

Elvis Presley visits Mt. Sherman Assembly of God Church

Mt. Sherman, located approximately five miles from Jasper. According to Walter Lackey's History of Newton County, the first post office there was called Killgore. It was established October 23, 1891 with Jackson Killgore as postmaster. It was discontinued in 1898 and the mail was sent to Jasper. It reopened on February 23, 1914 with a new name, Plumlee, but the name changed again on March 15, 1934. The name Mt. Sherman was suggested by John C Spencer. Mt. Sherman was a small, thriving community with school, church, and store/post office. Land for the church was given by William Alonzo Spencer, who was called to preach and was ordained by the Assemblies of God on February 15, 1918. A little country church was built and Alonzo preached there for many years. The church faced many changes in the 1930s when it was rolled back from the road on logs, a stage was built, and the pot-bellied stove was replaced by gas heat. In the early 1980s, a foyer, classroom and two bathrooms were added and a new front porch.

In 1977, it still was a little country church with only twelve pews, six on each side. There was an old, high-backed piano badly in need of a tune-up and no full-time preacher. But something happened on January 3, 1977, that made Mt. Sherman Assembly of God the talk of the area. Elvis Presley came to visit. On this day, the church would conduct the funeral services of its founder, William Alonzo Spencer. He was the maternal grandfather of Ginger Alden, who was Elvis' fiance, and Elvis would be by her side at the funeral.

The Rev. Martin Villines and Rev. Guy Jones would officiate for the service. A young minister who had just arrived to take the pulpit at Jasper Assembly of God would be asked to sing. He was along time fan of Elvis and his Jasper congregation often enjoyed some of the same gospel songs Elvis sang.

One of the songs chosen for this occasion was "How Great Thou Art." Rev. Roger D. Maddox had sung this song many times, but on this occasion his voice broke about halfway through. Then the solo became a duet. Elvis began to sing the harmony as they finished, "Then sings my soul, my Savior, God, to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art."

After the service, the King of Rock and Roll apologized for joining in the singing. Young Reverend Maddox thought quickly and replied, "That's all right, Elvis. You can sing with me any time!"

by **Diana Nelson**

printed in ***Newton County Historical Society Newsletter Vol. 13***