

Whatever Happened to Bootleg Corner?

A SUMMARY HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN
OF MOUNT CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

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Do you ever wonder what formerly occupied the soil your home or workplace now occupies? Or stop to think how much the landscape of our cities actually changes in the course of a person's lifetime? Neighborhoods grow and decline; some get revitalized, others get replaced. In some cases, "transformation" may more aptly describe what takes place. The following story traces the transformation of a relatively small area of real estate on the outskirts of Greenville, South Carolina.¹

Through the burgeoning textile industry early in the twentieth century, Greenville, South Carolina, became a bustling center of economic activity and development. The heart of the industry lay in the Parker District, a western region of the city formally created by the state legislature in 1922. Comprising the district were fourteen communities, nine of which were mill villages: American Spinning Company, Brandon Mill, Dunean Mill, Judson Mill, Mills Mill, Monaghan Mill, Poe Mill, Union Bleachery, and Woodside Mill. Non-mill localities included City View, Duncan's Chapel, Park Place, Sans Souci, and West Greenville.

"Bootleg Corner" lay in the Parker District near where the Reedy River passes beneath Highway 183 on the outskirts of the city, only a couple hundred yards off of Hwy 183² at the intersection

¹Greenville County was probably named for Revolutionary War general Nathanael Greene (1742–1786) or for Isaac Green, an early resident. Cherokee Indians populated the area up until the late 18th century. Settling by whites was prohibited by a treaty between the Cherokees and the British. Following the Revolutionary War, many Scotch-Irish and English immigrants began to settle here. The Census Bureau registered Greenville County's population in 1790 as 6,503. In 2002, the population of Greenville measured close to 400,000.

²Cedar Lane Road (Hwy 183) is now known as the Western Corridor or Pete Hollis Highway. Early in the twentieth century, it was Douglas Avenue (1920s), then Orange Street, and by 1939, the (New) Belt Line Highway (see Plat L-99).

of Old Bleachery Road,³ Drayton Avenue,⁴ and Hampton Avenue Extension.⁵ Bootleg Corner was a prominent part of a little community tucked behind a knoll known to the locals as “Red Egypt.”⁶ Like most small communities, the people living around Bootleg Corner were wary of strangers. The area’s growing reputation as a haven for bootleggers proved simultaneously a bane and a blessing. The “blessing” kept many unwelcome strangers out. The “bane” was the steady temptation of illegal moonshine.⁷

³Old Bleachery Road was known formerly as Riverside Drive.

⁴Drayton separates the current church fellowship hall from the main parking lot. In 2004, Cedar Lane Road access to Drayton was shut off, and in 2006, the church successfully petitioned to have Drayton closed.

⁵Old plat books show that the current Hampton Avenue Extension used to be called Cedar Lane Road. This road also marked the boundary between Greenville County and City View. By mid-century, the reputation of City View had suffered from government corruption, and residents of the Bootleg Corner community were wary of the area.

⁶Residents attributed the name “Red Egypt” to the knoll on Cedar Lane Road that has since housed the Southern Bell building for decades and now is partially covered by the new Pete Hollis Highway. The derivation of the name seems to have risen from the messy deposits of red dirt through which the school-aged children trekked on their way to and from school and while playing in the area. Of course, Greenville is known for its red dirt, but this small patch seems to have actually been nicknamed because of it. A small neighborhood baseball diamond rested on top of the knoll. Annually, a carnival arrived and set up there. James Eaton, who as a young boy actually grew up on Patterson and Monroe Streets, remembers getting free rides at the carnival as payment for taking carnival horses to his house or to the river for water (interview with James Eaton [b. 1941], of 310 Morris Street, March, 2006).

⁷People who lived in communities surrounding Bootleg Corner recall the warnings of their parents to avoid the area. Old Bleachery Road on both sides of Cedar Lane had an unsavory reputation (interview with Wyndell McConnell of 18 Pine Grove Lane).

MOONSHINING AND BOOTLEGGING

During and after the days of Prohibition (1920-1933),⁸ the manufacturing of home-made whiskey under the cover of darkness (e.g., moonshine) boomed. The moonshine traffic created multiple problems—the unregulated content in the beverages, the increased availability and resulting drunkenness, and the dangerous and now legendary distribution of it. Moonshine runners, like the producers, typically worked under cover of darkness also, and they hustled whiskey from stills hidden in the hollers of mountains to markets all over the Southeast. “These men were the real Dukes of Hazzard [sic], only there was nothing funny about their business. Driving at high speeds at night, often with the police in pursuit, was dangerous. The penalty for losing the race was jail or loss of livelihood.”⁹

The practice of producing and running moonshine in the eastern United States soon adopted a term that had entered the American vocabulary from the “western” United States in 1874. “Bootleg” originally was a noun, simply referring to the portion of a boot covering the leg.¹⁰ Eventually the noun became an adjective. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the word “boot-leg” was first used as an adjective in the *Omaha Herald* in 1889. The paper read:

⁸National Prohibition in the United States began with the passing of the National Prohibition Act of 1919 (Volstead Act) that supported the 18th Amendment to the constitution passed in January of that year. The Act defined “beer, wine, or other intoxicating malt or vinous liquors” as any consumable beverage that exceeded .5% alcoholic content. After thirteen years of uneven enforcement of this Act, the national legislature repealed the 18th Amendment with another amendment (21st) in 1933.

⁹<http://www.nascar-gambling-odds.com/history.htm>

¹⁰*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition.

There is as much whisky consumed in Iowa now as there was before..."for medical purposes only," and on the boot-leg plan.

Somewhere along the way, "bootleg" began to describe an action. Etymologists credit the famed western cowboys who used their high boots as veritable backpacks for all manner of small items they wanted to conceal, covering the boot with their pant-leg to prevent discovery. The boots were especially suited to conceal weapons and whiskey flasks.

BOOTLEGGING AND BOOTLEG CORNER

Previous to and following the Great Depression, Greenville had become known as the "Textile Capital of the World."¹¹ Four bustling textile mill villages of "lint heads"¹² working for Poe, Monaghan, Poinsett, and American Spinning Mills (formerly Samson Mill) surrounded the Corner, with other mill

¹¹In the early 1820s, textile manufactures began operating here, and the city and county soon became a textile center. Greenville's natural geography and plenteous river water supply (Saluda, Enoree, and Reedy Rivers) lent itself to providing power for the burgeoning textile industry. Within a hundred years, Greenville had achieved world-renowned status. Sources say that "employment in the textile industry in Greenville County peaked in 1954 with 18,964 workers directly employed in the mills" (Kennedy, Eugene A., "Greenville: From Back Country to Forefront" [Greenville County, South Carolina]. Vol. 45, *Focus*, 03-22-1998, pp 1(6).

¹²Interview with Mrs. Mattie Carter (b. 1927), 305 McCrary, March 2006. The nickname derived from the common experience of mill workers—exiting from their mills with their heads covered with cotton lint. Mrs. Carter (former resident at 20 Patterson Street) began working at Judson Mill at age 16 and later moved to the "Card Room" at Poe Mill about a year later where her father, Earnest Ward, also worked. Her future husband, Fountain "Pete" Carter (b. 1926) also worked here. Having multiple family members working at the same mill meant the possibility of a larger home. Families were granted homes based on family size, more than on their roles in the mill. Each week, the employees were paid in "tickets" (brown envelopes containing cash).

communities dotting the surrounding landscape of Greenville County. Each of the mill communities possessed a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and a Baptist church, but the somewhat clannish mindset of the mill villages typically made non-residents feel unwelcome.¹³

Equally clannish, the Bootleg Corner community experienced neglect by the more socially progressive neighboring mill villages, and for some residents finding steady work proved difficult. However, the independent-spirited, resourceful, tightly-knit community took pains to look after each other. A solid work ethic permeated the people, and while many worked in the area mills, others tried their hand at other honest ventures, and did all they could to make ends meet. However, a few of the locals turned to bootlegging to make or supplement their living.¹⁴ Not everyone involved in bootlegging imbibed of the corn or sugar liquor. For some, desperate for work of any kind, the black-market industry simply provided a means of income.

¹³Inter-mill community dating relationships often raised the ire of residents; some still recall how boys from one mill community interested in a young lady from another often found a hard, unwelcome reception among the young men of the lady's village. The aspiring suitor not only needed to win a girl's heart, but often needed to earn his spurs by defeating a few youthful ruffians. Though the students from the surrounding mill villages often went to the same high school (Parker or Greenville High), many within the communities did not look fondly on romantically "hooking up" with someone from another village.

¹⁴Some recall other bootleggers such as Earl Greer on Old Bleachery Road and two other ladies who sold moonshine down behind McCarter's. Michael Yearwood, a current resident of City View who then resided at 9 Monroe Street, often frequented the area as a child, being sent by his father on regular errands to procure his father's moonshine for him. Michael says that for a time the filling station (currently our Annex Building) actually served as a front for a competing bootlegger, James Moore, across the street from Fat Ma (interview with Michael Yearwood on 5/19/04). James Eaton affirms Michael's Story.

Of the bootleggers in the small community, none was more prominent than Tiney Lillian Center, known to all as "Fat Ma." People still recall Fat Ma sitting on the porch of her home along the main thoroughfare at 1506 Hampton Avenue Extension,¹⁵ selling moonshine that had been processed in copper stills from the mountains of western North Carolina, Marietta (SC), or Caesar's Head. Though legendary for her violation of the law, residents remember Fat Ma as very kind to people whom she knew. She offered help to people, especially when they were sick. In those days, the whooping cough laid many people low, and doctors regularly prescribed a mixture of whiskey and quinine to alleviate a patient's distress. Fat Ma often freely dispensed medicinal quantities of moonshine to customers so they could prepare the professionally recommended remedy.¹⁶ Fountain "Pete" Carter¹⁷ literally "moonlighted" as a moonshine runner in the 1940s and 50s for "Hot Shot" Burns and "Broad" Hartin, the reputed bootlegging kings in the state of South

¹⁵Formerly 1427 Cedar Lane Road. Previous to "Fat Ma," a bootlegger by the name of Charlie Rue did business on the corner. Jack Rich, mentioned later in the story, purchased moonshine from Charlie Rue in the 30s and early 40s. Jack was saved October 9, 1945, "at 5:30 in the afternoon." God turned him away from drinking and into the ministry.

¹⁶ Southerners seemed to have preferred drinking their moonshine from Mason jars (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,828744,00.html#ixzz0ssWA7Y7z>). On July 5, 2010, while working to clean up the portion of the Reedy River just under Bootleg Corner, Layton Talbert of Travelers Rest, SC unearthed an intact half-gallon Mason jar and some unbroken medicine bottles. In keeping with the spirit of these finds, he scrubbed them clean with Bar Keepers Friend cleanser and kindly donated them to the church!

¹⁷Interview with Pete Carter (305 McCrary), March, 2006. Pete grew up on a farm and did not live in the mill villages, though he did work at Poe Mill. It was here that he met Mattie Ward, whom he would later marry in 1983 (after the first spouse of each of them had passed away). Mattie's father, Earnest Ward, often collected old bottles to sell to Fat Ma for two cents a piece. Fat Ma cleaned the bottles out and reused them for her customers.

Carolina. The men provided Pete and others with late model Ford or Cadillac coups with the rear seats removed and the engine souped up to be able to outrun the law at speeds exceeding 120 mph, stocked their vehicles full, and sent them on their dangerous evening runs.¹⁸ Pete could earn as much as \$35-\$50 in a night (as much as many earned in a single week), depending on the number of drops he had to make. A typical run for him involved four stops: the home of Christine Center (one of Fat Ma's daughters),¹⁹ Fat Ma's, a drop at Cripple Creek (where the moonshine was stored under a manhole cover in the street), and then at Broad Street (just beneath where the jail was located at the time). At Fat Ma's, Bill Barton, a partner to Fat Ma, would hurriedly meet Pete in the middle of the street to unload the delivery. He would hand the merchandise to a girl named Frances who would quickly take it down to store in tow sacks in the river. Pete often encountered highway patrolman, Tommy Houston, a notable officer who had a knack for catching his man. Pete, however, managed to outrun or outwit Officer Houston every time.²⁰

¹⁸NASCAR stock car racing actually attributes its origins to bootlegging in the Southeast. Since Sundays were the busy business day for bootlegging, deliveries usually were made on Saturday nights. The drivers preferred not to have their high-powered vehicles resting idly on Sunday afternoons, and they often resorted to racing other drivers. The races on clear stretches of back roads gradually grew into the legal oval-shaped racing wildly popular throughout the country today.

¹⁹Christine lived along the river at the corner of Old Bleachery and Cedar Lane approximately where our upper river parking lot currently is, renting a lot jointly owned by the Schwiars and Pinckneys. "Christine's Place in the Holler," a bar currently located at the corner of Old Bleachery and Verner Springs Road, was started and owned by Christine from 1957 until she sold it to Buford B. Hartin in 1987. He sold it in 2002. [We are not sure if there is a connection between "Broad" Hartin and Buford Hartin].

²⁰The only way the police could arrest a runner was to catch him with the whiskey in his car. Since police cars did not have radios, they watched out for

Even after the repeal of Prohibition (1933), a variety of state laws limited legal alcohol sales and permitted heavy federal taxation of whiskey. Liquor stores and bars were the only legally-licensed vendors of alcohol. Liquor stores typically closed at sundown, leaving bars as the only late night resource. On weekends, however, Blue Laws restricted all alcohol sales between midnight Saturday and early Monday morning,²¹ therefore bootlegging flourished on weekends.

When open for business, Fat Ma often stored portions of her inventory under her broad skirt, doling it out as business prospects happened by. James Eaton (b. 1941), a boy living at 19 Patterson in the neighborhood, often climbed one of the nearby oak trees lining the Reedy to watch where Fat Ma stowed the moonshine after a day of business. He would watch as she lowered the whiskey into the river with a rope. When the coast was clear, he made his way down to the river and helped himself to the moonshine. James never drank, and in fact, developed a life-long abhorrence to alcohol; but he was a shrewd entrepreneur. He

cars that looked suspicious. If they believed they spied a runner, they would have to attempt to block him in, one police car pulling up in front of the car and one in the rear to prevent escape. Only once did the police stop Pete Carter. To Carter's relief, it was after his final stop on Broad Street, and though his car smelled like a still, it was empty, and the police let him go. On another occasion, a suspecting officer, began following him at the edge of town. Pete's car was full of whiskey, and he knew he could not make his drops. He drove slowly to Main Street, parked, and went into one of the businesses. The police car followed him the whole way, but passed on after Pete stopped. Pete then returned to make his deliveries.

²¹The city of Greenville had a favorable referendum vote in 1999 to curb the historic "Blue Laws" and began issuing permits for the sale of alcoholic beverages on Sunday in 2000. Greenville County was exempt from the Blue Laws for sale of various goods and services in the early 90s through Section 53-1-150 of the State Code (Accommodations Tax threshold) and by referendum (Section 53-1-160).

would sell the moonshine himself at \$1.25/qt. He used the money for his own spending money or to buy his school books. James apparently kept making enough of a dent in Fat Ma's inventory—after all, she couldn't really report him to the police for stealing her moonshine—so she brokered a deal with James' stepfather, Lewis Crane, in the following terms: "If you can stop your boy from stealing my moonshine, I'll provide you with all you can drink."²²



Fat Ma accepted cash or trade for her moonshine. Mattie Ward Smith (b. 1927, now Mattie Carter) recalls her first husband Harold's addiction to drink.²³ Though he held a good job at

²² The bootlegging industry was just one of several black markets dotting the national landscape. The Depression figured prominently in everyone's budget. Wyndell (Bryant) McConnell (b. 1941) of 18 Pine Grove Lane recalls her grandfather (Ben Simpson) using her, a small three-year old, as a decoy while making sugar deliveries to bootleggers in Marietta. Simpson ran a small market on W. Washington Street near the train depot, and the funds from his sugar sales to bootleggers helped make ends meet. Wyndell recalls the impassioned response of her grandmother (Rosa Simpson) when she learned what the grandfather had done.

²³ Mattie and her second husband, Pete Carter, whom you have already met in the story, have been most delightful resources. When I met them early in 2006, they graciously welcomed me into their home and began telling me

American Spinning, his craving for alcohol often grew great enough that he would be willing to barter with family possessions to purchase whiskey. One day Mattie spied Harold leaving the yard wearing an oversized, lumpy coat. She learned shortly after that the family hen and rooster now belonged to Fat Ma.

The impressions the Corner left on lives is enduring. James McConnell accompanied his uncles to the Corner as a young boy before and during World War II. McConnell never forgot much of what he saw, and many years later wrote a college term paper on the ruinous effects of alcohol.²⁴

Though the neighborhood lay on the outskirts of town, it fell within the “belt” of the city trolley circuit. Beyond the intersection of Cedar Lane Road and Blue Ridge Drive (Hwy 253), open farmland dominated the area. Greenville residents looking for booze could access Bootleg Corner or visit one of many other bootleggers nearby (i.e., Helen Black [near the American Spinning Mill], Bill Hughes of 8 Monroe Street, Patricia Hammond Moore of 217 Patterson [Douglas] Avenue,²⁵ J. C. Clark of 1432 & 1434 Cedar

their story. In the course of multiple visits, I learned much more about the area and also had the joy of hearing both Mattie and Pete share their testimonies of salvation and their participation in the ministry of Woodside Church of God. They kindly accepted my invitation for them to attend the “Bootleg Corner Reunion” service on March 26, 2006, and let me introduce them to our church family and briefly explain their connection to the area. Though they do not attend church at Mount Calvary, they quickly won a spot in the hearts of our people, and they definitely have in mine. Though alcohol touched Mattie’s life, she herself never touched alcohol. Mattie grew up at 8 Knight Street in the American Spinning Mill area and moved to 8 Monroe Street in 1951, before moving to 20 Patterson Street in 1968.

²⁴Interview with James McConnell (b. 1937), 18 Pine Grove Lane, March 25, 2006.

²⁵This home used to stand immediately next to the current Fellowship Hall of Mount Calvary. Mary Moore’s family also owned the corner property

Lane [now Hampton Avenue Extension],²⁶ and Fat Ma's daughters, Hazel Elizabeth Henderson and Christine H. Myers, who lived near her along Old Bleachery Road) or visit the notorious stretch of at least six different bars a few hundred yards west of Bootleg Corner on Cedar Lane Road. Cedar Lane Road's notorious reputation spread equally far as Bootleg Corner's,²⁷ and the area attracted many ministries who attempted to close down the bars through street-preaching. Today, Tommy's Social Club is the last remaining bar on this stretch of road. Gobbler's Knob, another bootlegging center along Anderson Road near the Judson Mill community, provided yet another of several drinking attractions around town.

Another ignominious feature somewhat associated with the area was the "Ape Yard."²⁸ Apparently, this area, located near the Poe Mill community (near the intersection of Shaw and Buncombe Streets), provided a moral and spiritual deep hole into which many

across from Fat Ma's place. Two buildings used in a car garage business stood on the property (pictured on cover). In 1954, Mary rented the two buildings to the Gilberts when they began in the neighborhood, and she faithfully attended the services that began there.

²⁶ In the 60s, Mr. Clark, an elderly man, also ran a perfume factory of sorts out of his home. He never welcome "Preacher Bell" to his home though Mrs. Clark did profess faith in Christ. One winter evening, Pastor Bell attempted to visit Mr. Clark during a blinding snowstorm. Mr. Clark allowed him to come inside, but as soon as Pastor Bell explained that he had come even during inclement weather to talk with Mr. Clark about his soul, Mr. Clark showed him the door. A couple years later, Mr. Clark himself came to profess faith in Christ, and Dr. Bell testifies that Mr. Clark became an avid soul-winning partner (Phone call with Rod Bell, November, 2006).

²⁷ Clifford Culpepper of 4 Edgemont recalls hearing of Cedar Lane Road's reputation as far away as Anderson Road in the Judson Mill community.

²⁸ Interview with James McConnell, March 25, 2006. Interview with Mattie Carter, April 14, 2006. No one seems quite sure of the origination of the name, but it was apparently located across the railroad tracks (from Bootleg Corner) and accessed through "Bay Rum Valley"—an unofficial alleyway linking Huff Line to the "Ape Yard" area.

hard-working men would fall, sometimes disappearing for weeks at a time while on drinking binges. Men often lost their jobs and even their families. The men might resurface in their community later, hold down another job for a while, and then return once again to the black hole for another extended stay.



"GOD PLACED A CHURCH CLOSE BY"²⁹

MISSION STATION #1 (1954-59)

Elements of life in the Bootleg Corner and City View communities became a growing social concern to the county government, and more importantly, God placed the community as a spiritual burden on the heart of a young man who desired to evangelize the neighborhood with the Gospel. In the spring of 1954, Bill Gilbert, a member of nearby Cedar Lane Road Baptist Church and a soon-to-be graduate from Fruitland Bible Institute in Hendersonville, North Carolina, began canvassing the neighborhood to inquire about their willingness to have a church of their own. After only a week or two of canvassing, Gilbert was determined to go forward, being especially grieved that this group of people "belonged to no one."³⁰ Gilbert arranged to rent two buildings that formerly had been used as a filling station and a car garage and found himself located directly across the street from Fat Ma.³¹ Gilbert, his wife Frances, and two children, Jimmy (age 7) and Charlean (age 5), began pouring their lives into the ministry here. With the help of the Fred and Alma Rich family³² (daughters Margaret, Rachel, and Betty), the Charles and Hazel Welch family (children were

²⁹The heading reverses the concept conveyed by Robert Burton (1577–1640) in the quotation below—"Where God hath a temple, the Devil will have a chapel" (*Anatomy of Melancholy. Part iii. Sect. 4, Memb. 1, Subsect. 1*); <http://www.bartleby.com/100/151.html#80>.

³⁰Frances Gilbert, Bill's wife, still recalls the way Bill expressed his burden to her in these very words.

³¹1426 "Old" Cedar Lane Road, Lot 3.

³²Fred (d. 1992) was a master carpenter and actually built the pulpit furniture as well. Alma (formerly of 1335 Cedar Lane Road) passed away on Mother's Day in 2005.

Barbara and Jimmy), and Carl and Gertrude Lowery,³³ they converted the two buildings from their mundane use and strove to make a spiritual impact. Sitting on wooden benches in a concrete block wall building reeking with a musty car garage smell, the congregation grew to more than 60 in attendance. One of the joyful moments of ministry came when Hazel, one of Fat Ma's daughters and a bootlegging partner, professed Christ and was afterwards baptized by Pastor Gilbert.³⁴

In addition to weekly preaching and visiting, Gilbert began a radio program, broadcasting live Sunday afternoons on WAKE. He enlisted the help of the Rich girls: Margaret to be the church piano player and Rachel to sing the weekly opening number, "Near the Cross." A third and youngest daughter, Betty, age nine at the time the ministry began, remembers occasionally singing with her sisters, standing on Coca-Cola crates to reach the imposing microphones.

Frances Gilbert (b. 1930) has vivid and meaningful memories of helping her husband pioneer a mission ministry. The conditions of many homes in the neighborhood and the even poorer state of spiritual health burdened the hearts of the young couple. Laboring tirelessly, they ministered to spiritual and physical needs of the people. Former members, most of whom were children at that

³³Some young couples training for the ministry at Furman University also joined them: Bill & Ann Justice and Bill & Ann Bashor. Both men were seniors and on the verge of completing their ministerial training. A third couple, training in church music, also joined them. The names of other attenders in those early years include Mary Moore, Buddy and Erlene Watson, Jim and May McJunkin (Mrs. Gilbert's parents), and Claude and Lydia McJunkin.

³⁴The mission appears in the annual minutes of the Greenville Baptist Association for the first time in 1956. The average Sunday school attendance for 1956 was 63 with a high of 81 (p. 29). For 1957, the average was 61 with an enrollment of 78 (p. 30). In 1958, 92 were enrolled, and the average attendance was 65.

time, fondly recall Pastor Gilbert's riveting preaching and the helpful role that Mrs. Gilbert filled, teaching children's Sunday school and visiting regularly in the neighborhood homes.³⁵

The following pictures capture moments in the history of that first mission venture:



Pastor Bill and Frances Gilbert stand in the middle. Their children, Jimmy and Charlean stand in the front row.

³⁵Mrs. Gilbert (of 102 Colonial Avenue) first made me aware that any other ministries existed on Bootleg Corner prior to Mount Calvary. Her interest in this history project has been the catalyst for many enjoyable visits to her home. She also supplied us with the few pictures of the ministry in the 1950s.



The four daughters of Mattie Carter are pictured above (Glenda “Ann”; Brenda, Linda, Debora), as well as Mrs. Gilbert (back row).

In spite of the mission’s growth, Fat Ma’s moonshining distribution business still outdrew the little church. More people milled around Fat Ma’s yard across the street waiting for her to open for business than attended services. However, Fat Ma never opened for business on the Lord’s Day until after church had been dismissed. In spite of her rejection of the Gospel in those years, Fat Ma regularly gave to the church out of her bootlegging profits. She developed a fondness for the Gilberts, even giving them a hand-made quilt that Mrs. Gilbert graciously passed along as a gift to Mount Calvary Baptist Church in 2002.



Though the fledgling mission met with some encouraging growth, it was unable to sustain itself and needed additional financial support. At the suggestion of the Greenville Baptist Association, Washington Avenue Baptist Church began sponsoring the mission work in 1956.

Often in the work of God, pioneers in ministry endure forceful and painful blows from which later workers are spared. In the fifth year of the demanding and emotionally draining ministry, Pastor Gilbert's health began to fail. Laboring to meet the varied physical and spiritual needs of his people, he suffered a nervous breakdown from which he would never fully recover. Early in the summer of 1958, he took his doctor's advice, left the pastoral ministry, and relocated with his family to New Orleans, Louisiana.



The mission church continued for another year or so, being led alternately by Lyman Rich,³⁶ Preacher Shockley of Brandon

³⁶Lyman was the oldest brother of deacon Fred Rich. The contribution of the Rich family in these early years was significant. Lester (Jack) Rich (of 1221

Community, Preacher Ferguson, and Tom Walton. However, by August 1, 1959, most of the little flock had transferred to a new mission work of Washington Avenue Baptist Church,³⁷ and others returned to Cedar Lane Baptist. The statement included in the GBA's minutes for 1959 expresses well the disappointed hopes of the mission and bright prospects for a still needed ministry:

Washington Avenue Church deemed best to give up sponsorship of Hampton Avenue Extension Mission and give their attention to a need in the Whitehorse Heights area. The mission on Hampton Avenue has not had a sponsor since the first of August. The chief probation officer of the Greenville Juvenile and Domestic Court thinks our work in this section has done much to reduce the delinquent concern. We need a sponsoring church or churches for this mission (p. 29).³⁸

W. Parker Road), the middle brother of the three, was a former employee of the White Rose Company just down Hampton Avenue. Extension from the Corner. After his conversion in 1945, Jack became an evangelist who would one day hold a week of meetings at the mission from April 14–18, 1957. In 2002, when talking with Jack, he immediately began asking questions about Pastor Boyd. He listened for years to Pastor Boyd on the radio and continues to listen to Pastor Boyd's posthumous radio ministry. "A fine Bible teacher," Jack says of Pastor Boyd, remembering especially his messages in the book of Exodus. In 2006, Jack is still pastoring Poe Baptist Church at the age of 90. His people refuse to let him retire.

³⁷This ministry continues today as Berea Heights Baptist Church at 6914 White Horse Road, Greenville.

³⁸Based on comments in the minutes of the GBA, the city of Greenville seems to have begun a program in connection with the GBA, targeting the rapid growth in juvenile offenders. In the first nine months of 1959, 1089 juvenile cases had come before the Domestic Relations Court. The court handled delinquent, dependent, and neglect cases. The program aimed to assign

MISSION STATION #2 (1959-1961)



Within a week of that written appeal, on October 21, 1959, a youth choir led by Charles Welchel, a former song director at Cedar Lane Baptist Church and pioneer in the mission church with Pastor Gilbert, began to rent the former mission building for a youth choir practice.³⁹ The choir grew to become a Sunday school and then to

become Bethel Chapel Baptist Mission. Under Pastor S. F. McAuley (1898-1998), a former pastor at Cedar Lane Baptist Church (June 1948-September 1959), and his faithful wife, Floree, the little mission grew quickly and applied for membership in the Southern Baptist Convention. By the end of 1960, the church was quickly outgrowing their facilities and had begun building a new facility on Sulphur Springs Road in Greenville. On January 29, 1961, the congregation moved to new facilities at 403 Sulphur Springs Road in Greenville under the name of Bethel Baptist Church. They continue at that location today.

Ironically, one of the obstacles that each of the fledgling Baptist mission efforts had to overcome in the community was denominational prejudice. Many residents had been raised

needy juveniles to area churches; however, by 1962 the program had already been discontinued (p. 47).

³⁹A. L. Martin, whose daughter Shirley was in the choir, rented the facility for the choir out of his personal funds. Harriet McAuley Bryson, the daughter of S. F. McAuley was also in the choir.

Pentecostal in the Assembly of God church and believed Baptists were worse than bootleggers and should be shunned!

MISSION STATION #3, PHASE 1 (1962–67)



Through Dr. Harold Sightler (1914-95) of Tabernacle Baptist Church, the Lord led Rod Bell, a graduate of Bob Jones University who was serving as president of the newly established Tabernacle Bible Institute, to begin a new mission church on the Corner in the fall of 1962 under the name of Baptist Tabernacle. Bell had grown up in a moonshining family in the mountains of West Virginia and was particularly prepared of the Lord to have a ministry to the people of

Bootleg Corner. He had been saved on January 9, 1957, and called to preach less than six months later through Christ's admonition to Peter, *Feed my sheep* (John 21:15:16,17).

Pastor Bell, and his wife, Lenore, stepped into the mission leadership. Bell had no previous pastoral experience, but he had a desire to reach the community. He recalls visiting people at unearthly hours. After getting off of work sometimes at 10:00 p.m., if he saw someone's porch light on, he would stop in for a visit. Bell did not always visit people at such unusual hours; sometimes he visited during the daytime.☺ Charles Cunningham (currently of 6A Savannah), used to live at 1412 Hampton Avenue Extension, and remembers Pastor Bell coming to his home on Saturday afternoons to hold "Sunday School" on the porch. Often neighbors gathered for these occasions.

Bell also sought for opportunities to minister when community residents were in a crisis. David Brown (currently of 114 Highlawn) recalls a near-fatal car accident he had as a young man of 17. David lived without much thought of God and often visited bootleggers in the area. That night, the doctors told David's family that he would not live to see another day. Someone in the family called Pastor Bell to come down to Greenville General Hospital and pray over David. Bell went and prayed, and thankfully, David survived. In fact, 30 years later in 1996, David came to Christ. Today, Mount Calvary has the joy of having David's son, Lucas, participating in our Released Time ministry with nearby Cherrydale Elementary School. Mattie (Ward/Smith) Carter (mentioned earlier) and her nephew, James Eaton⁴⁰ (also mentioned earlier), recall Pastor Bell's ministry to their family during the days when Mary Crane (James' mother and Mattie's sister) was dying of cancer at the young age of 44 (d. June, 1966). Bell visited them often, praying with Mary and ministering comfort to them. Though James was often away during that time because of his military obligations, his wife Barbara (Taylor), who grew up on the other side of Red Egypt,⁴¹ often sat with Mary, and remembers Bell's timely personal ministry to the family.

⁴⁰ James' name occurs often in this story. He loved growing up in the Bootleg Corner community and felt like it was a young boy's paradise. He loved the close-knit friendships, the camaraderie, the adventure, and the freedom that constituted life in that time and place. He has been an invaluable source in attempting to reconstruct this story, and in the process, I feel like I found new friends in he and his wife, Barbara. In May 2006, James gave both my son and me a handsome leather wallet like those formerly made by the prison chain gangs in the area.

⁴¹ Barbara grew up on Shippey Street in the American Spinning community located at the corner of Buncombe and Old Buncombe Roads. American Spinning demolished its mill community when it closed for business. The land lay empty for many years before being purchased for a shopping center.

Dr. Bell recalls those days as the days when he and others helping him learned to pray. Often on Friday nights, men from the mission gathered to pray all night. Gradually, they sensed the Lord opening a door for them in the community. They purchased the original corner property from the sponsoring church, Tabernacle Baptist, on July 1, 1966 (see record of deed below).

By the spring of 1967 more than 250 attended Sunday school. Former residents of Bootleg Corner testify that it was during the 1960s that “things began to really change in the community. The bootleggers were now on the way out.”⁴² The days of ministry were characterized by simplicity of faith and a childlike trust that God would perform what He had promised. Amazingly,

⁴²Jimmy Eaton told me this on June 9, 2006. After reading through two early editions of this story, Jimmy talked with several of his former acquaintances, seeking to verify portions of the story with which he was not familiar. When talking with one of his old neighborhood friends, his friend (Harold) made the above statement.

eighteen men were ordained to the Gospel ministry during those first five years of the mission. Of those eighteen, all but one has remained faithful to his ministerial calling. A partial list of names of early helpers in the ministry includes the following:

- Bev & Juanita Alvis
- Charlie & Peggy Anderson
- Ralph & Helen Boone
- Jim & Sandy Brock
- L.C. & Phyllis Easterling
- Jim & Susan Florence
- W.L. Fuller
- Clyde & Willie Mae Johnson
- Don & Eve Karr
- Bob and Beth McQueary
- Joe & Mrs. Norris
- Les & Charlene Olilla
- Charlie & Susan Rice
- John & Marie Rice
- Russell & Beverly Rice
- Jimmy Rose
- Don & Karen (Little) Strange
- Jim & Kathy Tanner
- Fred & Jane Thomson
- Hal & Ruth Williams

Some dramatic conversions marked those pioneer years. One of the most memorable is the testimony of Bill Hughes (then renting at 8 Monroe Street). Hughes' resistance to Bell's ministry and the Gospel grew heated and threatening. During one visit, Hughes warned Bell that he would put a shotgun bullet through anyone from the church who attempted to visit him. Bell accepted the warning but sought the next available opportunity to send someone to witness to Hughes. Soon Bell sent two of his unsuspecting "preacher boys" to see Hughes, who welcomed them as kindly as possible. He invited them into

his home, had them be seated, shut the door, and promptly loaded his double-barreled shot gun, pointed it at the men and subsequently preached them a ranting “sermon” of his own for more than an hour. At that point, Mr. Hughes began to tire, and as his head nodded in sleepiness, the boys bolted, making a beeline for Pastor Bell—they wanted an explanation of why they had been given such a “hot prospect”!

Within a matter of weeks, Mr. Hughes actually attended services, and Pastor Bell preached the Gospel with real fervor. When Mr. Hughes did not respond to many appeals during the invitation, Pastor Bell said something he’d “never said before, has never said since, and hopes to never say again” – he asked if there were anyone present who wanted to give a testimony for the Devil. Bill promptly raised his hand. Though Pastor Bell initially hesitated to acknowledge him, Mr. Hughes insisted that he be heard. He testified that the Devil was a hard master and that the devil had ruined him and his family. When finished, Bill ran out of the room. Leaving the close of the service to Charlie Anderson, Bell took off after Bill and followed him home. Finding him sitting behind the house weeping in despair, Bell was able to lead him to Christ. Bill became one of the most faithful soul-winning partners Pastor Bell ever had.⁴³

As the decade wore on, the church began to sense the need to expand its current facilities, and the church began to purchase neighboring properties. In 1967, the church built a new auditorium on the property adjacent to the little building in which it started. One humorous anecdote about the dedication service of this building is very interesting. Bell invited Dr. Bob Jones Sr. to pray the dedicatory prayer. Failing in health and mind, Dr. Jones accepted the invitation over Dr. Jones Jr.’s wishes. As he stood to pray the dedicatory prayer, Dr. Bob, Sr.,

⁴³Recounted by Rod Bell on March 26, 2006, during the evening service at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Bootleg Corner Reunion.

announced a text from Revelation 3:14-16 and launched into a stirring message denouncing the lethargy of the modern church. After a full sermon, Dr. Bob never did pray the dedicatory prayer. Instead, he turned to Pastor Bell and asked "this young man to close in prayer." This was the final public ministry Dr. Jones Sr. ever performed. He died the following year.

During one Friday night prayer meeting, anticipating still future growth in the ministry, Pastor Bell and his deacons took off their shoes and marched around the kudzu-filled dumping ground along Cedar Lane Road and claimed it for the Lord.⁴⁴ Nearly 20 years later (1985), without any knowledge of that marching prayer meeting, the church would purchase that property, and in 1991 would construct its present auditorium on a large piece of the property claimed by these men so many years before.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Pastor Bell and the men claimed Joshua 1:3, *Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.* Years later when recounting this testimony to some fellow pastors, Pastor Bell was mildly rebuked by one of the men who insisted that the promise was intended for Israel. Bell recalls responding, "Well, it worked for this Gentile. You got to me too late. I just believed it." In 2002, when Dr. Bell came to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the founding of Mount Calvary, the church gave him a small, velvet lined, mahogany box, with a picture of the old church building etched into it and an engraving of Joshua 1:3. Inside the box was a bag filled with dirt from the property the men had once marched around.

⁴⁵As the church has continued to grow and the need for more property arises, the present leadership cannot help but remember this marching prayer meeting and wonder if God means to provide the remainder of that land to the church.

MISSION STATION #3, PHASE 2 (1967-1973)



Sadly, as Rod Bell prepared to leave the church to begin to plant a church in Virginia (April 1967), dissension entered the church through a couple of Sunday school teachers, each of whom wanted to be Bell's successor. During the summer of 1967, the strife in the church grew so great that church attendance dropped drastically within a single month. Les Olilla (a deacon in the church and a member since 1964) and his wife left in July for a month to return to his home church in Rosswell,

Michigan, to be ordained. When he returned to Greenville in August, the church had only 17 people remaining. Of these 17, eleven belonged to one family who would also leave in just a short time.

After returning to the decimated church, Les was asked to accept the pastorate for the meager group. Far from desiring the pulpit, Les never believed he could preach. His heart's desire had been to return to the logging companies in the area where he had been raised and have Bible studies among the men. However, the Lord used the church's need for pastoral leadership to begin to redirect Les into a preaching ministry. Continuing to work full-time at BJU, Les accepted the pastorate on a short-term basis and without a salary, believing the Lord would have him do his best to stabilize the struggling ministry. Within a year, the church had grown again to nearly 100 on Sunday morning. During this time, the Lord opened the hearts of the people in the community of Bootleg Corner in a special way. Of the 75-100 church members, more than 50 percent were from the community. The former congregation had almost

completely disappeared, but God had given the church a fresh harvest to replace them.

During the rebuilding process the Lord enabled the church to never fall behind on any of its mortgage payments to its founding church or to miss any missionary support payments. In fact, during this time the church began to establish its own autonomy and began the process of becoming completely independent. In 1968, Baptist Tabernacle became Mount Calvary Baptist Church.

After a year, Pastor Olilla received a call from his home church in Michigan to assist the pastor in the ministry there. As he left, while the church looked for a successor, Evangelist Don Wilson supplied the pulpit for the last half of the year. At the beginning of 1969, the church called Robert McQueary, a new graduate from BJU who had worked faithfully beside Pastor Olilla as youth pastor and choir director, to become the new pastor. Pastor McQueary continued the rebuilding process and the persistent effort to reach the community around Bootleg Corner with the Gospel. Though a majority of the church people lived in the community, the pastor still encountered neighbors who discouraged his stopping at their home by reaching for their shotgun when he came by. After two full years, Pastor McQueary left to plant a church in Tennessee under Baptist Home Missions. Following him, Pastor George Kohler, a full-time employee in the maintenance department at BJU, pastored until December of 1972.

MISSION STATION #3, PHASE 3 (1974-PRESENT)



After an interval, Tom Wallace, the chairman of the deacons, approached Mr. Jesse L. Boyd Jr., a full-time Bible faculty member of BJU, about supplying the pulpit for a time “until they could do better.” Until then Mr. Boyd had been working with another small group of believers in Greenville on East North Street. By the time he consented to fill the pulpit at Mount Calvary, the church had dwindled to less than 40 people.



The summer of 1973 proved to be another pivotal summer in the church’s history. Pastor Boyd was away in summer ministry for the University. In his place, Jack Waters filled the pulpit. He took the opportunity to deal earnestly with long-standing internal division within the church. Since his ministry would be brief, he

spared nothing in urging the church to obedience. Throughout that summer the Lord used Water's ministry to purify the church and bring it to biblical Christian unity. When Pastor Boyd returned at the end of the summer, the church asked him officially to be its pastor, voting 12-3 in favor of his coming. Consisting primarily of newer believers, the church began to grow under Pastor Boyd's settled expository preaching ministry. During his first full year as pastor, the church had a goal to grow to "forty or more in 74." People began to gravitate toward the ministry because of the preaching. An atmosphere of expectancy and spiritual hunger pervaded the services even in those early days. Very soon the growing church was able to pay off its debt to Tabernacle Baptist Church for funding the 1968 building project. Within five years the church had outgrown the facilities, and either a move or a major renovation was necessary. During these years, the church felt compelled to remain on Bootleg Corner. Though the bootleggers were gone, the church believed God had put them here to reach this community. Since there was still work to do, the church believed they should remain. In 1979-80 the church extended its auditorium to double its seating capacity.

In 1979, the church called Gary Wilcox as part-time youth pastor. Pastor Wilcox served until 1986, when he left to pastor a church in Mohawk, New York. In 1980, Pastor Boyd called Mark Minnick as his associate pastor. Pastor Minnick rotated preaching during Pastor Boyd's summer ministries away. In 1983, John Tipton, a member of Mount Calvary, came on the pastoral staff part-time to give attention to the college ministry. In 1986, the church extended a call to Jeff Rush to fill the part-time youth pastorate position being vacated by Pastor Wilcox.

During this time the church continued to grow both spiritually and numerically. In 1985, the church formed a committee to investigate expansion possibilities. Under the committee's

leadership, the church purchased land along Cedar Lane Road and began making plans for a larger auditorium.

In May 1989 Pastor Jesse Boyd became Pastor Emeritus and turned over the church to Pastor Mark Minnick. Under strong expository preaching, the church continued to prosper. During the summer of 1991, the congregation moved into its current auditorium built along Cedar Lane Road, using the old facility as a fellowship hall. John Tipton joined the staff full-time in August of 1994, and Jeff Rush followed in January of 1996. In 1999, ten-years after Pastor Minnick had become Senior Pastor, the church added its fourth full-time pastoral staff member, Robert Vincent.



Mark Minnick



John Tipton



Jeff Rush



Robert Vincent

The summer of 1999 saw the completion of the first phase of the Educational/Office Wing that was fully completed in the fall of 2000. In 2003, the church acquired three lots between Patterson and Monroe. In 2005, the church was able to acquire all of the adjoining land formerly owned by the Ideal Laundry Company.⁴⁶ Most of the land lay between Drayton and Patterson, but two large lots stretched between Patterson and Monroe Streets. In 2006, the church began acquiring additional lots between Patterson and Monroe.

We thank the Lord for placing us where He has. The more of the history of our neighborhood that we learn, the more certain we are that God has put us in the place of His choosing. We attempt to minister to the people around us not simply because we're commanded to do so, but because we have grown to know and love them. It thrills us to have been on the same spot for these few decades, and to still be using some of the same buildings and properties used by the ministries that preceded us.

As we mingle with our neighbors, we continue to find people who testify to the life-changing impact of Bootleg Corner – often for the worse. Lives truly were disfigured and ruined on this corner. It is our desire that God will use the ministry He has raised up and left on this corner to transform lives for His glory. Bootleg Corner may be gone, but we believe the work of God in this area is not finished. As we rejoice in God's past wonders, we

⁴⁶In 1947, a major explosion at the Ideal Laundry Company forced the company to relocate to its location between Drayton and Patterson Streets. The magnitude of the explosion was such that James Eaton, a small boy of six at the time and living more than half a mile away at 36 3rd Avenue in Poe Mill, recalls everyone wondering if the area had been hit by a bomb. Windows of homes rattled and burst from the force of the explosion. The company operated in its Patterson Street location for more than 50 years before moving to Highway 25. This move made the land near the church available for purchase. Mary Crane, mentioned earlier, before her death in June, 1966, worked at the laundry for several years, earning \$25/week.

anticipate and desire to participate in what He will yet do to extend His rule into our hearts and into the hearts of men and women in this community.

The spiritual, moral, social, and economic needs in our surrounding community have attracted a plethora of variegated religious ministries. More than forty “churches” now dot the landscape within a one-mile radius of us. Some reiterate the same Gospel message we deliver. Others propagate a diluted Gospel or no Gospel at all.

Like many other churches in fundamentalism, people from all over the city constitute our church family, but historically few people from the area in closest proximity to us have attended our services. Therefore, an understandable challenge for our people is to adopt our immediate neighborhood as more than a place through which we simply pass on the way to and from our church facilities. Our community must become—and thankfully is becoming—a place with which our people are familiar, and its residents neighbors with whom we have intentional, friendly interaction.

To guide the stewardship of our evangelistic responsibility, we have attempted to be systematic in our approach. The best way we have found to be certain that we have presented the Gospel at every home in our neighborhood is through door-to-door visitation, attempting to cover our entire community two times annually. Our goal in these “cold-call” visits is to remind our neighbors that we are there, that we love them, and that our primary goal is to inquire if they know their sins are forgiven. For us, this ministry works in an itinerant fashion, moving from one neighborhood to the next, and then repeating the cycle. In an effort to adjust to different living patterns in our community, we go on different days at different times of the year.

While we pray for an immediate harvest, we also have come to understand the need to entrench ourselves for the long-haul of seeing God work in hearts at a slower pace than we may have initially projected. Over time, the Lord has opened up a variety of long-standing evangelistic ministries that enable us to immerse ourselves in the neighborhood and integrate our lives with community residents in ministry forums. We did not set out to implement an elaborate evangelistic program in our community, but as God brought various opportunities to our attention, He has burdened and raised up people to fill the ministry needs.

Several years ago, we subdivided our immediate community into defined areas, and we began treating each neighborhood as a specific mission field. We assigned each mission field to an adult Sunday school class. Outreach leaders in each class lead continuing evangelistic efforts in that area. People in our church are involved in Bible clubs, follow-up visits, preparing meals, visiting the elderly and shut-ins, and even assisting in cleanup projects that help an individual family or a group of families. Some of our families have even moved into the area. Our desire is to communicate that we are glad to be their neighbors in order to serve them primarily by communicating the Gospel to them and secondarily through other acts of kindness that reinforce our professions of love for them.

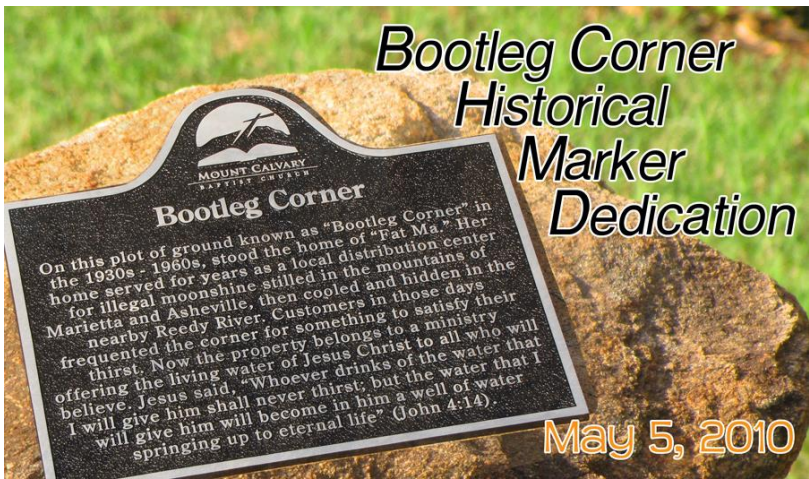
In addition, the Lord has opened the door for us to begin a weekly weekend teen outreach, a weekly Bible class on Sunday mornings offered for people who may want to take a spiritual step forward but are still a bit intimidated by a larger church service, a Spanish ministry, a Released Time ministry (a Bible class in conjunction with a local public elementary school), an annual Neighborhood Bible School, and an annual teen evangelism weekend of "Cola Wars."

We do find that professions of salvation often come more easily than genuine fruit, so we must press on even when we might be discouraged. We long to see children saved and preserved from a life of evil, teens converted and their way cleansed by the Word of God, and parents so gripped by the claims of the Gospel that they would nurture their children in the admonition of the Lord.

The neediness of our field guarantees ministry opportunities for as long as the Lord tarries. Our field has many needs, but as we endeavor to minister to those needs, we learn that we have many needs ourselves. Over time we can actually see God growing us to participate better in more of what He wants to do in our corner of town. We pray for a harvest, and we pray that we will be good stewards of that harvest.

ADDENDUM

A Historical Monument at Last! – The prospect of erecting a historical marker on or near Bootleg Corner became a reality on May 5, 2010. Additional impetus came from the Grand Opening of our newest neighbor, the Greenville Swamp Rabbit Trail, set to open officially on May 7-8, 2010. Ty Houck, the coordinator of the Swamp Rabbit project attended and formally introduced our church to the “neighbor” whose presence would bring many in our community right by Bootleg Corner and give us many additional opportunities to tell its story.





MOUNT CALVARY
BAPTIST CHURCH

Bootleg Corner

On this plot of ground known as "Bootleg Corner" in the 1930s - 1960s, stood the home of "Fat Ma." Her home served for years as a local distribution center for illegal moonshine stillled in the mountains of Marietta and Asheville, then cooled and hidden in the nearby Reedy River. Customers in those days frequented the corner for something to satisfy their thirst. Now the property belongs to a ministry offering the living water of Jesus Christ to all who will believe. Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

Actual text on plaque