

## Oldham County history: William Kellar formed Harrods Creek Baptist

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As Indians disappeared from the Oldham County landscape, pioneers moved slowly from Fort Kuykendall, a couple of miles east, to establish a new community.

The small hamlet of Brownsboro that still exists today is a reminder of this early Oldham County community, established in 1788..

Families, composed of mainly Baptists and Methodists, met in one another's log cabins for worship until the arrival of a dynamic and promising young preacher, William Kellar.

Under Kellar's leadership the Baptists formally organized as the Harrods Creek Baptists in 1797 and received membership initially into the Salem Association of Baptists but switched to the Long Run Association in 1803.

William Kellar established not only the Harrods Creek church but Eighteen Mile and Lick Branch in Oldham County as well as Beargrass Baptist in Jefferson County.

A native of Virginia and known as a wild youth, Kellar moved to Tennessee, where he met his wife and found the calling to ministry. He moved his family to Brownsboro and was described as a strong, physical man who had mechanical skills in woodworking. He ran a distillery on his farm at Brownsboro that cleared him more than “a thousand dollars a year,” which helped to support his preaching.

Kellar was described by fellow friend and preacher John Taylor as “so beloved that all the people loved to be at his house and in his company.” Taylor went on to say that Kellar's voice was “the most melodious for singing I had ever heard; and many precious songs he knew, he warbled forth with that heavenly melody, which seemed to change our wilderness into the Garden of the Lord.”

Kellar left his congregation briefly in the War of 1812 to join a corps of Kentucky foot soldiers and mounted rifleman under the command of the governor of Kentucky, 66-year-old Maj. Gen. Isaac Shelby. Shelby's forces included five brigades of Kentucky buckskin-

clad infantrymen and the 3rd Regiment of Mounted Riflemen. These Kentucky frontiersmen were instrumental in driving back British forces in the Battle of the Thames.

Kellar returned to his family and congregations after the war but died a few years later, at the age of 49. From the dozen charter members of 1797, Harrods Creek Baptist Church had grown to 279 members at the death of Pastor Kellar.

It was said that Kellar died of an infection from a bear attack he received as he was traveling to Eighteen Mile Baptist Church to preach, although there has been some dispute regarding this story. His wife, Rebecca, his son, Abraham H. Kellar, and eight daughters survived him. After his death, one of his three daughters, who was 12 years old, was severely injured in a storm when a branch fell on her and shattered her leg, which had to be amputated.

Kellar was preceded as minister by Benjamin Allen, who had been apprenticed to Kellar at 12 years of age to learn cabinet making and lived with Kellar's family for six years. During this time Allen grew up in Harrods Creek congregation, was baptized by William Kellar and became licensed to preach. He married Elizabeth Clore and they had five children: William Kellar, James Clendenning, John Taylor, George Waller and Rebecca Ann. The given names of Benjamin's sons were names of Baptist preachers of that day.

Allen got to oversee the construction of Harrods Creek Baptist Church in 1822, which is the structure that stands today. During Allen's ministry, he became influenced by Alexander Campbell, who, along with Campbell's father, Thomas, founded the Campbellite movement.

Originally associated with the Presbyterian Church, Campbellites argued that there were too many different types of religious associations and that they should all come together under one unified church, which became the Disciples of Christ or Christian Church.

In 1831, Allen split from the Harrod's Creek Baptist Church and formed the Christian Church across the road. In 1831, Harrod's Creek Baptist Church had 209 members; following preacher Allen's withdrawal, the church in 1833 had 40 members.

Harrods Creek Baptist Church continued to survive, even after the split with Allen's departure, and over the years eventually membership increased. In 1966 the congregation built a new church beside the original structure and in the 1980s, there was some concern

that the older church would have to be torn down. Thanks to the hard work of some local citizens, funds were secured to restore and keep the church.

The stucco finish that covered the little pioneer church was stripped away during the restoration. Underneath the stucco were hand-hewn poplar beams that provide the support for the trusses and floor bracing of 2-foot-thick limestone walls chinked with clay. Three long narrow windows are on each side of the building and a simple arched doorway is accented overhead by circular wrought iron sculpture. Today, as visitors walk up the stone steps and enter the church their voices are uplifted through the acoustics that reverberate from the stone walls. One can visualize a pioneer life where church socials, gospel songs and worship echoed through the fabric of the Brownsboro community.

*Reference: Thoughts on Mission by John Taylor, 1819, pp. 55-65.*