

It was a fall day, Oct. 3, 1897, when a group of believers, under the leadership of Rev. Swindler of Newberry, gathered under the protection of a brush arbor on the corner of Holmes and Oak Streets. A brush arbor consists of small trees or bushes with branches intertwined across the top to give some protection from the elements and wide enough for a small group to gather beneath. The purpose of this gathering was to worship God and to establish a body of believers in the community. These believers were known at first as Little River Baptist Church.

Before they were able to erect a building, this group needing protection and growing met on the upstairs floor of a Fleming Street drug store. Later they met in a hall over the company store building. Methodists and Presbyterians also used this facility. On the fourth Sunday, morning and evening services were held.

On Dec. 20, 1898, the church called a meeting to reorganize. There were 25 people listed as charter members. They called Rev. James A. Martin as their pastor. Rev. Martin also was a medical doctor at Martin's Crossroads. This faithful group had already organized a Sunday School sometime in 1898 under the direction of Houston Roper.

During a conference on March 12, 1899, the church members voted to change its name from Little River Baptist Church to Laurens Second Baptist Church. In August, the church was voted into the membership of the Laurens Baptist Association and also sent messengers to the October 1899 annual meeting.

On Jan. 14, 1900, a committee was appointed to find a suitable site on which they could build a church. They desired their own house of worship and soon were able to purchase materials and build a church with an upper floor for classrooms, allowing Sunday School groups to meet. This was all possible because Laurens Mill deeded a lot to the church and promised to pay the full amount above \$500 of the cost of the construction. They were a determined group of people, willing to give sacrificially to obtain their goal of \$500. The people worshiped in their new building for the first time on March 31, 1902. A bell was installed to call the community to worship services. The Women's Missionary Union had been organized sometime in 1901. There was no apparent explanation for the dedication

service to be delayed until July 3, 1904. Also at some time, a pastorium was constructed next to the church.

In 1946, after calling Rev. Grange Cothran, plans to remodel and add to the church of Holmes Street were put aside and the decision was made to build a new church on Fleming Street. The Fleming Street lot also was deeded to the church by Laurens Mill in exchange for the lot on Holmes Street. A member of the church who was a local builder was asked to oversee the project. T. B. King agreed to serve as foreman and was paid a small fee. Many of the members of Second Baptist Church contributed their time and talents until the building was completed. The members gave regularly and sacrificially. Each time they needed money for a particular item, it was provided. The last service in the old church on Holmes Street was Aug. 15, 1948. This meeting turned into a testimony time for those in attendance.

Many prayers and dedication of time, along with much hard work seemed worthwhile as the members settled in the new facility in August 1948. The church continued to grow and soon the lumber from the old church building was being used to build an educational building. Even the church bell found a home in the bell tower of the educational building. A new pastorium was built with gray granite rock like the church in 1956. A ramp was constructed at the back entrance in 1966.

In 1972, the church voted to operate a kindergarten as a mission. Many children were blessed as they were prepared for first grade. Bible stories and songs were taught and Bible verses were learned, perhaps lives were changed for the better. Second Baptist Kindergarten closed its doors in May 1988.

On April 1, 2001, the Rev. J.D. Shiflet was called to be pastor at Second Baptist Church. Under his leadership, many improvements have been made to the church building — including a remodeled alter — and numerous new members have joined the church. Student ministry leaders Joel and Polly Martin joined the church in 2011. In December of 2020, after nearly 21 years as pastor of Second Baptist, Rev. Shiflet retired from pastoring due to health reasons. In Jan 2021, the Rev. Ervin Stutzman became the interim pastor.

On January 5, 2022, the Rev. Phil Wyatt was called to be Senior pastor of Second Baptist Church. We are excited about what the Lord has for our church in the coming years under his leadership. In fall 2022, Joel and Polly Martin resigned as student ministry leaders, moving forward to serve the congregation in other capacities. In 2023, Rev. Ervin Stutzman, later joined our congregation serving as our Associate Pastor. In July 2023, Luke & Taylor Freeman answered the call to be the Student ministry leaders at Laurens Second Baptist.

For a more complete history of Second Baptist Church, please visit the church library or museum.