

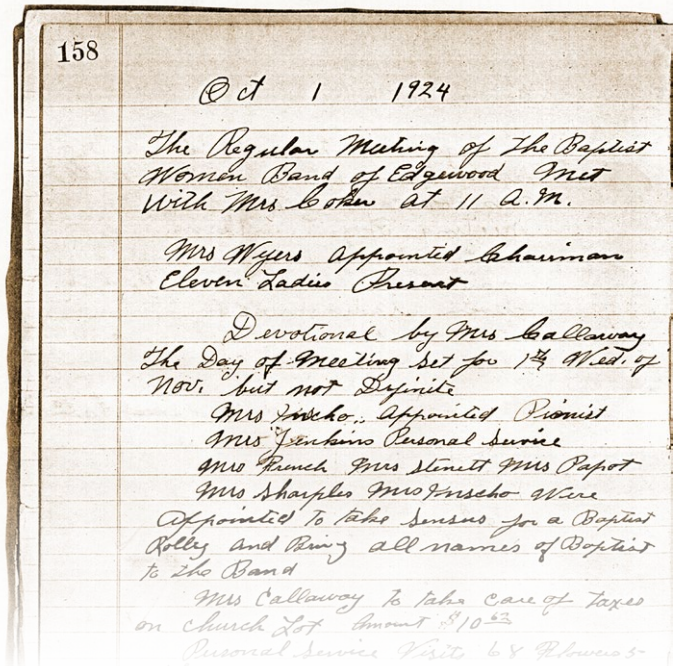


By Shannon Lindsay

THE STORY OF DAWSON IS ABOUT ITS PEOPLE AND WHAT OUR FAITHFUL GOD HAS DONE TO EXPAND HIS KINGDOM THROUGH THEM.

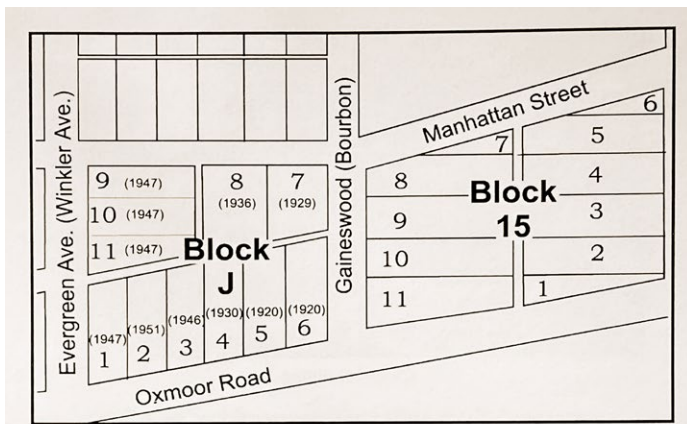
What began as a way to familiarize myself with our history in preparing for a building campaign and a 100-year anniversary celebration quickly became a labor of love, as I dug deeply into the personal lives of our church's namesake and several of our founding members. I wanted to learn as much as I could about Dr. L.O. Dawson. I wanted to know why this small but active group of members at Edgewood Baptist Church felt so strongly about Dr. Dawson that they renamed the church after his passing.

Not only do I have Ray and Doris Atchison to thank for their accounts of Dr. Dawson in their book *Light in the Valley*, but I found many historical documents, newspaper articles, and other bits of information that helped shine a light on who Dr. Dawson was as a person and as a man of God. It was quite evident that in every way possible, the fact that "He Loved Much," was true, just as the plaque in our Sanctuary's Vestibule states. And the impact he had on people still exists today. I received a phone call just a week ago from a man living in Colorado Springs, CO, named Mr. Tolleson. He told me about his parents, who had both been students at Howard University and studied under Dr. Dawson. They must've thought a lot about Dr. Dawson, because they had given Mr. Tolleson the name Dawson when he was born some 84 years ago. Mr. Tolleson was looking for information to share with his eighteen-year-old grandson, also named Dawson. For a pseudo-historian such as myself, I took great pleasure in making a Dawson connection across the country and across the years.

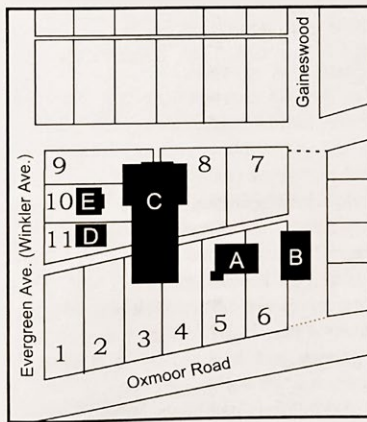


Top photo: Mrs. Callaway (center) at the farewell party for Rev. J. Ivey Edward, Dawson's 3rd pastor, (1947). Above: Minutes from the Baptists Woman's Band.

As I continued my research, I became particularly interested in a lady named Mrs. J.T. (Frances) Callaway, or "Fannie" to her friends. Though I had never heard her name before, I quickly found out that God would use her in a very special way to initiate the beginning of our church.



Lots 7 through 11 of Block 15 were given by Mrs. J. T. Callaway.



The Fieldstone Building (A) was built in 1925 on lots 5 and 6.
 The Chapel Building (B) was placed on part of lot 6 and part of the closed roadway.
 The Main Building (C) was built in 1951.
 The Scout hut (D) and the Duplex (E) stood until the West Wing was added in 1959.
 The Fieldstone Building and Chapel Building were removed to make way for the East Wings.

Frances was married to Dr. John Callaway. They met each other when he was a first-year medical student in Birmingham and Fannie was working at the Jefferson County Courthouse. The couple married and decided to build their home at 102 St. Charles Street, becoming one of few in the neighborhood. Though the Callaways had first met each other at a Baptist Young People's Union meeting, there was not a Baptist church in the area. One night they were attending a prayer service at a nearby church when an offering was taken up for a manse. Dr. Callaway leaned over and told Frances that he would have given more money if it had been for a Baptist Church. That's when Mrs. Callaway set out to find enough Baptists in the area to organize a new church. And organize they did. The Callaways invited five other people to join them, and Edgewood Baptist Church was officially formed in their home on St. Charles Street. Shortly thereafter, the members launched a plan to purchase property nearby and construct a building for the church. With a budget of \$5,500, two lots on Oxmoor Road were purchased.

As the story goes, Edgewood Baptist Church hired its first pastor, Rev. Samuel Heath, who stayed from January through May 1920 before he returned to his home in Equality, AL. Since the recession of 1920 lasted a few years, the Edgewood community did not develop as quickly as hoped. However, the group remained confident of a future for their church,

which was demonstrated by their continued tithing and saving. Within five years, they had paid for the purchased lots and had accumulated \$3,500 in cash.

Mrs. Callaway and her husband, John, were very involved in the community. Dr. Callaway ran Edgewood's first pharmacy, was the town's mayor, and served as a trustee of the church until his passing. He served in many roles of the church and was instrumental in securing Dr. Dawson as pastor. While Mrs. Callaway worked as a realtor, she was also involved in the Baptist Woman's Band, a group that supported missions, and was part of the original nine ladies at the organizational meeting. These early members were very active and became the standard for all WMS/WMU groups that followed. Mrs. Callaway must've been pretty astute financially. In December 1921, the ladies elected her as treasurer of the Building Fund, in which she served for many years.

In December 1925, the Fieldstone Building was constructed and paid for with the money saved from the 1920 group and the money from the Baptist Woman's Band's Building Fund. The church also took out a loan for with a loan of \$11,000 at 7% interest. Even through the Depression of 1929, the church continued to acquire property immediately behind the Fieldstone Building. When the WMS discovered that another lot next to the Fieldstone Building could be purchased for \$1000, they raised the money any way they could, such as selling eggs and milk. (All before an Edgewood law forbidding cows and chickens in town.)

They sponsored teas, cooking schools, and bazaars to help pay off the debt on the building. Throughout the Depression, the deacons would meet to discuss the financial needs. Almost always, they were behind. At one time, when a person was needed to make reports to the committees regularly, Mrs. Callaway offered to keep these records without charge in order to save the church money.



GROUND BREAKING HELD—The Rev. E. C. Arendall, pastor, assists Mrs. T. J. Callaway, a charter member, in breaking ground for the new \$250,000 Dawson Baptist Church. Left to right in the photo are: Mrs. P. M. Carlisle, a charter member; W. C. Sterrett, charter member; Mr. Arendall, Mrs. Callaway and A. L. Dawson, son of the former pastor for whom the church was named.

Dr. Callaway suffered from ill health and died in 1931 at the age of 49. And when Dr. Dawson died in 1938, the Fieldstone Building still had a debt totaling \$1,750. Mrs. Callaway recommended that a fund be created for the purpose of “extinguishing” the debt completely. Mrs. Callaway volunteered to pay \$5 a week until the fund reached \$500. At the church conference that month, it was announced that the fund had been activated and named the J.T. Callaway, J.A. Coker, and L.O. Dawson Fund, a fitting memorial honoring three outstanding charter members.



Though the Callaways had no children of their own, I’m told that Mrs. Callaway loved working in the nursery on Sundays and teaching Sunday School. When we traveled to Dothan, AL last year to interview Mrs. Inice Elise Tarrant for our 100-year documentary, I asked her about Mrs. Callaway. At 95 years old, Inice stated that she remembered her well as a special lady who was soft-spoken and loved our church. She recounted how she vividly remembered Mrs. Callaway working in the nursery on Sundays. Additionally, notes from *Light in the Valley* tell us that she was especially helpful with young couples who were just getting started in marriage. It seems that Mrs. Callaway was very interested in the upcoming generations, and I feel certain that she made a great impact on them.

In May 1939, Lots 7 through 11 of Block 15 were given to the church by Mrs. Callaway. Later that year with the debt on the Fieldstone Building paid off and the church being debt-free, plans were made to build a new auditorium. Mrs. Callaway was appointed to the committee. Because of the war, the original plans were put on hold even though the church was growing every week and was in desperate need of space. When the end of WWII appeared w, a new committee was formed in March 1944, again with Mrs. Callaway serving on the committee. When the time came, she was given the honor of helping the pastor lift the first spade of dirt at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Dawson’s beautiful new Sanctuary was dedicated on March 18, 1951, with Dr. Edgar Arendall at the helm. Mrs. Callaway was so anxious to eliminate the debt on the Sanctuary that



Charter members. Front row, left to right: Mrs. J. T. Callaway, Mrs. James M. Ward, James M. Ward, Hannah Coker, Lewis Dawson Back row: Mrs. T. M. Steen, T. M. Steen, W. C. Sterrett, W. I. Pittman, Mrs. W. I. Pittman

she came to Dr. Arendall one day and said, “Here is my engagement ring. I want it to be sold, and the amount applied to the building fund.” Arendall countered, “You shouldn’t give this ring. Keep it because it is personal.” Mrs. Callaway quickly replied, “But, Pastor, I’m not giving it to you; I’m giving it to the Lord.” Thereupon the chairman of the deacons and the finance chairman took the ring downtown, and sold it for \$2000, a magnificent sum for those years, and applied it to the building fund as she wished.

The more you learn about someone you admire, the more you want to know about them. Mrs. Callaway died in Ringgold, GA, where she had moved during her elderly years to be near family. She died at the age of 91 and was buried next to her husband in Elmwood Cemetery. While I have searched high and low, this is all of the information I have been able to find about her so far—not even her obituary.

Yet, one thing I do know about Mrs. Callaway, or Fannie, as I’m sure she would insist on calling her, is that the faithfulness she displayed over the years has been a personal inspiration to me. In my mind’s eye, I picture this tiny woman with a soft voice, saying that she wanted to “give her all to the Lord,” and I believe she did. I hope her story will continue to inspire future generations to contribute to God’s Kingdom sacrificially like she did, both financially and through the giving of her time and talents all for the glory of God.

On the last page of *Light in the Valley*, Mrs. Callaway is quoted as saying, “A church must move forward. If it becomes static, eventually it will surely die.” Thank you, Fannie, for shining your light brightly for Jesus, and may we seek to do the same.

P.S. I hope you’ll make plans to join me on April 6, 2025, when we celebrate all that God has done through His people at Dawson over the last 100 years.



Shannon Lindsay has served as Dawson’s Communications Director for the past 13 years. Her love of history is only surpassed slightly by her love of sports. In her spare time, she enjoys playing pickleball and spending time with her family. She and her husband, Michael, have one son, Tyler, and an energetic Aussie Doodle named Ginger.