

Past Perspectives February 2016

Miller Church

The Miller Church and Cemetery are located just south of Bella Vista, at the corner of Miller Church Road and Punkin Hollow Road. The site can be reached by going south on Chelsea to Arthur until it becomes Punkin Hollow Road, or by taking Prescott from Chelsea to Miller Church Road.

Rachel Hildebrand Miller was born on February 24, 1841. The church and cemetery are named after her and her first husband, William Miller. The school, formerly District 74, was consolidated into the Bentonville district in 1949, but the building continues to be used as a community church. Services are conducted every Sunday morning by Pastor Fred Pearrow. Previous pastors included Russ Curry, Joe Northcutt, Rex Crabtree, and others who served various lengths of time.

Miller Church and School is believed to have been first built in 1865, and celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2015.

Rachel Miller and her husband William, who had married in 1861, evidently suggested that a church/school be built on their land. He died on January 21, 1898, at age 62. Rachel remarried on July 10, 1899, to John Morris. A deed signed by Rachel and John Morris and John Troutman, as trustees of the church, in 1900 shows that \$125 was paid by the school district and "...said school district is hereby given and granted the right and privilege to permit said building to remain upon said land and to use said land as school premises...free from any charge for rent for said lands." When Rachel died, she left the land to the three daughters of her niece Minnie Short. Over the years, the property has been owned by various members of the family, and is now owned by Diane Crabtree.

Ramona Short Crabtree, a granddaughter of Minnie Short, attended Miller School from the first through the eighth grades. When she started first grade in 1936, the present building was already in use, replacing the previous one which is thought to have been torn down around 1930-31. That may be when the name Miller began to be used, because originally the previous building was called the Pleasant Hill Methodist Episcopal Church, and at one point was known as Rose Hill. The community did fundraising to pay for the present building in the early 1930's, with most of the funds coming from the youth performing plays at other schools in the area.

Now in her 80's, Ramona Crabtree still keeps the books for the cemetery, a job she inherited from her aunt Cleo Williams, who died in 1996. Sherry Burnett, a local resident who attends the Miller Church, said "Ramona and her Aunt Cleo are why the Miller Church has always been able to keep its doors open. If a pastor wasn't available, sometimes Ramona would open the doors just to have Bible study or she would get a pastor's assistant." Cleo always cleaned the church, a task that Ramona took over in 1994 and continued for 20 years. Sherry's brother, Jesse Costulis, and

his wife Thelma handle that now. Sherry and Jesse's grandfather, John Wesley Clark, was on the school board.

The cemetery was fenced in the late 1950's with a chain link fence, but that was stolen, gate and all. In the mid 1990's, a picket fence was built, and that was replaced in 2016 with a bronze colored chain link fence.

Prior to the school consolidation into Bentonville in 1949, a big dinner was always held at noon on the last Friday of the school year, with a program to honor the eighth grade graduates. After consolidation, a gathering continued to be held the weekend of Memorial Day each May. One family, the Russows, moved away to Kansas but would come back each year for a family reunion, and the entire community would come to visit. Eventually that faded away, but was restarted in 2010 by Sherry and Ramona, building on the idea of Pastor Pearrow to have an annual memorial service honoring the veterans buried in the cemetery. The two women went through all the cemetery records and were able to identify all but eleven of the graves at the time, with one more identified later. The most recent burial took place in 2015, and there are some spaces still available.

Ramona remembers that, prior to consolidation, annual Christmas programs were a big event. A pie supper was always held on the Friday night before Christmas to raise money for treats for everyone. A program would be held in which all participated...a verse to recite, a song to sing, plays being performed, then Santa Claus would come. Most of the students gave the teacher a present and she would give them some small gift, perhaps a pencil.

Ramona's first teacher was Miss Wilma Watson for first grade. (Being a one-room school, each teacher taught all eight grades.) Mrs. Joe Beasley was the teacher for the next five years. She and her husband lived in Centerton. He was county judge, and he would drop her off at school each morning on his way to work in Bentonville.

Starting with Ramona's seventh grade, the teacher was Inez (nee Sullivan) King, and for eighth grade, it was Miss Esther Beasley, the sister of Joe Beasley. Esther Beasley later became principal at Hiwasse School for 16 years.

Sherry remembers her dad telling her he walked to school every day with a group of other kids, carrying his lunch. They used lard buckets as lunch pails. There was one girl in the group who was taller than all the boys, and Sherry's dad said that girl beat him over the head every day with her lard bucket. He'd come home with bruises each afternoon.

There was a tall bookcase in the school that had a door and lock on it. During the week, the students would leave their books on the desks, but on Friday afternoon, any books they didn't need for the weekend would be locked in the bookcase to get them out of the way, then church services were held in the building on Sunday morning and Sunday evening. Since most of the students had farm chores to do when they got home, usually there wasn't much homework assigned. Ramona's parents had no boys, so she was always in demand for planting corn and

tomatoes, and picking strawberries. The school term was always eight months, from September through April, ending just in time for the students to help with the crops each spring.



Miller School in 1940, when the teacher was Mrs. Joe Beasley. From the collection of Shelly Short.



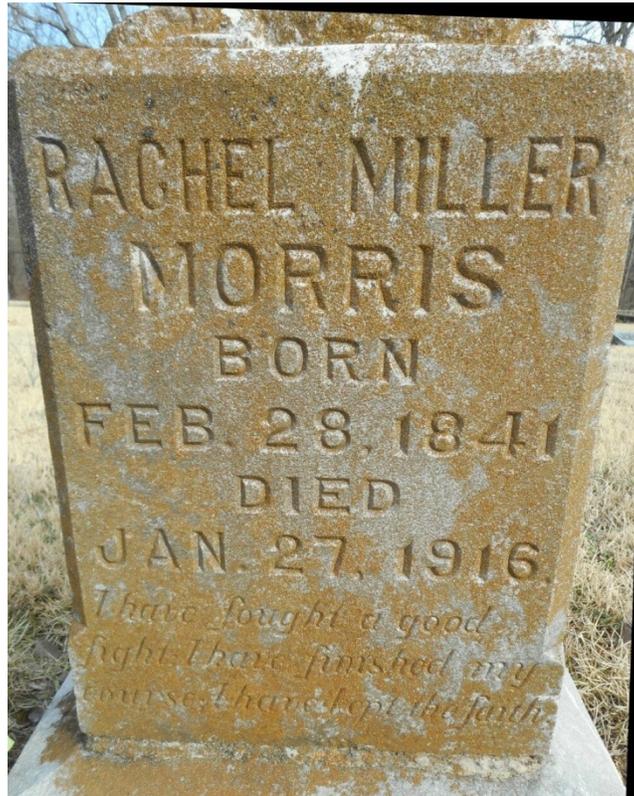
Miller School in 1922, before the present building was built. From the collection of Shelly Short.



Miller Church, with the cemetery behind it, stands at the corner of Miller Church Road and Punkin Hollow Road, south of Bella Vista. Courtesy of Xyta Lucas.



Miller Church is named after W.A. Miller and his wife Rachel. They are buried in Miller Church cemetery. Courtesy of Xyta Lucas.



The gravestone of Rachel Miller Morris. Courtesy of Xyta Lucas.



Following the death of Mr. Miller, his widow Rachel married John Morris, whose grave can also be found at Miller Church cemetery. Courtesy of Xyta Lucas.