

A Cloud of Witnesses: Family and Community in Early Twentieth Century Wiregrass Pentecostal Evangelism

A number of cultural, personal, and communal factors led the curious to join the Holy Ghost ranks. Some of these factors are lost in the silences of the historical record, but others remain detectable.

—Randall Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*¹

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AT THE AGE OF NINETY, MY GRANDMOTHER, DAISY SNELLGROVE Tucker, told again the story she had heard and retold herself many times since childhood, with a child's collapsed concept of time and space: how Pentecost came to Alabama. Now she bequeathed it to her granddaughter as one would an heirloom:

It started—what they said, and what they still say: that after the Civil War, the United States had gotten into such a bad state and people were so discouraged, and they'd lost so many people, and churches were broken into, and torn up—that the Holy Spirit came in a new way and a lot of people got converted at some services, and it was like a fire spreading. It moved this way, all the way. And it moved—I don't know whether it moved up in the North, but it moved in the South, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, all across there, and the upper parts of Florida. And people began understanding the Bible, and understanding that the Lord was still here. And that he was still taking care of the people. And that is when the Snellgroves got involved in it...I remember Azusa Street because everybody talked about

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¹ Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, Ma., 2010), 206.

it...The preachers that preach about it [they would say] ‘on Azusa Street in California.’”²

Born in Dale County in 1912, six years after the beginning of the 1906 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, Daisy Tucker had heard this local version of the classic Pentecostal creation myth since early childhood from her namesake, Aunt Daisy Snellgrove Bryant, and Uncle Handy Washington Bryant, and other kinfolk in the Assemblies of God.³ Eighty-plus years later, she told the story to her granddaughter with the same dramatic tone. Her family was one of many in the Wiregrass region of southeast Alabama and northwest Florida who embraced Pentecostalism in its early twentieth-century form—part of the early groups that organized in the South and grew leaders who helped form and define the Assemblies of God in 1914, now the world’s largest Pentecostal organization.⁴

Before and just after the pivotal Azusa Street revival, Alabama was a generative environment for several Pentecostal ministers who later participated in the founding meeting at Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914, or became regionally or nationally prominent in the Assemblies of God. Mack M. Pinson, Henry Greene Rodgers, William Files Hardwick, John Wade Ledbetter, Daniel J. Dubose, and others set down foundation stones early in the century for Pentecostal organizations in Alabama and especially in the southeastern part of the state. Several of these men went on to serve as regional and national leaders, recognized and remembered in official Assemblies of God histories, Pentecostal memoirs, histories, and a growing body of academic scholarship.⁵

² Daisy Snellgrove Tucker, interview with author, 24 March 2002.

³ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 186.

⁴ Edith L. Blumhofer and C. R. Armstrong, “Assemblies of God,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded edition, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, assoc. ed. Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 333. The Assemblies of God (AG) is officially the World Assemblies of God Fellowship.

⁵ Other than G. B. Cashwell, of the southern organizers, Pinson and Rodgers appear most often in older histories of the Assemblies of God. W. E. Warner, “Pinson, Mack M.,” in *New International Dictionary*, 989. Pinson and Rodgers are

Alongside these better-known religious leaders were local citizens—“relatively unknown men and women of conviction”—who contributed significantly to the founding and setting in order of churches in southeast Alabama in the early part of the twentieth century.⁶ These activists of the “tongues movement” in the Alabama Wiregrass exemplified characteristics of the southern Holiness and early Pentecostal movement that have only recently begun to be identified in scholarly research.⁷ White, literate, a mix of economic and social classes, they were raised with a strong premillennialist belief in the “Lord’s soon return.”⁸ Most were old enough to remember or to have experienced firsthand the economic and social chaos that followed the Civil War. They were farmers and laborers who were also traveling evangelists, pastors, lay workers, and home missionaries devoting already difficult lives in rural Alabama to spreading their beliefs about the gifts of the Holy Spirit in what they considered “the last days.” Often with

briefly discussed in Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*; in Vinson Synan, *The Holiness—Pentecostal Tradition—Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 1997), and Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York, 1979), 167, 183–84. Hardwick, Dubose and Ledbetter have been discussed by a few focusing on Pentecostal developments in the Deep South, especially Robert H. Spence, *The First Fifty Years: A Brief Review of the Assemblies of God in Alabama (1915–1965)*, anniversary ed. ([Springfield, Mo., ca. 1965]); and Gary Don McElhany, “The South Aflame: A History of the Assemblies of God in the Gulf Region, 1901–1940” (Ph.D. diss., Mississippi State University, 1996). A significant discussion of the relationship among early evangelists Pinson, Rodgers, and Cashwell as well as Church of God in Christ (COGIC) leader, C. H. Mason, with an unindexed mention of Dan Dubose and J. W. Ledbetter, is in David D. Daniels, “Charles Harrison Mason: The Interracial Impulse of Early Pentecostalism,” 255–70, in *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders*, eds. James R. Goff, Jr. and Grant Wacker (Fayetteville, Ark., 2002).

⁶ A phrase used in McElhany, “The South Aflame.” The Wiregrass is a geographical region including southeastern Alabama, northwestern Florida, and southwestern Georgia.

⁷ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 64. Stephens catalogues and identifies, from a multitude of primary and secondary sources, several major characteristics of southern Holiness and early Pentecostal worshippers.

⁸ Missing from the stories here is evidence of whites and African Americans worshipping or organizing alongside each other. Although blacks may very well have been present with whites at the tent revivals, brush arbor meetings, and other worship services in these Wiregrass counties in the early days, that fact was not recorded or remembered by the local sources I have found.

little property but an independent or entrepreneurial spirit, many were not tied to a particular homestead but moved where work or the Spirit led them. In several cases, they followed that path regardless of the social consequences.

The beliefs and work of these people in south Alabama, Georgia, and the Florida panhandle led to a strong early spiritual network across the region that contributed to the development of several Pentecostal organizations, primarily the Assemblies of God. In this paper, I weave together oral histories and family stories of my kin and their neighbors with primary and secondary sources and with historical research on the early Pentecostal movement in the Wiregrass region in order to contribute to a growing body of knowledge and a more nuanced portrait of a complex spiritual community. The stories I recount here reinforce characteristics identified and fleshed out in Randall Stephens's analysis of early southern Holiness and Pentecostal peoples, especially the influence of the religious press, the highly mobile life of evangelists and organizers, and the inclusion of women in these roles. My purpose is to illuminate the stories of my ancestors and their neighbors with this regional analysis and suggest areas for further study.

Studies of the influence of kinship on Pentecostal organizing are lacking in the scholarly literature. Family and community ties are a growing area of research in their own right in the study of history.⁹ As the stories here make clear, along with the search for spiritual life, kinship is a core defining element of these people. Religious life in the Wiregrass region, and throughout the South, has always been undergirded by kinship and the connections of community. Subjected to frequent travel, regional migration, economic hardship, and other social and cultural stressors, the ubiquitous web of family and community relationships in this area should not be discounted as a key factor when documenting and analyzing southern Pentecostal history. This article is not a study of kinship in early Pentecostal organizing in the Wiregrass, but a push in that direction. The blood

⁹ See for example, Carolyn Earle Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens, Ga., 2004).

and geographic connections exposed here were an undeniable influence on southern Pentecostals and point to a valuable subject in their own right that deserves more research.

During this key period of Pentecostal organizing in south Alabama, several of my ancestors joined themselves to that spiritual world. Lafayette Snellgrove (1883–1942), my great grandfather, was probably already preaching in the Primitive Baptist church when he introduced his sister Daisy Bell (1884–1934) to his good friend Handy Washington Bryant (1882–1957). Daisy Snellgrove married Handy Bryant in 1902, and Lafayette married Handy’s sister, Jessie Bryant (1888–1932), in 1906. Jessie Bryant Snellgrove remained a Missionary Baptist her whole life, even though her husband, brother, and almost all the other adults around her joined the Pentecostal movement and later the Assemblies of God.¹⁰

I have gotten to know a little bit about their personalities through stories my grandmother and great aunts have told me—and a few photographs passed around the family reveal more than their children can describe. In one, Lafayette, whom everyone called “Fate,” stands tall before a house in a dark wool suit and a tie held not-so-straight by a shiny little tie clip. Handsome like all the Snellgroves, he stands ready to preach with a worn leather Bible lying open across his large left hand. In another photo, taken early in their marriage, Daisy and Handy sit together in their Sunday clothes. Uncommonly pretty in a striped blouse of stiff, starched ruffles, Daisy smiles warmly and directly into the camera lens. She keeps her left hand on her hip and her right elbow resting on her husband’s arm while she holds her wide-brimmed hat in her lap. Handy, with hands hidden under

¹⁰ Tucker interview, 2002; *Marriage Licenses, November 1884 to 1930 by Grooms, Surnames beginning with B, Dale, Alabama* (Dale County Courthouse, Ozark, Alabama, n.d.), transcribed by Christine Grimes Thacker, 2003, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/al/dale/vitals/marriages/groomsb.txt> (last accessed 24 November 2008); *Marriage Licenses, November 1884 to 1930 by Grooms, Surnames beginning with S, Dale, Alabama* (Dale County Courthouse, Ozark, Alabama, n.d.), transcribed by Christine Grimes Thacker, 2003; <http://files.usgwarchives.net/al/dale/vitals/marriages/groomss.txt> (accessed 24 November 2008). Jessie Bryant sometimes appears as “Bryan” in courthouse records.

his hat, leans forward, darkly tense and serious, perhaps with a little foreboding but ready for the work ahead.

Always clean and starched, Daisy Snellgrove Bryant was born eager for a life of perfection and expected the same from those around her. Her nieces agreed that “With Aunt Daisy, you had to walk the chalk line.” And throughout her life, she willingly followed the voice of the Spirit. At the age of fifty, on the morning of a stroke that would let her linger only a few days, she must have sensed the future. She turned to her daughter Gertrude and said, “Get me a clean apron, I’m going to meet the Lord today.” Early in her marriage, she convinced her father—Jesse Sephus Snellgrove (1862–1920), from a family of Primitive Baptists—to let her go to a tent revival in the community, likely part of the Pentecostal activity burning through the Wiregrass from the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century.¹¹ The meeting may have been in walking distance of their home in Gilley’s Precinct in 1900, near present-day Wicksburg, Houston County, or near Pinckard, Dale County, where they lived in 1910.¹² With a confident smile, Daisy reassured her worrying father that she would not be taken in by any opportunistic evangelists or other questionable

¹¹ Phyllis Collins Marshall, phone interview with author, 23 September 2008. It is not clear whether Daisy Bryant attended a Holiness or an early Pentecostal revival. Tucker interview, 2002.

¹² 1900 U. S. census, Dale County, Alabama, population schedule, Gilley’s Precinct 3, Enumeration District 62, p. 12B (penned), dwelling 211, family 214, Jessie Snellgrove; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com*, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed 30 November 2008); from National Archives microfilm T623, roll 12. 1900 U. S. census, Dale County, Alabama, population schedule, Gilley’s Precinct 3, Enumeration District 62, p. 7A (penned), p. 187 (stamped), dwelling 111, family 112, Martha Bryant; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com*, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed 30 November 2008); from National Archives microfilm T623, roll 12. In 1900, the Snellgroves had moved from their home in 1870 in Victoria, Coffee County and were living “pages away” from the Bryants in Gilley’s Precinct, in present-day Houston County. 1910 U. S. Census, Dale County, Alabama population schedule, Precinct 6 Pinckard, Enumeration District 82, p. 13B (penned), dwelling 268, family 269, Handy Bryant; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com*, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed 30 November 2008); from National Archives microfilm T624, roll 10. In 1910, the Bryants lived in Pinckard with their daughter Gertrude, Handy’s mother Martha Bryant, his sister Jessie and her oldest daughter, May (Mae Agnes). Lafayette Snellgrove is absent, and the census-taker counts Jessie as a widow.



Lafayette "Fate" Snellgrove holding a Bible, possibly at the time of his ordination in the Assemblies of God, 1914. Photo courtesy of the author.



Handy Washington Bryant and Daisy Snellgrove Bryant, about 1902 (the year of their marriage). Photo courtesy of the author.

characters, and Snellgrove reluctantly agreed. He knew that God and her native strength of will would keep her safe, and he also was curious about these new preachers, who claimed lifelong sanctification through the Holy Spirit. But, Jesse added that Daisy could go only on condition that she would sit in the very back of the tent.¹³ He must have prayed that the further she sat from the altar, the less likely it was that she would be swept up into this new movement. He should have had more faith in his daughter, who could not be swept into anything but who instead chose deliberately and fully to follow the path of the Holy Spirit believers. From that tent meeting onward, what Jesse Snellgrove probably knew would happen did happen: his eldest daughter became a happy and headlong casualty of the Holy Spirit. And it only encouraged her choice when she was asked to leave the Pinckard Baptist Church and the choir singing she loved so much.¹⁴

“[The revivalists] stayed there, sometimes they’d stay months, and a lot of people went to the meetings and left the churches.”—Daisy Tucker, 2002

PENTECOSTAL REVIVALS AND CAMP MEETINGS—like those of the Methodists, Baptists, and other denominations—have always been efficient and popular ways of re-exciting the community and bringing the lost into the fold. To a greater or lesser degree, depending on how well known the evangelists or participants were in the community, the Pentecostal versions of these revivals were often viewed as “outsider” religious events by established mainline denominations in the community. Daisy Bryant, with her father’s permission, went to the revival and returned several times, often enough for the Baptists to ask her to leave their church in Pinckard, where she sang in the choir. Her niece remembers, “I don’t know what they said to her,

¹³ Marshall interview, 2008.

¹⁴ Mae Agnes Snellgrove Taylor, Daisy Snellgrove Tucker, Gladys Snellgrove Cole, interview with Frances Tucker, 11 April 1976 (hereafter known as Snellgrove sisters interview, 1976); Marshall interview, 2008.

because when she told us about it—every time we used to go down past that church, she used to tell us about it, she'd laugh. She said it was the best thing that ever happened to her."¹⁵ Daisy Bryant's strong religious conviction led her past social concerns regardless of the threat of conflict or ostracism. Some mainline churches punished their members for attending Pentecostal tent meetings, as in Daisy Bryant's experience. But the threat of ostracism or excommunication did not prevent older denominations from losing many members to the new movement, some going happily, as in Daisy Bryant's case.

Sometimes a visiting evangelist known to the community might be invited to speak in an established church, and the converts who resulted would not be the traditional stereotype of poor or marginalized holy-rollers.¹⁶ Such was the case with the peripatetic preacher, M. M. Pinson. During the summer of 1906, Mack M. Pinson, a Holiness preacher from Georgia, preached in the area, apparently attracting the more well-to-do community members. Pinson reported in *Living Water*, a Holiness newspaper, that he was holding meetings in Coffee Springs, Geneva County, Alabama: "God is giving us the ears of the people. Some of the business men are going out and bringing the people to the services. I am preaching to more men in this town than any in which I have been!" Pinson next went to Coffee County, where he held a tent revival near the Old Tabernacle community. There he met brothers Dan and Jim Dubose, members of Old Tabernacle Methodist Church, who would continue to work with him into the following summer, and for several years after that. Pinson profoundly influenced the Dubose brothers and several others who would later become Assemblies of God ministers and laymen.¹⁷

¹⁵ Tucker interview, 2002; Snellgrove sisters interview, 1976. In 2002, Daisy Tucker quoted almost verbatim the same story she and her sisters recalled in the 1976.

¹⁶ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, especially 58–59.

¹⁷ Spence, *Fifty Years*, 8–9; Robert H. Spence, "When Pentecost Came to Alabama," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 4 (Fall 1984): pt. 1, 3–4. Spence writes that Pinson influenced the Duboses as well as Isaac Jordan, C. Herbert Johnson, his great-uncle James Elijah Spence, and his father Thomas Herman Spence. Pinson and his family are found in the 1920 census living with the Hardwicks in Hartford,

Originally from Georgia, Pinson was one of the group that first called for a national meeting of a variety of Pentecostal groups at Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914, from which were formed the Assemblies of God. He spent long periods evangelizing around Alabama and throughout the southeastern U. S. in the early part of the twentieth century, until he moved to Arkansas and then to the Southwest later in life. After his first trip to Alabama in 1906, in the spring or early summer of 1907, Pinson and his friend, H. G. Rodgers from Tennessee, traveled to Birmingham to hear North Carolina Pentecostal evangelist Gaston B. Cashwell, who had experienced the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street and was now preaching the baptism in the Holy Spirit around the South.

After leaving Birmingham, Pinson and Rodgers followed Cashwell to Memphis, where they experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the form of speaking in tongues.¹⁸ As he would a number of times in his life, Pinson now rethought and redefined his spiritual beliefs. He began to move from the traditional Wesleyan idea that sanctification—the instantaneous experience of “Christian perfection” through the grace of God and one’s devotion—could come in the form of baptism in the Holy Spirit and began to believe that “entire

Geneva County, but from late 1913, he lists his base as Phoenix, Arizona, and then Oakland, California, in the Church of God in Christ ministerial rolls. 1920 U. S. census, Geneva County, Alabama, population schedule, Hartford, Enumeration District 105, p. 9B (penned), p. 158 (stamped), dwelling 175, family 183, William F. Hardwick; digital image by subscription, Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed 30 November 2008); from National Archives microfilm T625, roll 16. “Pinson” is transcribed as “Pinner” in Ancestry.com, but the author sent in a correction, 2008. Current members of El Bethel Assembly of God, just across the highway, are not sure exactly where Pinson’s first revivals in 1906 were held. Weatherford writes that Pinson set up his revival tent at New Tabernacle Church, just north of Old Tabernacle. Laurelle DuBose Weatherford, “El Bethel Assembly of God History” ([New Brockton, Ala., ca. 1992–93]), 1.

¹⁸W. E. Warner, “Pinson, Mack M.,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded edition, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, assoc. ed. Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 989. For more on M. M. Pinson, see Scott E. Hill’s recent *Alabama Review* article, “A Seed-Sowing Time: M. M. Pinson’s Pentecostal Paths in Alabama,” *Alabama Review* 69, no. 2, (April 2016): 132–63.

sanctification” and his newly found Holy Spirit experience that had manifested as glossolalia were separate events.¹⁹

Pinson probably influenced more people through his writings in the Pentecostal press than he did through his preaching. Religious publications were a key factor in the early evangelizing successes of Pentecostalism in the South. Not only did newspapers, periodicals, and books help spread the Word, but reading these writings imbued widely-scattered rural readers with a sense of community that extended beyond their immediate environs to their regional and national brothers and sisters.²⁰ Pinson worked as “corresponding editor” to Cashwell’s *Bridegroom’s Messenger* (first published in Atlanta in 1907) not long after they met.²¹ In 1910, because Pinson’s “finished work” views differed from the editors’, he founded his own paper, *Word and Witness*, and a few years later, combined it with *Apostolic Faith*, edited by E. N. Bell. Mack Pinson evangelized in person in Alabama, and in his absences, his presence must have been felt through his newspaper. In fact, Pinson’s behavior in these anecdotes and other biographical material intimates he epitomized the southern Pentecostal: a traveling evangelist and newspaper editor who received his authority and assurance only from God through the Holy Ghost and who was not afraid of confrontation or conflict.

In the summer of 1907, Pinson returned to the Wiregrass with new theological ideas. Both Dubose brothers experienced Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the form of speaking in tongues that summer, and both preached with Pinson and on their own at Baptist and Methodist revivals that year. Mainline churches usually maintained a distance from the Holy Ghost evangelists, but sometimes a church

¹⁹ R. M. Riss, “Finished Work Controversy,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded edition, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, assoc. ed. Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 638–39. This separation of experiences, along with the belief that speaking in tongues is the first evidence of the Holy Ghost baptism, distinguished Pentecostals from their Holiness brethren from Azusa Street onward.

²⁰ Randall J. Stephens, “‘There is Magic in Print’: The Holiness–Pentecostal Press and the Origins of Southern Pentecostalism,” in *Southern Crossroads: Perspectives on Religion and Culture*, eds. Walter H. Conser Jr. and Rodger M. Payne (Lexington, Ky., 2008), 195–230; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 126.

²¹ Warner, “Pinson, Mack M.,” 989.

would invite a Pentecostal preacher for their summer revival season. Probably because of their friendship, the Duboses' home church, Old Tabernacle Methodist, invited them all to "assist" that summer in meetings. On the appointed evening, the Duboses arrived early, and according to Spence, by the time the meeting officially began, it was already packed with "people seeking salvation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit." This was partly because the Old Tabernacle congregation and others around the county knew the Duboses, and some were also curious about this new approach to religion. The attendance numbers were so great that "in desperation the preacher closed the meeting on Thursday night of the first week."²²

When the Methodist door closed, the Baptist door opened. Eanon Baptist Church, then located about a mile east of its present location at the junction of Coffee County Roads 147 and 148 and a few miles down toward the Pea River from El Bethel and Old Tabernacle churches, also invited the Duboses.²³ Spence writes, "By the second night...there were so many people seeking God that benches had to be moved outside." Instead of shutting their doors, the Baptists set benches outside their church and eventually moved the whole service out-of-doors.²⁴

The story of the formation of one of the earliest Pentecostal churches in southeast Alabama illustrates how the tenuous relationship between mainline host congregation and guest Pentecostal evangelist could go awry and provides an example of the Pentecostal activist tendency to readily engage in conflict.²⁵ Assemblies of God historian Robert Spence and El Bethel Church member and histo-

²² Spence, *Fifty Years*, 10.

²³ Pastor Mike Taylor and congregants of El Bethel Assembly of God in conversation with author, 17 May 2008; Albert L. Strozier, *Coffee County Baptists Coffee County Baptists: History of the Coffee County Baptist Association of Alabama and of the Forty-five Member Churches of the Body*, ([Coffee County, Ala.], ca. 1981), 130–31. *Historical Atlas of Alabama*, eds. W. Craig Remington and Thomas J. Kallsen (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1997), vol. 1, 78. No information about which spelling came first, although Eanon "site of church and school" is "also spelled Enon." "History of Churches in Coffee Baptist Association 1998–2002," uses spelling "Eanon."

²⁴ Robert H. Spence, "When Pentecost Came to Alabama," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 4 (Fall 1984): pt. 1, 5. Spence, *Fifty Years*, 10–11.

²⁵ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 7.

rian Laurelle DuBose Weatherford (daughter of Dan's brother, Jim J. Dubose) both tell the story that during a guest sermon at an Old Tabernacle revival, circa 1908–09, Mack Pinson intimated to the Methodist congregation in attendance that they might be headed away from heaven because of their spiritual practices. Spence explains, "He cited the 'Methodist Episcopal Church, South' and tacked on the end of the title, the phrase, 'of God,' implying that the church was 'south of God,'" in the direction of Hell. This comment provoked some anger, and a church elder was remembered to have said, "Why don't these people build them a church of their own?"²⁶ In fact, the Dubose brothers' father, an established Old Tabernacle church member, would help make that happen.

In another year or so, the first church, named Enon (later renamed El Bethel Assembly of God) and located on the "New Tabernacle to Pope's Mill Road," was built.²⁷ Joshua Dubose, father of Dan and Jim, a member of Old Tabernacle and son of one of its founding trustees, gave much of the money and materials to build a new church. Unlike traditional stereotypes of poor and socially marginalized "holy roller" converts, the Duboses were middle class, with the resources to contribute to the growing movement.²⁸ Early members came from nearby established churches of Old Tabernacle Methodist, New

²⁶ Spence, *Fifty Years*, 11–12. Spence points out that new Pentecostal converts sometimes stayed with their old churches, often because in the early years there were few, if any, Pentecostal churches for them to attend: "Those new in the faith maintained some degree of Pentecostal fellowship but for the most part functioned within the framework of the existing community churches." Laurelle DuBose Weatherford spells her name differently from Dan and Jim Dubose.

²⁷ Weatherford, "El Bethel Assembly of God History," 3. Weatherford lists several temporary sites—schoolhouses and homes—used for worship until the first building was completed in February 1910. Assemblies of God Public Relations Department, "In the Last Days...A Brief History of the Assemblies of God" with C. C. Burnett (Springfield, Mo., 1962, revised and expanded, 2007), 2. El Bethel Assembly of God is considered the "first Pentecostal church in the state."

²⁸ Steven Corhern, "Old Tabernacle Draft 2," unpublished research paper shared with the author, spring 2010, 1–2, 33. Joshua Dubose may have been following in the footsteps of his parents, William K. and Martha Ann DuBose [*sic*], who probably deeded over some of the land for the building of Tabernacle Church in 1858. Corhern adds, "Like most early American Methodists, the first trustees of Tabernacle Methodist Episcopal Church, South likely belonged to the middling class of yeoman farmers" (8).

Tabernacle, and Enon Baptist. The first pastors were J. W. Ledbetter, Jim Dubose, Dan Dubose, W. F. Hardwick, J. W. Andrews and W. H. Martin. Several of these men went on to play a variety of important roles in the development of the Assemblies of God in southeast Alabama and the region.²⁹

Daniel J. Dubose (1880–1971) had grown up in the Old Tabernacle community of Coffee County and was another important actor in the south Alabama Pentecostal movement. A spiritual lodestone throughout his life for both lay and minister, Dan Dubose and his brother are examples of the middle class Pentecostal converts who were more common than historians have traditionally suggested.³⁰ After he and his brother James J. (Jim) Dubose met and mentored under Mack Pinson and Dan’s spirit-baptism in 1907, Dubose evangelized in Georgia during 1908 and was ordained by H. G. Rodgers in 1910.³¹ He attended the Slocomb meeting in February of 1911 and was appointed to the committee for licensing and ordaining preachers, along with his brother Jim, W. F. Hardwick, and J. W. Ledbetter.³²

The minutes record that Dubose told the Slocomb attendees that “he intended to give full time this year to evangelistic work in a tent” and that “he expects to labor in cities, towns, and other places in Coffee, Dale, Pike, and Barbour counties,” a testimony to how widely

²⁹ Spence, *Fifty Years*, 12. New Tabernacle Church is now located on Highway 51. Dr. Robert H. Spence, phone interview with author, 3 June 2008. He said that the original site of El Bethel was closer to the Pea River. In *Fifty Years*, 12, he writes that the church was moved to its present location directly across the highway from Old Tabernacle in 1914. Weatherford, “El Bethel Assembly of God History” 3, 33. Weatherford gives incomplete information on the years each pastored: J. W. Ledbetter (1910), Jim Dubose (1910, 1918, 1920, 1929, 1931–32), Dan Dubose (1910), W. F. Hardwick (?), J. W. Andrews (1916) and W. H. Martin (1917).

³⁰ Stephens, *Fire Spreads*, 6, 59–62.

³¹ McElhany, “The South Aflame,” 251. It is highly likely Dan Dubose also attended the early organizing meeting at Dothan in 1909.

³² “[Minutes of] the Church Of God Represented By The Workers And Preachers Of South East Alabama And North Florida, Slocomb, Alabama, Feb. 10–12, 1911,” Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center (FPHC), Springfield, Mo., the archives of the Assemblies of God (<http://www.ifphc.org>) (hereafter: Slocomb handwritten minutes, Feb. 1911), 3.

an evangelist might travel. Dubose preached throughout the area during the period that he was ordained under the auspices of the Churches of God in Christ (1912–1914) and then appeared in the first published Ministerial Rolls of the Assemblies of God in 1914. Through February of 1913, he listed himself as based in Dothan, Houston County, but in December of that year he gave Ariton, in the northern part of Dale County, as his base. Christine Johnson, a lay worker, reported that in late October or early November of 1913, Dan Dubose and Files Hardwick appeared closer to home, at a meeting in Clintonville, just south of Tabernacle, Coffee County.³³

From 1914 onward, Dan Dubose made Ariton the base for his ministry. In the winter of 1921, he became the first pastor of Bethel Assembly in Ariton, a small congregation formed just north of the Barbour County line, with the help of Sisters Martha Joiner and Donnie Metcalf.³⁴ During this time his responsibilities begin to expand. From its first meeting in 1915, through the 1930s, Dubose served in one capacity or another in the Southeastern District of the Assemblies of God, several times as a member of the Character Committee. He visited churches and preached at revivals throughout the region. On at least a few occasions, he visited Columbus, Georgia, staying at the homes of church members, including the house of Gertrude Bryant Martin, the daughter of Handy Bryant.³⁵

The February 1911 meeting at Providence, a settlement near Slocomb in Geneva County, was the culmination of at least five years of concentrated evangelizing and organizing churches in

³³ COGIC Rosters, 1912–1914, FPHC. Along with other consistently ordained ministers early in the alphabet who regularly renewed their ordination certificates, his name is probably on the missing pages of the COGIC Roster of 1914. *Word and Witness*, 20 August 1912, 3; and 20 November 1913, 3, FPHC. Dubose's certificate of ordination with the Church of God in Christ (held in the Assemblies of God Archives) is dated February 10, 1913.

³⁴ The original Bethel Assembly was between Ariton and Doster on Highway 51 just over the Barbour County line on the left before the Shanghai Road. Thanks to Mrs. Angela Dowling for calling around to her relatives for its location. The church is now closer to town on Highway 51. Bethel Assembly of God, "Church History," <http://www.meetmeatbethel.com/churchhistory.htm> (accessed 27 August 2008); page no longer exists.

³⁵ Spence, *Fifty Years*, passim.



Dan Dubose and William "Files" Hardwick carrying luggage, about 1910. Photo courtesy of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.



Fate Snellgrove in his car, date unknown, possibly in Enterprise, Ozark, or Dothan, before 1917. Photo courtesy of the author.



Jessie Bryant Snellgrove (second from left) and her four daughters (left to right), Daisy, Muriel, Mae Agnes, and Gladys, about 1923 in Bibb City, Columbus, Ga. Photo courtesy of the author.

the Wiregrass region. More than thirty men and women from Dale, Geneva, Coffee, Houston counties in Alabama, and Holmes and Jackson counties in Florida, convened for four days.³⁶ H. G. Rodgers chaired the meeting and J. W. Ledbetter recorded the minutes. They formed committees, licensed and ordained preachers, and licensed women as Home Missionaries into their organization, all under the name of the Church of God. The men listed places that needed evangelizing, and several reported what they had been doing the year before and what they intended to do in the coming year.³⁷ And when they were done with business, they and all the attendees came together for worship and to ask the Holy Spirit to anoint them and their work. Although not in the official minutes, a large number would have been present to participate in the open services at the convention, some of them recently having been with Rodgers at his ten-day meeting at Wicksburg, just prior to the Slocomb meeting. Among these were likely Handy and Daisy Bryant and possibly Lafayette Snellgrove.³⁸

On the second day of the convention, highlighting the southern Pentecostal propensity to travel often and widely, the men brainstormed about new places to evangelize. Together they composed a long list of places “in need of a meeting,” needing “Evangelistic work,” or “found to be in need of a pastor.” The names of towns and villages all over southeast Alabama and northwest Florida and reaching over into Georgia were offered by one man or another who knew the area like the back of his hand and would at least be helping with, if not leading, the meetings or pastoring. “Place a few miles south of Graceville, Fla., needs a meeting,” one said. “Place near Ione, Thomas Co.,

³⁶ Carl Brumback, *Suddenly...From Heaven: A History of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, Mo., 1961), 153; William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God*, (Springfield, Mo., 1971), 90–91.

³⁷ Slocomb handwritten minutes, Feb. 1911. Attendance number is simply a count of people listed in the handwritten minutes. There were probably many more attending, especially during religious services.

³⁸ Assemblies of God Public Relations Department, “In the Last Days,” 2007, 2. Slocomb handwritten minutes, Feb. 1911.

Ga., Has House for service, needs a meeting,” Secretary Ledbetter recorded another. “The Section between Vernon and Noma Fla. needs an Evangelist.” “Watson’s School House, 3 miles west of Enterprise,” and “Wicksburg,” and on and on until almost every man had named a place known to him that “needed a meeting.”³⁹

The Snellgrove family charted a similar path into the Florida panhandle, following painting work, which was Fate’s day job, as well as preaching opportunities. Besides their home in Pinckard, Lafayette’s eldest daughter Mae Agnes remembered living in Columbia (in the northeast corner of Houston County), in Geneva, and in Florala, Covington County, in Alabama; and in the towns of Milton, Baker, and Roberson Point, in northwest Florida, all before she was ten years old in 1916.⁴⁰ Lafayette’s second daughter Daisy Tucker remembers evangelists coming at revival season: “Those people stayed in their tents around [the area]. If they were making enough money—taking up a collection and making enough money to live on—they would stay there a year! And sometimes they would live with people around there...Papa preached around in the edge of Florida—which was *wild*—those people were wild down there!”⁴¹

The Slocomb, Alabama, “Church of God” group kept that name until about 1912, when Rodgers and the leaders of the Apostolic Faith Movement arranged to affiliate with Charles Harrison Mason’s Church of God in Christ, a predominately African American Pentecostal group based in Memphis.⁴² Separate ministerial rolls for the “white COGIC” ministers record many of the same names from the Slocomb group—including Jim and Dan Dubose, W. F. Hardwick, M. M. Pinson, H. G. Rodgers, J. W. Ledbetter, J. W. Andrews, W. H.

³⁹ Ione is now in Brooks County, Georgia. Slocomb handwritten minutes, Feb. 1911.

⁴⁰ Snellgrove sisters interview, 1976.

⁴¹ Tucker interview, 2002.

⁴² Assemblies of God Public Relations Department, “In the Last Days,” 2007, 2. Synan, *The Holiness—Pentecostal Tradition*, 171. The most thoughtful discussion of the Alabama white Pentecostals’ relationship with C. H. Mason and the COGIC group I have found is in Daniels, “Charles Harrison Mason,” 262–66.

Martin, and husband and wife, Wayne and Jewell Tomlin, as well as H. W. Bryant and L. Snellgrove.⁴³

Dan Dubose's claim at the Slocomb meeting that he would be evangelizing in "cities, towns, and other places in Coffee, Dale, Pike, and Barbour counties" hardly described the enormity of the task he, the Tomlins, and others were taking on. Preachers often traveled many miles to spread the word, all the while supporting a family, as well as being supported in various ways by their own extended family of parents, in-laws, cousins, and others across the region.⁴⁴

Clergy in south Alabama, Pentecostal and otherwise, were also often "bivocational." Working at preaching was often a job they took on along with the work they already were doing to support themselves or their family. While they lived in the farmlands of the Wiregrass, many of these men and women were tied to the growing season. "Most of the preachers were straight from the plow, hammer, saw, paint brush, trowel, wrench, pick, and shovel."⁴⁵ Dan Dubose's brother Jim listed his occupation in 1918 in Dale County as "farming and preaching."⁴⁶ As the eldest son of a third generation Dale and Coffee County farmer, Lafayette Snellgrove undoubtedly worked in

⁴³ COGIC Rosters, 1912–1914, FPHC. For more information about research on the "white COGIC" group, see Darrin Rodgers, "Church of God in Christ and in unity with the Apostolic Faith," Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, <https://ifphc.wordpress.com/2008/06/25/church-of-god-in-christ-and-in-unity-with-the-apostolic-faith/> (accessed 23 November 2008).

⁴⁴ Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship*, 4–5, 150–51. Although Billingsley focuses on antebellum kinship, she notes the pertinence to postbellum historical studies of her research.

⁴⁵ Brumback, *Suddenly...From Heaven*, 110; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1998), especially 235–36 and passim. Flynt's discussion of the low pay of ministers of rural mainline denominations, which necessitated them becoming "bivocational," is also applicable to the Pentecostals' situation. See also Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1989), 16–18, for his discussion of life for rural farming poor whites in the Wiregrass in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁴⁶ "Jim J. Dubose, registrant," World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918, Registration Location: Coffee County, Alabama; Draft Board: 0; 12 September 1918; digital image only by subscription, Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed 21 November 2008); from Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, microfilm: M1509, Roll: 1509370.

the fields from the time he was very young, but he also worked as a painter and steeplejack before and during his stint as a Pentecostal preacher. According to his daughters, he was often absent for long periods on painting jobs.⁴⁷ Handy Bryant, who had worked as a farm laborer from the time he was young, was involved in the Pentecostal movement long before he was ordained in 1912. In the 1910 census he was a farmer working on his own account, supporting his sister Jessie Snellgrove's family in the absence of Lafayette (Jessie is listed by the census taker as a widow), who was probably working in northwest Florida.⁴⁸

Despite the responsibilities of farm work, Handy, Lafayette, and a host of other men and a few women managed to fit in travel throughout the region to put on revivals and meetings. During particular times of the year, many of these men lived much of their lives "on the road," to evangelize new towns, or just commuting long distances every week to reach the meetings they regularly pastored alone or with another minister. J. L. Bailey, based down south in Slocomb, Geneva County, described the scene from New Hope, northeast Coffee County: "The devil in trouble, 15 at altar, fire falling, saints shouting and dancing in the Spirit, as never seen before." Z. W. Bullock from Bellwood in northern Geneva County outlined his preaching schedule for about a week and a half in June of 1915: Haleburg, Henry County, to Kinsy, Houston County, to Holloway Tabernacle out from Batten's Crossroads in Coffee County, to Clintonville, Coffee County.⁴⁹ Brumback heralds: "Every Pentecostal preacher was an evangelist, intent on carrying the message into new communities. He arrived in town, secured permission to erect his tent on an empty lot, and began to

⁴⁷ Snellgrove sisters interview, 1976. Lafayette Snellgrove's three oldest daughters claim that he helped paint the dome of the State Capitol building in Montgomery, but no documentation has been found for this.

⁴⁸ Marshall interview, 2008. 1900 U. S. census, Dale County, AL, pop. sch., Gilley's Precinct 3, ED 62, p. 7A (penned), dwelling 111, family 111, Martha Bryant. 1910 U. S. census, Dale County, AL, pop. sch., Gilley's Precinct 3, ED 82, p. 13B (penned), dwelling 268, family 269, Handy Bryant. Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, 74. Wayne Flynt notes that some landowning families in Alabama (including Geneva County) were often in worse financial shape than the tenant farming ones.

⁴⁹ *Word and Witness*, 20 October 1913, 3, and 1 June 1915, 3, FPHC.

preach his tradition-defying message.”⁵⁰ H. G. Rodgers describes life on the road for the Pentecostal preacher before 1914:

All of us were living a life of faith and preaching a gospel of love. It was inspiring to hear them give their reports. They had slept on the ground and in stock barns. They had preached under trees in front yards and in brush arbors. They had lived on sardines and vienna sausages...had done without food for days to get a meeting started...but God was with us.⁵¹

In March of 1918, William Files Hardwick (1887–1966) married Irene Lammon (1897–1988) from Hartford, Geneva County, about forty miles south of Ariton.⁵² Hardwick, known as Files or “Bill,” was another Pentecostal worker present at the Slocomb meeting who eventually held a national leadership position. Born in Georgia, where he was converted at a camp meeting led by Dan Dubose in 1908, he started his preaching life in southeast Alabama and influenced many in the Wiregrass area before he moved to Arkansas. About 1910, Hardwick lived with Dan Dubose’s family in Centerville, Coffee County.⁵³ At Slocomb in 1911, Hardwick served with the Dubose brothers and J. W. Ledbetter on the committee to license and ordain preachers. Based in Ariton in 1911 and for several years afterwards, he also had attended the Bible School in Anniston started

⁵⁰ Brumback, *Suddenly...From Heaven*, 107.

⁵¹ C. C. Burnett and Carl Conner, *Early History of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, Mo., n.d.), 5–6, quoted in Brumback, *Suddenly...From Heaven*, 153–54. See also Glen Gohr, “Arthur Shell, Sr., “Early Days of Pentecost in Alabama,” *Assemblies of God Heritage*, vol. 19, 3–4 (Fall–Winter 1999–2000): 28–33.

⁵² Irene Lammon Hardwick, interview by Harold Hardwick, “about 1985 or 1986,” <http://lammon.org/getperson.php?personID=P544&tree=Lammon> (accessed 13 January 2014). The page no longer exists, but the author saved a pdf image of it. Irene Hardwick referred to her husband as Bill, although he is referred to as Files in other sources.

⁵³ McElhany 1996, 251. 1910 U. S. census, Coffee County, Alabama, population schedule, Precinct 12 Centerville, Enumeration District 60, p. 8B (penned), dwelling 152, family 152, Daniel Dubose; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com*, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed 30 November 2008); from National Archives microfilm T624, roll 7.

by D. C. O. Opperman and run by Rodgers.⁵⁴ Hardwick served as District Secretary from 1916–17 and 1920, Council Chairman for the Southeastern District (1923–26), and District Presbyter for 4 years. In 1928, he officially organized the youth group Christ’s Ambassadors, and Sadie Lammon Johnson, Irene’s sister, his sister-in-law, served as the first District President.⁵⁵

In an interview conducted by her son, Irene Lammon Hardwick remembered her father balking when Files Hardwick first asked him for her hand: “Pappa said, ‘No,’ said, ‘...you’re a Holiness Preacher and I want my daughter to have a home.’ And said, ‘A Preacher never has one.’” The first week of their marriage, she recalled, they traveled from Hartford about twenty-five miles, to hold a camp meeting at the Sawyer place in New Brockton, Coffee County.⁵⁶

Irene Hardwick also recalled that they would regularly walk several miles to meetings: “We walked all the time.”⁵⁷ Fortunately, walking was not the only form of transport. Howard Goss, the cofounder of the Apostolic Faith Movement in Texas, writes, “For transportation our workers rode in trains or horse-drawn carriages, if they could afford it. If not, they rode bicycles, or in lumber wagons; some went horseback, some walked.”⁵⁸ Some of the motivation for organizing and affiliating with a recognized religious group was to make travel for these workers easier. Rodgers, Goss, and others encouraged ordained ministers to apply with regional Clergy Bureaus so that they could qualify for discounted rail travel to and from preaching stops at camp meetings and revivals. In 1912, Goss posted a notice on the front page of *Word and Witness* that, with a correctly filled out

⁵⁴ Slocomb handwritten minutes, Feb. 1911, 8–9. The Bible School was also attended by Slocomb conventioners J. A. Marshall and J. A. Cullefer, both from Geneva County.

⁵⁵ Spence, *Fifty Years*, 37–47, 56, 67. Rachel Johnson Rigby, phone interview with author, 9 June 2008.

⁵⁶ Hardwick interview, 1986. In everyday usage, the terms “Holiness” and “Pentecostal” were often interchangeable.

⁵⁷ Hardwick interview, 1986.

⁵⁸ Ethel E. Goss, *The Winds of God: The Story of the Early Pentecostal Movement (1901–1914) in the Life of Howard A. Goss* (Hazelwood, Mo., 1958, rev. 1977, updated 1985), 125.

application form, “the railroads in Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas will grant to ministers of the Churches of God in Christ half fare rates.” Applicants were urged to send their forms to Goss or to E. N. Bell (another early organizer and the first general chairman of the Assemblies of God) in Arkansas, to be checked before mailing to the Bureau. “The rates can also be had by our preachers living in the Southeastern territory from Southeastern Clergy Bureau at Atlanta...” This notice of cheaper travel appeared just beneath the call to meeting by J. W. Andrews of Graceville, Florida: “Every one interested in the work in Southeast Alabama and West Florida, please meet us in Dothan...”⁵⁹

In the early years of organizing, women preached, healed, and ministered in leadership positions, though usually alongside male companions or partners or assisting male pastors and preachers, including Irene Hardwick’s sister Sadie Lammon Johnson, Christine Johnson, Docia Noles, Martha Joiner, Donnie Metcalf, and Daisy Bryant, as well as many other women. Local women were licensed preachers before and after the establishment of the Assemblies of God in 1914, although, officially, the organization allowed only prophesying by women. They could not be ordained as pastors.⁶⁰ The reality of the itinerate evangelist’s life was that women lived it as well as men. Goss practiced what he preached, writing, “Rarely could one evangelist go into a new field alone, and turn the community upside down for God in a short time. Jesus did not attempt it, far less then should we.”⁶¹ Goss and his wife, Ethel E. Goss, followed this rule of thumb. Husbands and wives often worked together; occasionally, like H. G. and Ethel Rodgers, father and daughter did. Sometimes the wife was the licensed preacher instead of the husband, as in the case of Sadie Lammon Johnson and her husband, Charles Herbert

⁵⁹ “To Preachers,” *Word and Witness*, 20 December 1912, 1; and 20 October 1913, 4, FPHC.

⁶⁰ R. M. Griffith, D. Roebuck, “Women, Role of,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded edition, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, assoc. ed. Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 1204–05.

⁶¹ Goss, *Winds of God*, 121.

Johnson. Jewell Tomlin's name appears on almost as many lists as her husband's name does, slowed down only by a few months' interruption of childbirth. Docia Noles was listed in Assemblies of God ministerial rolls when her husband, Sam W. Noles, was not. Daisy Bryant attended the second district meeting at Hartford in 1917 and was licensed to preach.⁶² Martha Rebecca Joiner—sometimes known as “Sis Joyner” in documents—preached at many revivals, and in 1921 with Sister Donnie Metcalf she helped set in order Bethel Assembly, now in Ariton, Dale County.⁶³ Undoubtedly, there are many other examples of women pastoring and preaching in the Wiregrass region during the liminal period of Pentecostalism before 1914, waiting to be uncovered.

The fact that wives were encouraged to preach and prophesy with their husbands may have helped lessen “temptations of the flesh,” an occupational hazard of the priesthood, but instances nonetheless arose. One couple who worked together for several years despite those problems were John Wayne and Jewell Standifer Tomlin. They married in August of 1910 in Dale County. After receiving her Home Missionary's license at the Slocomb convention in 1911, Jewell Tomlin's name appeared on three of the four rosters of the Church of God in Christ from 1912–1914. Her husband was listed on all four.⁶⁴

For a few years, Wayne Tomlin (1886–1961), a very active evangelist, seemed to be everywhere at once, preaching, holding revivals, and helping start churches. A short article on the front page of

⁶² Spence, *Fifty Years*, 28.

⁶³ Bethel Assembly of God webpage, <http://www.meetmeatbethel.com/church-history.htm>: accessed Aug. 27, 2008 (no longer accessible as of Aug. 8, 2012. Author has a PDF image of the page.). In the foyer of Bethel Assembly, there hangs a photograph of Donie Metcalf and Martha Joiner taken in the early 1920s.

⁶⁴ *Marriage Licenses, November 1884 to 1930 by Grooms, Surnames beginning with T, Dale, Alabama*, (Dale County Courthouse, Ozark, Alabama, n.d.), transcribed by Christine Grimes Thacker, 2003, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/al/dale/vitals/marriages/groomst.txt> (accessed 29 March 2017). Though we can see that Jewell kept up her license, the record is not as clear on how often she accompanied her husband to Pentecostal events. COGIC Rosters, 1912–1914. She appears again on the ministerial rolls of the new Assemblies of God organization along with her husband in April 1914, just one month after she gave birth to their son, Clanton Wayne.

Word and Witness reported that he had been near Coffee Springs in November of 1911 with Mack Pinson, praying for the healing of two Grimes boys, and that they were still well in 1914. The Grimes family, the Holloways, and several other families founded Holloway Tabernacle in 1912, just a few miles from Coffee Springs, probably the new church “7 miles south of Enterprise,” opened by Tomlin on August 22, 1912. In December 1912, Tomlin oversaw another church opening in Mississippi. Naomi King reported from Clarence, Mississippi, that “Bro. Wayne Tomlin just closed a good meeting here. The Church of God in Christ was set in order. We are praising God for the new light and walking in it.”⁶⁵ In October of 1913, Handy Bryant, who farmed some acreage near Pinckard, reported to *Word and Witness* that Midland City’s first annual camp meeting had been a success, the result of an extended period of effort. Besides Brother Wayne Tomlin, who “did most of the preaching,” Handy reported, “...other preachers and workers were with us and were blessedly used by the Lord. People came from far and near to hear the word, and the attendance was by far the largest in the history of the work at this place. God was present at every service to save, heal, and fill with the Spirit.”⁶⁶

Tomlin was also involved in building, figuratively and literally, the early Pentecostal structure. In December of 1912, J. W. Andrews of Graceville, Florida, called a convention for the next February in Dothan, to organize the building of “a tabernacle for the purpose of holding a camp meeting annually for the benefit of the work in the South.” He added, “Also come prepared to stay and work a few days on the tabernacle.”⁶⁷ Almost a year later, in November of 1913, Wayne Tomlin reported from the State Camp Meeting at Dothan; the tabernacle J. W. Andrews had called for the year before was now built:

⁶⁵ *Word and Witness*, 20 March 1914, 1; Alabama Historical Association Historic Marker, off Coffee County Road 636, <http://www.alabamahistory.net/coffee-historical-markers.html> (accessed March 29, 2017). *Word and Witness*, 20 August 1912, 3, and 20 December 1912, 3, FPHC.

⁶⁶ *Word and Witness*, 20 October 1913, 3, FPHC.

⁶⁷ *Word and Witness*, 20 December 1912, 1, FPHC.

“The Lord has been good to us in giving us this tabernacle, which is a modern building with a seating capacity of about 2,000, and every cent has been paid. It is a nice lot of one and a half acres in Westover, a sub[urb] of Dothan.”⁶⁸ Tomlin had just been elected a delegate to the General Assembly of the Church of God in Christ at the Dothan convention in October.⁶⁹

Jewell Tomlin did not appear with her husband in the December 1913 COGIC Roster, but by then she was several months pregnant with their first child. Their son, Clanton Wayne, was born in March 2, 1914, in Pinckard, but that did not seem to slow his father’s pace. In August 1914, Tomlin reported from Russellville, Arkansas, so it is possible that he also attended the first organizing meeting in April of the Assemblies of God in Hot Springs.⁷⁰ In September, however, he published a notice in the *Dothan Eagle* that his address was in Dothan.⁷¹

Wayne and Jewell Tomlin traveled and preached together often, from their appearance in the record, but this fact did not shield their marriage from serious problems. In the following month of October at the Dothan convention, after several years of fervent evangelizing,

⁶⁸ *Word and Witness*, 20 November 1913, 1, FPHC.

⁶⁹ “Minutes of the Church of God in Christ, Dothan, AL, 1913,” FPHC (hereafter 1913 Dothan Minutes).

⁷⁰ 1913 COGIC Roster: 1 February 1913, FPHC; “General Council Minutes,” April 1914, 12. Monroe County Beacon, “Obituaries: Clanton W. Tomlin,” http://www.monroecountybeacononline.com/June_2008/june_19_2008_news.htm, (accessed 4 December 2008): “[Clanton W. Tomlin] was born March 2, 1914, in Pinckard, Dale County, Alabama, a son of the late John Wayne Tomlin and Jewell Standifer Tomlin.” The Tomlins and others were on the AG Apr 1914 lists, but also on COGIC Roster 1914 (partial), FPHC.

⁷¹ Clanton W. Tomlin obituary, 2008. 1920 U. S. census, Dale County, Alabama, population schedule, Pinckard Beat 6, Enumeration District: 85, p. 17A (penned), dwelling 331, family 331, John B. Standifer; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 5 December 2008); from National Archives microfilm T625, roll 12. *Christian Evangel [Pentecostal Evangel]*, 15 August 1914, 2, FPHC. *Dothan Eagle*, 25 September 1914, 1; and 15 October 1914, 4 (digital image only by subscription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 3 December 2008); from *Ancestry.com*. When Tomlin advertised a second notice for the Westover revival in October of 1914 in the *Dothan Eagle*, he signed himself “Wayne Tomlin, Assembly of God Pastor.”

matters came to a head. Before his fellow ministers, including J. L. Bailey, Handy Bryant, Dan Dubose, J. M. Graham, W. F. Hardwick, Docia and Sam Noles, and Lafayette Snellgrove, Tomlin was accused of several serious offenses, including threatening to kill himself, his wife, and eight-month-old child.⁷² He confessed to everything and asked forgiveness of the convention. The brethren, who had known him for years, formally forgave him and revoked his preaching license until “he proves himself worthy.” His redemption must have come quickly, for the Holloway Tabernacle historic marker claimed him as one of its first pastors in 1915, along with J. E. Spence.⁷³

In the same October 1914 meeting, Handy Bryant was also confronted and accused of adultery. The group agreed not to renew his expired minister’s license until he could be reviewed, although his name appears on the November 1914 “Lists of Ministers Ordained in Good Standing” for the Assemblies of God. Handy’s participation seems to have continued uninterrupted, for, along with his brother-in-law, he attended the first District meeting of the Assemblies of God in Hartford in December of 1915. He and Daisy were at the next two district meetings without Lafayette. At the 1916 meeting, Handy was licensed, and again in 1917, along with Daisy Bryant, who was licensed for Home Missionary work. Handy Bryant was also in the Assemblies of God ministers’ list of 1918.⁷⁴

Wayne Tomlin’s and Handy Bryant’s swift reinstatement and continued participation in the movement—at least for a few more years—is not surprising for several reasons. By the end of 1914, this white COGIC group was set to join the newly organized Assemblies of God. It is likely the ministers knew they needed to get their house in order for the new beginning, and they also knew they needed these two highly effective and dedicated evangelists for the work that was to come. And, there was a deep connectedness among them. Many, if not most, of these Wiregrass men and women were kin to each

⁷² 1914 Dothan Minutes, FPHC.

⁷³ See Alabama Historical Association, “Coffee Historic Markers,” <http://www.alabamahistory.net/coffee-historical-markers.html> (accessed March 29, 2017).

⁷⁴ “Combined Minutes,” Apr.–Nov. 1914, 13, FPHC. Spence, *Fifty Years*, 16–17. “Combined Minutes,” 1914–1918, FPHC.

other by blood or marriage—or they were as tightly knit as kin, many families having lived and died with each other for several generations back. In addition, the shared ecstatic experiences of this spiritual community bound them together emotionally from its beginning. And now, as the months and years passed, they were deeply ensconced in the life of this movement. Their Pentecostal brothers and sisters must have felt they knew these men well enough to bring them back quickly into the fold, especially during this pivotal time of transition and growth.

Tomlin was not to stay in the Assemblies of God. Jewell Tomlin died of influenza in South Carolina in 1918.⁷⁵ By 1930, he and his new wife, son Clanton, and two more children were living in Miller County, Arkansas, where Tomlin worked as a Methodist minister.⁷⁶ By 1917, Lafayette Snellgrove had deserted his wife and four daughters for a new life in St. Lawrence County, New York, and would not return to Alabama or the Pentecostal life.⁷⁷ Handy and Daisy Bryant, however, stayed in the Pentecostal movement. Like countless others from the Wiregrass, in 1919, they moved with daughter Gertrude, sister Jessie Bryant Snellgrove, and Jessie's four daughters (Mae Agnes, Daisy, Gladys, and Muriel), and with Handy's and Jessie's

⁷⁵ "In Memory of Jewell Standifer Tomlin," *Southern Star* (Dale County, Ala.), 11 December 1918.

⁷⁶ 1930 U. S. census, Miller County, Arkansas, population schedule, Sulphur, Enumeration District: 21, p. 12A (penned), p. 29 (stamped), dwelling 150, family 150, John W. Tomlin; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 10 August 2008); from National Archives microfilm T626, roll 84. Sulphur, Miller County, is located in the far southwest corner of Arkansas, south of Texarkana.

⁷⁷ "Lafayette Snellgrove, registrant," *World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, Registration Location: Saint Lawrence County, New York; Draft Board: 2; 12 September 1918; digital image only by subscription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 21 November 2008); from Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, microfilm: M1509, Roll: 1818815. 1920 U. S. census, Saint Lawrence, New York, population schedule, Potsdam, Enumeration District: 180, p. 7B (penned), dwelling 136, family 162, Harry Snellgrove; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 8 December 2008); from National Archives microfilm T626, roll microfilm: T625, Roll 1260 (apartment house address: 43 182 Market Street).

mother, Martha Jane Peters Bryant, to work in the textile mills of Bibb City, a mill town in north Columbus, Georgia.⁷⁸

Though the Bryants and Snellgroves moved into unfamiliar territory, Pentecostal activity had been going on in Columbus for several years; there were many recognizable faces. By 1915, Sam and Docia Noles and other familiar names from “down home” had begun organizing what became the North Highland Assembly of God in north Columbus. J. M. Graham, from Enterprise, who had been preaching in southeast Alabama for several years, was the first pastor.⁷⁹ The Bryants and their children and grandchildren attended North Highland Assembly of God and later East Highland Assembly (renamed Evangel Temple) for many years.⁸⁰ The Tenth Anniversary Convention of the Southeastern District Council of the Assemblies of God was held in Columbus in 1925 at an unnamed “Assembly of God Church [on] 3125 Third Avenue,” just a few blocks from Hanson Avenue where the Bryants lived in 1922.⁸¹ In 1932, North Highland Assembly of God, where G. C. Courtney pastored, hosted the Alabama–Georgia District Council meeting, and East Highland Assembly of God hosted the meeting in 1934, where Sam W. Noles, originally from Cottonwood, Houston County, pastored.⁸²

The closely knit relationships of family and spiritual community that had existed “down home” in southeast Alabama continued in

⁷⁸ Bryant, Martha; 5 October 1922, Number 26857, Death Certificates, Vital Records, Public Health, RG 26-5-95, Courtesy of the Georgia Archives. 1919 is an estimated date calculated from Handy Bryant’s mother’s 1922 death certificate in which he states he has lived in Bibb City for three years. Snellgrove sisters interview, 1976. Agnes Snellgrove Taylor stated they moved in 1919. Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, especially chapter 4. Marshall interview, 2008: information on membership in the churches. Occupation information is from the 1920 and 1930 censuses. Besides working in the Bibb City Mill, Handy and Daisy rented rooms to boarders, and he later worked as a Singer Sewing Machine salesman, among other jobs.

⁷⁹ North Highland Assembly of God History, <http://www.north-highland.org/history> (accessed 29 March 2017).

⁸⁰ Marshall interview, 2008.

⁸¹ Spence, *First Fifty*, 42.

⁸² Spence, *First Fifty*, 68, 70.

Georgia. Daisy Tucker remembered that her mother, Jessie Bryant Snellgrove, the steadfast Missionary Baptist, was visited in Bibb City late in life by the same Pentecostal ministers who had known her and her husband back in Dale County. "All the preachers she was brought up with, they would come to see her, you know, they came to Columbus...they were all Assembly of God." Jessie often attended Pentecostal services preached by her husband, her brother, and others.⁸³ These ministers may have felt some responsibility to check on Jessie after her husband abandoned the family, but they also were connected by old friendships and community connections. Old community and family bonds held fast over time and space and were strengthened by common spiritual experiences beyond denominational boundaries.

As Dan Dubose rose higher in the national organization, he also continued to keep close ties with his friends from Alabama. In the 1930s, Dubose would come to Columbus to preach during revivals.⁸⁴ His engaging personality lives on in stories passed down in the family of Gertrude Bryant Martin, Handy and Daisy's daughter. In one, Dubose had already been assigned a family with whom to stay while preaching in town, but at the first night's meeting sought out Gertrude Martin in the congregation, someone he had known since she was very young, probably since birth, having worked with her father and mother in the very early days of the movement. "I want to stay with you, Gertrude!," Dan Dubose was heard to say.⁸⁵ Another story from about the same time reveals, at the least, Dubose's memorable charisma. East Highland Assembly in north Columbus planned to have a tent revival where Dubose was to preach. That evening the weather turned to a battering rain, coming down so hard

⁸³ Tucker interview, 2002.

⁸⁴ In 1930, Dubose was "pastoring a "Holiness church" in Laurel, Mississippi. 1930 U. S. census, Jones County, Mississippi, population schedule, Laurel, Enumeration District: 9, p. 1A (penned), dwelling 7, family 7, Daniel J. Dubose; digital image by subscription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 5 December 2008); from National Archives microfilm T626, roll 1151.

⁸⁵ Marshall interview, 2008.

that they were afraid the tent might give way and so loudly that they could hardly hear under the drenched canvas:

Brother Dubose stopped the service and told everyone gathered under the tent: 'We're going to pray and ask the Lord to stop the storm so that we can worship him. We will stay under this tent and will ask the storm to stop in Jesus' name.' And the rain stopped immediately, and so Brother Dubose could preach. And it did not start up again until they were getting in their cars to go home.⁸⁶

Local leaders such as Dubose, Rodgers, Pinson, Ledbetter, the Noleses, the Tomlins, and the Grahams knew the Bryants and Snellgroves as well as they knew each other. The early Pentecostal movement in southeast Alabama was a complex and interwoven community, layered, in the way a family history is layered, with the lives of many actors, known and as yet unknown to us, and deserving much more research. The bonds developed among kinfolk and old community members influenced the religious structures and community of the early Pentecostal people of the Wiregrass region of Alabama. Those relationships spilled over into regional and national organizations such as the Assemblies of God and were inextricable with its rapid and exponential growth in the U.S. The influence of kinship communities on southern Pentecostalism deserves recognition and research in order to write a more nuanced narrative of this period in the history of Alabama.

⁸⁶ Ibid.