

History Of Smithfield



Smithfield, Kentucky

HISTORY OF SMITHFIELD

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Author's Note

This brief history was compiled for and dedicated to

*The Smithfield Garden Club
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Acknowledgements:

*Atlas of Henry and Shelby Counties 1882
Cemetery Records
Collins History of Kentucky
Court Records
History of Henry County by Mrs. H. H. Drane*

These are memories as told to me by my parents and grandparents, and things that I remember. When I began trying to recall my earliest recollections of Smithfield, I was reminded of the song "Dearie, Do You Remember". Having lived in Smithfield all of my life, I know that those of you who remember some of the things that I will tell are a little - not much older than I.

F.M.S.

Smithfield, Kentucky, located on the L & N Railroad was named for Thomas Smith of New Castle, Henry County's first millionaire and President of the Railroad Company. The town was incorporated in 1870. When it was known that a railroad was to be built, Shelby County attempted to put the line in Shelby County, but Mr. Smith used his influence to bring it through Henry County. There was a settlement here before the railroad came through which some think was called Jerusalem. It was probably centered around the Church, which was organized in 1802 and stood at the present junction of Highways 22 and 1861.

In 1847 a company was formed to construct a railroad from Louisville to Frankfort; and in 1848 the Lexington and Frankfort Company was formed. There were some difficulties, and it was in 1851 when the Louisville and Frankfort tract was laid. It was later linked to the Frankfort and Lexington Railroad, and in 1881 the line was acquired by the L & N. For a number of years there were six passenger trains a day passing through Smithfield: going to Louisville at 7:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; coming from Louisville at 9:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. This was an accommodation for commuters. W. D. Crabb, a lawyer, utilized this service daily. This passenger service was discontinued in 1955, and the track between Eminence and LaGrange was removed in 1960.

In July 1936 a freight train wrecked at the edge of Smithfield, burning a house and barn, the stock pens and a number of people who were riding in one of the cars.

After the railroad was built, the town became somewhat of an industrial center; and in the early days it boasted of several factories: a broom factory, a chair factory, a cigar factory, a feather processing plant, and a hemp mill. A number of children were employed for short periods of time in the chewing gum factory and their wages were paid in chewing gum.

The Smithfield Milling Company was started in 1870 as a grist mill, by John E. Watkins. His son, Richard Watkins, built the present building in 1898. Four generations of the family have been connected with this milling business, which is in operation today.

Interesting existing businesses as listed in "Atlas of Henry and Shelby Counties 1882" included the following: W. L. Vories, ex-State Senator, was Agent for the Louisville-Lexington Railroad. He also owned a drug-store which his nephew, my grandfather, I. G. Meade, operated for several years.

William Hieatt was Justice of the Peace and Conveyancer.

William T. Poulter was Postmaster.

C. F. Jackson operated a general store.

Isaiah Fawkes was a carpenter, contractor and wagon maker.

E. V. Berry was a carpenter and contractor.

W. B. Gardner was a carpenter, contractor and dealer in hard and soft lumber.

W. A. Brentlinger was a blacksmith. The shop was later operated by Harry Hammond, a typical smithy.

L. W. Sanders was a bricklayer.

B. F. Jackson was a stock-breeder and dealer.

J. Sam Callaway was a breeder and dealer in fine horses and cattle.

William Atchison was a dealer in all kinds of livestock, with mules as a specialty.

Jessie M. Jackson was a fine-stock breeder and owner of a stable and track 1½ miles east of Smithfield. He also owned a race-track on the Hill farm.

John E. Watkins was the owner and patentor of the celebrated washing machine. His advertisement stated, "My machine is made entirely of wood; anyone can keep it in repair; it will wash five times as fast as any other machine; it will not injure clothes. State, County, Township or Precinct rights for sale; also machines are manufactured and for sale by owner at his shop or residence. All persons wanting machines or territories will call by letter or personally at Smithfield, Kentucky. Also miller and manufacturer where custom work will be done at all times."

Now, I remember when Mr. Watkins operated a saw-mill on about the spot where Corliss Watkins' home stands.

The first Post-office was established in the depot in 1851 with Fleet H. Goodridge as the first Post-master. A number of people served as Post-masters between 1851 and 1914 when Miss Addie Spurgeon became Post-mistress. She served in this capacity until 1941. She was succeeded by Mrs. Gladys Morgan who retired in 1973.

The Finley Flats (apartments) were located across the railroad from the depot.

For a number of years there were three general stores in Smithfield where you could buy almost anything you wanted. There was even a millinery store where the ladies bought all of their hats. In the early 1920's there were four stores-H. M. Head's, O. O. Corbin's, W. C. Power's and E. Stout's. I especially remember Stout's Grocery as it also contained an ice-cream parlor which featured delicious banana-splits. Two unforgettable customers were Matt and Wes Moody. Matt was known as "One-eyed Moody". She would come to shop dressed in a big floppy-brimmed hat, a shirtwaist and a long black skirt, carrying her money tied in a handkerchief. She would pay for each item as she bought it, untying her handkerchief, taking out the nickel or dime required; then securely tying her handkerchief before making the next purchase. She would

place her selections in her gunny-sack for the trip home. Matt and Wes lived on the VanCleave place.

A bank was established in Smithfield June 13, 1905, with a capital stock of \$15,000.00. Enos Swain was the first cashier with Miss Carrie Atchison as assistant cashier. This bank was consolidated with the LaGrange Bank in 1932.

In 1829 James Ewing and John Samuel were bonded to operate a tavern in Ewing's house, near Smithfield.

This country was founded upon the principle of religious freedom; thus, wherever several families settled a Church was soon organized. Traditionally, this was true of Smithfield settlers. In 1802 East Floyd's Fork Church was built at the present junction of Highways 22 and 1861. Some of the first members of East Floyd's Church were Negro slaves. In 1808 the name of the Church was changed to East Fork Church. In later years the worshipers wished to use the original front door step of stone as the base for the bulletin board of the present Smithfield Baptist Church. However, in attempting to move the stone from its resting place, the men dropped the stone causing it to break in many pieces. The bits of stone were cast into Mason Smith's barnyard. Today, two of the larger pieces of stone are being used as patio steps in the yard of Tom Potts. As for the Church, in 1872 the present brick building was erected. East Fork passed into history and Smithfield Baptist Church came into being. The Reverend E. G. Berry served the Church as Pastor for forty-two years.

Ellen Durrett, a rather large person, was the faithful house-keeper of the Church. She always sat on the back pew in the left section. One Sunday a guest minister closed his long sermon by announcing, "We will now open the doors of the Church to receive new members". Ellen straight-way arose from her seat, waddled to the doors, and with a mighty struggle opened both big doors, letting in a blast of cold air.

Lawrence Owen sold his land in Clark County in 1811 and purchased a tract of about 400 acres in Henry County, four miles southwest of New Castle. Lawrence Owen became, at an early age, attached to the Methodist Church. So great was his zeal for the promotion of the interests of the Church that as soon as he found himself in possession of a tract of land, he set apart a choice acre to the Church. He devoted a portion of his means to the erection of a Church building upon it. This log Church, called Ebenezer Meeting House, was erected in 1811. Deed Book 5, page 458, records that on July 12, 1816, Lawrence Owen and his wife, Mary, deeded to Adam Mowry, Abraham Funk, Evan Watkins, Beale Warren, Joshua Whitely, Abel Robbins and James Hamilton, Trustees, the Ebenezer Meeting House and an acre of ground as a place of worship "for the

use of members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America according to the rules and discipline which may from time to time be agreed upon and adopted at their General Conference in the United States of America, and in further trust and confidence that they shall at all times forever hereafter permit the ministers of the M. E. Church to preach and expound therein." Smithfield Methodist Church grew out of this Ebenezer Meeting House.

Recently Price Meek located the well-marked grave of Lawrence Owen on the Lloyd O. Roberts' farm.

To continue, the first Methodist Church building was erected on the property now owned by Billy Dick Wilson. In 1882 or '83 a very lovely brick building was erected on a lot now owned by Mrs. Bryan Meek. The bricks for it were made on the site; Mr. Ben Gardeher, the contractor.

The Church of Christ at Hendrensville was constituted in the year 1834. In 1880 this Church merged with the Smithfield Christian Church which was organized in the home of Bro. W. H. Kalfus in the same year.

When I first remember there were two Churches for the Black residents of Smithfield - Methodist and Baptist. In the ensuing years, both burned. I remember stories of the times each Church was flourishing, and big basket dinners with singing and preaching all day were enjoyed by the congregations. Among those present would be Belle and Frank Bailey with their twenty-one children.

The early Smithfield residents, being aware of the importance of education, established Smithfield College in 1867. The building was erected of brick made from a low place behind the building. The first teachers were the Misses Perrys. In 1870 they were succeeded by the Reverend G. C. Crowe, a Presbyterian minister, whom the Presbyterian Synod designated as "A walking encyclopedia".

A private school for younger children was conducted by Miss Molly Moffett in a building erected on the corner of her father's farm, where Martha Wilson now lives. This is what we remember as the Jim Carr house. My father attended school there, and I have heard him tell how he and the Hieatt and Mitchell boys put gun powder in the stove and almost blew up the place. In 1893 the Kentucky Legislature passed a law requiring the establishment of public schools and the levying of local taxes in support thereof, but not until 1908 was the mandatory legislation made general for all local units. Around 1900 a public school - elementary and high school - was opened in the College building, and it continued to be used until it was destroyed by fire in 1939. The first high school graduating class was in 1916. Two young men were graduated - Fielding Meek who died in World War I and Guthrie Meade.

The school for the Black children was across from the cemetery on

Sunnyside Road. Olivia Morton was a highly respected teacher of the school. After completing this school, the students attended Lincoln Institute for higher education.

I remember some of the Black residents of Smithfield who made important contributions to the community:

The Taylors - Margaret, Kate, and Jim (Jim fired the furnace at the Mill).

The Fords - Bill (drove the delivery wagon at the Mill), Maggie, Georgia, and Freddy.

The Hays - Tom, Martha, Lizzie, Lucy, Walter, Isom. (Tom and his family, with the assistance of Lucy Davis, operated and maintained the Smithfield Slaughter House, an important establishment as residents took their animals there to be slaughtered. Tom and his family rendered high quality lard and made delicious sausage.

The Tinsleys - E. B. and Fannie.

It was quite an event when a telephone exchange was set up in the house next to the brick store and was operated by Mrs. Smee and her daughters Marguerite and Vannie. The exchange was later moved to the R. L. Saxton residence where it remained until the dial system was installed.

The first concrete sidewalks were laid about 1913 by a Mr. Olson from Eminence. Electric lights came to us in 1919 and street lights were turned on February 4, 1921.

Rural Mail Delivery was started in 1903, and my father, J. S. Meade, was appointed the first carrier. Roads were maintained by three toll-gates located at the forks of the Sunnyside and Bates Roads; at the top of the hill where Martha Wilson now resides, and at the Ballardsville Road where Perry Evans now lives.

The health of the citizens of any community is most important, and in the past the health of its citizens was well taken care of in Smithfield. In the 1882 Atlas Dr. E. S. Swain, who was earlier a surgeon in the Union Army, is listed as physician and surgeon. His office was in the home now occupied by the Pucketts. Following him were Doctors Zaring, Hancock, Johnson, Wilson and Newkirk. In 1921 the Smithfield Development Company, with capital stock of \$5000.00, was formed to build a house for Dr. Newkirk. Members of this committee were: R. J. Prewitt, C. B. Wilson, R. Watkins, O. T. VanCleave, H. M. Head, J. N. Drane and M. M. Watkins. Later this house was the home of Price and Edith Watkins.

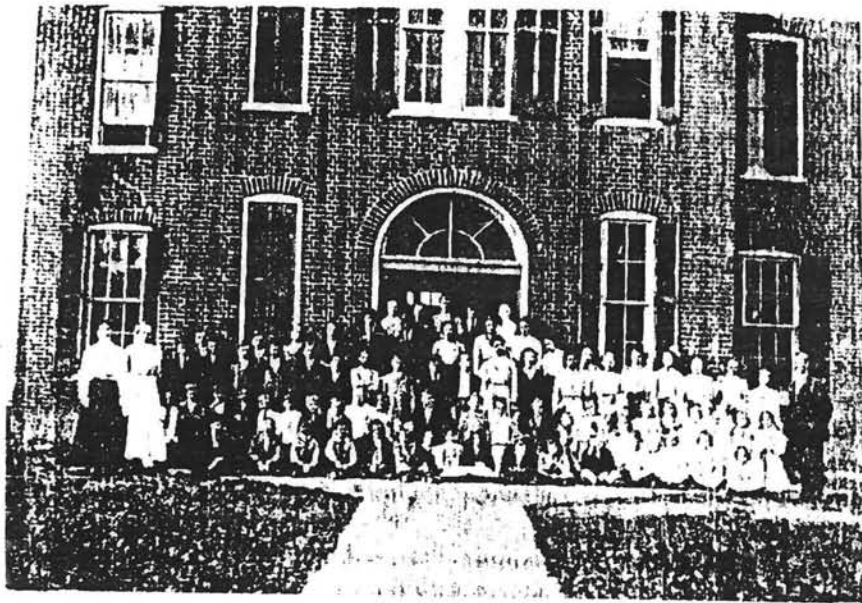
These Doctors officiated at the beginning of life for many of the town's citizens, but it soon became necessary to provide a place to receive the body after death. On May 27, 1865, a meeting was called for the purpose of organizing a company to be known as the Smithfield Cemetery Com-

pany. June third a committee reported twenty-one persons had subscribed \$1,135.00 to purchase land. On July 15 the committee reported \$1,650.00 on subscription papers. The committee contracted with Jas. E. Goodridge for ten acres or more of land at \$75.00 per acre. A charter was adopted on July 22, 1865. On November 4, 1865, B. F. Drane and E. B. Moore were ordered to select such shrubbery as may be necessary for ornamenting the grounds. On April 21, 1866, the committee reported they had purchased sixty trees which cost \$34.80 including freight. One of the big beautiful pines had to be removed in 1970. In the tree was an unusual growth which attracted attention over our area. The growth was called a "Witches' Broom". "Witches' Broom" is the name applied to peculiar broomlike out-growths on the branches of a number of trees. They consist of a closely-set cluster of fine slender branches, generally arranged more or less parallel to each other and often originating from an enlarged axis. (Encyclopedia Britannica, V, 23) The "broom" was fascinating.

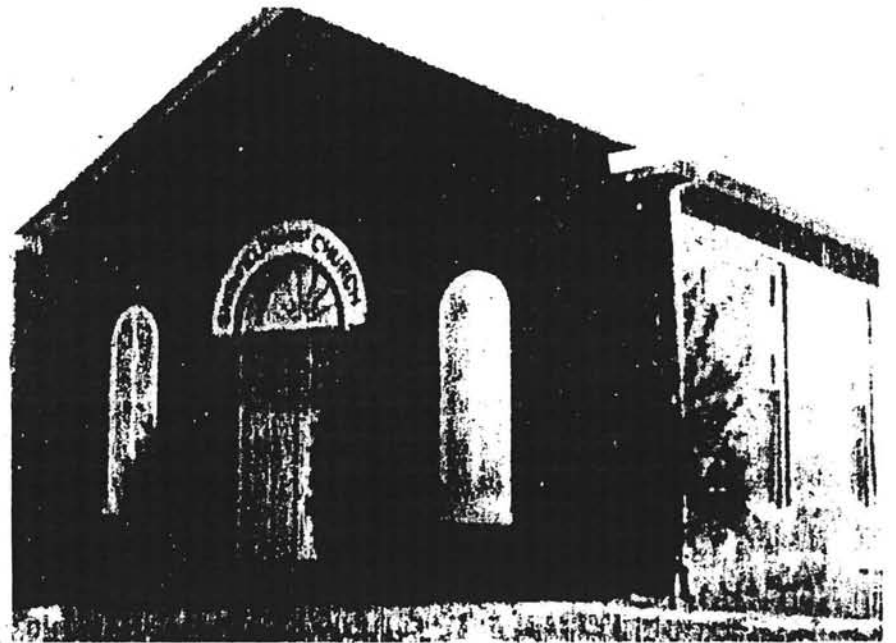
On May 25, 1867, the committee "agreed that Blacks may be buried in our cemetery and we charge \$5.00 for each interment". On July 4, 1868, the trustees were authorized to borrow \$550.00 for the purpose of building a house on the grounds of the cemetery for a grounds-keeper. The house was completed according to contract on August 29, 1868.

Recently we were discussing Smithfield of the past with Roy Jones, pastor of the Baptist Church, and he asked the question, "Why did the town, instead of continuing to grow, lose so many of its businesses and institutions?" After thinking about it, Mason and I decided the Depression of the late 20's and early 30's was a determining factor. Even though the building of a highway and more automobiles brought two garages to town, they also made it much easier for its citizens to go to larger places to shop.

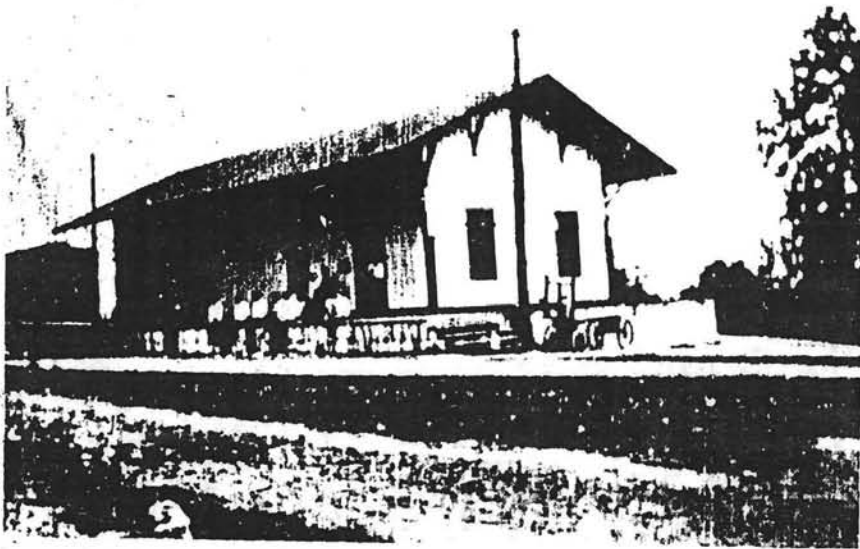
To the new-comer and the stranger passing through, Smithfield may appear to be just a wide place in the highway, but to many of us it is much more because "we remember when".



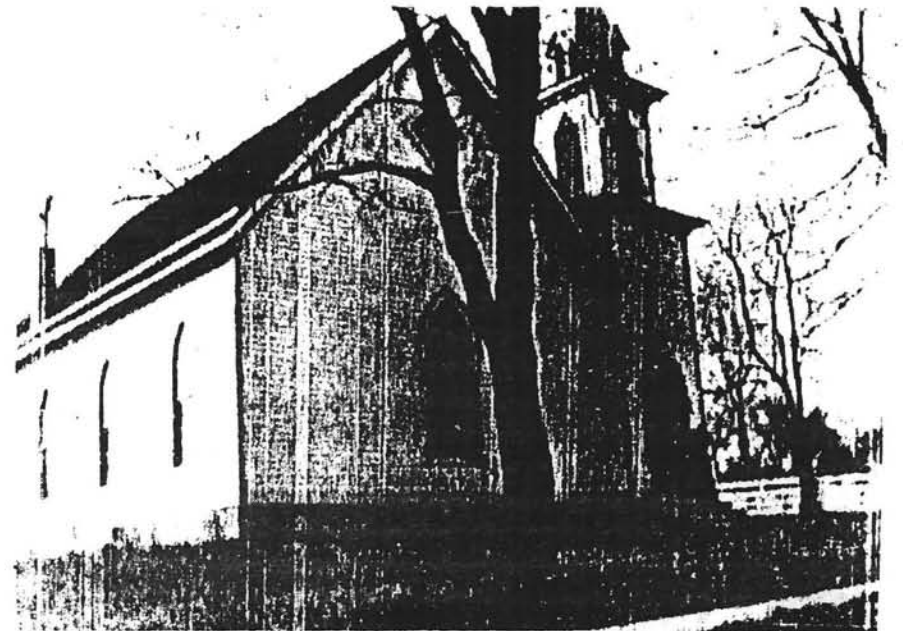
Smithfield Public School 1910



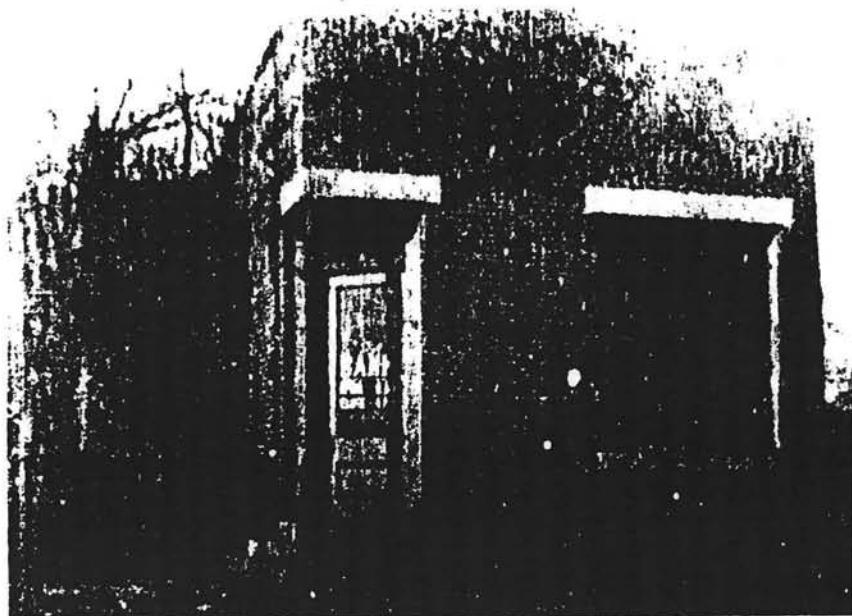
Smithfield Baptist Church



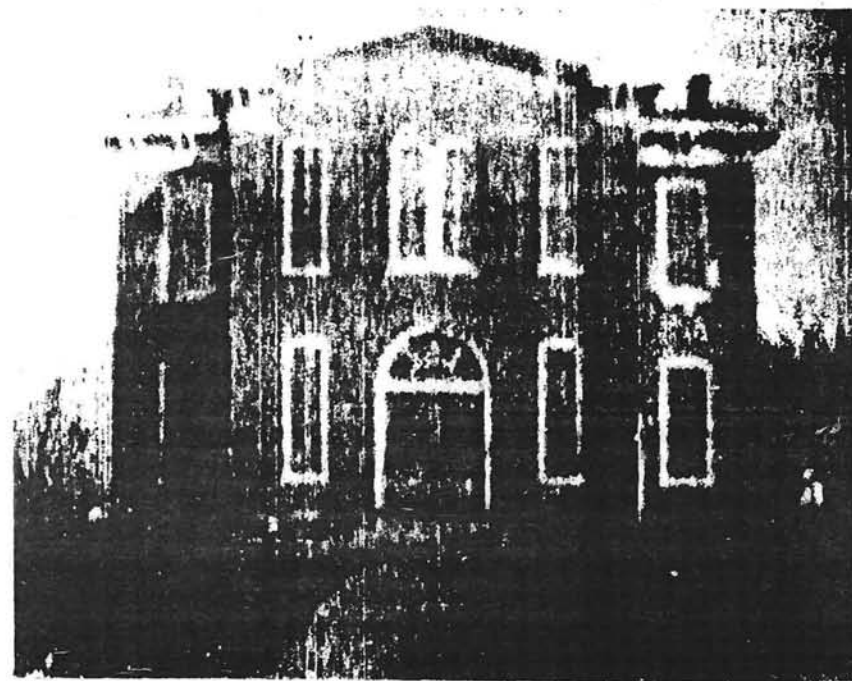
L. & N. Depot



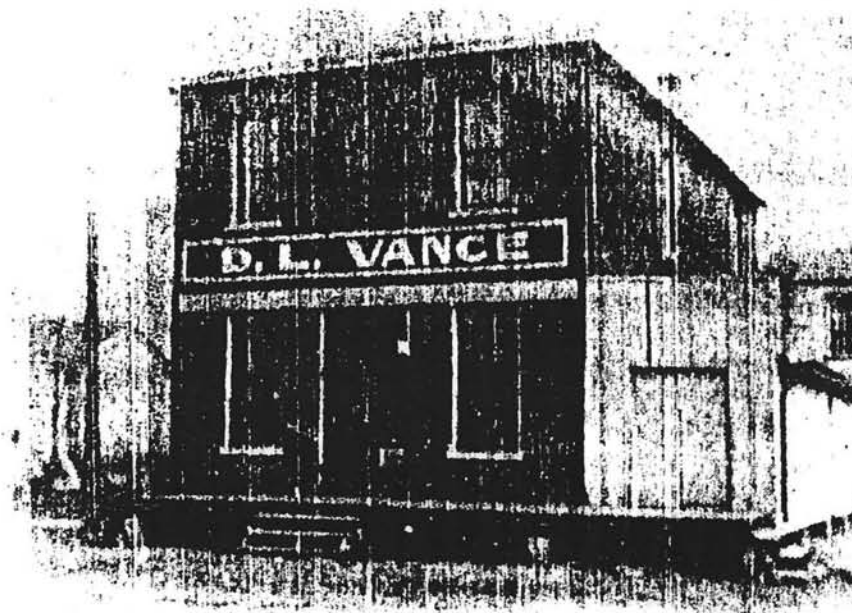
Smithfield Christian Church



Smithfield Bank



Smithfield College



D. L. Vance General Store

