

## The Clay Family & Kirkwood Baptist Church

"Bush Arbor" or "Beech Springs" church evolved informally from services held first in a bush arbor near a spring (possibly today's Gilliam Park) on Clay Street.

Bush Arbor Church was formally constituted in 1873 on Clay Street by Cleveland & Nancy Clay, Jesse Clay Sr., Newt Williams, Peter Hughes, and D.V. Stephens and named in Baptist records as "Beech Springs Baptist Church".

Services were first held in Cleveland and Nancy Clay's home, then in a vacant house, then a small church built by them in 1873. The "congregation built a small house ... in which services were held until sometime in 1874." These were all on Clay Street NE in Kirkwood, one street east of Clay Cemetery and south of today's Hosea Williams Drive.

Official Register.--Pastors.			
NAME	COMMENCED.	CLOSED.	REMARKS.
<i>Bush Arbor Church constituted in Summer of 1873                      with following members:                      (called                      Beech Springs)</i>			<i>George Broons                      Cleveland Clay                      Mrs. "                      Jesse "                      Newt Williams</i>
<i>Peter Hughes                      D.V. Stephens</i>	<i>Fall of 1873</i>		<i>on Clay St.</i>

The second church building was erected in 1886 after a donation of land and \$500 by J.B. Wade. It was located at the SE quadrant of today's Hosea Williams Drive & Clay Street on a 150' by 75' parcel.

Jesse Clay remained active in the church until his death. Cleveland Clay was active in Kirkwood Baptist Church until at least 1891 and served as a "Messenger" to the Stone Mountain Association of Baptist Churches in 1886, 1889, and 1891.

The church had 34 members in 1888 and met two Sundays monthly. By 1893 there were 55 members and a 57 member Sunday School and within a year the Sunday school had grown to 75 participants. The church was renamed "Kirkwood Baptist Church" in 1894. The building was subsequently moved to Howard Street NE & Hardee Street (today's Delano Drive) to become the congregation's third home in 1895.

Growth continued and in 1897 the congregation numbered 88 and met every Sunday. It absorbed Murray Hill Church and one to two smaller congregations in 1902 and the church's seating capacity in 1913 reached 275.



Clay Family Home Church  
Kirkwood Baptist Church, 1913  
Howard Street NE & Hardee Street (Delano Drive)

The congregation's fourth building was today's Pentocostal Church of God at 110 Howard Street NE. Their fifth building became today's Israel Baptist Church at 2071 Hosea Williams Drive. After Kirkwood Baptist Church's congregation joined the white flight from Kirkwood in 1966 it was renamed Rainbow Baptist Church in 1968 to reflect the new location on Rainbow Drive in Decatur.



Kirkwood Baptist Church  
Today's Pentocostal Church of God, 110 Howard Street NE



Kirkwood Baptist Church  
Today's Israel Baptist Church, 2071 Hosea Williams Drive

**From:**

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Beech Springs, Kirkwood, Rainbow Park.  
Mary Jones Freeman, 1973