U.S. was established at Peterborough, New Hampshire.

In 1832 McCormick had just invented the reaper, Samuel Morris, a portrait painter, declared he could use electricity for carrying messages through it was not until twelve years later that he succeeded in inventing telegraphy. South Carolina was threatening to leave the Union over protective tariff, and strong anti-slavery feeling was arising in the North but it was not until thirty-one years later that Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

While our nation consisted of only twenty-five states, the buffaloes and Indians still roamed the unsettled West, and the dauntless pioneers pushed courageously into new territory over treacherous rivers and dangerous Indian trails by ox cart and Conastoga wagon, in the eleven year old state of Missouri the sacred institution now known as the Salem Baptist Church was constituted near the spot where the church now stands on May 5, 1832 by Elder Jeremiah Vardeman.

From the history, Salt River Association, by Wiley Jones Patrick, published in 1909, I have obtained an interesting sketch of Elder Vardeman.

Jeremiah Vardeman was the youngest of twelve children. He was born in Wythe County, Virginia, July 8, 1775. His father was Swedish and his mother was Welsh.

In the autumn of 1779 the Vardeman family moved into the wilds of Kentucky when Jeremiah was only four years old. Jeremiah in his youth served as a scout and actually took part in the Indian wars before their close by Wayne's Victory in 1794. Jeremiah had but little opportunity for education but acquired some ability in reading, writing and arithmetic.

When he was 17 years of age he made a profession of faith during a revival at the Cedar Creek Baptist Church in Kentucky but very soon drifted into a life of gaiety and carelessness, although he had felt when he professed Christ that he should become a preacher.

Regarding himself as unworthy of church membership he left the church membership and the church without apology or explanation.

He eloped with Miss Elizabeth James and they were married without the approval of her family.

Together they lived a life of gaiety until they both had a religious experience which deeply aroused Jeremiah. He was restored to church membership and immediately promised the Lord he would do His will at any cost. From this time on until his death he was an ardent evangelist.

His ministry was conducted both in the country and the cities. Early in the spring of 1820 Elder Vardeman went to Nashville, Tenn., for service where he found only three Baptists. He conducted services in the Methodist Church for a while and later organized his services in the courthouse. By October 1 the church which he had organized numbered 150 members.

In the winter of 1828 and 29 he conducted a series of meetings in Cincinnati where over nine hundred confessed Christ.

Mr. Vardeman's first wife died. She was the mother of eleven children. His second wife, Elizabeth Bryan was the mother of one daughter. His second wife died in 1822. His third wife to whom he was married in 1823 was the mother of four children.

Being responsible for a large family and servants Elder Vardeman decided it would be better to move farther west. In October 1830 he located on a two hundred acre farm on Salt River in Ralls County.

Elder Vardeman did not keep a record of converts but the probable number has been estimated at not less than eight thousand. In addition to organizing the Salem Baptist Church, he helped to organize and evangelize other churches of Missouri.

Patrick describes him thus: "His usual weight was 300 pounds; yet his personal appearance graceful and commanding. His voice was powerful, sonorous and clear: his enunciation distinct and he

could be heard in the open air for a great distance. He took an active part in bringing the Baptist denomination in Missouri into active and harmonious cooperation in benevolent efforts”.

This is the picture which history has painted for us of the man who organized Salem, the first permanent Baptist Church in Ralls County, May 5, 1832, and served for five years as the Church's first pastor.

In the history of the church which was read at the Centennial by Mrs. Olive Watson Ditzell in 1932, it is stated that a paper found in the old Ellis family Bible is believed to bear the names of the charter members. They are Jeremiah Vardeman, his wife, Lucy, and two daughters, Dulcena and Julia; Henry Inlow and wife, Salona, who were the parents of Rev. Dudley Inlow and the grandparents of Rev. R.M. Inlow, an outstanding minister of his day; Dabney Jones and wife, Sarah; Elizabeth Blanchard; Thomas Conn and wife, Mildred; Francis Conn and wife, Nancy; Mrs. Elizabeth McGrew; and James Ledford and wife, Nancy. Patrick in his "History of Salt River Association" states there were eighteen charter members and the above list contains only sixteen. In Patrick's history there are five additional names found listed as constituent members of Salem. They are John Jefferies, Thomas Ellis and wife Elizabeth, and Wm. Boyd and wife Edna, which would bring the total to twenty-one, but I am unable to correct this discrepancy.

As listed in the Centennial history of the church, the pastors for the first one hundred years were; Elder Jeremiah Vardeman for five years. He was succeeded by Rev. David Hubbard who also served for five years. Rev. Walter McQuie 1842-1846; Rev. Benjamin Stevens 1846-1848. He was succeeded by Rev. Wm. Vardeman, son of the church's founder, who served for a period of ten years. Then came the Rev. R.C. Musick who was followed by Rev. John W. Keach. Rev. M.C. Busby became pastor in 1872. In 1874 Rev. B.F. Hixon was called. After five years he was succeeded by Rev. J.D. Biggs. Then came Rev. Wiley J. Patrick, author of the "History of Salt River Association" and pastor during the time of the church's greatest spiritual prosperity of which we have any record. He was followed by Rev. H. B Rice who served for two years. The next pastor was Rev. W.M. Tipton. Then in the following order came Rev. J. W. McAtee, Rev. N.E. Broaddus, Rev. G.T. Baker, Rev. Oliver Reed, Rev. R.T. Cambell, Rev. R.I. Connelly, Rev. Carl Schneider and Rev. M.D. Ratliff.

Since Salem celebrated it's Centennial in 1932 there have been nine pastors. Rev. L.B. Arvin served as supply pastor from November 1932-March 1936. The church record contains very little information

about this period. From July 1936-1941 Rev. T.E. Clark was the pastor. The church book records that he was injured in an automobile accident on the way to Salem in March of 1937 and was unable to fill his appointment that month.

Rev. Glenn Irons, present pastor of the First Baptist Church of Boonville, Mo., served at Salem from March 1942 until sometime in 1944 during which time there was a good number of additions to the church.

Rev. Russel Kreft, now of Louisville Seminary, was pastor from 1944 to 1946.

Rev. Charles Whaley, present pastor of the Baptist Church of Stover, Mo., served the church from October 20, 1946 until the fall of 1948.

Rev. Robert Y. Smith, now pastor of a newly organized church in Kansas City, Mo., became the pastor of Salem in October 1948 and served for about two years. In the beginning of his ministry church changed from its traditional "one Sunday a month preaching" to two Sundays per month and has maintained a "half-time" ministry ever since. The church also held its first Daily Vacation Bible School under Brother Smith's ministry.

Rev. Elvin Hall was pastor of Salem for a period of about two years during 1950 to 1952.

In July 1952 the present pastor and compiler of this historical sketch B. Earl Lett, began his ministry and pastor and people are endeavoring to maintain the sacred traditions of Salem Church.

From available records, which seem to be authentic, Salem has had twenty-nine pastors, two of which served for at least ten years each. The average pastorate up to the present time has been a little more than four and one-fourth years.

The first meeting place of the constituent members of Salem seems to have been a brush arbor which was constructed by slaves of Elder Jeremiah Vardeman who organized the church on May 5, 1832. Since then the church has had five buildings. The first one was built of logs on a spot now enclosed in the northwest corner of the Salem Cemetery. The second was a two room brick building, one room of which was used for a school. It was located across on the south side of the road from the present building and just west of the cemetery. Its cost is listed at about \$1000. The third, a frame building, was constructed in 1855 at a cost of \$1500. The fourth building was frame and was erected in 1898 at a listed cost of about \$2500. Some of the materials salvaged from the previous building were used in its

construction. Pictures of this building are in possession of some of the present members of the church and may be seen today at this 125th anniversary of the church.

The fourth building burned and was replaced in 1929 by the present structure in which we meet today.

For one and a quarter centuries the gospel has sounded forth from the Salem Church; from the days of the old hand reapers and the wearily plodding oxen plow to the age of mechanized farming; from the slowly lumbering stage coach to the era of television, trans world airliners, supersonic jet planes, atomic power and man made satellites; from a country of only twenty-five states and a population of only thirteen million to a mighty nation of forty-eight states reaching from sea to sea and a population of more than 160 million: but through all the years the Salem Church has ever embraced the same message of Salvation through the crucified, risen, reigning savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Salem Cemetery rest the mortal remains of many whose memory will ever be held sacred in our hearts. Truly we have met today on ground made hallow by saints who long have dwelt on the fairer shores of that better land and whose feet now tread the golden streets of the New Jerusalem with whom we soon shall gather and blend our voices in the songs of Moses and the Lamb in eternal praise for Him who loved the church and gave Himself for it. Through succeeding generation may Salem members and friends continue in loyalty and devotion to the eternal Gospel until Jesus comes again.

Mrs. Margaret Morley continues the history of Salem compiled by Rev. B.E. Lett. Pastors from 1952 to 1994 were Rev. B.E. Lett 1952-1963. He was succeeded by Rev. Ronald Allen 1964-1965. Then came Rev. Clark Triplett, ministerial student at Hannibal LaGrange College from April 1965 until August 1965. He was followed by Rev. Gerald Harrison 1965-1969, during Rev. Harrison's leadership Vacation Bible School was held and good stewardship was promoted. The next pastor was Rev. Milo Duer 1969 until July 1975. Followed by Russell Brownell who filled the pulpit five weeks before entering the Baptist Seminary at Forth Worth, Texas. He was succeeded by Steve Brown ministerial student at Hannibal La Grange College. He was ordained as Baptist Minister in Salem Church and served from 1975-1988. In 1978 during Rev. Brown's service an 18' X 46' basement was added to the north side of the church for Sunday school rooms and a water system was installed. In 1982 Salem celebrated it's 150 anniversary with Homecoming and old fashion days.

Then came Rev. Bill Dexheimer who was ordained August 27, 1989. He served from September, 1988 until September, 1993. During Rev. Dexheimer's service Salem received the Award Certificate for Pacesetter in Baptism, the church was incorporated, and the county road was re-routed to the south side of the cemetery. In 1989 a structure was built on top of the basement for more Sunday school rooms. In late 1991 members of the church began building on the west end of the church. The basement addition serves as a new kitchen and fellowship hall. The upstairs is used for more Sunday school rooms and the sanctuary was extended. A new baptistery, more pews, new carpet, and a new furnace and air conditioner were added. The 1992/93 year was the year of the debt retirement. The first full time staff was added, Associate Pastor David Rice. Rev. Dexheimer was followed by Rev. Steve Brown who served as Interim Pastor from March until December 1994.

He was succeeded by Rev. Jeff Fisher who was ordained August 13, 1995 and served from December 11, 1994 until June 30, 2000.

AWANA Club (a nondenominational Bible club) for children ages 3 thru 6th grade was started in September 1997.

He was followed by Rev. Roger Carter July 2000 to the present. Roger was licensed to the Gospel Ministry by Salem Baptist Church in October 1996, then ordained to the ministry in April 1997 at Littleby Baptist Church.

During the years between 2000 and 2007 the church has experienced continued growth. There are many young families, children and youth.

In 2002 Salem started a daycare ministry and many changes began to take place in the building. Walls in the basement were tore down to make larger rooms. A new room was added to be used as a nursery. Much of the basement was carpeted. Additional ground was purchased to allow for expansion.

We continue in loyalty and devotion.



Salem Baptist Church was organized by Rev. Jeremiah Vardeman. His slaves built the first brush arbor in which the church worshiped. A log church was erected in the winter of 1832. In 1844 a two room brick building was built using one room for a school, cost of that building was \$1,000. In 1855 a plain wooden building was built and used for a while. The cost of this building was \$15,000.00. In 1898 the wooden building was torn down using the lumber to build this beautiful church, the floor plan was in form of a cross, each wing had triple windows, double hung of stained glass, representing the Holy Trinity. The cost of this building was \$25,000.00. In May 1926 this building burned and was replaced by a smaller building.



This is the fifth building, built May 1926 to replace the building that burned. We are now using this building with the addition of Sunday school rooms to the north, to the west an addition to the sanctuary, a kitchen, fellowship hall, more Sunday school rooms and a nursery. A baptistery was added and the entrance was moved to the south side of the building, as pictured below.



Salem Church was constituted May 5th, 1832
By Elder Jeremiah Vardeman
with eighteen members

Articles of Faith

- Article 1 We believe that the scripture of the Old and the New Testament are the infallible word of God and the only rule of faith and practice.
- Article 2 That there is but one true God and the God-head the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
- Article 3 That by nature we are fallen and depraved creatures.
- Article 4 That Salvation, Regeneration, Sanctification and Justification are by the Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ.
- Article 5 That the Saints will finally persevere through grace to Glory.
- Article 6 That baptism is prerequisite to communion.
- Article 7 That the salvation of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.
- Article 8 That it is our duty to be tender and affectionate to each other and study the happiness of God's children and to be engaged singly to promote the honor of God.
- Article 9 And that Christ died for every man shall not be a barrier to communion.

Rules of Decorum

- Rule 1 Meeting shall be opened by prayer and then proceed transact such business as may come before the church in gospel order.*
- Rule 2 Three male members may proceed to do business but not before half past 11 o'clock.*
- Rule 3 The moderator shall inquire if the members of the church are at peace one with another.*
- Rule 4 The moderator shall invite members from sister churches to sit in council with us.*
- Rule 5 A door shall be opened for the reception of members.*
- Rule 6 References if there be any shall be attended to.*
- Rule 7 In time of business silence and attention are requested of the members and if they wish to speak they must rise from their seats and address the moderator and speak one at a time.*
- Rule 8 No member shall speak more than twice on any subject without permission from the moderator.*
- Rule 9 If any complaint comes into the church it shall be entered on the church book.*
- Rule 10 In dealing with members for private offence we must be governed by the rule laid down in the eighteenth Chapter of Matthew. Publick offences may be publickly dealt with.*
- Rule 11 A motion and second must be attended to with out reasonable objection.*
- Rule 12 All questions shall be decided by a majority of the members present except choosing officers and receiving members which shall be done by unanimity.*
- Rule 13 The church agrees to meet at Salem on the third Saturday in*

each month and do such business as may come before there is gospel order.

- Rule 14 We believe it to be the duty of members to fill their seats days of business and to attend the preaching of the gospel as often as God in his providence may permit.*
- Rule 15 Where members are received by baptism their duty privileges shall be made known to these as members in good standing and full fellowship.*
- Rule 16 We believe it to be the duty of church members to bear a part in defraying church expenses.*
- Rule 17 Any male member failing to attend more than two meetings together shall be required to give his reasons unless they be known by the church.*
- Rule 18 Where as letters of dismissal have been granted to members of this church who have failed to hand these to other churches and the holders serve to think the church has no powers over them and to eradicate this evil after the 3rd Saturday in April 1869 as declared by the church the following resolution shall become a rule.*
- Rule18 Be it resolved that all letters of dismissal granted by this church to any of its members and not handed into some other church within twelve months after date of said letter it shall become null and void.*

The following resolution was adopted on the third Saturday in February 1882. Resolved that our meetings shall be on the third Sunday and Saturday proceeding in each month.

(This is a duplication of the Rules of Decorum adopted February of 1882. The misspelled words and rule 18 twice was as in the original document.)

Temple of the Country Side

*On the hill by a pleasant roadside
Stands a temple of God among men,
As a beacon light to the people
For a century and fourth, it has been.*

*No stately spires adorn this temple
No classic lines its plainness erase
While within is no semblance of splendor
Nor the presence of great men with their mace.
But this temple is modest in structure:
Its people come from the valley and hill
They are just the plain, common people
Whose desire is to know Jesus' will.*

*Through twelve and a half decades they've gathered
From their homes in the country around
To weep by the tomb of a loved one
Or in some heavenly joy to abound.*

*Many souls have been wakened with vision
In this place, as Isaiah's of old,
When he stood on God's holy temple
And heard the great truth that was told.*

*Tell me not that this church has been useless
Nor that its efforts in failure have been
From within its walls have gone many
To become better women and men,
Some have lessened the pain of the suffering
Or sought the poor and hungry to feed:
Others told their friends of a Savior
Who through grace can supply every need.*

*This torch which has lighted the pathway
Of those who before us have trod,
Into our hands today has fallen
As a gift and a trust from our God.*

*We think of the faith of our fathers
As they sturdily toiled on their way.
Shall we now abandon their labors
Or in ease and idleness stay?*

*Let this temple of God be joyous
With the praises of aged and youth!
Let us join in fervent endeavor
To enlighten the world with His truth!*

-B. Earl Lett

JEREMIAH VARDEMAN

"JEREMIAH VARDEMAN WAS A DISTINGUISHED MINISTER SOMEWHAT RARE IN THE ANNALS OF THE CHURCH. HE POSSESSED THE PECULIAR TALENT OF BRINGING THE LEADING TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL HOME TO THE CONSCIENCES OF HIS HEARERS. HIS ILLUSTRATIONS WERE SINGULARLY VIVID, HIS LANGUAGE STRONG, SIMPLE AND WELL SUITED TO CONVEY CLEAR THOUGHTS TO EVERY CLASS, EVEN THE MOST ILLITERATE. WHILE THE DEEP FOUNTAINS OF FEELING GUSHED FORTH FROM HIS OWN HEART AND POURED LIKE A SHOWER OF RAIN OVER THE MINDS OF HIS HEARERS." -J.M. PECK

JEREMIAH WAS BORN JULY 8, 1775, IN WYTHE COUNTY, VIRGINIA. HIS FAMILY MOVED TO CRAB ORCHARD, KENTUCKY IN 1779, AND IT WAS THERE THAT VARDEMAN WAS CONVERTED IN 1792. HE LATER MARRIED AND SETTLED IN PULASKI COUNTY, KENTUCKY. AFTER A PERIOD OF PERSONAL DEPRESSION, VARDEMAN WAS AWAKENED BY THE PREACHING OF THOMAS HANSFORD, FORSAKING THE WORLD, HE RESOLVED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL. HE WAS ORDAINED IN 1801, AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS PREACHING, DESCRIBED ABOVE, WERE EVIDENT FROM THE START. FOR NEARLY THIRTY YEARS, VARDEMAN LABOURED AMONG THE CHURCHES IN KENTUCKY. HE ALSO TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY PREACHING THE WORD, BAPTIZING CONVERTS AND ORGANIZING CHURCHES.

J.H. SPENCER, IN HIS *HISTORY OF KENTUCKY BAPTISTS*, SAID:
*"JEREMIAH VARDEMAN WAS THE MOST EFFECTIVE PULPIT ORATOR,
AND THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PREACHER THAT EVER LIVED IN KENTUCKY."*

IN 1830, VARDEMAN EMIGRATED TO MISSOURI AND SETTLED IN RALLS COUNTY. HERE HE CONTINUED THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST WITH UNABATED ZEAL. HE IS CREDITED WITH PLANTING SEVERAL CHURCHES IN MISSOURI INCLUDING BETHEL, MT. PLEASANT AND SALEM IN HIS HOME COUNTY. VARDEMAN WAS ALSO A PROMINENT FIGURE IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF FIRST BAPTIST PALMYRA. IN 1834, HE WAS CHOSEN THE FIRST MODERATOR OF THE GROUP LATER KNOWN AS THE "GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF MISSOURI BAPTISTS". VARDEMAN ALSO HELPED THE BAPTISTS TO ESTABLISH WILLIAM JEWELL COLLEGE IN LIBERTY, MISSOURI, WHERE THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY WAS NAMED IN HIS HONOUR.

R.S. DUNCAN, IN HIS *HISTORY OF MISSOURI BAPTISTS*, RECORDS:
"VARDEMAN CONTINUED HIS MINISTERIAL LABOURS WITHOUT RELAXATION UNTIL DEATH HE HAD. AT THAT TIME, BAPTIZED MORE CHRISTIAN PROFESSORS THAN ANY OTHER MAN IN THE UNITED STATES. THE NUMBER WAS NOT LESS THAN EIGHT THOUSAND. HIS SUCCESS IN THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL WAS PERHAPS UNEQUALLED THAT OF ANY OTHER MINISTER WEST OF THE ALLEGHANY MOUNTAINS."

VARDEMAN FIRST MARRIED ELIZABETH JAMES, THEY HAD ELEVEN CHILDREN. HE LATER MARRIED ELIZABETH BRYAN, WHO BORE ONE CHILD BEFORE HER DEATH. FOUR CHILDREN WERE BORN TO VARDEMAN AND HIS THIRD WIFE, LUCY BELLOCK.

VARDEMAN DIED MAY 28, 1842, IN THE 67TH YEAR OF HIS AGE. ONE SON WILLIAM H. VARDEMAN FOLLOWED HIM IN THE MINISTRY.

MARKER PLACED BY THE BAPTIST HISTORY PRESERVATION SOCIETY - MAY 6, 2008