

Sketch of Early Presbyterian Church in Indiana

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Going back to the beginning of the last century, we find the vast region of country lying north and west of the Ohio River, now become the well cultivated and well ordered state, an almost unbroken wilderness. In the depth of this wilderness dwelt several powerful tribes of Indians. Exclusive of the savage tribes and nations occupying it, was a white population of 4,875, of which a small portion in Clark's grant at the Falls of the Ohio was of English descent; the other mostly of French extraction and residing at or near Kaskaskia, Vincennes, and Detroit. Along with men of other religious faiths there were Presbyterians among the first Anglo-Saxon settlers in the country about Vincennes. In 1783 Patrick Simpson came from Glasgow, Scotland, to Vincennes. About 1796 Daniel McClure, with several stalwart sons, settled near Vincennes; and in the year 1800 several other Presbyterian families came and took up their residence in the community. It is altogether probable that Samuel Thornton Scott, who afterward became the first resident Presbyterian minister in Indiana, in the year 1802, taught a school in Vincennes and, having the ministry in view, held religious services in the country on the Sabbath. Some of the earliest settlers have left written testimony to this effect and that after this Scott returned to Kentucky and studied for the ministry. At the spring meeting of the Transylvania Presbytery in 1803, the Reverend Alexander Cameron and the Reverend James Vance were appointed to preach in the settlements in the Illinois grant and at the Port Vincennes. This

¹This sketch, written at the instance of the Presbytery of New Albany, is based almost entirely on notes and records made by the Reverend A. Y. Moore, an early Presbyterian minister in Indiana.

[It supplements, at many points, our existing books upon the subject, the excellent *Contributions to the Early History of the Presbyterian Church in Indiana*, by Hanford A. Edson, 1898, and *A Brief History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Indiana* prepared by a committee of the Salem Presbytery and published in 1828 over the name of John M. Dickey, now very rare.—Editor.]

is the first record that we have of preaching appointed by Presbyterian authority for Indiana Territory. But at the fall meeting these brethren gave reasons for not fulfilling the mission to which they were appointed, which reasons, say the records of Presbytery, were sustained.

In the fall of 1804, a communication was received by Transylvania Presbytery from Post Vincennes asking for supplies to be sent them,—that is, supplies of the Bread of Life through the ministry of the word. Supplies were also asked, through the Reverend James Vance, for the Illinois grant. Mr. Vance was appointed, and doubtless filled his appointment. But no supply was appointed for Post Vincennes. At the spring meeting of the same Presbytery, in 1805, a petition from a number of the inhabitants of Knox County, Indiana Territory, praying for supplies, was presented and read. This implies that at this time there were a number of Presbyterians in Knox County, and that they were anxious to have preaching. The Reverend Thomas Cleland was appointed to supply in Indiana Territory as much of the time as he could, with convenience to himself. From a memoir of Dr. Cleland published in 1859, we have a record in his own words of the fulfillment of this Presbyterian appointment. He says:

In the Spring of 1805 I was directed to visit Vincennes and the adjoining regions. It was an uninhabited route I had to go; a small wilderness trace with only one residence on the way, in the most destitute part of the way, to entertain me during the night. There was my poor animal tied to a tree, fed with the grain packed in a wallet at Louisville, and myself stretched on a puncheon floor of a small cabin for the night's rest. All passed off, however, without any detriment or discomfort. The next evening made up for all previous privations. I was welcomed and entertained at the Governor's palace during my stay in Vincennes. The late William Henry Harrison [continues Dr. Cleland, writing a few years after the death of President Harrison], then a young man with a Presbyterian wife, was Governor of Indiana Territory as it was then. He had recently held a treaty with a certain tribe of Indians assembled at Vincennes.

The first sermon ever preached in the place, at least by a Presbyterian minister, was in the Council House but a short time before occupied by the sons of the forest. I preached also in a settlement twenty miles up the Wabash, where there were a few Presbyterian families, chiefly from Shelby County, Kentucky.

The next year after Mr. Cleland's visit in 1806, the Indiana church was organized near Vincennes and embracing Vincennes. This organization was effected by Samuel B. Robertson, pastor of New Providence and Cave Run churches in Kentucky. In this same year, 1806, the General Assembly appointed Samuel T. Scott a missionary for three months in Indiana Territory and especially at Vincennes. Whether Scott performed this service and the organization of the church under the hand of Robertson was the result, or whether he was unable to go and Robertson went in his stead, at least for a shorter time, and while so ministering organized the church, is not known. But there is no doubt about the organization of the church in this year and by Mr. Robertson. The organization occurred in a barn of Colonel Small, about two miles and a half east and north of Vincennes.

In 1807 Scott was again appointed by the General Assembly to the same missionary work to which he had been appointed the year before, and record is made by the Presbytery of West Lexington at their meeting, October 13, 1807, that Mr. Scott was absent fulfilling a mission assigned him by the General Assembly. Scott had been licensed by the West Lexington Presbytery, December 28, 1805, and was ordained by this Presbytery and installed pastor of Mt. Pleasant and Indian Creek churches on October 10, 1808. The pastoral relation of Scott to his churches in Kentucky was dissolved and, with his wife and two children, he removed to Indiana to take charge of the Indiana church, and so became the first resident Presbyterian minister in Indiana.

The Indiana church in Knox County, it is altogether probable, was the first Protestant church organization in that region. But among the acts of the first session of the second General Assembly of the Territory, begun and held at the borough of Vincennes the 16th day of August, 1807, was the incorporation of the Wabash Baptist church.¹

In narratives of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it is stated that as early as 1802, a Methodist class was organized near the present site of Charlestown. Samuel Galloway is

¹ John B. Dillon; *History of Indiana*, 1859, p. 421.

named as the class leader, and a log church is said to have been built for this Methodist Society as early as 1803.

The first Baptist church organized in Indiana is said to have been organized on Owen's Creek near the Ohio River in Clark's grant of 1798. It was constituted by Elder Isaac Edwards of Kentucky. There were only four members, two men and their wives. The name was subsequently changed to Silver Creek, and later on to Charlestown, by which it is still designated.¹

In 1807 a second Presbyterian church was organized in the Territory by Reverend James Vance of Kentucky. It was the Palmyra church.

The village of Charlestown in Clark County, was laid out in 1806. The Reverend John Todd, who had moved from Virginia to Kentucky in 1806 or 1807, spent the summer of 1808 in Charlestown. He without doubt preached in Charlestown and the adjacent region.

The General Assembly, from time to time, commissioned men as missionaries to labor in Indiana. In 1809, James H. Dickey was commissioned to labor four months in Indiana Territory. In 1811 Mr. Dickey was again commissioned to labor three months between the Scioto and Wabash Rivers, at discretion. He probably reached no settlements in Indiana that year, as there were no settlements at that time on the upper Wabash in Indiana. In 1811 the growing troubles with the Indians arising from the opposition of Tecumseh and his brother, the Shawnee prophet, to the sale of lands by the Indians to Governor Harrison as the agent for the United States Government, culminated in the battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, 1811.

The Honorable Jesse L. Williams, in his *Historical Sketch of the First Presbyterian Church, Fort Wayne*, says, "When General Harrison, in September, 1812, marched to the relief of the garrison at Ft. Wayne then besieged by the Indians, the expedition was accompanied by the Reverend Matthew G. Wallace as chaplain to the army. If, as may be presumed, he preached to the soldiers while here, his was the first proc-

¹ William T. Stott, *Indiana Baptist History*, pp. 37-38; J. C. Tibbetts, *History of Coffee Creek Baptist Association*, Cincinnati, 1883, pp. 18, 12-13.

lamation of the Gospel in Protestant form on this ground." In the year preceding, 1811, Mr. Wallace had been commissioned to preach for one month on missionary ground in Miami Presbytery. This Presbytery included the eastern part of Indiana. Its western boundary was a line running north from the mouth of the Kentucky River. Stephen Bovellev was also commissioned the same year to labor for three months in Western Ohio and in Indiana. James McGready was also commissioned the same year to preach for a period of three months in Indiana. In 1812 these same appointments of these three men, Wallace, Bovellev, and McGready, were renewed by the Assembly.

In the year 1812 the church of Charlestown was organized and the members of the Palmyra church were united with it. Because of this merging of the Palmyra church with that of Charlestown, the Charlestown church has been considered to be the second Presbyterian church organized in Indiana, although it ought more properly to be regarded as the third.

In 1813 the only missionary appointed by the Assembly for Indiana was William Robinson, who was commissioned to labor for one month in the Whitewater settlement.

Doubtless the war with Great Britain which began in June, 1812, and continued until the beginning of the year 1815, interfered seriously with the prosecution of mission work. The Indians were the allies of Great Britain and in 1813, to preserve the settlements in Indiana from attacks by the Indians, there was a good deal of active military service along a line from the northern part of Switzerland County to Fort Harrison on the Wabash.

In 1814 the General Assembly again commissioned William Robinson to labor for one month in the Whitewater settlement. The Reverend Joseph Anderson was also commissioned to labor for four months, at discretion, in the State of Ohio and in Indiana Territory.

In December, 1814, the Reverend William Robinson came to Madison and took up his abode there, the second resident Presbyterian minister in Indiana. But there was no church at Madison or nearer to it than Charlestown. In the spring of 1814 Williamson Dunn, who some years previously had

settled where Hanover now is and who had been appointed both a justice of the peace and an associate judge by Governor Harrison and who early in 1813 had received a commission from President Madison as a captain of rangers and had been in active service with his company until it was mustered out of service in the spring of 1814, on his return from his military service, desiring to unite with the church and make a public profession of his faith in Christ as the captain of his salvation, and there being no church nearer than Charlestown, twenty-five miles from his home, he went there and was received into the church.

Mr. Robinson, who had taken up his residence in Madison, taught a school there and late in 1815 organized the Presbyterian church of Madison with fifteen or twenty members. But previous to the coming of Mr. Robinson into Indiana another Presbyterian church had been organized in the summer of 1814, at the Forks of White River, by the Reverend S. T. Scott of Vincennes, with seventeen members. Several years afterwards when Daviess County was organized and Washington was laid out and made the county seat, this became the Washington church. In December, 1814, John M. Dickey, who had been licensed by his Presbytery August 29th of the same year, visited this church in the Forks of White River, spent a few Sabbaths with them, and agreed to return in the spring and labor among them as their minister one-half of the time, they promising him a salary of eighty dollars for this portion of his labors. Mr. Dickey came with his family to this church in May, 1815.

In 1815, upon petition of the Synod of Ohio, which had been constituted in 1814, the Ohio River was made the boundary between the Synods of Ohio and Kentucky. This placed all the churches of Indiana nominally in Miami. But in 1817, upon petition of Louisville Presbytery, which had been organized out of Transylvania Presbytery in 1815, so much of the Synod of Ohio as lies west of a line drawn due north from the mouth of the Kentucky River was attached to the Synod of Kentucky. By this action of the General Assembly the larger part of the churches of Indiana came within the limits of Louisville Presbytery.

About this time the restoration of peace with Great Britain and with the various Indian tribes brought a great increase of population to the Territory and the legislature initiated measures to secure the admission to which it was entitled by the ordinance of 1787 upon reaching a population of 60,000. By the official returns of the census ordered by the legislature, the population reported to the legislature at its session, which began December 4, 1815, was 63,897.

In May, 1815, the Reverend James McGready was commissioned by the General Assembly as a missionary for three months in the Indiana Territory in the counties of Clark, Harrison, Gibson and Knox. A portion of his labors seems to have been performed in the early part of 1816, for in 1816 several churches are reported as having been organized by McGready in this region. On the 6th of February he organized the church of Blue River in Washington County, with seven members. At Jeffersonville on the 16th of February he organized the Union church of New Albany and Jeffersonville, with seventeen members, Thomas Posey, the Governor of the Territory, and Joel Scribner of New Albany being made elders. On the 27th of the same month, February, 1816, Mr. McGready organized the Pisgah church in Clark County, with fifteen members. In the Assembly of 1816 the commission of McGready as a missionary for the same length of time and in the same counties of Indiana was renewed. During this same year he organized the Princeton church in Gibson County. But the missionaries appointed by the General Assembly were not the only Presbyterian ministers who labored in missionary work in Indiana. The Reverend Samuel Shannon organized the church of Livonia in February, 1816, with thirteen members. Salem church was also organized by Shannon in 1816. The number of members at its organization is not known, but in August, 1817, the number was twenty-seven. In 1816 the Reverend Nathan B. Darrow, who had been sent into Indiana by the Connecticut Missionary Society, organized a church at Rising Sun. Mr. Darrow also, in December, 1817, organized the Graham church in Jennings County, with seventeen members. He also organized a church in Brownstown, Jackson County, which however through

deaths and removals became extinct in a few years. On December 7, 1817, the Union church of New Albany and Jeffersonville was reorganized in New Albany as the First Presbyterian Church of New Albany, the Jeffersonville members having moved away. The Reverend D. C. Banks of Louisville presided at the reorganization. In 1817 the Hopewell church was organized by the Reverend James Balch, who at the same time became a permanent resident of Sullivan County, the fourth resident minister in the Territory. But Mr. Balch was advanced in years and died in 1821. In July, 1817, the Reverend Clarence Hickman of the Presbytery of Geneva, New York, moved to Princeton, Gibson County, to take charge of the little church there and to preach the gospel in the adjacent regions. But in a few months death removed him from the scenes of his earthly labors. In October, 1817, the Reverend John Todd took up his abode in Charlestown as minister to the church there, nine years after his first temporary residence in the place. He continued ministering to that church until 1824, when he returned to Kentucky.

In 1815, after the Indian troubles were over and the Territory had become a State, three-fourths of the State was in possession of the Indians. As late as 1818 the maps of the State represented the Indian boundary as starting from a point in the northern part of Jackson County and running northeast to the Ohio line near Fort Recovery, and starting from the same point and running northwest to the Wabash a few miles above Terre Haute. In 1818 Governor Jennings, Governor Cass, and Judge Parke, commissioners appointed by the United States, succeeded in purchasing from the Indians all of the lands south of the Wabash, except a few reservations. On account of this purchase and the new lands that were thrown open to settlement, increasing streams of immigration flowed in upon the State, and in 1820 the population had increased to 147,178, considerably more than double what it was four years before, when Indiana was admitted as a State into the Union.

In 1818 the Reverend W. W. Martin of West Lexington Presbytery, came to the State with his family and took charge of the churches of Livonia, Blue River, and Salem.

In 1818 and 1819 the Reverend Orin Fowle spent a year in the State under the direction of the Connecticut Missionary Society. The church of Jefferson, Jefferson County, was organized by him, October 25, 1818, with 20 members. In October, 1818, the Reverend Isaac Reed located in New Albany as the supply of the church for one year. In this year a house of worship was built, a Sabbath School Society formed, and a Sabbath School of sixty scholars was gathered and instructed. This, says Mr. Reed, was the first Sabbath School organized in the State. The church numbered 35 members by the end of the year. After the close of his year's labor at New Albany, Reed returned to Kentucky.

In April, 1819, Mr. Dickey, of Washington, Daviess County, received a call to Pisgah and New Lexington churches. He says that when he visited the church of the Forks of the White River in 1814, he found many of the members unsettled. They had come into the region about the beginning of the war and were fenced in by the Indians. When the war closed, the Indian fence gave way, and the members moved into the regions beyond, seeking lands that would suit them better. Because the church was thus weakened and there were no immediately adjacent fields for labor and no provision for the necessary support, he removed to Pisgah. He was installed over the Pisgah and New Lexington churches by the Presbytery of Louisville, August 7, 1819, the first pastor installed in the State.

In 1819 Mr. Robinson removed from Madison to Bethlehem, but sickness and infirmities laid him aside almost entirely from ministerial labors and from that time until his death, March 28, 1827.

In July, 1819, the Reverend Thomas Searle, previously professor of divinity in Dartmouth College, came to Madison. On March 4, 1820, he organized the Hanover church with 23 members who had previously belonged to Madison. August 13, 1820, he was installed pastor of the Madison and Hanover churches. He also organized the Dartmouth church in Jennings and Ripley Counties, August 17, 1821. October 15, 1821, he died, "a minister greatly beloved and very useful," as it is recorded of him.

January 2, 1819, the Corydon church was organized with seven members, by the Reverend John F. Crowe. September 26, 1819, the Bloomington church was organized with 12 members by the Reverend Isaac Reed. Bethany church in Owen County was organized by the Reverend John M. Dickey. Franklin church was next organized with 28 members who had previously belonged to the Salem church. The Orleans church was organized by the Reverend W. W. Martin, October 2, 1820, with 16 members. Some time in 1821 the Presbyterian church of Evansville was organized with 10 or 12 members, by the Reverend D. C. Banks.

In July, 1822, the Palestine church was organized in Lawrence County by the Reverend W. W. Martin, with 24 members. In October, 1822, the Reverend Ezra H. Day from New York became stated supply of the New Albany church, but within a year, September 22, 1823, he was removed by death, and the church and the wide field around was again without a minister.

In October, 1822, the Reverend Daniel C. Proctor began to preach in Indianapolis three-fourths of his time and one-fourth to the church at Bloomington. The church at Indianapolis had not yet been organized. But Mr. Proctor, in May, 1822, in an exploring tour under the direction of the Connecticut Missionary Society, had stopped in the new town of Indianapolis for a few days and preached there. Arrangements were then made with him by those interested in the organization of a Presbyterian church to return and preach for them for a year. The church was organized July 5, 1823, with 15 members. Proctor, after the expiration of his year's service at Indianapolis, removed to Kentucky.

In December, 1822, the Reverend Isaac Reed returned from Kentucky to Indiana and became pastor of the Bethany church in Owen County.

The Reverend C. C. Beatty, who in 1822 and 1823 spent a year in Indiana, as a missionary of the Assembly's Board of Domestic Missions, organized December 17, 1822, Shiloh church in Parke County with seven members. January 8, 1823, he organized a church in Vigo County with nine members. January 9, 1823, he organized Ebenezer church in Parke County with nine members.

In April, 1823, the Reverend John F. Crowe of Louisville Presbytery was called to the Hanover church and in August following was installed as pastor. He gave the church three-fourths of his time and devoted the other fourth to mission work.

In December of this year, 1823, the Sand Creek church of Decatur County, which is now the Kingston church, was organized by the Reverend John R. Moreland with forty-seven members.

In the fall of 1823 the Synod of Kentucky in session at Lexington divided the Presbytery of Louisville and formed a new Presbytery in Indiana. It embraced all the territory of Louisville Presbytery north of the Ohio River. At the suggestion of the Reverend Isaac Reed it was called Salem, in reference to the Scriptural significance of the name. April 1, 1824, Salem Presbytery met at Salem, Indiana, and was opened with a sermon by the Reverend Samuel Thornton Scott from Ephesians 4:3, 4. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Members present were: Samuel S. Scott, John Todd, John M. Dickey, W. W. Martin, Isaac Reed, John F. Crowe, ministers; and elders, Samuel Ford, Alexander Waltner, William Reed, John Holmes, James McPheeters, James Carnahan, Thomas N. White, Jonathan E. Garrison, William Alexander, Peter Ryker, John Martin, Samuel S. Graham and Andrew Weir. William Robinson was absent on account of infirmities.

The number of ministers was small. But they were men who expected great things and undertook great things. The number of churches was thirty, and the communicants reported to the General Assembly of 1824 numbered 1,024.