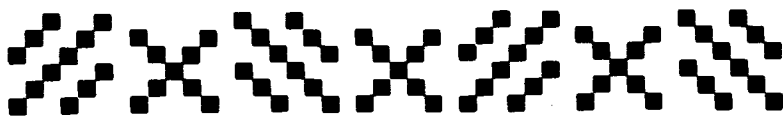


## Adjourned in Peace: A History of Piner Baptist Church

*Sylvia C. Henricks\**



"The church of christ on the Forks of Little Buck creek<sup>1</sup> met persuant to ajournment . . . on the 2d saturday in July 1833. after prase and prair . . . the church proceded to business."<sup>2</sup> From that first business meeting in 1833 to the last in 1906 this small Baptist church grew in size, built two houses of worship, served and admonished its members, declined in numbers, and finally disbanded. During those same years the rural Indiana community in which the church was located developed from a pioneer settlement to a thriving farming area on the southeastern edge of Indianapolis.

Organized on June 8, 1833, at the home of Nehemiah Smith, the church's Baptist foundation was evident from the "previously called for help" it received from neighboring churches of that faith. Lick Creek Baptist church sent five men, Bethel three men, and Pleasant Run two men to help start the church. The group chose a moderator and a clerk and, "inviting visiting bretheren to a seat in counsel," began the meeting.

The Articles of Faith, "called for red and approved" by the church's organizers, were modeled on those in common

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<sup>1</sup> While the official name of the church was the Church of Christ on the forks of Little Buck Creek, the church was known locally as "Piner," and the cemetery still bears the name. It is not known where the name "Piner" originated—perhaps a contracted form of pioneer or in reference to pine trees that may once have grown there.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated all quotations were taken directly from the church's two record books containing the minutes of business meetings from 1833 to 1906. The books are in the possession of Ruth and Helen McMillin, Indianapolis. Capitalization and spelling follow that of the original. Punctuation was added only when needed for clarity.

use among early Baptist churches in Kentucky and Indiana and reflected Piner's predestinarian beliefs:<sup>3</sup>

- 1st We believe in one only true and living god the father the word or son and holy ghost equal in wisdom power and glory.
- 2nd We believe the scriptures of the old and new testament to bee of divine authority and the only infalable rule of faith and practice.
- 3rd We believe in the total depravity of human nature and that a recovery from that situation is wholly and entrely of the free sovereign unmerited grace of god in christ Jesus.
- 4th We believe that god prposed in himself for his own glory to make a display of his wisdom power Justice goodness and truth in the works of creation.
- 5th We believe that god from eternity purposed to save his people from their sins for his holy names sake and that in infinite wisdom he dvised the plan and apointed every means nesessary to accomplish the great end of their redemption which he affects in his own good time by the operation of his holy sperit.
- 6th We believe that believers are Justified before god alone by the rihteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to them.
- 7th We believe that good works are the effects of the faith of gods elect and follows being born of the sperit and in this point of view are evidence of a gracious state.
- 8th We believe baptism and the lords supper are ordinences of the gospel instituted by Jesus Christ and none but those who process [*sic*] faith in Christ and obedience to his will are fit subjects of either.
- 9th We believe immersion according to the scriptures and apostolick practice to bee the only proper mode of baptism.
- 10 We believe in the resurrection of the boddy both of the Just and unjust and that god will Judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath Ordained.
- 11th We believe the righteous will for ever abide in the peacefull presence of god their redeemer and his pardning grace and forgiving love will bee the theme of their song while the wicked shall remain in ever lasting torment.

The first meeting also adopted rules of decorum, which served the church with only minor changes throughout its history.<sup>4</sup> The first rule provided for opening and closing prayers at each meeting. The church then established the offices of a moderator and clerk who respectively conducted

<sup>3</sup> Piner's doctrinal platform closely followed the Philadelphia Confession of 1742, a model frequently used by Baptist congregations. See John F. Cady, *The Origin and Development of the Missionary Baptist Church in Indiana* (Berne, Ind., 1942), 28-30.

<sup>4</sup> In November, 1833, "annuley" in Rule 2 was changed to "occasionally," and it was voted "to erase that part of the third rule that related to enquiry after fellowship." Rule 3 was restored to its original form in January, 1834.

and recorded the meetings. To ensure order at each meeting the rules required that only one person speak at a time and that no one individual voice his opinion on a particular subject more than twice without permission from the church. All questions were to be "decided by a majority except the reception of members and that to be by unanimity." Finally, the assembly made provisions to settle disputes between members and in the last rule exhorted the brethren "to attend their stated meetings of the dissiplin except providentially hindered and to keep and mentain the worship of God as a church."<sup>5</sup>

After laying down basic doctrine and church order the council examined the members, "withdrew and after consulting return and reported and sung and prayed giving a charge and the right hand of fellowship and pronounced them a gospel church of Jesus Christ. the names of the members in constitution were as follows. viz Elijah Vice, Susan Vice, Nehemiah Smith, Sarah Smith, Wm Forsythe, Sarah Forsythe, Edmond Lovett, Mary Lovett, Abraham Henricks, Susan Henricks, Franky Smith, Rebecca Perkins, Elizabeth Vice, Susan Vice, Francis Vice, Nathaniel Vice, Polly Vice, Benson Cornelius and Thomas McFarland, Betsy McFarland, Deborah Cornelius, Sarah Wicoff, after which the church agree to call her name The Baptist Church of Christ in the forks of littee Buck Creek and adjourned to meet the 2d sat in July next."

In line with the rules of decorum the business of the church was carried on by a moderator, a clerk, and deacons. At various times trustees and a treasurer were appointed to serve. One of the first items of business recorded in the July, 1833, meeting was the choosing of a moderator and clerk and two deacons. The church selected Elijah Vice to serve as moderator, Thomas McFarland as clerk, and Nehemiah Smith and Elijah Vice as deacons.

The moderator performed an important role in the church. He presided at business meetings held on the second Saturday of each month and at all special sessions of the church. As a part of each business meeting and also the Sunday service he "opened the door for the reception of members."

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<sup>5</sup> Rule 10 was added in April, 1848: "All mail members absenting themselves for three stated meting of the church shall be delt with the same as for other offences." An attempt in January, 1853, to change Rule 10 failed, but it was amended in April, 1870, to include the phrase "without any just caus."

The moderator also had the duty of guiding the church in decisions concerning its property, its relations with other churches of the same faith, and the members' duties to each other. He chose the committees needed to do the work of the church—whether the task was to “bear the letter to the Association,” to aid in an ordination service at a sister church, to investigate the cost of hitching racks, or to visit a dissatisfied church member. He needed to be a man of authority for the church meetings were sometimes turbulent. The church was never without a moderator, although often a moderator *pro tem* presided. Those who served as moderator included Abraham Smock, Elijah Vice, Nimrod Kemper, William Forsythe, Nehemiah Smith, Benjamin M. Phillips, Abraham Henricks, Jackson Kemper, George Riggs, Amos Morris, and Asa N. Parr.

Of all those who served the church only the clerks left a still extant legacy, the church record books. The clerk kept the minutes of the business meetings and recorded the decisions of the church as they were made. The duties of the clerk also involved reading the previous month's minutes and handling all correspondence, including the yearly letter to the association. Occasionally, his duties were expanded. For example, in December, 1846, it was voted “to keepe a standing fund and have aponted the Brother Clerk her treasure for which he is to keep a seperate Record of all Receipts and Expenditures and is to pay out on the order of the church.” Those who filled the office of clerk over the years included Thomas McFarland, John Ross, Moses B. Portlack, Alfred Martin, Alexander Carson, Benjamin M. Phillips, William C. Adair, Jacob Cochran, John McNutt, John L. Thompson, George Riggs, Asa N. Parr, Nimrod Kemper, and J. N. Kemper. William Cropper Adair served as clerk for the longest period. He joined the church in December, 1843, and was chosen clerk the next month. He served until September, 1869, when his request to be released from his duties was granted.

Finally, Piner church elected deacons to fulfill the congregation's responsibility to watch over and guide the conduct and spiritual life of its members. Because these functions defined the main purpose of the church, the office of deacon assumed special importance, and those who served in

it began their duties only after ordination. After participating in an ordination service for a deacon at Lick Creek church in April, 1834, Piner debated whether to ordain a deacon "by prair and laying on of hands or other wise . . . ." They decided in June to ordain their deacon "by prair and giving the rite hand of fellowship."

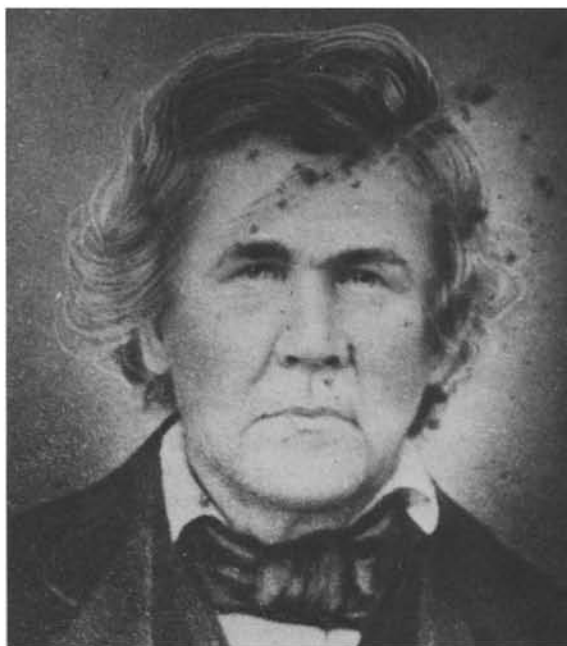
Although during some periods the church chose a treasurer to manage its finances, often the duties of the deacons were expanded to include handling the church's money. For example, in December, 1834, it was "Agreed that the deacons act as Treasurers." When the church decided to raise funds in May, 1837, it "Instructed the Deacons that (after having defryed the expenses of the Church) they may give of what is Left in the Treasury, to Traveling preachers and other Church members who may need assistance as they may think proper." The financial responsibilities fell another time on the deacons when in October, 1861, "the Church at the request of their Treasurer Release him of that Office and have placed it on the Bro Deacons."

For a time during the later years of Piner church there was only one deacon and then for a three year period, no deacon. Jacob Cochran, a deacon since 1849, died in 1866; and in March, 1871, John Monroe asked to be released from the office. Monroe had served as deacon from June, 1838, to April, 1853, when he asked to be released. However, the church voted "to continue Brother Monro in the office of deacon." He asked again in January, 1854, and his request was granted; but he was selected again in July, 1857, and served until 1871. He acted as deacon for almost thirty years. Those who functioned as deacons included Elijah Vice, Nehemiah Smith, John Ross, Alexander Carson, John Monroe, Abraham Henricks, Benson Cornelius, Jacob Cochran, John Dilliner, Asa N. Parr, and J. W. Kemper.

Of course, in addition to its business officers and deacons Piner church also called men to serve as ministers.<sup>6</sup> The first

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<sup>6</sup> The frontier Baptist congregations often "called out" their preachers from among their own members. To any man who showed ability the church voted the opportunity to "exercise his public gifts" by encouraging him to preach within the bounds of the church. If his abilities warranted, the church licensed him which gave him the opportunity to preach at large. See William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830* (New York, 1931), 46-48; Cady, *Origin of Missionary Baptist Church*, 125-29.



NEHEMIAH SMITH, MODERATOR AND DEACON  
OF PINER CHURCH

Courtesy author

minister, Abraham Smock, was perhaps the most well known.<sup>7</sup> In August, 1833, the church called him "to preach and administer for us one year." The next year he was again asked to be the minister and it was "Agreed to hold an additional Meeting on the fourth Sunday in Each Month at some place within the Bounds of the Church." After a couple of years, however, Piner needed to choose another minister and in November, 1835, Ebenezer B. Smith agreed to serve for a year. It was voted in July, 1836, "to contribute something to support Br. E. B. Smith," and in December, 1837, the

<sup>7</sup> In his *History of Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1884), 581, B. R. Sulgrove says of Abraham Smock: "He organized the first Baptist Church [Lick Creek] in the township [Perry] . . . in the spring of 1826. He was pastor of this church for a number of years, and also of the First Baptist Church of Indianapolis from December, 1826, to July, 1830, organizing more Baptist churches than any other man in the county, and was a leading minister for many years. He was both eloquent and impressive, and in his work zealous and fervent, but retired from the ministry long before his day of work should have ceased." Smock also served as the first pastor of the New Bethel Baptist church, organized in 1827, until 1832. During his pastorate the church increased to about fifty members. See *The Trail of a Century, Being a History of the New Bethel Baptist Church and Community from 1827-1927* (Wanamaker, Ind., 1927), 20-21.

motion was made and carried "to raise . . . the sum of twelve dollars against our next meeting."

In March, 1839, the church "Agreed to Call Br. Nay of Johnson County" and sent three men "to bear a letter unto . . . Rev. Nay . . . and report At our next meeting." At the April meeting the men reported that "Br Nay and Br Riggs agrees to tend on us one at a time monthly for an un definite time." A. B. Nay served the church until 1860, sharing the duties at various times with S. Billings, Peterson K. Parr, and J. G. Jackson. In June, 1855, Nay told the church that it was "out of his power at this time to attend this church," but he was pressed into service until April, 1860, when the church received a letter from him stating that he could not "comply with there Request at presant but will visit this church as often as he can."

In March, 1862, the church obtained the part time services of George Weaver. He was assisted in the early years of his ministry by Jackson, B. Jones, and David Caudell, and after 1867 by Parr. Weaver's tenure of eighteen years terminated in January, 1880, for some unexplained reason. "By a motion and a second the Church Refuses to Call Brother Weaver to the pastorel Cair of the Church." It was voted that the clerk notify him of the decision. Although the preceding items of business were rescinded the following month, Weaver's name did not appear on the church records again.

Parr served Piner as part time minister beginning in March, 1860, "in conjunction with Brother Nay." He was ordained at Bethel church in May, 1866, and the next year began a long period of service to Piner, sharing his responsibilities until 1872 with Willie Tyler. Then Weaver and Parr ministered together to the church until Weaver was dismissed. In April, 1881, Robert Thompson was asked to assist in the work with Parr. They served together for eighteen years until Parr died in 1899 after having ministered to the church thirty-two years. Thompson continued his service for a few years, being aided from December, 1900, by T. J. Jones. In June of 1903 William Richards was called to work with Jones, and Thompson was not mentioned in the records after 1903. In July, 1905, J. F. George was called and acted as minister when the last minutes were recorded in July, 1906.

Besides identifying the men who served Piner church, the minutes reveal the format of the business meeting. The August, 1834, meeting is typical of the form used in the early

years: "Met pursuant to an adjournment on the 2nd sat in August A.D. 1834. after prayer and praise proceeded to business. the peace of the church Called for and peace seemed to exist. . . . Opened a door for the reception Of members and Received . . ." After itemizing the business the clerk signed his and the presiding moderator's name. The term "Adjourned in order" came into use in 1835. By 1870 the format had changed: Piner opened its business by inviting "Brethren of Sister Churches of our faith . . . to a Seat with us in council," and closed with "Adjourned in Peace." The minutes also record some variation in the name of the church. During the early years the minutes call it simply "the Church." After 1870 it was referred to as "The regular Baptist Church of Christ at the forks of little Buck Creek," and occasionally as "the regular or predestinarian Baptist church" or "the regular Old School or Primitive Baptist church."

At the first business meeting in July, 1833, Nehemiah Smith gave a record book costing 81¼ cents, the first of the two record books in which the minutes of the meetings were faithfully recorded. The church also elected officers and took in five new members. It agreed "to send a letter to the association knocking for admittance"<sup>8</sup> and chose the men "to bare the letter and act in behalf of the church if received." Finally, they voted to commune at their next meeting. At the August meeting the assembly called Abraham Smock to minister to them and elected Thomas McFarland as treasurer.

The newborn church had a minister and officers but no church building. After Nehemiah Smith offered a half acre of land at the corner of his property, the congregation voted in late December, 1833, for "the male members to meete on the 2nd day of January next to work at the place for building the meeting house and say what sort of a house we build." But for some reason, perhaps a question about the site, construction was delayed. Building was not mentioned again until January, 1838, when it was "Agreed by motion & second to build a comfortable meeting House." The next month Piner decided to locate the church on "the S.E. corner of Br. N. Smith's land proposed by himself,"<sup>9</sup> and it was voted to build "a hewed log house 24 Feet by 32." In February, 1839, the church agreed "to Recind the act of building

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<sup>8</sup> A copy of the 1833 minutes of the Indianapolis Association meeting at which Piner church was admitted is in the Indiana Baptist Collection (Hamilton Memorial Library, Franklin College, Franklin, Indiana).

<sup>9</sup> Now the northwest corner of Southport and Combs roads, located in Franklin Township, Marion County, Indiana.



a log House & build a frame house instead there of 36 feet x 24." This grander plan was perhaps overly ambitious for the minutes of September, 1840, record "Agreed that we build a meeting house of hude logs 30 by 24 and that we commence the bilding monday the 21 of Sept 1840." This must have been done, for the process of building was discussed no further. By September, 1846, the church had decided to purchase a stove "for the meeting house," and in January, 1847, they ordered the treasurer to "furnish lights in place of some that is broke out of the windows." In March, 1848, they voted to "take up the case of seating her house." A committee was appointed to "lay of[f] the house and number the seats and Report . . . the amount of lumber and what sort and sise and all conserning the seats."

The building constructed in the early 1840s lasted for more than two decades. During the 1860s Piner church commenced an effort to build a new meeting house. In May, 1868, the church "agree to build a house and have chosen . . . a committy to superintend and see if the church can bild a good fraim house." At the June, 1868, meeting the minutes record:

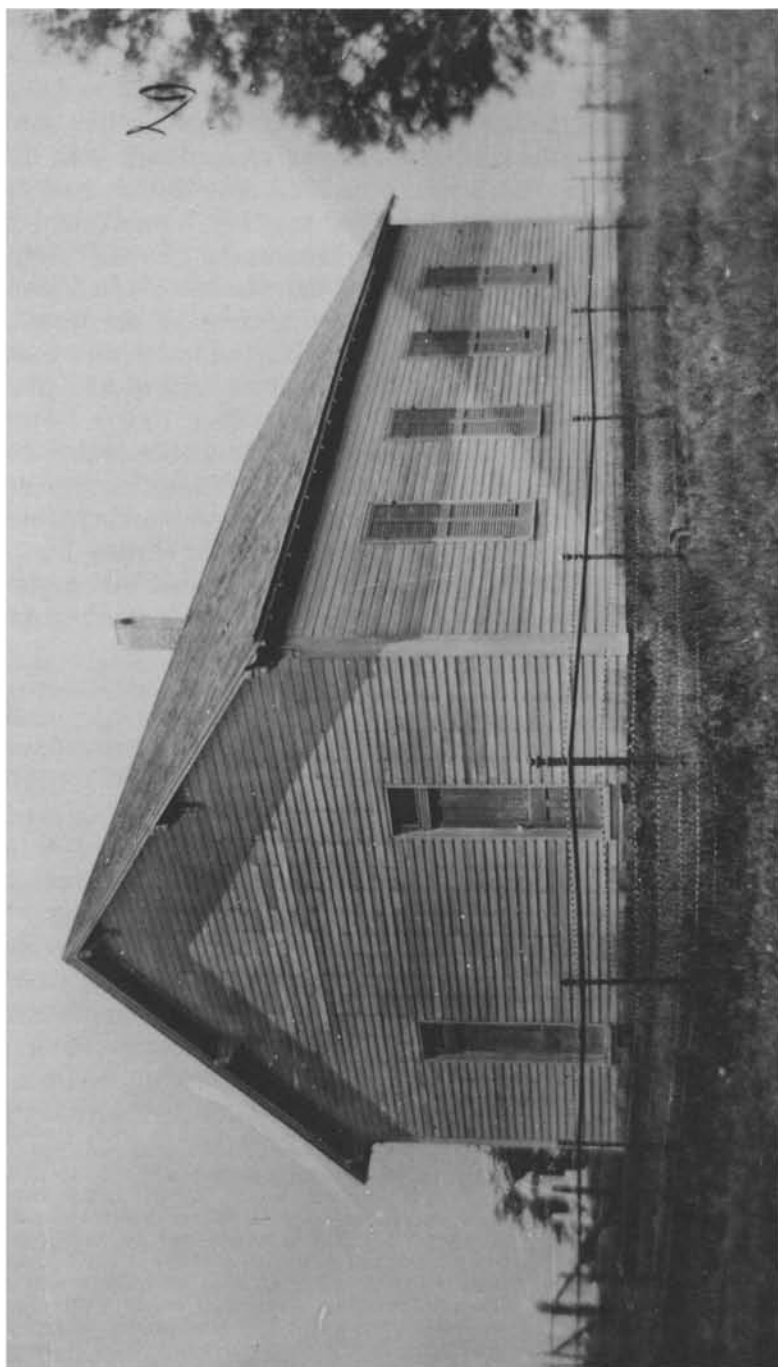
the church call on the committy chosen at our last meeting to Report whether they have done what the church Request them to doo and the committy Report they have in part and the church have agreed to build a house 40 by 36 and Request the committy to further bisness and each start a subscription and see what they can do against our next meeting of busnes.

There was no more mention of the subscription fund or of building until October, 1871, when "The Church agrees to borrow Ninty five Dollars of Br Dollins to pay on the meeting house." A photograph of the church taken during its last years shows it to have been a frame structure.

Piner church always maintained ties with other Baptist churches.<sup>10</sup> As early as the July, 1833, business meeting it

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<sup>10</sup> Mentioned most frequently were the "sister churches" Lick Creek, Little Buck Creek, Pleasant Run, and Bethel. Lick Creek Baptist church was located in the northeast corner of Perry Township on Churchman Pike. It was organized in 1826 and disbanded in 1866. The site is now part of Sarah T. Bolton Park in Beech Grove. Little Buck Creek church, also called Buck Creek Baptist church, was located west of Piner church in Perry Township. It was organized in 1838, and eventually became the Southport Baptist church. Pleasant Run church was situated in Warren Township, organized in 1832 and disbanded in 1856. Bethel church is in Union Township, Johnson County, five miles south of Franklin on the Franklin-Nineveh Road. It was organized before 1833, with land given for a church in 1839. See Sulgrove, *History of Indianapolis and Marion County*, 581, 593, 590, 622; and Elba L. Branigin, *History of Johnson County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1913), 349-50.



PINET BAPTIST CHURCH

Courtesy author

voted to ask for admission to the Indianapolis Association, and in July, 1834, the assembly voted to "write a Letter for inspection at next meeting And send Deligates" to the association. Membership in an association, an organization of autonomous Baptist churches, was voluntary, based on similarity of beliefs and practices. The associations met for fellowship and mutual edification and exerted no direct authority over the member churches. The letter carried by each church's delegates or "messengers" to the yearly meeting of the association was a token of spiritual harmony with the larger group of sister churches. The July and August minutes of Piner church for almost every year recorded the preparation of such a letter and the selection of delegates to carry it to the association meeting.<sup>11</sup> Piner occasionally participated in other association business. In July, 1862, the church appointed a committee to select "a suitable site for the Association ground," and in August of 1881, 1882, and 1883, the church called for the association to meet the following year.

Participation in the association, however, did not imply relinquishing any of the church's individuality. In August, 1834, at the first meeting of the association to which Piner sent delegates, the men were instructed not to join the General Association, and "to indeavor to alter the the [*sic*] time of Commenceing the Association from Saturday to Friday." In August, 1839, the church vigorously asserted its position on missionary endeavors in the letter sent to the association: "We as a Church disapprove of all Benevolent institutions."<sup>12</sup> Piner

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<sup>11</sup> The Wabash Association of 1808 was the first to be organized in Indiana. The printed minutes of the association meeting usually included the articles of faith subscribed to by the participating churches, membership figures, delegate names, the topics discussed, and a greeting in the form of an exhortation from the elected moderator. See Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 54-57, 417-563; Cady, *Origin of Missionary Baptist Church*, 143-46.

<sup>12</sup> Piner church was organized at a time when the antimitmission controversy was exerting a divisive influence among frontier Baptist churches. Many felt that benevolent institutions such as missions, church schools, and temperance and tract societies were in opposition to the doctrine of predestination. They believed "that God in his own time and way would bring his elect to repentance and redemption, and that therefore any effort on the part of man to assist God in his redemptive work was not only presumptuous, but wicked." *Ibid.*, 67. There was also opposition to missions on the grounds that the autonomy of the local church was challenged by the power accorded a missionary society to send preachers where it wished and to raise money. Missionary societies were also considered unscriptural. One champion of the cause of anti-missions wrote "that God did not send Jonah to Nineveh through a missionary society, nor was he 'sent to a seminary of learning to prepare him to preach to these Gentiles . . .'" *Ibid.*, 74.

also demonstrated its independence by switching its affiliation with an association. In May, 1840, the decision was made to remove the church's membership from the Indianapolis Association and join the more conservative Conns Creek Association. Ten years later, in November, 1850, Piner voted to "acquiesce with the association in dropping the correspondence with the Marion association."

The church was always ready to help in the organization of a new church as they themselves had received assistance. In February, 1836, for example, three men were sent to help "Constitute a Church in Johnson County . . . ." In January, 1837, the church "Agreed to send helps to meet with the brethren at the Little Sugar creek schoolhouse." Six months later they helped organize a church on Big Sugar Creek, and in August, 1841, they "Received a request from a number of Brethern at or neare Lickcreek. Requesting Helps to Constatute a Church . . . ." In January, 1842, the church responded to a request "to aid in the constitution of a church at little Buck Creek By a number of members who have With drawn from sd. church." In March, 1855, they received a call for aid to organize a church from "a few Brethren in Jasper county, Illenois," and five men were appointed to meet the brethren "at tarrehaut according to there Request . . . ." Two men were sent in response to a request from "Brethern in Tipton County near Sharpsville" in July, 1864.

The only time the church refused help was when a group of its own members wished to withdraw and form a new church "at the School house near Bro Morris." At a meeting in May, 1840, the motion was made and seconded—but not passed—"that the Church Grant the liberty of as many of her members . . . of going into a Constitution near Br Wm Morris . . . ." The request "was not granted" because of "its nearness to other Sister Churches." There were twelve letters of dismission at the next meeting, including one from a deacon. Efforts made to effect the return of those who left to form "Union church so cald" failed, and in November, 1840, the minutes record: "We as a church dis-fellow ship the conduct of same Brethern and Sisters."

Piner church often received requests for aid in ordination services. In April, 1834, the church responded to a request from the Lick Creek church for help in ordaining a deacon by sending three men. In August, 1838, it sent dele-

gates to the Little Buck Creek church to aid in ordaining "Br Henry H. Hunter To the ministry."<sup>13</sup> The church voted to assist in ordination services at Conns Creek church (September, 1855), Hickory Creek church (December, 1856), Bethel church, Johnson County (January, 1866), Antioch church (April, 1876, and June, 1897), Providence church (October, 1876), South Stotts Creek church (July, 1878), and Shiloh church (July, 1881).

The church asked for help in an ordination service of one of its members, William Forsythe, on two occasions—once in September, 1837, and again in March, 1838. In October, 1837, the council, composed of delegates from Little Buck Creek, Lick Creek, Bethel, Pleasant Run, Concord, and Pleasant View churches met. "The council called on the Candidate to tell his Christian Experience and pass an examination." After listening to him and examining his views on "the doctrine of the Gospel the council retired to consult." They "reported they deem it inexpedient to ordain Bro Forsythe at the present." The second council, with delegates from Little Buck Creek, Concord, Little Eagle, Bethel, and Indianapolis churches met in May, 1838, but was also unable to ordain Forsythe.

If a congregation could not settle a dispute, it sometimes called to "sister churches" for counsel. Piner church both gave and received this kind of aid. In response to "a friendly letter from a number of Brethern at Mount laben Boon county" in November, 1843, it sent three men. A delegation sent to Mount Carmel church reported in the minutes of January, 1889, in some detail.

Report of the delegates appointed to sit in council with other delegates from other Churches in Lebanon and white water associations met December the 22. 1888 with the Mount Carmel Church hancock County Ind. Organized by Choosing Brethren J.L. Thompson, Mod and D.H. Goble, Clerk. after all the evidence relative to the division and duly

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<sup>13</sup> Sometimes a licensed preacher gathered a congregation, or a congregation could organize itself and call a licensed preacher to minister to them. On such occasions a council of churches met and examined the candidate's views and character and, finding him satisfactory, ordained him. The typical preacher lived and worked among his people. A farmer for five or six days a week, he preached on Sundays and other days of special services. He received no pay other than small gifts and services that his congregation might bestow. He was limited in education, partly due to the lack of opportunity for study, but also because the churches were opposed to an educated, paid ministry. See Cady, *Origin of Missionary Baptist Church*, 25-27; Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 46-47, 72-73.

Considering everything connected with it the Council by Motion and second declared by a unanimous vote the Party represented by Elder John Weaver was Mount Carmel Church of Primitive Baptist.

James L. Thompson.

Amos Morris.

James A. Merriman.

Piner church asked for aid in council in May, 1835. Several months earlier one of Piner's members, William Forsythe, was accused by fellow church member, Nimrod Kemper, of having "made bunched and sold an unreasonable quantity of short shingles which were thought to be of no use in Consequence of their being too short." After hearing all the evidence at a special meeting in March and considering the written testimony of a witness, the church decided that Forsythe "did wrong" and voted to exclude him. Some question must have remained, for in May the church again took up the case "in order to rescind the act of his exclusion," and a meeting was set for the third Friday of June. Lick Creek, Little Buck Creek, Bethel, and Pleasant Run churches were asked to help in council. (At that May meeting Nimrod Kemper was granted a letter of dismission, and at the June meeting preceding the special meeting there were nine letters of dismission, seven of them Kemper by name.) On the appointed day the church met with ten men from the invited churches. The council organized by appointing a moderator and clerk. "By motion and second the Council agreed to sing the 351 Hymn of Miller's Collection 13th Edition after which the moderator addressed The thrown of Grace. After hearing all the testimony on both sides the Counsel agree that the Church did right in Excluding brother Forsythe but upon his acknowledgment, we restore him to fellowship."

The regulation of behavior—as in Forsythe's case—was one of the prime concerns of Piner church. Although the church condemned all ungodly and sinful behavior, it most frequently acted against such offenses as intoxication, dancing, adultery, and lax attendance at worship services. In such cases the church followed the third rule of decorum and insisted that "every publick offender must make publick acknowledgement or suffer the pain of excommunication by the church." Frequently members brought charges against themselves. In August, 1838, for example, "Br Campbell Power informed the Church that he has recently done wrong and now feels

that it is his duty to make public acknowledgment. And is sorrow for that which he has done and solisits forgiveness of the church hoping that God has for given him." Accordingly, the church "Agreed by motion and second to bear with br power." Power apparently continued his conduct for in September, 1838, when "The peace of the Church [was] called for," "the Church was informed that Brother Campbell Power had been Guilty of un Christian conduct viz the sin of intoxication." Taking up his case, "by voice of the church they exclude him."

In May, 1842, "Brother Stapp laide in a charge Against Him Self that he had ben oute of temper which he beleves unbecoming a christian and the church Agreed to forgive him." In January, 1845, Stapp "Exibited a charge against himself that he had bin guilty of the sin of intoxication where upon he gave satisfaction." But in March of the next year a charge was brought "against Brother J. Stap for fiting and intocseation which charge is Referd by citing the Brother to attend her next meeting," and by sending a committee to visit him. He was excluded at the April, 1846, meeting.

The church also watched vigilantly over the vows of marriage. For example, in March, 1846, "the church Exhibeted a charge against Brother Nathaniel Vice for Miss conduct for that of puting away his Wife unlawfully and Ex the Brother on the same by proof." In November, 1849, the church determined that "Nathaniel and Levina Smith has bin guilty of unchrestian conduct in that of harboring another mans lawfull weded wife and suffering another man that has a lawful wife to visit his house and failing Repeated promises of stoping him from comeing to his house . . . ." Nevertheless, when "Brother Nathaniel Smith maid sattisfactorly acknowledgement . . . he was Restored in full fellowship and Sister Levina Smith maid know acknowledgement so she is know more of us."

Although the male members of the church were required to attend the meetings unless "providentially hindered," many apparently did not and were reprimanded or expelled. In July, 1848, "the church Exhibeted a charge against Brother A Martin for faling to attend her stated metings and sends Brother Phillips to site the Brother to her next meting of bisness." Martin must have been unwilling to mend his ways for in October, 1848, the church voted "where as Brother

Martin has bin a covinent Braker in absenting him self for the space of one year therefore he is no more of us." In June, 1852, "the church Exhibet a charge against Brother Nathan Smith for absenting himself from the church and for fitting . . . ." A church member was sent to visit him and to "Request him to attend our Next church meting." The next month Piner decided that "after and investigation of the matter the charges was dismissed and the Brother continued in the church," but in March, 1853, Smith asked for a letter of dismission which was granted. In December, 1852, "the church Exhibeted a charge a gainst Brother Thomas Carson for absenting him self from the church . . . ." One of the deacons was sent to request him to attend the "next meting of bisness." In January, 1853, Carson apparently responded to the church's action, for the minutes recorded that "after and investigation the Brother making satisfactory acknowledgement he is continued in the church."

Although strict attendance rules were not applied to women, they equally merited the concern of the church. In March, 1847, "the church Exhibeted a charg against Sister Nancy Mccall for intoxication and un Christian language and sends Brother and sister Monroe to site the sister to our next of bisness." At the next meeting "Sister Mccall came farward and maid acknowlegments to the church and the church Received her acknowledgment and continue the the [*sic*] sister in the church." But in July, 1848, "the church Exhibeted a charg against Sister Mccall for unchristian conduct such as profain language and Excluded her on the charge."

The only obvious cases of doctrinal disagreement with the church concerned three women, "Sister Martin, Sister Vise and Sister Catterson." A committee was sent in May, 1854, to see why they had not been attending the meetings. At the June, 1854, meeting only the member sent to visit Sister Vice was ready to report. He said "he viseted sister vise and she Requested to be Excluded that she did not beleave as we did. the Report was Received and . . . the church by her vote say sister vise is know more of us." The brother sent to visit Sister Catterson reported in September that he had visited her and "she did not make intire satisfaction." Another church member was appointed to see her "and obtain intire satisfaction." Catterson did not provide this interrogator "intire satisfaction" either. In October, 1854, the



church was told that Catterson had said she "did not beleave in the doctrin of Election and predestination and the voat of the church being taken she says she is no more of us." Not until January, 1855, did the church settle Sister Martin's case. At that meeting "she was Requested to speak for her self when she said she was hurt at the church for excluding her husband and she wanted a letter that she might join some other church not of our faith and beleaf so Mr Martin might instruct her and after due investigation the church with drew the right hand of fellowship."

Besides its condemnation of ungodly behavior by individual members, Piner church also attempted to settle disputes that arose between church members. In accord with its seventh rule of decorum the congregation expected members to "carefully avoid going to law with each other on any pretence whatever." Rather, as the third rule instructed, "in all cases of tresspass or private grevance between individuals" members ought to apply "the rule laid down by our saveior in the 18th chapter of Matthew . . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Several incidents surrounding the figure of William Forsythe afford examples of just how the church settled minor disputes between members by application of its rules. One of the original members of the church, Forsythe was apparently a sincere Christian, but one who received Piner's chastisement as well as approval. In March, 1835, for example, he "arose and acknowledged that he had done wrong by his having talked so as to interrupt the Church at Little Buck Creek when she was Communing." Upon confession of error the church forgave him the offence. (It was later in that same meeting that Forsythe was accused by a fellow church member of making short shingles.) Although in March, 1837, he was recognized by Piner to be "a member who exercised a publick gift," his efforts to be ordained had been twice thwarted—the second time because of "an objection from three members" of the church. No doubt this ranked Forsythe, but he apparently tried to practice the church's rules for keeping peace. In June, 1838, he "address the Church

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<sup>14</sup> *Matthew* 18:15-17 (KJV): "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone . . . if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

similar to the following manner, that it appears like there are difficulties and hardness among us, and his sincear wish and desire is for us to lay all hardness and difficulty aside and come to gether in love after which those who haveing Heretofore fel any kind of grievence or hardness to wards any brother or sister of this Church." Forsythe's speech must have impressed the congregation for "after consultation they all profest to lay aside all hardness and give the the [sic] right hand of fellowship mannifesting a clocer walk with God."

Although elected moderator in January, 1838, and again in December, 1838, Forsythe continued to experience troubles with the church. In January, 1839, he apparently fell into some disagreement with another member, and he and his wife were granted letters of dismission. Then in a meeting three months later "Br Forsythe and Br Thomas Smith senior Acknowledged the for giveness of Each other of a difficulty formly Existing between the Two brethern." At that same meeting the church agreed to call in Forsythe's letter "and give a new one in stead there of."

An entry in the record book for August, 1843, indicates that Forsythe again had caused controversy: "Bro McFarland motioned that the church Take up the objections as intended against Bro Forsithe which the church said she woud not." Whatever the problem it was resolved, for the next month the minutes related that "Where as there was a difi-culty and hardness Existin Betwene the Church and Bro McFarland that difi-culty is reconsild." In May, 1853, "Brother Foresithe came forward and Request the church to forgive him for all past offences and the church by her vote says she for gives him." At the same time the church voted "to in vite Brother Foresithe to preach to morrow."

In 1855 a dispute arose between two of Piner's members which the church was unable to settle without the aid of a council of "sister churches." At the July, 1855, meeting "Brother Heslet Excibet a charge against Brother Phillips for telling a thing that was not so . . . ." A member of long standing, having joined the church in 1839, Phillips had served as moderator, clerk, and trustee. Although elected a deacon in January, 1854, Jacob Heslet was a newcomer who had belonged to the church only since 1853. The church postponed a decision, requesting "the Brethren to meet and

try to settle between them selves." At the September meeting, however, "Brother B M Phillips Exhibet a charge against Brother Heslet for accusing him of knowingly telling a falls hood and if proved himself clear of the same he would not beleave it and after and investigation the church said Brother Heslet is no more of us." In October the dispute continued to occupy the church's attention. Although a motion and second were made for the church to "Reconsider her act of last meting," the church refused to do so. Phillips was serving as moderator at that time. In March, 1856, at the business meeting on Saturday preceding the Sunday on which church was held, pro-Heslet members urged the church to reconsider Heslet's exclusion, but the church again voted against doing so. However, Heslet's friends prevailed, and "On Sunday following the church agree to have a call meting for the purpose of calling a council in Regard to the Exclusion of Mr Heslet and have apointed the fourth Saturday in March 1856 for that purpos."

At that meeting on March 22, 1856, the church, after debating the propriety of calling a council to reconsider the previous September's decision, agreed to "call on cons creek, Bethel South, Stots Creek, mount Gilead, Eagle creek for helps in council to take the acts of the church as they stand Recorded on her book and see if the church have Erred and if the church have Erred to point out where in and leave the matter for the further consideration of the church." Heslet himself was the representative sent to Bethel, Conns Creek, and South Stotts Creek churches. The eleven representatives from the invited churches met in May and asked the aid of three of the Piner church members present. After "Eliciting all the evidence with Regard to the Exclusion of Jacob Heslet which thing appears is to be a grievence to a portion of said church" the council decided that "the charge prefered against said Heslet by Brother Phillops was of a public Nature consequently the church could not have did otherwise from what she did." At the June meeting, 1856, "Brother Jacob Heslet Came forward and maid full Satisfactoriel acknowledgement to Brother Phillips and the church and is Restored to fellowship." In February, 1857, Jacob Heslet asked for and received a letter of dismission for himself and his wife.

The minutes of the later years of the church record fewer discords among the members. In October, 1877, "Br Asa

N Parr brings A charge against Br Joseph Henricks with treating the Church with contempt in abrupt absenting himself from the church in time of worship which charge was sustained." In November the church voted to "withdraw the hand of ffellowship" for the cause given. In February, 1879, Jane Henricks, Joseph's wife, had some disagreement with Piner which she outlined in a letter to be read to the church. After listening to the letter the assembly voted "to sende a Commitee to see Sister Jane henricks in order to make a reconciliation." In March the committee reported that Jane Henricks "still adhers to the substance of her letter to the Church. But is Willing and Concents to atende the Sesions of the Church and try to Reconcile the difERENCE between her and the Brethren mentioned in the letter." In May, 1879, after again considering the matter, the church decided that because of her "refusing to obey the mandats of the Church the right hand feloshipe Was With Drawn from sister Jane henricks."

The vigor of Piner church during the various periods of its history is indicated in the recording of its minutes and in the available membership lists. Those wishing to become members of the church came forward and were accepted "by letter," "by relation," "by experience," or "by experience and baptism."<sup>15</sup> In January, 1870, one candidate was received for baptism when he "came forward and gave A reason of his hope in Christe by A relation of his exersise of mind." Although the fifth rule of decorum indicated the reception of members was to be by "unanimity," in November, 1839, it was "Agreed that the Church at any of her meetings open a door for the reception of member by two thirds of the Church being presant by the moderator Being presant and opening the door."

After the confidence and growing membership of the first few years, the church fell into troubled times. In 1838 Nancy Vice and Katharine Coverdill were lost to the Methodist church.<sup>16</sup> One member was excluded for intoxication and

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<sup>15</sup> No service of baptism is mentioned in the church records, but such services were held during the warm months at a special place along Little Buck Creek not far from the church. Author's interview with Ruth McMillin, January 18, 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Loss of members to other denominations continued throughout the church's history, the last such entry being recorded in February, 1896: "the refference concerning Brother James Carney and Sister Carney his Wife taken up and the hand of fellowship with drawn from them for uniting with another Church of different faith and order."

ten letters of dismission granted, all while only three new members joined the church. There was dissension over the ordination of William Forsythe. The trustees had been slow to present a deed to the church property and when presented, it proved unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, Piner weathered these difficulties. In spite of four more letters of dismission (all charter members) in January, 1839, and a "Motion and second for the Church Mutually to desolve" the church remained intact and voted "to still unite to geather as a Church And not desolve." In January the deed to the church property was finally accepted. During the next two months, despite a loss of two additional members, the church voted to build a frame building. In April it was decided to have an extra meeting each month, and "on the Sabbath after her day of bisness," the church received Benjamin M. and Polly Phillips, who proved to be faithful members and marked the beginning of a rise in membership and strength.

Again in the early 1860s the church suffered bad times, if one can judge by the many entries in the minutes that consist merely of the date and a declaration of "no business." Some entries note simply "No Quorum today" or "no minute was made on the account of the none attendance of the Brethern," or "no Church Buisness done to day for want of members." After the Civil War, however, the church seemed to gather new strength. With Parr as one of its ministers, it entered into a period of relative prosperity. The members built a new frame church, frequently gave their aid in council to sister churches, and participated in the community by allowing the church building to be used for several years in the 1870s for a singing class.

The first record book contains several membership lists in its back pages. The first list is undated, but a check through the minutes indicates the last name (Susan Stapp) was added in May, 1837. The list includes sixty-three names, with the notation added after twenty-four of them "Dismissed by letter." One person had "Died," and one had been "Excluded." The next list, also undated, but probably drafted in 1842, has sixty-seven names, thirty-three of which were on the previous list. Of the sixty-seven names, thirty-two were subsequently marked "Dismist," and two "Excluded." Of those marked "Dismist," nineteen had been on the first membership list.

The third list grew to seventy-three names, and since the fourth list is dated March, 1855, it can be safely assumed it covered the years from 1842 to 1855. It is the longest list and marks the strongest period in the history of Piner church. The fourth list has fifty-two names, the last four those of members who joined in April, 1867. By that time fifteen of the members were marked "Dismissed by letter," nine were "dead," and two "Excluded." Twenty-six names began the fifth and last list in the record book, which is dated March 24, 1867. Only three names appear to have been added before the keeping of membership records was apparently abandoned. Abraham Henricks was the only name on the fifth list which had been on the first list. Four names—John Monroe, Sally Monroe, Polly Phillips, and William Smith—had been on the second list.

A list of members made from the minutes themselves, indicating new members and dismissions from 1869 to 1906, shows forty-one names were added, eleven removed by letter, two by exclusion, and nine by death. Of the members who joined in that thirty-seven year period, twenty-eight were still nominally on the roll in 1906. George Crouch, who joined in February, 1894, was the last new member.

Piner church always remained comparatively small. In part, no doubt, this occurred because it demanded that its members adhere to a firm, if not rigid, set of beliefs and practices. As noted earlier, Piner also shunned missionary and charity efforts, even to increase its own membership. As a result, while Piner declined in numbers in the late 1800s, the several more progressive Baptist churches of the community, which supported Sunday schools, missionary endeavors, and educational institutions, continued to grow.

The final business meeting of Piner church was held on July 14, 1906. There was no business beyond the formalities of inviting "Brethren of our faith and order . . . to seats in council," of calling for and finding "the peace and fellowship of the Church," and opening "the Doore of the Church . . . for the reception of members." The minutes conclude "No other business adjourned in peace" and were signed by "Brother Morris Mod" and "J.N. Kemper. C.C."

The record book ended with the following entry, probably written in 1924:

Feb. 26.

We the three remaining members of Forks of Little Buck Creek Church (known as Piner Baptist Church) do hereby agree to sell Church building and contents to Mr. Fred L. Shafer for the sum of (\$150.00) one hundred and fifty dollars.

The money obtained for sale of building and contents to be placed in a fund to be used in the upkeep of grounds and the construction of a new fence the custodians of this fund to be the aforesaid remaining members.

The three members were Salina Crouch, who had joined the church in 1875, her son George, who joined in 1894, and Belle Grove McMillin, who became a member in 1893.<sup>17</sup>

The building stood unused for many years during the interval between the dissolution of the church and the final disposition of the building. One resident of the community remembers how she and her friends attending the nearby Bunker Hill school sometimes played during recess in the empty church.<sup>18</sup> By 1924, when the three remaining members decided to sell the building, it had fallen into hopeless disrepair and had been vandalized.<sup>19</sup> The remaining pews were sold or given away and the structure dismantled, the lumber being used to build a house in the neighborhood.

In 1946, "Following a mass weed-cutting operation in the old 'Piner' Graveyard . . . many descendants of the pioneers buried there held a basket dinner at the home of John Dilliner . . . and organized an informal association to help care for the old cemetery."<sup>20</sup> The cemetery association met for several years, cutting the grass, trimming the trees, and cleaning the grounds. A letter dated September 20, 1949, indicated a neighboring farmer had been accused of having moved a fence to include part of the church property and of having made "about a dozen" unauthorized burials in the cemetery, "probably under a pauper burial contract with the county."<sup>21</sup> In 1967 appointed trustees conveyed the deed for the land to the Brookside Primitive Baptist church for the purpose of

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<sup>17</sup> Author's interview with Ruth McMillin, January 18, 1974. It is through the care of the sons and daughters of Belle Grove McMillin, the last living member of the church, that the church record books have been preserved.

<sup>18</sup> Author's interview with Ethel Wendling, April 21, 1973.

<sup>19</sup> Author's interview with Ruth McMillin, March 30, 1973.

<sup>20</sup> Records of Cemetery Association, in possession of Mrs. Nile E. Weber, Southport Road, Indianapolis.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

rebuilding a church on the site. Estimates of construction expenses discouraged the plan, however.<sup>22</sup>

Piner church survives only in the memories of a decreasing number of community residents. The open area at the east end of the cemetery is the only indication there was ever a meeting house on the site. The cemetery, surrounded now by suburban homes, has assumed the identity of "Piner." It is a landmark, a reminder to all that within those bounds stood one of the area's earliest churches.

The record books of Piner Baptist church are a journal of a significant community institution written by the people who shaped it month by month. The church, in return, gave meaning to their lives. Their mode of life was different from that of today, but their discouragements and pleasures, while differing perhaps in detail, were much like those the present generation experiences. Those nineteenth century men and women surely could not have imagined twentieth century life, but the records of Piner church preserve today a fragment of their era.

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<sup>22</sup> Author's interview with Ruth McMillin, January 18, 1974.