

# Verbena Baptist Cemetery, Chilton County, Alabama

By Derric Scott

The **Verbena Baptist Cemetery** today consists of a few graves immediately behind the present church building in two small white picket fences in the backyard. The church has been located on this property since before 1879 when they bought one acre "where the church building presently stands" from John H. Clisby and his wife Fannie. There are only 4 headstones still visible in the fenced areas behind the church.

The only fully legible headstone is for the burial of William Bascom Shell who was temporarily in the area and died here. That grave is from 1884, so the cemetery was in use at that time. Of the other three visible stones (but not legible today), two are documented to be Thompson children. Reverend James Luther (J. L.) Thompson was pastor of the Verbena Baptist Church in 1884 and 1885 so it is very likely that those graves are of his children. Thus far no record of his marriage or his wife has been found. Today there are no indications of other graves.

In 1884 the Church was still expanding and they obtained the next lot to the west for the parsonage. Today, the church owns this and many more of the surrounding lots.

The Sanford University Library has a photo of the old church building and a handwritten note on the back says it is the building from before 1879.

## **William Bascom Shell**

There are notes in the Alabama Christian Advocate, 6/11/1884 (p2 col 5) about him. It says he was born in Pike County 8/16/1860 and died in Verbena 3/12/1884. His great uncle was a pastor as was his maternal grandfather. He had a young child and moved his family, his sister, and mother to Verbena. He then went on to Texas to prepare to move them all there and became ill. Just after he returned to Verbena he died. His mother was Emma Wilbanks Shell Harris and his father was John William Shell who died from measles in 1864.

## **Rev. James Langham "J. L." Thompson**

Baptist Minister James Langham Thompson was born on 30 May 1852 in Coosa Co. He appears in Baptist Convention reports as early as 1879 as a delegate from the Central Association and then as a pastor beginning in 1882 at Union in Elmore County.

He married Fannie Bailey in Perry County on 15 Apr 1879 and soon had son Herman Winkler on 8 Feb 1880 (Herman lived until 1959 and was a veteran of WWI). By 1882 J. L. was attending the Baptist Convention as a minister from "Union," Elmore County and in 1884-1885 he was attending as delegate and minister at Verbena Baptist Church. It is likely that it was in these years at Verbena that his two other children died and were buried in the Verbena Baptist Church Cemetery. From the Cemeteries of Chilton survey they were likely "Aire Elmar" (a son) and an infant daughter. Apparently Fannie died before 1890 and J. L. remarried. To speculate, it is possible that she died from complications of childbirth of the infant daughter and it is further possible that she is buried in the cemetery with her children. In 1886 J. L. had moved to become pastor at Columbia.

J. L. then married Nancy Alabama Ellis in 1890. She died from typhoid in 1903 when they were living in Bessemer and was buried in her brother's plot in Oakwood Cemetery in Montgomery. They had no children. Next he married Martha F Carter in 1905. They had 3 daughters, Louise b 1907, Helen b 1909, and Martha b 1912.

He died at the age of 82 on 24 Aug 1934 from complications from a car accident and was buried in Brundidge Cemetery. Martha died on 6 Aug 1940 and is also buried in Brundidge Cemetery.