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Minister and teacher: Gordon served one church for 30 years

By **BRENDA S. EDWARDS**
brenda@amnews.com



Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, a stone building located in Jessamine County, ceased to exist as a body soon after 1871. The church looked like this in 1898.

Neal McDougal Gordon, great-great-grandfather of Neal Gordon of Danville, was minister for 30 years of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church in Jessamine County.

After hearing about family history at the University of Kentucky King Library, Gordon checked out the file and found that his great-great-grandfather Neal was a minister and also was involved in 1848 in helping blacks from Liberia.

The task included educating men from the "African Mission." He also taught blacks at his home. One of the pupils proved to be mentally deficient, another went back to Africa, and the third

became principal of a school in Charlestown, S.C., according to documents at UK.

Gordon wrote a letter to a newspaper about his concerns about starting a Kentucky colony for freed slaves.

"We have looked to the rights of the master and the condition of the slave, but propose reflection," he wrote.

"We propose reflection will convince us that there is another important element in our social system, which ought not by any means to be forgotten. There are many persons of color in our midst, either by birth or emancipation free. While here, their condition cannot be disjoined from ours, and it is the past, not only of good policy, but of sound philanthropy, to fix upon some system of action in regard to them, which shall secure the good of all.

"Relying on your indulgence, Mister Editor, I propose in a few occasional numbers, to offer to the consideration of my fellow citizens of the state, the plan of a Kentucky colony for free persons of color, under proper guards and regulations. The intrinsic importance of the subject will not fail, trust, to secure their candid attention."

The elder Gordon also established Gordon's School for Boys in 1850 to train young men to the Presbyterian ministry. Some of the students boarded at Gordon's residence.

Many years at Ebenezer

The Rev. Neal McDougal Gordon served as minister at Ebenezer church from 1843 to 1870. The church ceased to exist as a body soon after the death of Gordon on March 19, 1871.

For years there has been no regular congregation at the church.

The church has one service a year on the second Sunday afternoon in September. The Ebenezer Church Cemetery Association has its annual gathering. Activities usually include a potluck picnic and worship service followed by the annual business meeting.

Gordon, son of John and Margaret McCurry Gordon, was born in Elbert County, Ga., Nov. 13, 1813. As a child he had a weak constitution and his parents carefully watched over him. He was naturally studious and was given all of the advantages afforded by the nearby common schools. He graduated with the honors of his class from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, in 1836.

Upon graduation from Miami University he began the study of theology in Erskine Theological Seminary, in Due West, S.C. In 1841 he was assigned to the destitute churches in Kentucky and made his first visit to Ebenezer. He was installed as pastor of Ebenezer Church on May 13, 1843.

He taught at Centerville Bible College in Alabama, before coming to Jessamine County in 1841.

Gordon suffered personal tragedy soon after taking over the church. He had married Martha Jane Harris of Maury County, Tenn., in 1841. They had a daughter, Sarah Jane, who died in infancy. Martha Jane died Nov. 5, 1845, in Kentucky. Martha Jane's closest relative was a brother, Henry Harris, who wrote to Neal after Martha's death.

Gordon went abroad the year after his wife died. In 1846, Gordon attended the Presbyterian Council in London, England, as a delegate from his Presbytery.

In 1849, he married a second time to Catharine Smith, daughter of James and Elizabeth Black Smith of Indiana. James was born May 11, 1798, in Great Britain, and married Elizabeth on May 24, 1819. They left Great Britain four days later and arrived in New York on July 23, 1819. They had four other children, Hugh, Helen, Eliza and Mary.

Smith also was a Presbyterian minister. He was Abraham Lincoln's pastor in Springfield, Ill. After Lincoln became president, he appointed Catharine's father to Consul to Dundee, Scotland.

Gordon and Catharine had five children, Sis, Mattie, Eliza, John and Logan, and a baby who died in infancy in 1853. The girls attended Sayre Institute for Girls in Lexington, Ky.

Gordon's reign at Ebenezer was by far the longest and most successful pastorship in its history. He was buried in Ebenezer Cemetery.

More information about the church can be found at Web Site www.raisemyebenezer.com.

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