



## Celebrating 100 years of worship

### Rockliff Church of Christ observes its centennial



A crowded Rockliff auditorium of folks enjoy congregational singing at the recent 100th anniversary celebration. Preacher Bill Boyd, at left, prepares to deliver his sermon. Jessica Boyd Photography

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E.G. Rockliff, above, preached at the 1918 meeting as presented in the historic newspaper ad.

Rockliff's granddaughter, Grace Baldree, at left, enjoys recent service with Dee and Gary Johnson.

Rockliff Church of Christ has come a long way since the tent meetings and brush arbor gatherings in the early 1900s.

The congregation is observing its 100th anniversary, with the first service taking place July 28, 1918. That first message was delivered by evangelist Edward George Rockliff from Michigan. This is called the beginning of the Rockliff Church of Christ, but the full history is a bit more involved.

It's believed this is the only time Rockliff preached in Warren County, with the 38-year-old England immigrant making quite an impression. He returned to work in Michigan, Canada, West Virginia and Ohio, and became a citizen of the United States. The meeting was announced in *The Warren County Times* as a protracted meeting, with "a hearty welcome extended to all."

Several years before Rockliff's meeting, a small group of Christians had gathered for worship in the old Mount Zion School, and had hosted a tent meeting near the home of Robert Mitchel Horton and another near the school. In 1916 Horton purchased an acre of land across from his home where the Rockliff meeting house would later be built.

Horton and his family started going to the mountain and obtaining rocks for the foundation. The rocks were dragged down the mountain on a sled pulled by a team of mules. At the foot of the mountain, the rocks were loaded on a wagon for the remainder of the trip. This work continued into the early part of 1917, but it was not until the summer of 1918 that a brush arbor was built for the meeting with Rockliff.

In 1920, Horton and his wife sold the land to the trustees of the newly formed Rockliff Church of Christ, and plans were made for the construction of the meeting house. Horton was one of the original trustees, and they received contributions from many area congregations. There's a long tradition of local churches of Christ helping each other. Horton was among the many individuals who also contributed both financially and with his time and labor. In 1925 this band of saints gathered in their new meeting house, with the small frame building serving them for 50 years.

Charles Talley, 90, is possibly one of the longest attending members of the church. He and wife Doris have been attending with their family for 68 years.

He has one unusual memory of the church and a predicament he found himself in. In the late 1950s he was in charge of turning on the heat to warm the auditorium prior to the service. While attempting to light the pilot light on the floor furnace the match fell into dry leaves and caught on fire.

"I thought, now what do I do?" said Talley. "I didn't have a phone to call for help, no water and no flashlight. I grab two song books, and put the fire out using the books, all this while dressed for church."

He was able to drive back home, collect his wife and young daughter and make it back to the church service.

"I was so nervous, probably didn't hear a word of the service," said Talley. "I still had on my dirty clothes, and was so embarrassed I was one of the first ones to leave."

In 1975, the current brick building was constructed, with one of the original foundation stones displayed in a garden area near the entrance, along with the original headstones from the graves of Robert and Ellen Horton.

Bill Boyd serves as the current preacher, delivering the message to Sunday's record crowd of 158. He welcomed everyone, with special recognition to E.G. Rockliff's granddaughter Grace Baldree. She resides in Madison, and was honored to be part of the historic event.

"We had a great time, with people introducing themselves to each other," said Talley. "We had lots of food and enjoyed a delicious meal and wonderful fellowship."

The congregation meets for Sunday services at 9 a.m. for Bible study, and 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. services. Wednesday evening Bible study is at 6 p.m., where everyone is invited with a "hearty welcome." The church is located at 5384 Viola Road.

"The church of Rockliff is not the church of E.G. Rockliff, it is the church of Christ, which meets where R.M. Horton labored and where E.G. Rockliff once preached," said Boyd.



Guests gathered in the church fellowship hall for lunch following the morning sermon. One hundred years ago, the meal was referred to as "dinner on the ground," and featured numerous tables laden with food displayed on the church property. Today guests enjoyed the same delicious food, but inside the air conditioned building.