Calvary Baptist Church celebrates 175 years

In 1812 the culmination of a number of years of effort resulted in the constituting of a Baptist Church in Bayou Chicot.

In 1867 the congregation of that church celebrates 175 years of active worship. The church is thought to be the oldest Baptist Church in the state west of the Mississippi River.

Officially organized November 13, 1812, it is thought that Protestant religious services had been held in the settlement by the 1790s when that area was ruled by Spain. Public worship by those not of the Catholic Faith was forbidden at that time but isolated communities of Protestants were gathering to worship privately.

Joseph Willis, the founder of the Calvary Baptist Church and others in the area, is credited with the organization of this church where over 90 percent of the families were Protestant or of Protestant heritage.

The Calvary Baptist congregation is planning a full day's program marking the historic occasion. Brother Lynn Clayton, editor of The Baptist Message (the Louisiana Baptists’ state paper) and former editor of the state paper of the Kansas-Nebraska Convention, will deliver the Message of Inspiration during the morning service which begins at 10:50 a.m.

Kathy Sylveste, representing the Louisiana Baptist Historical Society, will make a presentation, and a number of special musical renditions will be part of the service.

Following a noon meal for members and guests, the afternoon session will include special personal reflections by members of the congregation as well as a presentation by Winston DeVille, a distinguished member of the community who is a Fellow of the American Society of Genealogists and author of a number of books and articles relating to Louisiana as well as columnist for this and other area newspapers. His talk will be “Baptists at Bayou Chicot - Strangers in a Foreign Land”.

Comments by the present pastor, Rev. Leon Terrell and the former pastor, Rev. W. Porter Lazenby will be included in the afternoon session as well as music and special readings.

Calvary Baptist Church was sponsor for other early Baptist groups throughout the area and the celebration is expected to attract historians, former members and friends from throughout the state.

The celebration will be held at the Calvary Baptist Church in Bayou Chicot, Sunday, November 8, with the lunch in the school cafeteria. The afternoon event begins at 1:30 p.m.