

https://godanriver.com/news/local/history/we-are-going-to-trust-god-loyal-baptist-church-pastor-says-after-fire-the-historically/article_b9666a9a-54dc-11ee-9a81-47cf47ef9331.html

'We are going to trust God,' Loyal Baptist Church pastor says after fire. The historically Black Danville church traces roots to 1886.

Charles Wilborn

Sep 16, 2023

The Rev. Andre Austin, pastor of Loyal Baptist Church, had just checked into a hotel in Lynchburg for a one-night revival when he got word a fire had broke out at the 99-year-old building in Danville.

“I felt numb,” he explained to the Register & Bee of his first reaction when he picked up the phone to hear Loyal Baptist was ablaze.

He was in shock.

“This can’t be,” he said. “No way.”

He instantly darted back to the church in what he described as the “longest ride” from Lynchburg to Danville.

“It seemed like everyone was driving 35 mph,” he said in a Saturday morning interview.



The Rev. Andre Austin, pastor of Loyal Baptist Church, points to fire damage Saturday morning while talking about the Friday blaze.

A deaconess was leaving the church shortly before 3:45 p.m. Friday when she spotted smoke, according to Austin. The fire department arrived just minutes later and stayed on scene for more than three hours battling the blaze in hard-to-reach areas of the historic church.

People are also reading...

- 1 Study asks community: What do you want to see in Chatham's future?**
 - 2 Teenage suspect in Danville homicide found incompetent to stand trial**
 - 3 Mad campaign dash culminates Tuesday with special elections in Danville, Pittsylvania County**
 - 4 Tornado Watch until 9 p.m. - Update from Meteorologist Sean Sublette**
-

The cause is blamed on an electrical issue with a wall lighting fixture — a sconce — on the second-floor balcony. The fire entered the attic and quickly grew and burned through the thick timbers, Danville Fire Department Battalion Chief William Smotherman reported.

When firefighters arrived they saw smoke coming from the roof. When they got into the sanctuary and walked up steps to the balcony they found “fire pushing from the attic, through the ceiling and into the sanctuary,” Smotherman said.

“Fire crews were able to extinguish the flames and save the church,” he said. That meant setting up two aerial fire vehicles to open the roof, allowing for “vertical ventilation of trapped smoke and heat.”



A small window area of Loyal Baptist Church is evidence Saturday of a fire that broke out Friday afternoon.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

By Saturday morning, there was little visible evidence outside that a fire was raging just a day before.

However, walking a few steps inside the church, the strong smell of charred wood gives way to the sight of an enormous gaping hole in the ceiling exposing blacked beams.

“This light right over here is where it started,” Austin said as he took a Register & Bee reporter to the balcony area for a closer inspection to the destruction.

In addition to expansive seating, the balcony also housed the sound system.

“This is probably destroyed, too,” the pastor said as he urged caution walking over to the right side of the second-story space littered with pieces of the white tin ceiling, burned insulation and other black debris on chairs and the floor overlooking the

pulpit.

Since there's no power to the building, Steve Hall, a trustee of the church, used a flashlight for a closer inspection to the damage.

"It's a blessing that it didn't happen in the middle of the night," Austin said, finding some positive light amid the tragedy.

Austin — originally from Lynchburg — has been with the church for about eight months. It was Nov. 13 when the congregation of about 100 members elected him as pastor. He gave his first sermon Christmas morning.

"It's a beautiful sanctuary," Austin shared as he led the way down a narrow staircase to the basement.

That's where the fellowship hall is housed. On Saturday morning, there was at least an inch of water on the floor, remnants of the 2,000 gallons the fire department pumped on the flames Friday.

Hall and Austin are worried about the damage they can't see. They still don't know how far the fire spread in the attic and there's no way to tell what the wreckage water caused between the floors and walls on the way down to the basement.



Steve Hall, a trustee for Loyal Baptist Church in Danville, surveys damage Saturday morning after a fire damaged the building Friday.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

Rushing to the scene

When Austin made it to the church Friday afternoon, he had to park a ways down the street.

Walking up, he saw the fire trucks and people standing outside.

“To walk closer, and to see half of the congregation just standing there — it was even more of a wow factor,” he explained while standing in the basement with his shoes soaked from the water. “This church, the place where we worship, where we gather, is on fire.”

Hall learned about the situation Friday in call from a family friend who heard a radio report of it. At almost the same time, another church member sent a video.

Hall also rushed over.

“Oh my God,” he said in a quite voice, explaining his reaction when he got to the scene to see the church surrounded by firefighters.

Hall — a member of Loyal Baptist his entire life — was practically raised in the church, he said. His grandparents, mother and father all were members.



Phillip Stamps chats with the Rev. Andre Austin, pastor of Loyal Baptist Church, while seeing water damage in the basement following Friday's fire.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

Phillip Stamps, 87, who also has been a part of the church since he was just an infant, dropped by Saturday morning.

He was there Friday night, but wasn't able to come in to see the damage.

“It will come back,” he said, reassuring the pastor. “It will be restored.”

When he heard of the fire Friday afternoon, Stamps couldn't believe it.

“I said ‘I’ve been at Loyal Baptist for 80-some years and I ain’t even seen the floor dirty,’” he explained.

When he got to the church, his heart “just sunk.”

Loyal Baptist has been a part of his life since his earliest memories. Stamps said his mother would put him on her shoulders to come to church on Sunday mornings.

“It’s an institution,” he also said of the historic nature of the church. “This is a place for the community.”

History

Even though the current building — a landmark Tudor Gothic — was built in 1924, its roots trace back to the end of the Civil War.



Parts of a tin ceiling dangle Saturday morning after a fire at Loyal Baptist Church broke out Friday afternoon.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

The historic church was part of the 2015 Danville Historical Society's Holiday Tour, a yearly endeavor to spotlight significant structures and architecture in the Danville area.

A Virginia historic highway marker downtown traces the origins of the congregation as being "organized between 1865 and 1866 on Old Hospital-Dance Hill by former slaves," the Danville Register & Bee reported in 2015. This marker recognizes the spot on Loyal Street, just behind the city's present Patton Street courthouse, where these emancipated slaves built their first church in 1870.

Worship continued at that site until 1924 when the congregation built its present edifice on Holbrook Street, according to previous newspaper reporting. The name then was changed simply to Loyal Baptist Church.

The landmark rises from the ridge of Holbrook Street, giving the church a physical presence from many parts of Danville.

Stamps suggested that in the more than 150-year history of Loyal Baptist, 5,000-plus people have come through the doors.



Part of the ceiling, insulation and other debris rests on chairs and the floor Saturday in the second-floor balcony of Loyal Baptist Church. A fire broke out there Friday.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

What's next

Church leaders originally planned to have a parking lot service Sunday, but changed strategies with the threat of rain. Instead they were set to use space at High Street Baptist Church in Danville.

Austin said he's had several churches reach out offering help in the wake of the fire. Loyal Baptist leaders were scheduled to meet early in the week to establish a temporary location to continue worship.

"Tons of people have already stressed that they are here to help us," he said.

An insurance adjuster also was expected to come by Monday. That's when they will get a clearer picture of what it will take to fix — or even rebuild — Loyal Baptist.

“We are going to trust God,” he explained when talking about what’s next. “We are going to get our minds together and do what’s best, not just for what we want, or what we think.”

Instead, they want “to look forward to the next generation, who’s going to be here after we are gone, what’s best for them.”

But no matter what happens, they want to keep the historic element intact.

“Because it’s one of the few monuments in Danville and the nation of historically Black churches,” Auston said of the reason.



A banner outside of Loyal Baptist Church advertising its 157th anniversary remains Saturday.
Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

There’s a banner outside the building noting the 157th anniversary of the church.

“We are going to need all the financial support we can get,” he continued, noting that although they have insurance, “we want to make sure it continues to be historic.”

To that end, they are going to set up a bank account for donations and would share details with the community when that's done.



Water remains Saturday morning in the fellowship of Loyal Baptist Church's basement. About 2,000 gallons of water was used to put out a Friday fire.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

The fire department

Austin had nothing but praise for the fire crews who ultimately saved the church from complete disaster.

“The fire department was absolutely wonderful,” he said.

In fact, Richie Guill, a fire marshal for Danville, lead the pastor and others in spiritual moment after the fire.



Debris rests on the second-story balcony Saturday of Loyal Baptist Church following a Friday fire.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

“He had a word of prayer in the middle of the sanctuary,” Austin explained, noting it was particularly moving.

“We want to thank them, all the fire responders and fire department,” Hall also said.

In all, 21 crew members from the fire department responded to the blaze.

“A special thanks to the Danville Police Department for traffic and scene control; the Danville Life Saving Crew for providing on-scene medical monitoring and drone coverage; and the Danville Utility Department for controlling the utilities of the church,” Smotherman wrote in the release.

Charles Wilborn (434) 791-7976

cwilborn@registerbee.com

[@CWilbornGDR](https://twitter.com/CWilbornGDR) on Twitter



Neuropathic Pain? New Device 'Melts' the Root Cause

neuroPro



Amazon Shoppers Say This Wrinkle Cream is Actually Worth It

Vibrance



Target's Best Selling "Botox in a Bottle"

Vibrance



Nerve Pain? Do This Immediately to Relieve Neuropathy (Watch)

Healthbay | Neuro Researches



A 70-year-old Granny Made a Bra for Elderly Ladies That is Popular All Around

Dotmalls



Blood Sugar Above 100? Do This Immediately!

Healthy Natural

By Charles Wilborn

https://godanriver.com/news/local/it-was-an-apocalyptic-scene-witness-says-as-blaze-levels-apartment-building-near-danville/article_58e43af2-81ab-11ee-a1ab-3fe0a817df53.html

Northpointe Apartments

'It was an apocalyptic scene,' witness says as blaze levels apartment building near Danville

Charles Wilborn

Nov 12, 2023

A small mound of blackened debris was all that remained about 12 hours after a raging inferno — described by one witness as an “apocalyptic scene” — leveled a building early Sunday morning at Northpointe Apartments, an area just outside of the Danville city limits.

It was shortly after 5 a.m. Sunday when Blairs Fire & Rescue got the call of the blaze.

When crews arrived, they found the entire building engulfed in flames.



A mound of debris is all that remains of a 12-unit complex Sunday afternoon at Northpointe Apartments after an early morning blaze.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

A dozen residents had to be saved from the structure, Blairs Fire & Rescue reported. Five people were taken to what was described as “local hospitals” and a few others were treated on scene.

Jacqueline Reid was asleep in her apartment located in the building next to the one that burned.

“I heard knocking on my door,” she told the Register & Bee outside of her apartment building Sunday afternoon.

People are also reading...

- 1 Update: Weather threat closes Danville, Pittsylvania County schools for students**
 - 2 Second Danville man arrested in child porn case; charges pending against third suspect**
 - 3 Minor flooding of river expected in Danville as three weather warnings hit simultaneously**
 - 4 Foundation awards more than \$900K to Dan River Region groups**
-

The banging persisted and she heard someone screaming “fire, fire, fire.”

When she got to the door she realized what was happening, so she grabbed her robe and gathered the parking lot with others to watch the horrific scene unfold.

Although terrified that the blaze could reach her unit, she said she “felt sorry for the ones it was going to affect.”



Crews fight a raging inferno Sunday morning at Northpointe Apartments just outside of Danville.

Blairs Fire & Rescue, contributed

Her son, the Rev. Daric Whitehead, was by his mother's side Sunday afternoon. He heard about the fire early in the morning when a friend called.

"When he told me about it, it really devastated me," he told the Register & Bee.

"Northpointe has always been a good, Christian community."

Whitehead, the associate minister of Shockoe Missionary Baptist Church in Java, immediately called his mother once he learned of the fire to make sure she was safe.

"For this to happen was very tragic," he explained. "The legacy that Northpointe gave was a peaceful legacy."

He said the complex was a beacon of hope for people who couldn't afford nice housing.

“Northpointe made it happen for them,” he explained.



A Sunday morning fire leveled an apartment building just outside of Danville.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

In all, 18 apartments were affected, the Blairs department reported. The 12 apartments in what was known as the “600” building were reduced to nothing more than rubble. Apartments directly adjacent also suffered damage.

It still wasn’t clear late Sunday evening how many people were displaced. At the complex, a few people were milling about the the area, exchanging stories.

Fire crews stayed on scene for about 10 hours. A large orange backhoe — with a clamp attachment — was stationed in the parking lot. A photo from earlier in the day showed the equipment working to clear debris as firefighters continued to pour water on the former building.

The magnitude of fire initiated what’s termed a countywide call for help. Departments from throughout the county and city of Danville sent crews to battle it.

In addition, the “Pittsylvania County Sheriff’s Office, Virginia State Police, Red Cross, and countless citizens” also offered assistance, Blairs Fire & Rescue reported.

Gene Gregory, who lives in the 408 building, had been gone for about 20 minutes Sunday morning when his daughter called him to say a building was ablaze.



A complex at Northpointe Apartments in Danville is reduced to rubble after a Sunday morning blaze.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

“When I got here, it was pure chaos,” he said Sunday, standing in front of the building that was razed. “It was an apocalyptic scene.”

Gregory lamented the lack of a fire alarm system for the complex. Although units have fire detectors, those devices act alone and aren’t linked to any kind of system to warn other residents of trouble, he explained.

Residents have endured fires previously.

“It happened four times in the five years,” he said.

In fact, a blaze hit the same building before, Reid said.

In **April 2021**, two people were injured when a fire broke out there, the Register & Bee reported.

In **May 2019**, a blaze displaced residents in 24 units there. No one was injured in the blaze that came less than two months after another fire at the apartment complex in March 2019.

Nobody was hurt in the March blaze, but 36 apartments had to be evacuated as the fire scaled the building. Several people were treated on scene for smoke inhalation.

“This was the worse,” Gregory said of all of the fires before. The previous ones left the buildings intact.



The intensity of a Sunday morning fire melted the siding of a nearby complex at Northpointe Apartments.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

This one obliterate it completely.

The cause wasn't known as of Sunday evening.

"There was fire raining from the sky," Gregory said, describing the scene as he arrived back home Sunday morning.

Saying it was a "tornado of fire," he noted that "embers big as golf balls" came down on his shoulders.

He also saw people running out of the back of the buildings.

"I didn't have the words, he said. "I was devastated."

Reid, who has lived there for six years, thinks it's time to move. Although her home was spared, she was without power Sunday and had to find somewhere else to stay.

"I'm tired of these fires," she said.

Charles Wilborn (434) 791-7976

cwilborn@registerbee.com

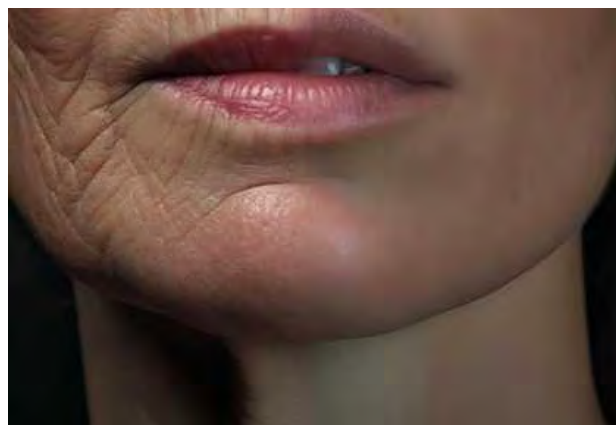
@CWilbornGDR on Twitter

■ Around The Web



Neuropathic Pain? New Device 'Melts' the Root Cause

neuroPro



Amazon Shoppers Say This Wrinkle Cream is Actually Worth It

Vibrance



Target's Best Selling "Botox in a Bottle"

Vibrance



Nerve Pain? Do This Immediately to Relieve Neuropathy (Watch)

Healthbay | Neuro Researches



Leading Doctor Says: "Think Twice Before Making Breakfast. Here's Why."

3harmfulfoods.com



A 70-year-old Granny Made a Bra for Elderly Ladies That is Popular All Around

Dotmalls

By Charles Wilborn

https://godanriver.com/news/local/update-less-than-500-without-power-following-sundays-powerful-storm-in-danville/article_f893f162-1925-11ee-931f-5ff4a3c5ecd2.html

Update: Less than 500 without power following Sunday's powerful storm in Danville

Charles Wilborn

Jul 2, 2023

The sound of generators pierced the air Sunday afternoon in Danville's Windsor Heights neighborhood after a fast-moving, violent storm sent trees crashing into homes and littered the streets with limbs and leaves.

Other areas of Danville experienced a similar fate with trees blocking roadways and power outages. The latest bout with severe weather comes about two weeks after another **ferocious storm** also damaged homes and vehicles.

In both cases, damage was caused by straight-line winds, according to the National Weather Service in Blacksburg.

Danville Utilities had fewer than 500 customers still without electricity by midday Monday and hoped to have the remaining outages restored by Monday evening.

People are also reading...

- 1 Eric Phillips wins special election for House District 48**
- 2 Tornado Watch until 9 p.m. - Update from Meteorologist Sean Sublette**
- 3 Minor flooding of river expected in Danville as three weather warnings hit simultaneously**
- 4 Mulchi wins 9th Senate District in special election**

The first severe storm warning came at 1:45 p.m. Sunday after a line developed and moved toward Danville. The National Weather Service warned the storms could pack winds of 60 mph and have quarter-sized hail.



Sunday's powerful storm sent this tree crashing into a home on Cambridge Circle in Danville.

Charles Wilborn photos, Register & Bee

After additional warnings and updates, the storm blasted the city at about 2:30 p.m., moving at a rapid pace of 55 mph.

Tanya Martin and Desmon Touchstone were in their Cambridge Circle house when a tree smashed through the top of their two-story home, which was under renovation.

“It blew up quickly, it was like five minutes, and it was gone,” Touchstone explained as he raked debris from the street in front of his home in Windsor Heights.

“I don't think I've seen the high winds here before,” he said of the area in the western part of the city.

“It could have been a lot worse,” Martin said, echoing Touchstone's sentiments. Despite the tragedy, they remained upbeat and were more concerned about their neighbor's home across the street where a tree also crashed into it. Those neighbors weren't home.

Martin and Touchstone were amazed by the touching spirit of crews from the Danville Fire Department when they responded.

Firefighters immediately asked what they could do to help.

“They were way over the top,” Touchstone said.



Workers from Danville Utilities work to bring power back online in the West Main Street area Sunday afternoon.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

“I’ve never heard of that,” Martin explained, again noting the firefighters’ efforts should be commended. “They were really kind.”

Martin and Touchstone didn’t even realize the tree had fallen on the home until they ventured outside to look.

There was no thunderous noise and since the house has a generator that instantly pops on with a power failure, they weren’t even aware the electricity had gone out.

Elsewhere in the neighborhood, some streets were completely blocked by down trees, forcing vehicles to find an alternate route on the winding roads.

With sunshine in full force following the storm, residents were out and about trying to clean up the mess.

Ballou Park also lost some trees in Sunday's storm and West Main Street in front of Ballou Park Shopping center was closed to traffic while crews navigated the fallen debris.

The lower playground at the park was closed because of the damage.

Danville Utilities reported about 9,500 customers were without power at the eight of the outage.



Crews with Danville Utilities work to restore power in the West Main Street area after a severe storm Sunday.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee

Additional crews from South Carolina and North Carolina were called in to help Danville Utilities restore power.

Crews first focused on areas with the most damage, then set off to places with scattered outages.

The city received reports of eight trees blocking roads, city spokesperson Arnold Hendrix said.

Over at the Danville Police Department, an entrance along Memorial Drive was blocked after several trees toppled in Sunday's storm.

Officials in Pittsylvania County kept an eye on the power outages, which were located mostly in the Ringgold area.

“The county and the power companies place the highest priority on the elderly and those with breathing difficulties,” officials wrote in a news release Monday morning. “While we continue to monitor the situation, we ask that family and friends check on those affected by the heat or lack of electricity.”

Dennis Sleighter, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Blacksburg, confirmed Monday afternoon that based on radar and reports from residents, the damage came from straight-line winds.

The line of storms started in the New River Valley and then progressed eastward through the afternoon.

In this case, it was simply the heating of the day — combined with a very unstable atmosphere — that triggered the storms.

“They formed well upstream and headed east,” Sleighter told the Register & Bee. “We’ve been in a pattern for a number days.”

The weather service placed the area under a severe thunderstorm watch Monday lasting into the evening.

The storm threat was expected to decrease heading into the Fourth of July and Wednesday, but should bounce back later in the week.

“It will increase increase Thursday with greater increase in Friday when cold front passes through,” he said.

Photos: Storm roars through Danville



Winds from Sunday's storm sent this tree crashing into a home in the Windsor Heights subdivision in Danville.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee



Limbs from a tree rest on the roof of a home on Cambridge Circle in Danville. A tree crashed into the brick structure during a Sunday afternoon storm.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee



Sunday's powerful storm toppled this tree in Cambridge Circle in Danville.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee



West Main Street is blocked Sunday afternoon by downed trees after a powerful storm.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee



Crews with Danville Utilities work to restore power in the West Main Street area after a severe storm Sunday.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee



Workers from Danville Utilities work to bring power back online in the West Main Street area Sunday afternoon.

Charles Wilborn, Register & Bee



Sunday's powerful storm sent this tree crashing into a home on Cambridge Circle in Danville.

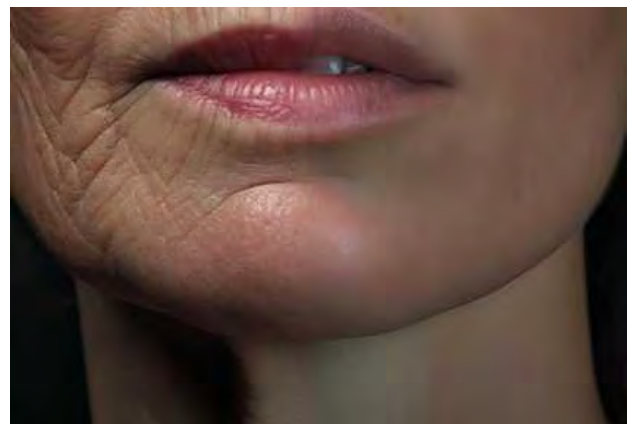
Charles Wilborn photos, Register & Bee

Charles Wilborn (434) 791-7976

cwilborn@registerbee.com

@CWilbornGDR on Twitter

■ Around The Web



Neuropathic Pain? New Device 'Melts' the Root Cause

neuroPro



Target's Best Selling "Botox in a Bottle"

Vibrance



A 70-year-old Granny Made a Bra for Elderly Ladies That is Popular All Around

Dotmall

By Charles Wilborn

Amazon Shoppers Say This Wrinkle Cream is Actually Worth It

Vibrance



Nerve Pain? Do This Immediately to Relieve Neuropathy (Watch)

Healthbay | Neuro Researches



Blood Sugar Above 100? Do This Immediately!

Healthy Natural