

Elim Baptist Church was organized and managed by men and women who valued hard work, Sunday worship, and Bible education for their children. The roots of Elim Church have been put down deep. They established a hardworking standard that is continued into the present and is shored up daily to carry Elim Baptist Church into the future. This is an outline of some of the rich heritage shared among one of the families who in 1857 made the decision to charter Elim Baptist Church.

Elias Robert Hodges (1820-1901) and Eleanor Elizabeth “Betsy” (Smith) Hodges (1825-1889)

Information about Eleanor Elizabeth (Smith) Hodges (1825-1889), Charter Member, and Elias Robert Hodges (1820-1901), Charter Member and Deacon of Elim Baptist Church, was extracted from Cecil Calder Garrison’s book, Descendants of Brother Elias Robert Hodges (1820-1901) and his wife Eleanor Elizabeth Smith (1825-1889), Draft dated 23 August 1989, and the family records of La Fayne Hodges May and Wyman E. May.

Eleanor Elizabeth “Betsy” (Smith) Hodges was born on 14 November 1825 to the family of Mary Ann (Baxter) Smith (1790-1853) and William Smith, Jr. (1789-1867). Betsy’s father, William Smith, Jr., was a member of Jones Creek Baptist Church, elected 1823 as Clerk of the Church, and 1829-1841 as Treasurer of the church. In 1826, he was elected a trustee of the church. He was a prominent landowner. Mr. Smith’s well-worded church records suggest that he was an educated writer. He was Justice of the Peace in the 16th district in 1819-1829 and 1837-1847. He was a Surveyor of Liberty County 1830-1832, Tax Collector 1836-40 and representative in the State Legislature 1853-54. He was captain of the 16th district militia unit 1824-1846. Betsy’s paternal grandfather was Reverend William Smith Sr. (1765-). In her childhood, Betsy lived within a godly church-going family.



*Eleanor Elizabeth “Betsy” Smith Hodges (1825-1889)
Elias Robert Hodges (1820-1901)
Charter Members
Picture Taken About 1870*

Her mother was Mary Ann Baxter (1790-1853). William Smith Jr. and Mary Ann Baxter married on 10 August 1810 at Beards Creek Baptist Church in Tattnall County. Mary Ann Baxter was born in South Carolina and died at their home in Liberty County. Sister Betsy was 28 years old at the time of her mother’s death. She was 42 years old at the time of her father’s death.

Her brothers and sisters were:

- John W. Smith, (1812-1841), who married Mary Mahon;
- William Baxter Smith, (1815-1856), who married Mary Ann Hodges (1818-) (sister to Brother Elias Robert Hodges);
- Nancy Ann (Smith) McGowan**, (1818-1894), **Charter Member of Elim Church** who married Gideon Alonzo McGowan (1814-1856);
- Martha Alice Smith, (1821-1840);
- James Madison Smith, (1823- 1893), who married Mary Louisa Baggs (1822-1887); and
- Sarah C. (Smith) Foster**, (1832-1912), **Charter Member of Elim Church**, who married **Doctrine Hampton Foster** (1831-), **Charter Member of Elim Church.**

The household of William Smith, Jr. and his wife Mary Ann Baxter, was located at the present Rye Patch community in the 16th district of Long (formerly Liberty County until Long was established in 1920) County and had some connections to the 17th district. This is where Brother Elias met his future wife, **Eleanor Elizabeth “Betsy” Smith**, daughter of William Smith, Jr. and his wife Mary Ann Baxter. Mr. Hendley Foxworth Horne, Justice of the Peace, who lived in the Jones Creek community, married Sister Betsy and Brother Elias on 12 January 1843. Sister Betsy was 18 years old and Brother Elias was 23 years old at the time of their marriage. From her photograph, we can tell that Sister Betsy was a slim, attractive, well-dressed lady with an intelligent look in her eyes. Her nickname “Betsy” leads us to think that she was easily approachable and well-loved. Also the fact that Betsy fondly nicknamed two of her girls, Tuppie and Dosia, makes us imagine a fun loving family who cared about each other.

Sister Betsy and Brother Elias settled a mile or so east of present Rye Patch Baptist Church, an area southeast of the Smith home place in the 16th district. Here they built a double pen log house that rested on blocks. A double-pen house was one in which the interior walls separating rooms were of interlocking logs like the exterior walls.

Brother Elias Robert Hodges (1820-1901)

Brother **Elias Robert Hodges** was born 8 February 1820 in Taylors Creek community, the 17th militia district of Liberty County, Georgia. He was the son of William Hodges and his wife, Rachel Clinton. He grew up in Liberty and Tattnall counties, his family spending an unknown number of years in the latter place.

Brother Elias had a harsh childhood living with a father who at the best was away from home but when home, he was a harsh disciplinarian. Brother Elias had seven brothers and sisters. He was the middle child. His father, William Hodges, died when Brother Elias was twenty years old.

A handsome, dignified man of consequence and influence in his community, Brother Elias Hodges was an honorable upright citizen. Brother Elias Hodges was a captain in the Liberty County Militia, 17th District (Taylors Creek), serving from 1844 until 1846. Brother Elias Hodges was a Mason, receiving his degrees in 1850 from Liberty Union Lodge, No. 96, Taylors Creek, Liberty County. He served as lodge treasurer, 1856-57. In 1857 he became a charter member of Altahama Lodge Number 227 at Johnston Station (now Ludowici), and continued a member until his death, Jan 21, 1901. Brother Elias was a confederate soldier, joining the army for six months at Camp Hughes, near Darien, Georgia, on 8 October 1861. He was enlisted in Captain Hughes’ Company of Liberty Guard, Georgia Cavalry, by Captain William Hughes, Jr., a resident of Jones Creek community. This unit became Company D in the 5th Georgia Cavalry.

Sister Betsy (Smith) Hodges joined Jones Creek Baptist Church in Liberty County (now Long) on 24 Sep 1850 and her husband, Brother Elias Hodges, joined there 24 Sep 1853. Sister Betsy was dismissed by letter on 24 Oct 1857 and Brother Elias was dismissed by letter on 24 Nov 1857, as part of their decision to help organize Elim Baptist Church.

The following member also left Jones Creek Baptist Church to help organize Elim Baptist Church:

Sarah Ann (Harnage) Shaw; their son Jeremiah Lamar Shaw;
Nancy Ann (Smith) McGowan, widow of Gideon Alonzo McGowan and sister of Betsy (Smith) Hodges;
Delilah (Simmons) Brewer, widow of James Brewer;
John Hall Howard and wife, **Sarah Ann L. (Brewer) Howard** (daughter of Delilah and James Brewer);
Sarah A. Easterling;
Nancy A. (Brewer) Gordon, wife of Artemis Gordon;
Doctrine Hampton Foster and wife **Sarah C. (Smith) Foster**, who was sister of Betsy (Smith) Hodges.

Thus, from the family of Mary Ann Baxter and William Smith Jr., came three of the charter members of Elim church: **Eleanor Elizabeth “Betsy” (Smith) Hodges, Nancy Ann (Smith) McGowan, and Sarah C. (Smith) Foster**. Counting Sister Betsy’s husband and Sarah’s husband, five of the fifteen charter members of Elim Church are counted. These families altogether produced 22 children who attended Elim Church.

Sister Betsy was 32 years old and Brother Elias was 37 years old when they helped organize Elim Baptist Church. They had seven children at the time. Brother Elias was one of the first deacons of Elim Baptist Church, serving during Elim’s formative years. We know that because he was called to be a deacon of the church that he had personal holiness, spiritual maturity, and a godly home life simply because that is what is required of a deacon. He was a model of spiritual virtue and served the congregation with dignity. He had the ministerial skills of relating to people, speaking well and being a spiritual leader.

Elim Baptist Church was a place of worship and acted as a social center where one could visit with seldom-seen friends and relatives before and after services, at revivals, dinners on the ground, all-the-day sings and homecomings and family reunions.

Brother Elias and Sister Betsy’s children were:

Martha Ann (Hodges) Stewart (1843-1918) who married William Frederick Stewart (1848-1935);
Nancy Elizabeth Sophronia “Tuppie” (Hodges) Sloan (1845-1919) who married John R. Sloan;
Harriet Amanda (Hodges) Wheeler (1848-1882) who married James Ferman Wheeler;
Sarah Jane (Hodges) Dunham (1849-1916);
William Elias Hodges (1852-1914) who married Nicey Elinor Stewart (1848-1912),
John Gideon Hodges (1854-1923) who married Sarah Eugenia Wheeler (1859-1951), daughter of Henry Jones Ripley Wheeler and **Zilpha (Brewer) Wheeler (Charter Member)** and granddaughter of Catherine Pamela (Bacon) Wheeler and Robert John Wheeler (**Charter Members**);
James Luther Hodges (1856-1926) who married Martha Corrine Wheeler (1857-1926);
Ida Minerva (Hodges) Berry (1858);
Theodocia “Dosia” Elmira (Hodges) Wortham, (1860-1911) who married Edward Heath Wortham (1862-1893); and
Edward Clinton Hodges, (1863-1923).

Sister Betsy was involved in Elim Baptist Church as the church members met together for worship, prayer and teaching. She raised her children in the way they should go. We gather this from her youngest daughter's obituary. Theodocia "Dosa" Elmira Hodges who married Edward Heath Wortham. From her obituary the following words are extracted: "Sister Wortham was a member of Elim Baptist Church for quite a number of years, also a member of Rye Patch Local Union for about three years and she proved a true sister in every principle advocated by the capacity to which she belonged."

Sister Betsy Hodges died at their home in the Rye Patch community on 8 October 1889 and was buried in the cemetery at Elim Baptist Church. Brother Elias Hodges survived until 21 January 1901 and was buried beside her.