

Planting 'God's Acre'

Fourteen farmers hatched a plan to remodel Flat Rock Baptist Church during the Great Depression.

This picture of my parents, Luther and Tallie Whitlock (below, right), standing in front of our home church has always been a special treasure to me.

The church was built in 1870 in Liberty, South Carolina on land surrounded by large, flat rocks. The pastor's 9-year-old daughter proposed the name "Flat Rock," and with the congregation's backing, Flat Rock Baptist Church was born.

Strong of Heart

There have been four church buildings since Flat Rock's establishment. The logs

of the first church were hewn by hand and have long since been destroyed. The congregation then outgrew the second building and it became a barn, which later burned down.

The third building, erected in 1905, was a one-room building heated in winter by a big potbellied stove.

In 1937, the congregation added four Sunday school rooms. The members also wanted to remodel the church, but this was during the Great Depression, and nobody had much money.

The weary times did not dampen the spirits of 14 men in the congregation, who came up with the idea of "God's

Acre Plan." They each agreed to plant 1 acre for God. Most planted cotton. All the profits from each of "God's Acres" were used to help remodel the church.

Gathering at the River

The salary of the first pastor was only \$7.50 a year, but the pay was supplemented with chickens, fresh butter and other staples from the congregation. The church didn't own a Bible, so the pastor brought his.

In 1903, two of my great-great-aunts, Jane Shelton and Charity Gillespie, bought a Bible and gave it to the church.

Flat Rock did not hold night services, so people brought their lunches and stayed all day. They walked, rode horseback or came in oxcarts and wagons.

My parents were baptized in the early 1900s at Flat Rock, and all 10 of us kids went there. All baptisms were held in a pasture where a pool had been built; the water came from a natural spring.

Baptisms usually took place after the August revival meeting, and great numbers of converts were baptized while the congregation sang the hymn *Shall We Gather at the River*.

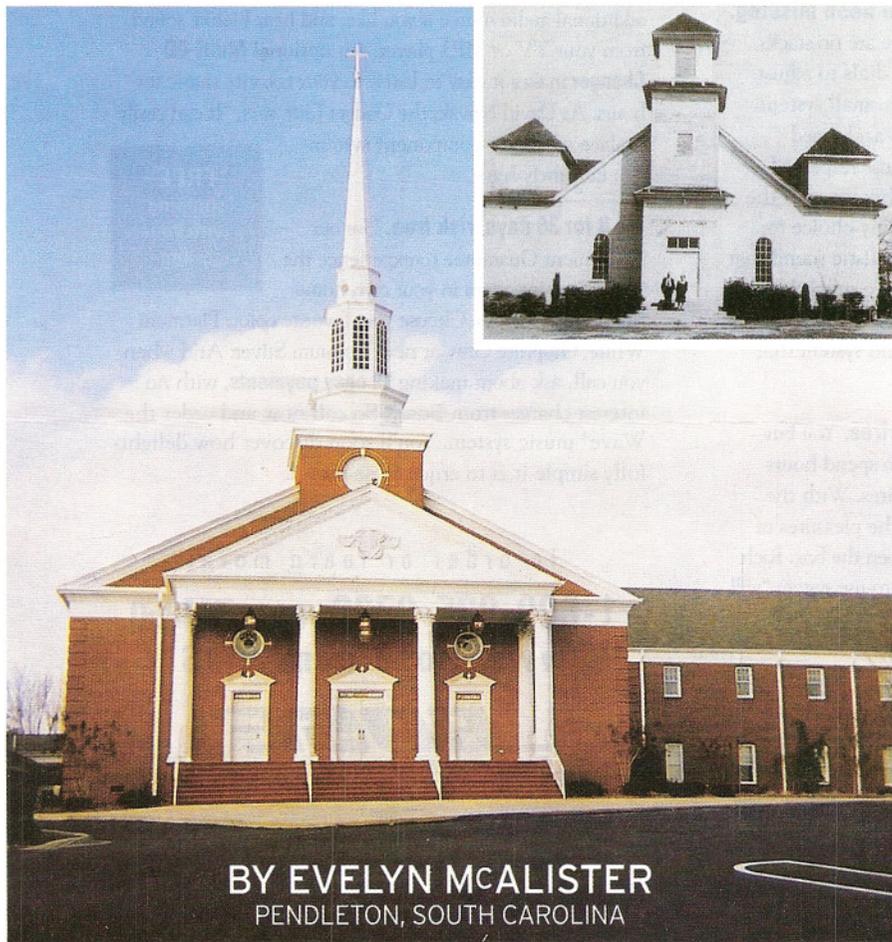
Flat Rock church practiced strict discipline in its early years. Members could be excluded for many reasons, including drunkenness, selling wine on Sunday, lying, dancing and gossiping about the preacher. Excluded members could be restored, however, if they came before the church and sought forgiveness.

Ground was broken for the present church on June 19, 1960. The beautiful brick building (left) sits on a hill overlooking miles of Pickens and Anderson Counties, with a commanding view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Flat Rock is a growing church with a heart for spreading the Gospel to the world. Anyone who visits this historic church is sure to find a hearty welcome.

Flat Rock Baptist Church survived the Depression years thanks to farmers who were willing to plant some of their acreage for God.

Marginal Note: The grass might be greener on the other side of the fence, but you still have to cut it.



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