

Celebrating the Past...

...Creating the Future!

A Brief History of First Presbyterian Church

A Presbyterian "Society" Formed

In 1822, only 23 years after the first pioneers came to South Charleston, a Presbyterian "society" was formed. At that time, South Charleston was made up of just 13 houses, located mainly along what is now State Route 42. Some homes could be found as far north as the Little Miami River, others as far south as our current Jamestown Street. One residence, a log house, belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Warner. The Warners kept a little bakery in their home and brewed light beers for sale. Our present-day Presbyterian Church and manse ("parsonage") now rest on the site of the Warner's barn and home.

The early Presbyterian congregation was organized by the Rev. William Dickey of Washington Presbytery. Dickey had been directed to spend eight days in missionary work on the headwaters of the Paint, Little Miami, and Deer creeks. His evangelistic efforts produced a Presbyterian society consisting of twelve persons: James Pringle and his wife Sarah; David Wilson and his wife Polly; James Rankin and his wife Margaret; Joseph Laird and his wife; Isaac Wilson and his wife; Jane Vance; and, Sarah Vance. The Pringles and Vances originally came from Kentucky, the Rankins from the eastern shore of Maryland, the Wilsons from Pennsylvania, and the Lairds from

Scotland. James Pringle, Sr. and David Wilson were chosen as the first ruling elders of this group, and they were ordained by the Rev. Andrew W. Poage later that same year.

The earliest written record of the South Charleston church (as an organized body) is found among the notes of the Presbytery of Miami (Dayton) on October 5, 1824. A request for missionary supplies was made by the Charleston church, and the Rev. Poage was directed to spend eight days in missionary labor in (South) Charleston, Buck Creek, Urbana, and surrounding settlements.

First Church Building Completed

By 1832, membership in the church had declined to just seven people. Despite their small number, however, these faithful men and women had a vision to build a permanent house of worship. An acre of land was donated by Clement Shockley (across the street from where he ran a hotel and tannery) for the site of our first church. In 1833, the building was completed, and it rested on what is now the northwest corner of Chillicothe and John Streets. This old frame church had broad wooden steps with a landing, an aisle in the center (with seats on both sides), and a pulpit at the back. Men and women were segregated during worship. In our church's early years, there was no resident minister, so several supply pas-

tors were sent from other Presbyterian churches. vng were: the Rev. John McLean of Bloomingsburg; Dr. J. H. Campbell (who at one time was superintendent of schools in South Charleston); the Rev. Franklin Putnam (1833-34); the Rev. John Galloway (1835-41); Reverends McComb and Peman (1843); Rev. J. Pelam (1844-49); Rev. Edwards; and Rev. J. E. Weaver (1851). Among those worshipping in this early church (in addition to the original founders) were the following families: Dooleys; Armstrongs; Paists; McCollums; Heiskells; Waddles; Pratts; Edgars; Stitts; Browns; Hemphills; Comries; Edwards; Kirkers; Paullins; Batemans; Mattinsons; Murrays; Cheney; and, Littles. The pews in this first church were boxed, with individual doors. The salary of the minister was raised by the sale of pews, the more desirable ones (such as those closest to a heat source) going to the highest bidder.

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First Resident Minister Called; Church Moves to Present Site

In 1857, our church took a big step, hiring the Rev. John Haight as our first resident minister. At this time, membership in the church was about fourteen or fifteen persons, and Rev. Haight found it necessary to supplement his income by practicing dentistry in his home. Although few in number, these members -- like their predecessors -- had a vision for a better church, and in 1858 they built the first of two brick churches to be constructed on our present site. During con-

struction, the Presbyterian congregation worshipped in Paullin Hall (located on the southeast corner of Columbus and Chillicothe Streets), while (for a short time) the Catholic congregation rented our old frame church.

Dedication services for the new \$5000 building were conducted on November 21, 1858. At the time of dedication, three men who had helped build the first wooden church -- T. J. Hicks, Abihu Raines, and Obadiah Raines - were still living. During the same year, a religious revival swept across America, and the South Charleston church benefited by increasing its membership to forty-five persons. After Rev. Haight's term, the Rev. George Fullerton became our next pastor.

He left the church at the outbreak of the Civil War, enlisting in the army as a chaplain. Rev. Fullerton was followed by the Rev. Nathan S. Smith (1861-67), who also left to pursue military service. During Rev. Smith's time in South Charleston, he ministered in the area of the Peirce School House (Route 41 and Pancake Chapel Road), and in the Carthage (Dolly Varden) neighborhood. It was then that the old, original frame church was made into a manse, where Rev. Smith and his family lived before they moved to what was later known as Dr. Collin's homestead (located on north Chillicothe Street).

Next came the pastorates of the Reverends: L. M. Schofield (1867-70); T.C. Thomas (1872-73); and, L. Kelsey (1873-77). During this period, the population

of South Charleston grew from 413 persons in 1850 to 516 in 1860, 818 in 1870, and 933 in 1880. Rev. Kemper next served as pastor in 1878 and remained here for twelve years.

*Rev. James K. Gibson Arrives;
New Building Constructed*

In 1890, the Rev. James King Gibson was called to our church. He stayed in South Charleston for twenty-five years and is, to date, our longest serving minister. During his tenure, he conducted revival services in a little frame church at Dolly Varden, and among workers who laid the first gas lines in Clark County.

From 1900 to 1902, Rev. Gibson oversaw the razing of the 1858 brick church and the construction of our existing building. This new church was formally dedicated on Sunday, November 3, 1907. Although by then the building had been in use for some time, the congregation decided not to formally dedicate the facility until it had been paid for in full. Women in the church (organized as the "Ladies Aid Society") were instrumental in raising over \$2000 towards the completion and decoration of the new \$8000 church building. Their Christmas bazaar and monthly dime socials helped pay for stained glass windows, furniture, carpeting, pavement, and other items.

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Other Milestones of the 20th Century

In 1916, the Rev. M. E. Koonce came as our ninth minister, and he remained until his retirement in 1933. During Koonce's tenure, our church celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1922. Present for the festivities was former pastor Gibson, as well as the South Charleston Methodist church congregation. Miss Catherine Pringle Walker, great-great granddaughter of James Pringle (one of the charter members of the church), unveiled a bronze tablet on which were inscribed the names of the founders of Presbyterianism in South Charleston. The bronze tablet still hangs in our church today.

In 1933, the Rev. Donald Lomas was called as pastor. He remained until 1937, when he left to do missionary work in West Virginia. Lomas was followed in the pastorate by the Rev. Earl F. Schottke, who served from 1938 until 1940. Next to serve was the Rev. Robert W. Rayburn (1942-45). In 1945, the church was renovated, and in 1946 the Rev. Eli Miller Mowry began his ministry here. During the time of Rev. Mowry, our church celebrated its 125th anniversary.

When Rev. Mowry left South Charleston in 1951, the Rev. Robert Thena began his ministry, which lasted until 1956. Our next minister was the Rev. Philip D. Hirtzel (1957-61), followed by the Rev. Donald Kratz (1962-64). In 1966, Rev. C. William Locke became the pastor. During his term, our church cele-

brated its 150th anniversary. Rev. Locke also oversaw major remodeling projects of the church and manse. He retired in 1988, after 22 years of service in South Charleston. Our current pastor, the Rev. William B. Reisenweaver, began his ministry here in August, 1989.

Celebrating the Past... ...Creating the Future

Today our church thrives as a dynamic fellowship of believers. Our spiritual and numerical growth in recent years has enabled us to reach beyond our walls, ministering effectively in South Charleston and surrounding areas, as well supporting overseas missionaries.

We are proud of our heritage. From its humble beginnings, our church has weathered many seasons in its history. But through good times as well as hardships, its members and leaders never lost sight of their vision for tomorrow. Because of their faithfulness, we are now a strong, vibrant church. We look back in remembrance to those faithful men and women of the past and forward to what we can do to impact our current world and future generations, for the

glory of God.

How do we envision First Presbyterian Church in the next century?

A Community Church

Our dream is to have a church that is vitally involved in bring Christians together to make our community a better place to live.

A Worshipping Church

We anticipate worship services that are distinguished by variety: in music styles, in the times of worship, and in the ways of communicating God's eternal Word.

A Youth-Oriented Church

Our ambition is to have a church offering high quality programs for children and youth of all ages.

A Warm Church

Our desire is that First Presbyterian Church will be a refuge where people can find genuine and lasting friendships in an increasingly impersonal world.

Source: Sesquicentennial Booklet, 1972. Revised 1997.
