A Church and Community

A wagon train led by George Law left Macon County, Georgia in early March, 1853 for Cass County, Texas. The route was over the "Texas Road" west to near Columbus, Georgia where it crossed the Chattahoochee River at Bartlett's Ferry, then southwest through Morengo County, Alabama where George Law's brother, James lived. From Alabama they moved on westward to Vicksburg where they ferried the Mississippi River, then through Monroe, Mt. Lebanon, and Minden, Louisiana before reaching Shreveport. The "Texas Road" which closely follows present day U.S. 80 ferried the Red River just north of Texas Street docking at the foot of Bossier Street. This ferry, like the Mississippi ferry, could accommodate two or more teams and wagons. From Shreveport the road was through Greenwood, Louisiana to Old Border now known as Jonesville, Texas where it joined the Clarksville Road. The wagon train turned north on this road to Jefferson and on into Cass County, arriving in late April, 1853. They stopped in the new town of Linden and bought supplies from the store of John Moore across from the new courthouse, built just the previous year.

Their trip had taken about fifty days. On a good day they could travel twenty miles although it was unwise to move cattle more than ten miles a day. On a slow day with breakdowns, unruly cattle, and rivers to cross, they made only ten or twelve miles. After 1870 when the railroads pushed into East Texas, the wagon trains were usually made up of only the men and livestock. The women and young children would follow by train.

It would be pure speculation as to who all made up this particular wagon in 1853, but we are sure of these: George and Martha Law, their sons Richard and Henry, sons-in-law Henry Howell and Alexander Collins, the William Griffin family, the Lewis Waters family, and the William "Billy" Brooks family. Alexander Haynes most likely joined near Columbus, Georgia and the William Maxwells joined along the way. Alex Haynes later married Martha Hill Smith who had come with her parents to Texas in 1836. She is Law's Chapel's only link to the Republic of Texas era. The individual members of these and later families are discussed in more detail in the following section called "First Families."

These newcomers from Georgia arrived in Cass County in late April with little time for planting the much needed crops. Their slaves, for those who had them, could start this chore but the first concern had to be for building plain board and log houses for shelter. By fall of that same year some would still be living in their wagons and under canvas tied between saplings. There was no need to worry about game, it was bountiful. And soon William Maxwell would set up a grist and saw mill. It was run by ox or mule power and stood on the hill which is just west of the intersection of the present Law's Chapel Road and Highway 59. There would be later industry when Ben
Lumpkin built a cotton gin in the 1880's and another saw mill about 1900. These were both located about a mile east of the church.

They were indeed thankful for this good land they now claimed, some of it sold for three and five dollars an acre, but a few weeks were to go by before the need for worship seriously entered their minds. At that time George and Martha Law invited their friends and family to join them in their house for prayer meeting. This was the beginning of Law's Chapel Church.

Later that summer George Law, with the help of William and a few of his other slaves, built a brush arbor across from his house under the oaks that still stand by the present church. Once there were three of these great trees, one right in front of the church. The men used to sit on the exposed roots of this tree to chew tobacco and talk politics and farming. Down the hill from this place was a spring which Mr. Law had discovered when he first arrived. In fact he had told the rest to go to Linden to claim their lands and leave him to this peaceful setting. This spring still flows after a hundred and twenty-three years surrounded, like the church, with oak and hickory trees, dogwood, wild plum, muscadine and woods fern.

For the next few years and until a log church was built, worship would be held under the arbor in summer and in the different homes in winter, not more than once a month, by whatever itinerant preacher came along. It mattered not what faith these men happened to be. After all, the new settlers were of different faiths, although it is generally accepted that the Laws were Methodist. Whenever one of these preachers, known as circuit riders, appeared, young boys or slaves were sent to spread the word to the area residents. At this time and until the turn of the century, women often came to church on horseback, riding sidesaddle in their long skirts. To make it easier for them to mount and dismount the horses, two rounds of a large tree trunk, one shorter than the other, were placed side by side to form steps.

The log church sufficed until 1869 when a plank structure thirty feet wide and forty feet long was built. A lean-to was attached to this building for the slaves who attended services. Many of these same slaves are buried in unmarked graves in Law's Chapel Cemetery. Those at Law's Chapel who owned slaves according to the 1860 Slave Census were: George Law with eleven, George Miller with six, Richard Law with four, Sarah (Mrs. Henry) Law with three, Alex Haynes with two, Henry Howell with two, and J. W. F. Cook with one. In 1925 this same building was widened an extra ten feet and is still within the present brick walls.

On October 1, 1859, the church joined the Jefferson District of the Trinity Conference of the Methodist Church. This is the first time that it could officially be called a Methodist Church. The document of the conference reads, "The first social church meeting for Law's Chapel, Linden Circuit, Jefferson District, Trinity Conference, held its first session on the first of October, 1869. On motion, J. W. F. Cook was appointed secretary. On motion, the calling of the roll was dispensed with. The preacher made his report to the meeting. Stewards report $30. Paid, on subscription, $20. On motion there was a missionary society formed and one cent per month from the male members to be paid. The business of the meeting having been transacted, the meeting closed with prayer by the preacher in charge." The document was signed by J.M. Stevenson, the preacher in charge, and grandfather of later Governor of Texas, Coke Stevenson. The Rev. Stevenson is the only circuit rider known by name who had earlier served the church. Also signing the document was James Wiley Franklin Cook who was appointed the church secretary. Charles Hammill was appointed the
first pastor.

The Civil War was another hardship to add to those Law's Chapel had endured for its first eight years. Things were somewhat better here than for all the relatives and friends left back in Alabama and Georgia. In June, 1861, George Law received a letter from his nephew, W. H. Johnson in Clark County, Alabama, who described conditions there. In part, he wrote: "All you can hear here is war, war, war, and hard times and bad prospects for crops. Old Alabama is full of volunteers. Have joined the Home Guard myself..... times are very hard in this country. The crops look very sorry and grasshoppers are eating our cotton and corn .... I expect you have a heap of deer and turkey. Here we have nothing but squirrel .... Religion is at a low ebb in this vicinity. It looks like that people feel more like cursing than praying."

In the cemetery are the graves of these known Civil War Veterans who all served from Alabama before coming to Cass County: Wash Harper, T. S. McDuffie, James A. Pierce, and Bradberry Teel. These served from Cass County: William Dunlap, Alex Haynes, B. F. Lumpkin and Robert Lumpkin, who were in our own Home, Guard, Henry Paulette, Allen W. Steger, and David Waters. James Harris (husband of Elizabeth Law), Elijah Echols, and George A. Law served from Cass County but are buried elsewhere.

The Law's Chapel residents who stayed behind did their share for the war effort. All farm products were assessed and the surplus was sent to the army. In January, 1862 a special war tax was levied at .25 on each one hundred dollars property valuation. Sarah Law paid seven dollars on her farm which must have been costly for the times. George Law died before the end of the war never knowing if the storm clouds of that conflict spread over his beloved spring. Of course, they didn't.

Mail for Law's Chapel could be received at Courtland until 1867 or at Linden. Beginning in 1872, mail was received in Atlanta which had been founded by that time. From 1898 until 1904 there was a post office at Roach, two miles west of Law's Chapel. James O'Rear was the postmaster. Until 1869 there were few houses on the old Atlanta and Linden Road. It was then known as the Linden and Bright Star, Arkansas Road and traces of it still exist just south of the church. The only other churches in the eastern part of Cass County at this time were Enon Primitive Baptist established in 1845 near Anti, Antioch Baptist in 1856, and Douglassville Baptist in 1859. Other churches came in the 1860s.

In January of 1867, toll bridges were built over Johns and Frazier creeks by Lewis Watson. This made it easier for the residents to get to Linden or travel westward in the rainy seasons but was another added expense to their lives. The years after the Civil War were to be difficult for everyone.

In 1869 Richard R. Law, son of George Law, deeded land for the church and cemetery. Richard's brother, Henry, had died in 1854 and was the first buried on the hill by the church. All this was then Law property. This deed recorded at Linden reads:

The State of Texas

County of Davis [Cass County's name from 1861-18711 19th day of October, A.D. 1869

Known by all men by these presents that I Richard R. Law of the aforesaid State and County as far and in consideration of $10 to me in hand paid, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, has sold and by these presents do bargain, sell, and convey unto Henry Howell, Lewis Waters, Wm. E. Griffin, Alex Haynes, A.W. Steger, J.W.F. Cook, and B.F. Lumpkin of the aforesaid State and County as trustees for the Methodist Episcopal Church South to them and their successors in office