

1937 Was Not a Good Year

The year 1937 was a tragic one for the community of Sale Creek as well as the Sale Creek Presbyterian Church. Just eleven years after the first service in the new sanctuary, the church suffered probably its toughest year of existence before or after.

Things began to go badly in the spring when deacon John Downey died unexpectedly at the age of 63, leaving his widowed wife, Florence, to live with their daughter, Thyra, for the rest of her life.

During the summer of that year, the community experienced a catastrophe when two trains collided head-on in the Ragan Hill cut and killed three trainmen. The sound of the collision and subsequent explosion caused by the bursting steam cylinders sounded like many tons of TNT being set off. The chilling sight of the wreckage with the men trapped inside was sobering to all who saw it.

Reverend L.D. Phillips was the pastor of the church and was fifty-two years old at the time. He had been the pastor for a number of years and was beloved by the members of the church. His wife, Mary, was a teacher at Sale Creek School and had four sons (David, Robert, Jimmy, Roger) as well as a daughter, Jean. At that time Mary was pregnant with twin sons. Tragedy continued to strike in the church when on October 25 she gave birth and both children (Donald and Dow) died in childbirth. The grieving Phillips family was still reeling from the loss of the two children when Reverend Phillips died suddenly on November 9.

On November 6 three days prior to Reverend Phillips' death, Elder Ed Downey got up early and prepared to meet his partner, Bill List, for a trip to the mountain to look at some orchard land there. Bill pulled up across the highway from Ed's house alongside Highway 27 at the end of Coulterville Road that morning. He was off the side of the southbound lane as Ed came out of his house and started walking toward the road. Bill related to me a number of years ago that Ed seemed to be lost in thought that morning and walked right out into the highway in front of a car driven by a man from Dayton. He was struck by the car and thrown into the air coming down on the pavement with very serious injuries.

An ambulance was summoned and Mr. Downey was taken to the Albert C. Broyles Hospital in Dayton. The injuries were so severe that Dr. Broyles had to remove one leg. Because of the type of injuries and the removal of the leg, Ed required a blood transfusion. Luther Coulter was one of the volunteers who gave direct blood transfusions to Ed in order to keep him alive.

For nineteen days Dr. Broyles and his staff fought to keep Ed Downey alive; however, on November 25, 1937, he went to be with the Lord. The community and the church were deeply sorrowful over Ed Downey's death because they knew that everyone had lost a close and dear friend.

My father once said that when W.H. List and Ed Downey died that many people wondered how the church could go on without their leadership. He said that the lesson that was learned was that the Lord rewarded the church's faithfulness by providing the means through others for the church to continue to be a viable ministry in the community. It is God who provides and not individuals. The church pulled together after the loss of a deacon, elder and pastor as well as the loss of two infants all within the span of a few months.