

History of the Presbyterian Church
of
Hamilton, Ohio
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Pioneers, sesquicentennials and frontiersmen are words which can aptly be applied to our Presbyterian Church, because it was indeed a pioneer in the development of this community, and its members were frontiersmen in these parts. Before 1796, the following applied to every church goer, "the laws of the Northwest Territory, then in force, required every man when he went to church to carry his gun and ammunition with him, under penalty of a fine, to protect himself and family from an attack of the ruthless savages".

To fully cover our subject and to go to the very beginning of Presbyterianism, let us go back to the name of Francis Makemie, who was closely allied with the early history of Presbyterianism in the middle colonies. He was a young missionary who was sent over to the Colony of Maryland in 1683 from County Donegal, Ireland, at the request of certain Presbyterians of the Eastern shore, to preach the Gospel, plant churches and endure hardships and persecutions for the sake of Jesus Christ. He assisted in organizing the first Presbytery in America, and served as its Moderator.

It was in Baltimore that the first Presbytery in America was organized. The colony of Maryland was so chartered that from the beginning religious toleration was granted to all and guaranteed by the famous Toleration Act of 1649. Here the persecuted Quaker, the despised Baptist, the exiled Presbyterian, as well as the Roman Catholics might worship God according to the dictates of his conscience.

Philadelphia and New Castle were the chief ports of entry to Scotch-Irish immigration, which was fundamental to Presbyterianism in America. So we find Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware were largely made up of this class of immigrants. From these colonies two steady streams of Presbyterian immigrants went out; one of them through southern Pennsylvania to the West, and the other through the Shenandoah Valley into Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky. It is from this last stream of immigrants especially that we trace the start of Presbyterianism in the Miami Valley.

The foundation of Presbyterianism was in the southwestern part of Ohio. The Presbytery of Transylvania in Kentucky was our fostering Mother; back of her were the Presbyteries of Lexington and Hanover in the state of Virginia, and back of these two Presbyteries was the Presbytery of Maryland, founded and organized by that sturdy, young Scotch-Irish Presbyterian missionary, Makemie. From this early beginning Presbyterianism in Hamilton has been influenced by and associated with six Presbyteries, namely:

- 1) Transylvania, 1798; 2) Washington, 1799; 3) Miami Presbytery, 1810; 4) Cincinnati, 1821; 5) Oxford, 1838 (in 1829 Oxford was cut off, while Hamilton chose to stay in Cincinnati Presbytery, but in 1838 we were put in Oxford Presbytery by Rev. Monfort) and
- 6) Dayton, 1870, in which we are today.

Now taking up the history of our own church. Prior to 1798 a dozen or more of the first members of the Presbyterian Church had settled in this vicinity. They could not organize without elders, but they did hold services. ~~The first services held in Hamilton were held in the mess-room of the Fort by Chaplain David Jones of General Wayne's Army, and perhaps also by Reverend Mr. James Kemper,~~

Revised

who was appointed by the Transylvania Presbytery, April 27, 1791, to "supply the settlements of the Miami at his discretion" as the records of that Presbytery show. Also records show that he visited Springdale and Big Prairie. Along the Miami River most of the first services were held in block houses.

After peace with the Indians came (Treaty of Greenville, 1795) the groves, where arbors were erected, furnished the most popular places for meetings. In the winter the neighborhood would meet on Sabbath from house to house in the log cabins. The Transylvania Presbytery advised that services be held without a minister when none could be had, when sermons were to be read by some elder or member of the church.

In 1800 a great revival began throughout the West and a big camp meeting was held on Indian Creek.

The exact date of the organization of the Hamilton Church can not be absolutely ascertained. Usually the first Presbyterial record of a church was when it asked for supplies or called a pastor. The records of Washington Presbytery (now Chillicothe) for April 2, 1807, have this entry, "A supplication from Hamilton and neighborhood round, for one half the ministerial labors of Reverend M. G. Wallace, was handed in. " It was granted. But as neighborhoods sometimes asked supplies before they were organized into churches, this record is not conclusive proof of the organization of this church.

ORGANIZATION

Upon the testimony of Robert Irwin, an elder and later a minister, who was raised in the congregation, this church was organized by Mr. Matthew Green Wallace in 1810 with 28 members.

This fact is also evidenced by an entry in the handwriting of Reverend Francis Monfort, that certain men were ordained as elders in 1810. They were William Bigham and David Beatty.

This church divided in 1832, simply on the question "of a pastor." The old branch, called the "Hamilton Church" went to Rossville, now the First Ward. Its name was changed by Act of Presbytery to the "Rossville Church" in September, 1847. The new branch, called "The First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton and Rossville" (remained in Hamilton.) (In 1847 they united under the name of the "First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton and Rossville.") After Hamilton and Rossville were consolidated into one town in 1854, this name was changed by Act of Presbytery in September, 1855 to the "First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton."

History seems to repeat itself, because the church again divided in 1873, and again on the same question "of a pastor". The old established group kept their same name and the church building. The dissenting group left May 8, 1893, with 91 letters of members of the old congregation, while 33 members of different faiths joined them. They called themselves the "Westminster Presbyterian Church". They erected a beautiful new stone church building at Seventh and High Streets, after a year spent in meeting in the Court House. Again there is a similar point of comparison to the earlier split, in point of time (22 and 25 years respectively) and they united in 1918 with 832 members in the union church, now called "The Presbyterian Church of Hamilton."

MINISTERS, HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND ACTIVITIES

The first pastor of the church was Reverend Matthew G. Wallace. It is very likely that Reverend James Komper, who came to Cincinnati

in 1790, and who preached one of the first Presbyterian sermons ever delivered in Ohio, may have preached in Fort Hamilton. However, the first record of preaching is that the Presbytery of Washington had appointed M. G. Wallace to preach one half of his time in Hamilton, in connection with Springfield (now Springdale) in 1801.

In 1804 Reverend John Thompson was appointed by Presbytery to preach one half his time in Hamilton. In 1807, and again in 1811, Mr. Wallace's time was divided with other places. In 1813 his salary was set at \$133 1/3 in money or merchantable produce to be paid by Hamilton, Seven Mile, and Dick's Creek, each to pay that same amount. A list of 61 names constitute his membership. The great event of his pastorate was the building of the first house of worship, at the corner of Third and Basin Streets. They purchased from David K. Este the south half of in-lot number 103 for \$150. They united with the Associate Reformed Presbyterians and each congregation was to have the privilege of occupying the house one half of the time. They erected a brick building 50x40 feet at a cost of \$5,098.88 $\frac{1}{2}$. Reed and Keyt (who built Old Main Building at Miami University) did the carpenter work. It was located in a beautiful walnut grove. When, in 1828, the Hamilton Basin was constructed in the rear of the church building, the congregations deemed their site no longer desirable, and sold lot and building to Silas Smith for \$600. The building was converted into a store and commission house. The money was divided between the two congregations. A list of subscribers to this first building, including many familiar names, has been preserved by Mr. James McBride.

The second pastor was Reverend Francis Monfort, who served for sixteen years, during the first split, - 1821-1837. His pastor-

ate was a faithful one. The first Sabbath School was organized in 1822 by Dr. Daniel Woolsey of New York, in an old school-house at the N. W. corner of Third and Ludlow Streets. He was superintendent until 1830. At that time there were no teaching aids of any kind, and the program consisted of prayer, reading Scripture and reciting verses. The second location for the Sabbath School on Third Street, between Court and High. Later, for a short time, it was held in the old log Court House. The jail was here too, and the story is told that the prisoners used to amuse themselves at their grated windows, by frightening any timid child who came along, by making faces, giving unearthly yells, or telling the scholar that the superintendent would put him in jail. The fourth location for the school was the present location of St. John's Church at Sycamore and Second Street, and the fifth was the present location of the Adams School in the First Ward. Not until 1836 was the Sabbath School housed in the church building.

During Mr. Monfort's pastorate also a great camp-meeting was held near Springdale in August, 1828, with services conducted by Mr. Thompson and Mr. Gallagher. At this time 90 persons were received into the church on profession of faith.

The second house of worship was built at the corner of Front and Sycamore Streets. In-lot number 22 was donated to the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church, - James Boal, George R. Brigham, James B. Thomas and Caleb De Camp, - by John Reilly, Esquire. Mr. Reilly was educated in the Presbyterian faith, and although he never made public profession, he regularly attended public worship and contributed liberally to its support. The deed bears the date of January 21, 1829, and reads in part, "to aid in disseminating the

Gospel, and the support of religion, as also in consideration of the sum of one dollar, for the sole use and purpose of a site for a house of public worship, subject to the control of said church, provided that the same might be sold to purchase a more eligible site for a church, and the proceeds applied to that purpose." The congregation erected a brick building for a church 50 x 40 and 18 feet in height to the eaves of the roof. The entrance was on Front Street, by two doors in the West end of the building. The high pulpit was on the West, between the two doors; the interior contained 72 plain, unpainted pews, with two aisles, and would seat comfortably 500 persons. The cost was \$1600. It was sold to the United English and German Lutheran Church in January, 1837, for \$700. In this house the division of the Presbyterian Church occurred by the organization on February 2, 1832, of the Hamilton and Rossville Presbyterian Church. It had 35 members. The House was not paid for at the time of the division.

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The/Hamilton Church, ~~xx~~ moving to Rossville, had preaching in a school-house on Second Street, between Main and Ross. On March 14, 1804 the proprietors of Rossville, in laying out the town set apart two lots on the corner of Second and Ross Streets for public use. It was intended for a Court House, but instead the lots "became the camping place for shows, circuses and other refining and liberal amusements." This property was given by a deed of perpetual lease to the Presbyterian Church April 3, 1832, by the trustees of Rossville. The progress of building the third house of worship was slow. It was a larger and taller building than the one left, but never finished. It measured 66 x 42 and cost \$5,000. It was of brick, had two doors in front and one on ~~the side~~ on either side of the pulpit and some distance back it was furnished

with pews; the back part had rough seats, from which it is inferred that "Mr. Monfort was not supposed to be in a state of chronic cutaneous disease of a malignantly contagious type, making it prudent to get as far from the pulpit as possible!" After the union of the two branches of the church, this house was fitted up for a Presbyterian parochial school, which was started in the summer of 1827, and taught for some time by Charles Matthews. It was afterward offered to Oxford Presbytery for an academy. It was accepted with thanks, but nothing more was ever done. The old church was pulled down and the High School building erected in 1857.

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During Mr. Monfort's ministry of 16 years it appears that 174 were added to the church.

On the retirement of Mr. Monfort, his son Joseph G. supplied the church of Rossville for six months, to April, 1838. In the summer of 1838 Reverend Thomas Whallon became Stated Supply for two years.

In 1834-35 there was a revival of religion and they uttered and published their protest against false doctrines then invading the church. They discussed and passed strong resolutions against slavery.

Many were the church trials held at this time. Many were convicted of guilt and suspended until they should "give satisfactory evidence of repentance." Suspension was published in the congregation. One example will suffice. On Saturday, September 19, 1835, the Session acted as a Court, with the Moderator as judge, and heard the case of a family quarrel between husband and wife. By the sentence the husband was "suspended from privileges of

church" until he should give satisfactory evidence of his repentance. The wife retained her standing as formerly in the church, in accordance with I Corinthians 7:15.

As early as March, 1841, the Session resolved to hold monthly meetings, which have been held with much fidelity ever since. They have responded to all kinds of appeal for aid, - among others, "when a committee of our German fellow-citizens made an appeal to them for aid when in 1847 their countrymen were suffering from intemperance."

By the hand of Josiah Scott they prepared a most admirable pastoral letter on "Dancing". "For its calm, kind Scriptural views it deserves to be read and quietly pondered by everyone who desires to lead a life of blameless Christian excellence."

In 1841 Reverend Adrian Aton came to Rossville as stated supply and remained until the church united with the Hamilton branch in support of Reverend Thomas Ebenezer Thomas, in 1842.

The first pastor of the church in Hamilton was Reverend Augustus Pomeroy. In his four years of ministry 57 were added to the membership.

During his pastorate the fourth house of worship was erected. It was built on the site of the present building. They purchased a this in-lot #253 on the West side of the Public Square from Nicholas Biddle on behalf of the Bank of the United States for \$500 in April 1835. They also purchased 20 feet off the North side of lot #254, adjoining, from Charles K. Smith for the sum of \$300 as appears by a deed made by Charles K. Smith to George R. Bigham March 23, 1835. The title of the congregation to the whole lot is perfect.

^{first}
The House of worship ~~located~~ on our present site ~~just~~
~~measured 85 x 48 feet.~~ It had a
basement to which admittance was through a side door by descending
a flight of steps on the South side. In this basement were three
rooms for the sexton, and a large room often used for school
purposes during the week. It had a door and one window on the
South, with two small windows on the North side. The seats were
without backs and had a great tendency to tip over. The prayer
meeting met here, and also the singing school, first mentioned
in 1847. The Sabbath School met upstairs. There was a gallery
across the East end of the upper room, with rough seats which
were only used when the house was crowded. It was seated with
plain pews, and had a high pulpit, railed in, which was finally
removed in deference to the wish of Dr. Thomas. It had a small
yard in front. In 1847 there was still a debt of \$1700, paid
off by individual members giving their individual notes.

When our present edifice was built, the question was de-
bated whether to tear down the old House of worship or to en-
large the old. In April, 1854 it was resolved to rebuild. During
the rebuilding, the Sabbath School was held in Beckett's Hall, and
divine worship was held in the United Presbyterian Church building.
After many delays the building was completed in the Spring of 1855,
at a total cost of \$8,000.

In 1853 the deacons first began to keep a separate record
of their own actions and that of the congregation. By 1855 the
average attendance in the Sabbath School was 125, as compared to
45 between 1830-34. In the records every year, names were record-
ed of those who received prizes for committing catechism to memory.
Great emphasis was placed upon this. In 1859 the first picnic of
the school is recorded. In 1860 the first Sabbath School paper

subscribed for at a cost of \$12.50. A picnic to College Corner is recorded in 1878, costing 15¢!

Mr. Pomeroy was followed by Reverend Jones of the Episcopal Church who, having friends here, supplied the church for a few months while on a visit.

It was stated that at this time the Holy Ghost came down and revived His people, bringing many into the church on profession.

Mr. Peckard, a Congregational licentiate for two years brought in 23 persons.

Mr. Thomas preached two thirds of his services in Hamilton and one third in Rossville, with one sermon a month in a school house South of Syames Corner. The congregation paid Mr. Thomas about \$500 per annum, raised by subscription from the 102 members of the church, according to an 1842 record. In February, 1847, the membership of the united church is listed as 201.

1849-1876 saw the following ministers serving the church: Reverend George Darling, Charles Sturdevant, Levi Christian, Hugh Ustic, William MacMillan, C. B. Martin, E. J. Hamilton, Nathaniel West and Mr. S. McC. Anderson. The work of each minister seems to have been judged by the number of persons added to the church roll. A very accurate account was kept in each pastorate.

Many interesting unrelated happenings were recorded in the Session's, Deacons' and Sabbath School records. For example, the Sabbath School record (on September 4, 1859 states that John Woods left to attend Miami University. In two separate places it is recorded that on April 14, 1865, President A. Lincoln was assassinated.

This church has very nobly done its duty in the wars that we have fought. On the Roll of Honor in 1861, 55 names are listed, and in 1862, 22 names are recorded as "those in the U. S. Service who came after." The names of those who died as a result of being wounded, and the battles engaged in are also recorded. On July 25, 1864, 76 comforts were sent to the army by the Sabbath School.

In reference to the music, - April 1, 1863, our first reed organ for the Sabbath School was purchased in spite of much strong opposition. It was later donated to the Children's Home. In 1865 another record shows a reed organ purchased for the church for \$350, of which the church paid \$150 and Jacob Shaffer \$200. In 1864 "The Golden Shower", our first song-books were purchased, and in 1875 one hundred "Royal Diadems", other song-books, were bought at a cost of \$27.

In 1868 a parsonage was purchased for \$6,000. This remained the residence of our pastors until February 1, 1929, when it was sold for \$5,500.

1868 saw the first celebration of Christmas by the Church School, and in 1879 \$50 was spent for a Christmas festival.

By a motion of June 6, 1870, the sexton was moved out of his three living rooms in the basement to make room for an enlarged Sabbath School, and other church purposes. The following year the basement was improved by the infant room being made into two class rooms, with a kitchen and library being provided. Sliding doors were added and the benches replaced by chairs, - all at a cost of about \$300.

A library seemed to be an important part of the Sabbath School and a new one was purchased this year costing \$301.46. In 1876 350 books were listed, and 469 in 1880.

At a two o'clock congregational meeting on January 27, 1872, in the lower room of the church, among other business, Isaac Robertson moved the adoption of the following resolution: "Resolved that the congregation deems it proper to adopt some measures by which families can have regular places of sitting while attending church, and that the following method be observed in the selection and appropriation of seats. The secretary shall write down the names of all persons who desire seats and place them in a hat, well mixed and shaken together; that the President shall then draw one name at a time and read the same aloud, and that the individuals as their names are read shall proceed to select their seats. And that hereafter, the trustees of the church may allow others, who desire seats, to make their selection in the order of their application." The pastor was allowed the first choice of seat, without drawing. Families of four or over were entitled to a whole pew.

The Henry Simpson will, probated July 16, 1855, gave the trustees of our church a legacy to be used by them for the purpose of assisting in the education of colored children in the city of Hamilton. This was accepted from N. C. McFarland, executor on Dec. 8, 1876, and thus to this day we have the "Simpson Fund".

The church seemed to be continually repaired and improved. For in 1876 the furnaces were put in arches, chairs were put in the infant room, and the Sabbath School quarters were painted and papered at a cost of \$209.34.

In 1877 monthly concerts were given to raise money for forei

and home missions, with money divided equally.

In 1878 our church raised by the envelope system money to liquidate the existing debt, and also for the contingent expenses of the church. This is the first mention of the envelope system.

On March 17, 1879 the deacons were instructed to purchase an organ for \$1200 from W. H. Clark Co., Indianapolis. This organ was replaced in 1907 by ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a new one costing \$3,000, - \$2,000 raised by the congregation, with a Carnegie donation of \$1,000. It was purchased from the Hutchings Votey Organ Co.

Hall's Lessons were used in the Sabbath School until 1881, when the Westminster Lessons were started by Reverend Abbey.

In 1882 an excursion to the Soldiers' Home is recorded, costing adults 90¢ and children 40¢, with total cost of \$297.92.

Children's Day was instituted in 1884.

In 1889 the young people of our church organized a Christian Endeavor Society with William Mitchell Secretary. All persons under thirty years of age were eligible for membership. This organization continued until a few years ago.

In 1893, as was said before, a schism arose in the church which resulted in the formation of two churches. The First Presbyterian was served during this time by the following ministers, - E. W. Abbey, J. P. Green, Charles A. Austin, William H. Mason, Otho S. Thornberry and A. Judson Arriek. The other church, the Westminster, was served by Reverend J. S. Edenburn, 1893-99, George E. Thompson, 1899-1903, James A. Liggitt, 1903-1905, Harry Glenn Finney, 1908-1917, and John T. Newell, supply, 1917-18.

The flood in 1913 was a very devastating catastrophe. It damaged the basement of the First Church, but it practically ruined all the furnishings of the Westminster Church. All but 18 families were in the flood. On May 7, 1913, an attempt was made to unite the two churches, but the motion was lost. Each of them continued as separate institutions until 1918 when they united as one organization.

In 1910 the old church was again repaired with a stucco finish applied to the exterior, with new doors, and a repaired entrance.

Dr. Charles Matthew Brown was called here in December, 1918 and continued as pastor for ten years. In this time several committees were appointed to consider the purchase of a new site and consider building. In 1919 the property at the N. E. corner of Market and Front Street was purchased for the erection of a new church edifice. It was leased to the Central Motor Company, and finally sold to them April 19, 1922 for \$20,000.

Dr. George H. Simonson was installed June 13, 1929 and served until March 1937, during which time a church survey was made, and on December 17, 1930 at the congregational meeting the site of the Gray property at Park and Eaton Avenues was considered and later purchased for \$16,650. Plans were inaugurated for the erection of a new church building. These were interrupted by two events. A conference was held by a committee of this church with a committee from the First Methodist Episcopal to consider a union with them, - with no results. Then, on June 6, 1934, another informal meeting was held by committees from the United Presbyterian and Presbyterian churches to discuss a merger of these two churches

In the same year our church was redecorated. In April, 1937, the Church School Children's Division was removed to the Church House on the West Side.

In November, 1937, Reverend John Stanley Harker came to Hamilton, accepting the unanimous call extended him by the congregation. In this year 1937-38 one hundred new members have been received into the membership of the church. A remodelling of the historic old church building, with the building of a new educational plant to the North has been discussed, planned and accepted, and the financial campaign to raise the necessary \$77,000 for the needed building program begun.

Time can not be used to name the many important persons who have held membership and offices in this historic old church. We have the records of members, elders, deacons and trustees since 1810. These records call to mind many of the prominent persons who have been responsible for the cultural, social and industrial, as well as the spiritual growth of Hamilton. May we ever be proud of and revere our old church, and may we pass its traditions and history on to the future, with additions that are worthy of the past.

Reverend John Lampe began the pastorate of the church in 1951 and served until 1959.

The Reverend Elvin W. Olson began his pastorate in September of 1959.

The Reverend Charles Collison, associate pastor began February 1958.