

## PREACHING AT THE CREEK

Submitted by Marty Everse

While hot on the research trail of Montevallo's early settler Edmund King, Carey Heatherly, UM archivist, recently made a startling discovery. Buried in plain sight but deep in the bowels of the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery, he dug up the minutes of the Shoal Creek Baptist Church. To anyone interested in the earliest history of Montevallo, the hard to read, scribbled notes within the pages of the book give an astonishing view of the town's pioneer families. This first Baptist church in Shelby County was located near the Perry-Mahler House in the northeast corner of what is today Shoal Creek Park. Fourteen people first met in what was called the Shoal Creek Meeting House in October 1817 and formed a branch of the Cahaba Valley Baptist Church, a church still active today on the banks of the Little Cahaba River in Bibb County. In April 1820, Shoal Creek became a church in its own right. Three years later, the congregation decided to build a new house of worship, a building that took 10 months to complete. In 1845, this second meeting house was "pulled down" and a new one constructed in the same location.

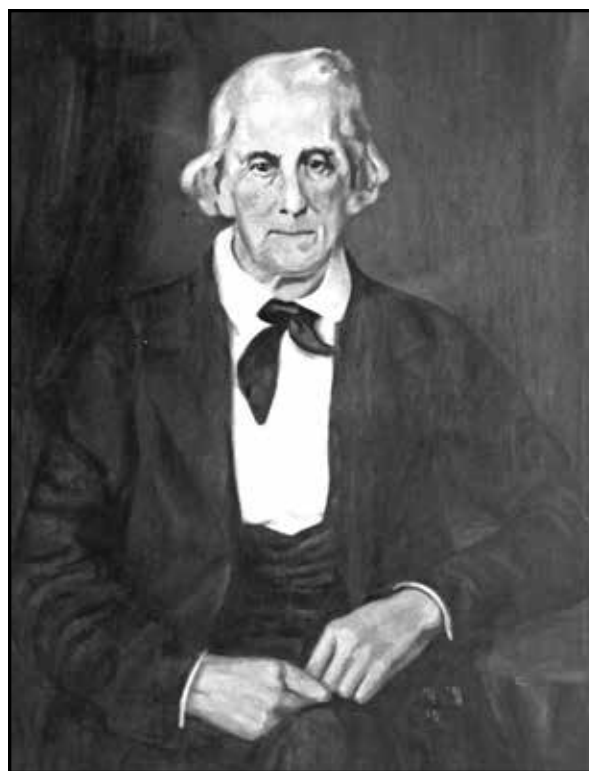
The minute book, originally kept by Edmund King the church clerk, recorded in detail the membership, when people joined, left, or were excluded. Those excommunications, as they were often cited, were for a variety of reasons chief among them was intoxication followed by non-attendance, fighting, swearing, gambling and dancing. Fighting, swearing, and gambling were a common trifecta. There were a few cases of adultery and even one of something called buggery. Guilty parties were returned to fellowship once they came before the congregation and admitted their wrongdoing in a humble and heartfelt way.

Few men had a greater weakness for the contents of the little brown jug than George Lucas. Both George and his wife Nancy were early members of Shoal Creek but over an 18 year span, 1830-1848, poor George was kicked out of fellowship five times. Four times he made a "humble confession of the sinful course which he had pursued" and was taken back into the fold. The church minutes end without any mention of a final plea for forgiveness. Throughout his bouts of backsliding, his harried wife remained a church member.

From the very beginning of the Shoal Creek Church whites and blacks worshiped together. Blacks were seldom referred to as slaves. They were servants or men and women of color in the record. The most remarkable man of color in the flock was a servant of Edmund King, Brother Nelson. Nelson was a church member from the earliest gatherings in the first meeting house but hit a rocky patch in 1820 when he and fellow King servant, Jacob, got into an undisclosed tiff and were both excommunicated. However, within a year they were restored to fellowship and the following year both were approved to "exercise their gifts," and the congregation instructed to attend and hear them

preach the second Sunday of each month. Five years later, Nelson and Jacob were again at each other's throats. This time it was obvious the quarrel was over a woman, a servant of Edmund King named Sucky. After an investigation, Nelson was again excommunicated having been found guilty of "incontinency and licentious conduct towards Sucky." In 1831, a church committee proposed reconsidering Nelson's case but after studying the matter, the excommunication was confirmed. Twenty-two months later, Nelson himself made application for readmission but was turned down. He tried again in 1835 and 1840 with the same result. This apparently ended Nelson's quest to be a Baptist.

The Shoal Creek Church minutes are fairly complete through 1851. After that there are only a few meetings recorded and nothing after 1857. The final minutes were kept by a secretary barely literate.



*A life-long Baptist, Edmund King served the Shoal Creek Church as secretary, treasurer and deacon. He was not above straying from the straight and narrow but readily confessed to his misdeeds. On one occasion, in 1824, he voluntarily acknowledged "of having acted improperly while in a passion" with the local doctor.*



540 Shelby Street • Montevallo, AL 35115  
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