You name a Baptist church in Watauga County, and Rev. Lawrence Hagaman, formerly a farmer, has probably preached there. The first church the son of the late Hard and Eller Hagaman pastored was the Beech Valley Baptist Church, then he was ordained in 1942 at Zion Hill Baptist Church. (Staff photo by Bill Sheffield)
Baptist Church To Honor 74-Year-Old Preacher

Hagaman married Betty Mae Trivette on April 24, 1929, but his wife died in 1943. "We had six children," he said. He later married Annis Jones, daughter of the late Marion and Meica Jones, and the couple raised five children.

"I have sympathy for the young people, especially the girls. They are tempted in every way a young person can be tempted, he said. "Young people's got too much liberty, I think, but Lord, I'm sorry for them."

"The young people in town has it a lot harder than the ones who live out in the country. Most of them give them a certain time to be back here, and they'd better be back then."

According to the Bible, the Bible speaks pretty much against drinking by young people and by adults except for a little wine for the stomach's sake, he said, adding that wine back then was of a much lesser alcoholic content:

"And the Bible said hell was enlarged for the drunkard," added the reverend.

In the days of Hagaman's youth an older adult escorted young persons on dates. "You didn't get 10 feet from him," Hagaman said of the chaperon.

The local church house was the "in-place" to visit back then, said Hagaman. "There was no moving picture show. They had no other place to go.

"The churches back then had wood stoves in them. Some ways, the church went down, but in some ways the church went up, not all bad. The church is just as spiritual as it once was."

"You can't mix religion up with the world; you can't live like that," he said. "The world's a goin' just like the Bible said it would go. There's not anything you can do about it."

Hagaman spent four Sundays a month at different local churches for 10 years, trying to convince residents of this prediction during his long evangelical career.

"Oh, I've saw many miracles, not those type of miracles you hear about on the radio about people getting raised from the dead and getting their backs straight all."

Being "born again" is a miracle, according to Hagaman.

"That's a miracle. Man has nothing in that," he said. "I saw people healed, who were sick, by prayer — God did it."

One wintry day Hagaman braved icy waters in a creek where baptismal services were held. "We had to go to the river and preach," he said. "I believe I baptized 18 that day," he recalled.

One thing that makes Hagaman happy is to hear "amens" voiced by members of a congregation in support of his message. "It just makes me feel like a dog that's chasing a rabbit ... he just runs that much harder," he said.

"It wasn't no problem to get people to go to church," said Hagaman of the old days. "You don't win many by persecuting them. You've got to win them by love and by friendship."

Hagaman says he looks at his twilight years with resolve and anticipation of better things to come. He quoted the apostle Paul from the New Testament.

"He said I have kept the faith. I have finished my course," said Hagaman. "I want to finish the work God give me, and when that's through — I'm through. I want to preach as long as he gives me strength.

"There's nothing like being a Christian — it's a joy."