

# Sexton: Effort underway to save 'simple country church' from ravages of termites

- Scott Sexton/Winston-Salem Journal
- Aug 23, 2014



The State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, N.C. is facing financial difficulties because of a dwindling congregation.

- David Rolfe/Journal



Standing on the ramp of the State Road Primitive Baptist Church, in State Road, NC, Friday, August 22, 2014, are, l-r; Larry Wood, Vickie Wood, Sammy Cheek, Lou Hampton, Henry Hampton, Melba Dameron, and Kenneth Dameron. Cheek is the caretaker of the small rural church, and Lou Hampton is one of the few remaining active members, though everyone else is connected to the church through family or history.

- David Rolfe/Journal



A termite-ridden section of sill at the rural State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, N.C.

- David Rolfe/Journal

STATE ROAD – Sammy Cheek didn't set out to become the caretaker at the Old State Road Primitive Baptist Church.

The congregation was aging, and its numbers dwindled with each passing year. One small job led to another. The next thing he knew, he was looking after the grounds and his wife was taking care of the church's modest bookkeeping.

Then again, the change might have been inevitable. Old State Road Primitive Baptist is in his blood. "My great-granddad joined that church in 1861, and

five generations of my family is buried up there,” he said by way of explanation. “As far as that goes, it’s my only place of worship.”

Less than a half-dozen regular members remain, but the passage of time and an aging membership aren’t the biggest threats to the church these days.

Termites are.

### **Sense of history**

Old State Road Primitive Baptist was organized about 1830 under the name Pleasant Grove in western Surry County near Wilkes.

According to a history written by longtime deacon Culmer Wood, the physical church was established on two acres of land donated by two early members on what was then known as State Road – not too far from Stone Mountain State Park.

An early church ledger described it in plain language: “The church met and found fellowship.”

The little church grew and thrived as generations came and went. A close knit and reverent community grew up and around the church.

“It was different from other churches I’ve been to,” said Melba Wood Dameron, referring to Primitive Baptists’ belief that all things are preordained.

Dameron grew in the church and attended faithfully with her family, including her father Deacon Wood. Her sister, Lou Wood Hampton, still belongs to Old State Primitive Baptist.

The church is “an old-timey place out in the country,” she said.

Dameron has moved on now. She lives in Clemmons and belongs to a Southern Baptist church in Lewisville.

But the pull of family remains strong. Before her father passed away in 2004, she lovingly typed the history of the church as he dug it up from Old State’s trove of old ledgers and documents.

A sense of time and place tugs on her shirtsleeve, the same way it does for Cheek.

### **‘Simple country church’**

Learning that the old place was under siege by termites – if you’ll pardon the pun – is eating at Dameron.

Her father contributed to a modest fund to help cover the costs of mowing and maintain the church cemetery, so it’s only natural then that she’s interested in helping preserve the place.

The church building in use today was built in 1910. It originally had two doors, one for men and one for women because the genders didn’t mix to worship. Over the years, the church added restrooms in the back and built a ramp to accommodate wheelchairs, a concession to the aging of the congregation.

“It’s been redone a couple times, but yeah, the outside is original,” Cheek said.

Termites threaten it now. “There’s a couple places that’s bad you can see inside,” he said.

When Cheek and Dameron's sister let her know that, she decided to try and do something. She's trying to start a fund to cover the cost of an exterminator - roughly \$800. That doesn't seem a lot, but it is to a church with fewer than 10 official members.

"There are just a few active members now," Dameron said. "They're not young, and they're not wealthy. It's a simple country church."

It's so small, in fact, that they have no regular preacher and only hold services in the building once a month. Other times, the faithful worship at nearby churches that hold the same beliefs.

"This church is a very special place," Dameron said. "It holds a lot of memories for a lot of us."

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Larry Wood (left) and Sammy Cheek stand in the sanctuary of the State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, NC.



The interior of the rural State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, NC.

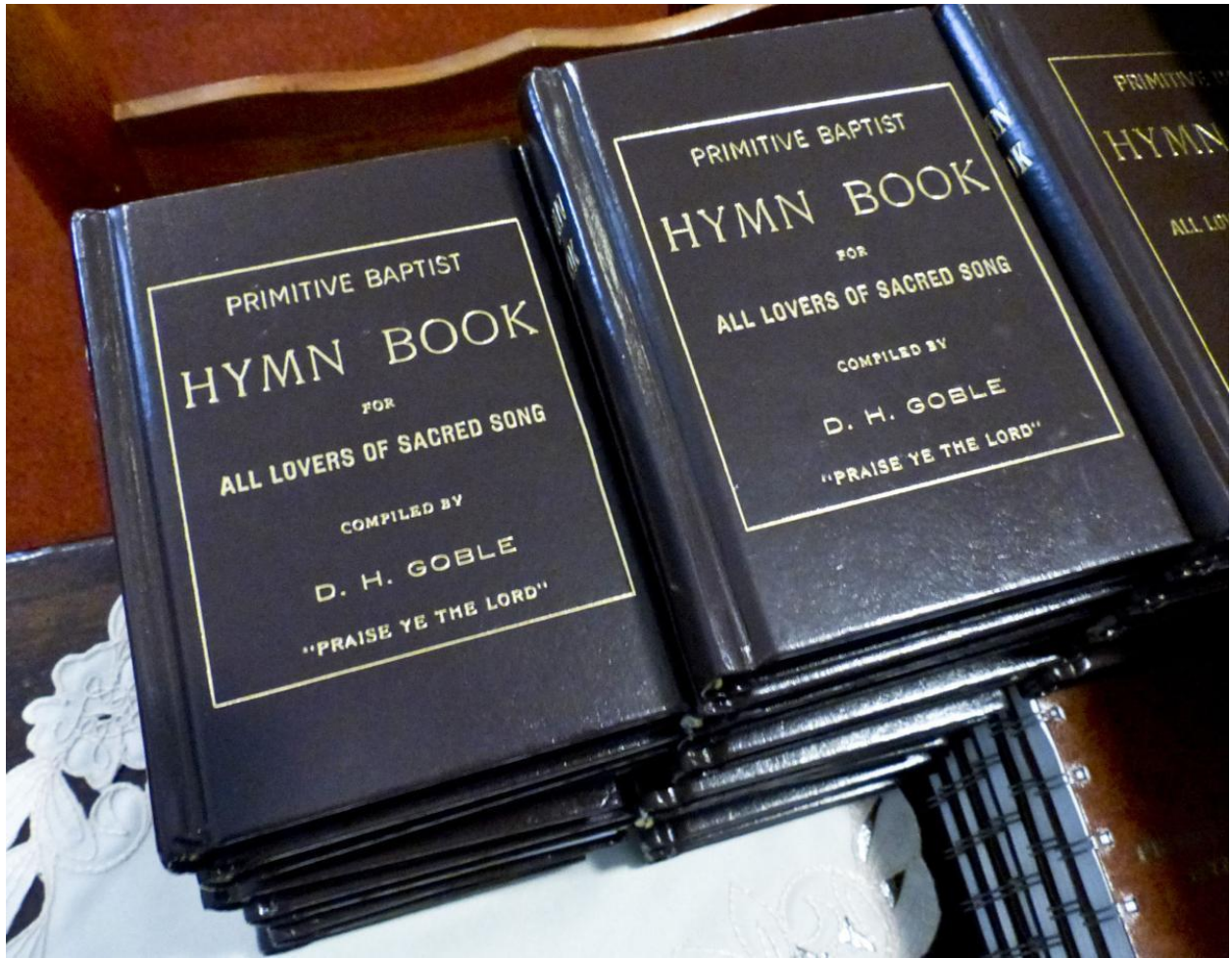




Sammy Cheek, caretaker of the State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, NC examines a headstone in the church cemetery on Friday, August 22, 2014. Although legally separate financial entities, both the church and graveyard are facing financial difficulties due to a dwindling congregation.



Vickie Wood looks out the doorway of the State Road Primitive Baptist Church, at the church cemetery across Zephyr Road in State Road, NC.



Stacked hymnals in the rural State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, NC.



The State Road Primitive Baptist Church was founded in 1830. The small congregation in State Road, NC, and its adjacent cemetery, are facing financial hard times due to a dwindling number of members.



Sammy Cheek, caretaker for the State Road Primitive Baptist Church in State Road, NC, opens the door to the small country church. Established in 1830, the congregation has dwindled to a handful of active members and faces serious financial challenges, in part due to termite damage.