

HISTORICAL SKETCHES

OF

**The Disciple Churches**

IN

LICKING COUNTY, OHIO,

BEING

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OF THE

**Licking County Pioneer Association:**

BY

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## Introduction

On entering upon the duty assigned to me, by the Pioneer Association of Licking County, O., to furnish for it, a history of the rise, progress, and present condition of the congregations of the disciples of Christ in Licking county, O., I beg leave to submit a brief prefatory, containing some of the leading tenets held by them, by which they differ from all sects and parties in Christendom.

The disciples of Christ, like all protestants and reformers since the days of Constantine the Great, were nicknamed after one of those who was prominent in presenting Christianity in its ancient simplicity, as delivered by the apostles of Jesus Christ, and in gathering them together into congregations. The much esteemed, but now deceased, Rev. Alexander Campbell, D.D., late President of Bethany College, West Virginia was eminently conspicuous in this respect: hence the nickname "Campbellites." But they ignore such cognomen and choose to be recognized by the simple and unassuming name "Disciples of Christ," or "Christians."

They regard all sects and parties of the Christian world as having in a greater or less degree, departed from the simplicity of faith and manners of the first Christians, and as forming what the apostle Paul calls "the apostasy." This defection they attribute to the great varieties of speculation and metaphysical dogmatism of the almost countless 'creeds,' 'confessions of faith,' 'formularies,' 'liturgies,' and books of 'discipline,' adopted and inculcated as bonds of union and platforms of communion in all the sects and parties since Arius and Athanasius wrote their respective creeds, or since the council of Nice in A. D. 325, which was convened by the authority of the Emperor Constantine the Great.

The effects of these Synodical covenants, conventional articles of belief and rules of ecclesiastical polity, has been the introduction of a new nomenclature, a human vocabulary of religious words, phrases and technicalities, which has displaced the style of the living oracles and affixed to the sacred diction ideas wholly unknown to the apostles of Christ: hence, they reject all 'human creeds,' 'confessions of faith,' 'formularies,' 'liturgies' and 'books of discipline,' and take the *word of the Lord, without note or comment* as their *only rule of faith and practice in religion*.

This body of Christians have taken this stand-point upon the two

great and fundamental principles of protestantism:

**1st. THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY BOOK OF GOD.**

**2d. PRIVATE JUDGMENT IS THE RIGHT AND DUTY OF MAN.**

Upon this platform the disciples of Christ hope to unite all the true and sincere followers of Jesus Christ.

They understand the sacred oracles to teach (and therefore they so teach and practice) that an immersion into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, after a public, sincere and intelligent confession of faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God and a repentance towards God, as necessary to the admission to the rights and privileges of the kingdom or church of the Messiah on earth, and as a solemn pledge on the part of heaven, of the actual remission of all past sins and of adoption into the family of God. That the Holy Spirit is promised *only to those who obey the Savior*. No one who is taught to expect that heavenly Monitor and Comforter as a resident in his heart, till he *obeys the Gospel*: hence they teach, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall received the gift of the Holy Ghost’ (Spirit) Acts 2:38. They meet every ‘first day of the week’ (the Lord’s day) in honor and commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus, and to break bread (the loaf) to show forth the death of the Son of God, to read and hear the word of the Lord, to teach and admonish one another, to unite in prayer and praise, to contribute to the necessities of the saints, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Every congregation chooses its own elders (bishops) and deacons, who preside over and administer the affairs of the congregation. And every congregation, either from itself, or in co-operation with others, sends out evangelists (preachers) to preach the gospel, immerse those who believe and repent, and to organize congregations; but every congregation regards these evangelists as its servants and therefore they have no control over any congregation, but are amenable to the congregation like any other member.

They acknowledge no higher ecclesiastical power than that of an individual congregation, nor any higher religious laws than the *word of the Lord*, which is their only and supreme law in religion.

In consequence of this truly scriptural and genuine Protestant ground taken by them, alike against the assumptions of the Roman Catholics and the interminable jargon and schisms of all Protestants,

they have met with the most fierce and bitter opposition from both. And until recently meeting houses have been locked against them, and other public places were denied them, so that they should not have a hearing; but many of the most moral and intelligent in every community where the disciples of Christ have preached, have cordially accepted the gospel of Christ, as the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes it, and therefore much of that opposition has fortunately 'died out.' Whether, in consequence of that fierce opposition to them, their numbers have rapidly increased I will not say, but in the short space of about half a century their numbers have increased in the United States alone to nearly one million. They have a considerable number of colleges, academies, and seminaries of learning, and issue a respectable number of religious periodicals.

### **THE BELL CONGREGATION.**

The first congregation of disciples of Christ, organized in this county, is the one known by the above title, which occurred sometime in the year 1829, in Eden township, in a log school house known as the Hen- thorn School House, situated about four miles south of where, in the year 1834 a fine frame church edifice was erected on the farm of Benjamin Bell Sr., in Knox county, near the centre east and west, and immediately on the line between Knox and Licking counties, and about equidistant from the village of Utica on the west, and Martinsburgh on the east, and where now stands a very neat and creditable frame church edifice, in which all those who continue steadfast in the apostles doctrine, meet on the first day of the week in fellowship and in prayer.

The first preaching by a disciple of Christ in this county was by Elder James Porter, at this place, in the year 1829, by whom also this congregation was organized. He was also its first elder and for some time its ablest and almost only public advocate. He resided in this vicinity and perhaps to him, more than to any other man the organization is indebted for its origin, advancement and present degree of prosperity and moral standing in this community. The number composing the first organization was some ten respectable and intelligent citizens of this vicinity, to wit: Jas. Porter and wife, Benjamin Bell, Sr., and wife, Elizabeth Bell, wife of Samuel Bell, Stephen Harris and wife, Isaac Henthorn and wife, and Elisha Stout.

After the congregation was fully organized, this little band of disciples, in the spirit of true Christianity, extended a cordial invitation to all their religious neighbors, to wit: Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, United Brethren etc., to unite with them on the one foundation of the apostles and prophets, 'Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.' But all declined, preferring to adhere with unyielding tenacity to their favorite creeds and confessions of faith, made by human hands.

Ignoring all human creeds and confessions of faith, they at once became the special objects of a most bitter and unrelenting persecution, which resulted in a public discussion about the year 1830, between the Rev. James Gilruth of the M. E. Church, and Elder James Porter on behalf of the disciples of Christ.— The discussion took place in a log barn belonging to Jesse Oldacre in Eden township. After this discussion the congregation grew rapidly in numbers and its members in grace, and in the knowledge of the truth, and subsequently under the ministerial labors of such evangelists as James Porter, John Secrest, John Reed, Reuben Davis, John Sargent, James Mitchell, Jesse B. Ferguson, Arthur Critchfield, Jas. J. Moss, Dr. Wm. Hays, David G. Mitchel, J. H. Jones, Isaiah Jones, Andrew Burns, Abner Lemert, Benjamin Bell, Jr., David Sharpless, David Weaver, Jonas Hartzel, Ziba Brown and many others, 'The Lord added unto the church daily, such as should be saved' until it now numbers about one hundred and fifty members in full fellowship.— Many of the original members have been "gathered home to their fathers," and others have removed to other localities. Their present officers are Wm. Bell, Sr., and John McFadden, Elders; and Samuel Boll and John Hughes, Deacons.

Benjamin Bell, Jr., upon whom, as teacher and elder rested, for ten or twelve years, the almost exclusive control of the church, for his efficiency in its management and supervision, is entitled to the lasting gratitude of the congregation.

### **THE ELIZABETHTOWN CONGREGATION.**

This congregation meets in Elizabethtown in Perry Township. The first preaching here by a disciple of Christ was some time in the year 1829 or 1830 by James Porter and John Secrest, in the house of Mrs. Elizabeth Lemert, and through the zeal and indomitable energy of that departed saint, the first church edifice was built on her

premises, in Elizabethtown, about the year 1831, and was constructed of hewed logs, in which they met for worship. A congregation was organized about the year 1833, with Joseph Leatherman its elder, but he declined to serve in that capacity. Sometime in the same year John Dodson united with this congregation and was appointed elder, and sustained that relation for sixteen years, and until he removed to the Brushy Fork congregation. Since that time the congregation has had the following elders to-wit: Abner Lemert, Beverly Lemert, Hezekiah Shacklet, William Brown and William Phillips. The two latter are their present elders. The first organization consisted of the following named persons, viz: Mrs. Elizabeth Lemert, Joseph Leatherman, and his wife, Minerva Lemert, Leroy Lemert and his wife, Abner Lemert, William Adams, his wife and two daughters, Archibald Mercer, David Mercer, Rachael Reed, Moses Priest, Jacob Priest, Daniel Lauthlin and wife.

Since 1830 the following named evangelists preached here at different times, up to 1837, John Reed, John Sargent, Reuben Davis, J. H. Jones, Benjamin Sanders, James Briton, Jesse B. Ferguson, Dr. William Hayes, James Mitchell, David G. Mitchell and Abner Lemert. And since that period, many others, including the present evangelist J. A. Walters.

In the year 1846 or 1847 they built a frame church edifice, much better than the hewed log house, but not in an eligible situation nor in good style, either for comfort or health, and that house having become uncomfortable, the congregation erected a very creditable church edifice in the most suitable place in the village and had it dedicated to the worship of God on the third Lord's day of June 1869. The dedicatory sermon was delivered by J. H. Jones.

The entire number of members enrolled in this congregation from its beginning, can not be accurately given on account of the first record having being lost; but from the best data at hand the number may be set down at 650. Many have since died and many others have removed to other localities, so that their present number is about eighty.

## **THE BRUSHY FORK CONGREGATION.**

The first preaching done here was by Jesse B. Ferguson about 1837 and afterwards by Wm. Hathway, Albert Law, Ziba Brown, Dr. William Hays, J. H. Jones and Asbury Gardner and many other

evangelists, including the present evangelist Wm. Atherton.

This congregation was organized in the latter part of 1837, with Artemas Baker, his wife, one son and two daughters, Robert Wills and wife, John Oatman and wife, Andrew Nicholson and wife, Jacob Palmer and wife, John Palmer and son, Ezekiel Skinner and wife, William Cooms and wife, David Cooms and wife, and John Perry and wife first members. Artemas Baker, Jacob Palmer and John Perry were its first elders,

Their church edifice is a substantial stone structure and was erected in the year 1838. It is situated about two and a half miles south-east of Clay Lick Station, on the C. O. R. R., on the road across the Flint Ridge to Zanesville, sometimes called the Mount Sterling road. The whole number of members enrolled from its commencement to the present time is about 300. Many of the original members have died and many have removed west, leaving the present number about 75 or 80.

### **THE YORKSTREET CONGREGATION.**

The first preaching in this vicinity by a Disciple of Christ was in August A. D. 1852 by A. E. Myers, who received his education at Bethany College, West Virginia. The next preaching was by John C. Winter, who preached once a month from November 1852 till September 1853.

In May 1853 the congregation was organized by John C. Winter and Dr. William Hayes, evangelists. The congregation consisted of the following named persons, viz: Abraham Morrow and wife, Jacob Stool- fire and wife, Noah Morrow and wife, Nathan McVay and wife, John Crow and wife, David Stoolfire, Catharine McVay, Elizabeth Hoyt, Hannah Crow and Jacob Winter and wife.

The first elders were Jacob Winter and Abraham Morrow and the first deacons were Jacob Stoolfire and Noah Morrow. This little band of Disciples at that time had no house to worship in, but through the kindness of our much esteemed fellow-citizen, Horace Beach, Esqr., and others, School Directors of District No. 5, in Harrison township, they were permitted to meet in the "Pine School House" on Yorkstreet. Their number rapidly increased and the attendance on their meetings became so large that the school-house could not contain all the people, they therefore erected a large tent on the grounds now occupied by their church edifice, of sufficient



dimensions to accomodate all who met. Here they continued to meet during the pleasant summer and fall months, untill they entered into their new church edifice, which was completed in September 1855. This is a neat frame building 35 by 50 feet, with a basement room for Sunday and Select Schools, and is situated in Etna township, within a few rods of the Harrison township line, at the south terminus of Yorkstreet, and about three miles from Pataskala on the C.O. Railroad.

In the month of September 1855, Alexander Campbell, late President of Bethany College, West Virginia, preached the 'dedicatory sermon' in the new church edifice; since which time the congregation has met there every Lord's day and continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine (teaching) in the fellowship, (contribution) in breaking of bread, (the loaf) and prayer.

The following named evangelists have preached here since its organization, to-wit: Benjamin Franklin, J. H. Jones, Asbury Gardner, John O'Cain, Dr. Israel Belton, Andrew Burns, William H. Taylor and some seventeen others.

The whole number of members enrolled in this congregation since its commencement is 213. This number has however been greatly diminished within the last few years by the formation of two other congregations, one at Hebron and the other at Reynoldsburgh, Franklin County, Ohio, of which, mention will be made hereafter. To the former ten members were transferred, including its worthy elder, Charles Stoolfire, who, at that time was an acting and efficient elder in this congregation. To the latter sixteen members were transferred, including many worthy and intelligent members.

Some of the original members have died and many others have removed to other localities, so that their present number is only sixty.

## **THE ROCKY FORK CONGREGATION.**

The church edifice of this congregation is situated on the lands of D. H. Ralston, in the north eastern part of Mary Ann township and is the meeting-house formerly owned by the M. E. Church, from whom William Hickey purchased it.

Of the history and statistics of this congregation I could not obtain much reliable information, but from such information as I could obtain, I give their numbers at 35 or 40.

## **THE HARTFORD CONGREGATION.**

This congregation meets in the village of Hartford, in Hartford Township, and was organized in March 1859, by elder William Hays. There have been four elders, but they, with most of the original members have removed beyond the bounds of the congregation. B. Cumpston and L. Cake are the present acting Deacons. The membership amounts to about 40 at present. A. Burns, David Weaver, Mr. Taylor, together with William Hays and others have ministered to this congregation at different times.

## **THE HEBRON CONGREGATION.**

The first preaching here by a Disciple of Christ was by A. E. Myers in 1852, and by Dr. William Hayes in 1853 & 1854. Since that time by Andrew Burns, Asbury Gardner, William H. Taylor, T. J. Newcomb, Mr. Dunn, Mr. Hoffman, J. A. Walters and James Grimm.

The congregation was organized in 1867 by T. J. Newcomb evangelist. Charles Stoolfire was its first elder and J. E. Kelsey and Israel Reese its first deacons.

Charles Stoolfire and J. E. Kelsey are its present elders. They have no church edifice of their own, but meet in the "Brick Meeting House" in Hebron, Union township. This church edifice belongs to the Bible Christians (sometimes nicknamed "Newlights") and the citizens of Hebron conjointly, but the Bible Christians have the preference over all others whenever they wish to occupy it for worship: they have however disbanded, since the Disciples of Christ have commenced here, leaving the use of the house entirely to the latter.

This is a young but energetic congregation whose numbers have increased rapidly until their present number has reached sixty.

They have met with more than usual opposition from their sectarian neighbors, but trusting in the justice of their cause, they are as firm as the Rock upon which they are builded, and have hitherto manfully and in the Christian spirit met all opposition successfully.

## **THE FALLSBURY CONGREGATION.**

This is a small congregation that was organized on the 3d Sunday in March 1869, in Fallsburgh, Fallsbury township. They are now engaged in building a church edifice in Fallsburgh, which is

nearly finished. David D. Mitchell, Mr. White and J. A. Walters were their first preachers, and John Howell, elder, Samuel Hupp, Clerk; and William Scott, John Howell and Jacob Booth, Trustees.

From the best information I could obtain, I give their number at twenty-five.

### **THE REYNOLDSBURGH CONGREGATION.**

This congregation meets in Reynoldsburgh, Franklin county, Ohio, therefore does not properly belong to the history of this county; but inasmuch as the nucleus of this congregation was transferred from the Yorkstreet congregation and many of its members reside in Licking county, I judged it apropos to give a brief sketch of its history in this connection.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago there was a small congregation organized here, but it had long since been disbanded. In February 1868 the present congregation was organized by Thomas D. Garvin, President of Wilmington College, with Wilington Sprague, James Flinn and Mr. Smith, its elders. They meet in a church edifice belonging to the Universalists, but will soon build one for themselves.

This, although young, is an intelligent congregation whose members are increasing rapidly. Their number at present is about sixty.

### **THE COTTAGE HILL CONGREGATION.**

This congregation was organized a number of years ago, and built a church edifice within a few rods of the line that separates Hopewell Tp. Licking county, from Muskingum county. Although the church stands in Muskingum county, quite a number of its members live in Licking county, probably 15 or 20. The Messrs. Varner and Perry have been among its most efficient Licking county members.

Statistics of the church of the disciples of Christ in Licking County. Ohio.

### **SOCIETIES. MEMBERS.**

Bell: 150

Elizabethtown: 80

Brushy Fork: 75

York Street: 60

Rocky Fork: 35  
Hartford: 40  
Hebron: 60  
Fallsburg: 25  
Reynoldsburgh: 25  
Cottage Hill: 15  
Total number: 565

The total number of members in Licking County is here given at 565, but it is probable that about 65 of these members reside in Knox county, but are members of the Bell Church, and in Muskingum and Coshocton counties, but attached to the Elizabethtown Church.

There are five Disciple's Churches in Licking County, the Bell church edifice standing over the line in Knox County, and the Cottage Hill Church in Muskingum County.

NOTE.—In consequence of the great difficulty in obtaining a full and complete history with proper statistics from all of the above named congregations, the foregoing sketch is necessarily imperfect, except perhaps, in the case of the congregation at York Street, where they have a full and complete record.

I am especially indebted to Elder John Dodson for nearly all the statistics of all the congregations in the eastern part of the county, except the Bell congregation; for the very full and complete history and statistics of which I am indebted to the evangelist David G. Mitchell and to my worthy friend Wm. Bell, Jr., for his energy in procuring and forwarding the same to me.— Other friends, not named, for assisting in procuring information contained in the foregoing paper, are entitled to our thanks, and will be kindly remembered.