

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Leesburg Presbyterian Church is commemorating its one hundred fiftieth anniversary on May 2, 1954, and although its life span as a church can be measured in years, its influence as a Christian institution for a century and a half is immeasurable.

The real founder of the Presbyterian Church in Loudoun County was Reverend Amos Thompson, who came to the County around 1764 as a missionary. Thompson had been licensed in 1761 by Brunswick Presbytery, the licensing agency for the College of New Jersey, and ordained in 1762 or 1763. His work in this County seems to have centered around two areas, Catoctin and Gum Springs, and in a short time his efforts here showed results. His congregation at Catoctin purchased a plot of ground "with the house erected thereon for a place of public worship for the Neighboring Presbyterian Congregation" in 1769. The church he established at Gum Spring applied to Presbytery for a minister in 1776.

However, many of the facts of the Presbyterians' early history in Loudoun County have been lost in time. They were dissenters in a Colony where the Established Church was Anglican. Virginia at that time had numerous statutes applying to dissenting churches. One of these required that ministers be licensed by the local courts in order that they might perform the Rite of Matrimony. Apparently great importance was attached to this responsibility for the license required a Bond of 500 pounds, a very large sum in those days. County records show that among the first Presbyterian Ministers issued a license were: David Bard, 1781; James Thompson, Dec. 1785; Amos Thompson, Feb. 1789; William Allen, Dec. 1800. So far no record has come to light on where James Thompson or William Allen preached.

Nor are any facts available of exactly when members from the Catoctin and the Gum Spring Churches banded together to form the Presbyterian Society in Leesburg. It seems entirely possible that as the area became more heavily populated, Presbyterians around Leesburg wanted a Church of their own, since it was a considerable distance to go to either of the existing churches. The Presbyterian Society probably held services in a private home, the Courthouse, or perhaps at Catoctin. In 1782 we find them with a regular minister, for that year Rev. David Bard was ordered from Catoctin "to supply Leesburg until the next meeting of Presbytery." It is an interesting commentary on the times that David Bard's annual remuneration while he was at Catoctin was 200 bushels of wheat, 50 bushels of rye and 250 bushels of Indian Corn.

It is also known that the church had its start during those strenuous years immediately preceding and during the Revolution and that the Presbyterians in Loudoun County like those throughout the Eastern Seaboard were ardent supporters of the Revolutionary cause. Commenting on the sentiment in the American Colonies, Horace Walpole, the British Prime Minister, remarked "America has run off with a Presbyterian Parson, and that's the end of it." The Presbyterian parson was John Wither- spoon, a great Scotsman who was a descendant of John Knox, and President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton). He was the only minister who was a member of the Continental Congress and the only minister who

signed the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation.

The Establishment of The Leesburg Presbyterian Church

The years during and following the Revolution saw great poverty among the people in this area. So it is a tribute to their faith and consecration and determination that by 1802 the members of The Presbyterian Society could plan to build a church. It seems to indicate that they were people of substance, probably aided by a certain amount of Scotch thrift. The Society bought at public auction on Nov. 9, 1802 the lot where the church now stands, one half acre for \$80. The deed conveyed the property from Patrick Cavan to Robert Wade, Edward Dorsey, John McCormick and Alexander Lawrence, representing The Presbyterian Church of Leesburg "for the sole use and purpose of a burying ground and place of worship to be conducted agreeably to the manner prescribed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of these United States, forever." It is an interesting coincidence that the property on which the Catoclin Church stood when the congregation bought it in 1769 was purchased from John Cavan, whom we have reason to believe was the father of Patrick Cavan. After the lot was bought, two members of the Society were appointed to enter into agreement with W. Wright to build a church "of brick 40 feet by 30 feet, in the clear."

Leesburg at This Time

Leesburg at this time was hardly more than a remote village which had grown up around a crossroads. Through it—North and South—ran the old Carolina Road, the main thoroughfare between the Northern and the Southern colonies. East and West the old "Ridge Road" connected Alexandria with Snickers Gap (Bluemont) and Winchester. At the time the church was being built, Leesburg had a Courthouse, the old stone Methodist Church, a considerable number of log houses, and a few of stone and of brick. There were an extraordinary number of taverns and ordinaries. Forty-five years previous to this, in 1757, Nicholas Minor had laid off 60 acres in streets and lots and the Assembly had issued a charter, which used the quaint phrase, of "erecting" the town of Leesburg. Among the original Trustees was Francis Lightfoot Lee, who some years later was to be one of Virginia's Signers of The Declaration. It was for this outstanding member of the famous family that the town was named.

The Organization and Dedication of the Church

The church's organization was the event of greatest significance in its early years. Rev. James Hall had charge of these ceremonies, undoubtedly by the order of Presbytery. At this time, Dr. Hall was the Moderator of the General Assembly and he was on his way from his home in Bethany, N. C., to Philadelphia to its meeting where he was to preach the opening sermon as well as preside. James Hall was one of those great pioneers working to establish the Presbyterian Church in the South, having already been as far as Natchez organizing missions. During the Revolution, Hall organized a troop of cavalry and served as its chaplain.

At the organization service held on Saturday, May 4, 1804, John McCormick, Obadiah Clifford and Peter Carr were elected Elders. Peter Carr, whose several descendants are still active members of the Church (among them being a present Deacon, John William Carr), is the layman who made

the largest contribution to the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in Loudoun County. Previous to this time he had lived in the Waterford neighborhood, where he had been a leader in forming the Catoctin Church, also serving as elder. When he moved to his plantation below Leesburg and built his stone mansion house about 1790, he became a part of the Leesburg congregation. In addition to the Carr family, the Church still has many active members and officers whose families participated in the Church's beginnings.

The following is taken from the Sessional Records of the Presbyterian Church of Leesburg, Virginia, May 5, 1804, pages 1, 2, 3:

"The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was this day administered in the Presbyterian Church and the following persons were admitted as members in full communion:"

Peter Carr	Sara Myers	Nelly Hanson
Obadiah Clifford	Jane Douglas	Mary Carr, Sr.
John McCormick	Mrs. Hickson	Margaret Wade
Joseph Knox	Mrs. Dow	Elizabeth Kitzmiller
George Rowan	Helen Curtis	Sally Taylor
Robert Wade	Agnes McCowat	Fanny Ewel
Joseph Douglas	Mary McCormick	Betsey Powell
William Knox	Sara Chilton	Mrs. Fulton
James Ewel	Mary Ann Knox	Mrs. Ewel

On Sunday, May 5, 1804, Dr. Hall dedicated the church building, received into the membership of the church 27 members of the Society, installed the elders, administered communion, and baptized two infant daughters of John McCormick. At this first service, a collection for missions in Virginia was taken and amounted to 40 shillings. This was, indeed, a generous sum for these times and this group.

We can imagine the great joy that came to the Leesburg Presbyterians with this service. Their goal to build and organize a church had been fulfilled. But just as our lives are a blend of joy and sorrow, so was theirs. In a few months, the death of Rev. Amos Thompson on September 8, 1804 brought them great sorrow. Amos Thompson was the first person buried in the new church yard, his tomb near the west wall of the church. Mr. Thompson's career had started in Loudoun 42 years before. He had been absent during the Revolutionary years, while he served as Chaplain in the Continental army. His death was a severe loss to the church and the community where he was counsellor, neighbor, pastor, and friend to the people. We may judge the great affection given him, and the eminence he had attained, by the fact that Dr. Moses Hoge came to Leesburg to conduct Mr. Thompson's funeral. Dr. Hoge was the outstanding Presbyterian minister of his generation and a few years following this was to become the President of Hampden-Sydney College. Here he established what was later our Union Theological Seminary.

Mr. Thompson's will, recorded by the Loudoun Court, reveals other expressions of his selfless life. After a period of three years he ordered his slaves set free. Both the will and the inventory show that Mr. Thompson was a man of means and a large land owner. One tract he ordered sold and the proceeds were bequeathed to New Jersey College, the interest "there-

of" to be used to educate "apparently pious young men for the gospel ministry."

In April, 1805, the first Presbytery Meeting was held in the Leesburg Church. It was a meeting of the Winchester Presbytery, the one into whose jurisdiction Loudoun County had been placed in 1797. Other Presbyteries to which the County has belonged during its history includes Lexington, Chesapeake and now Potomac.

The Ministers and Their Work

The church had no regular minister until 1807 when John Mines became the pastor. According to the minutes, Mines appeared before the Winchester Presbytery as a licentiate in 1798, 1799, and 1802. So he apparently had ample opportunity to try out his gifts as a preacher before being called to Leesburg and Waterford, these two churches being one pastorate until 1872. Some of the duties of the new minister were the unpleasant ones of administering discipline to erring members. This was offset, by progress and growth, and by the joy of baptizing 17 people in one day. Mr. Mines' work in Leesburg came to an end in 1822. In addition to the work in his pastorate, Mines was a commissioner to the General Assembly from Lexington Presbytery in 1805.

During the period 1822—1844, the church had four ministers whose combined pastorates lasted six years and these were interspersed with three periods when the pulpit was vacant. During these years the services were held by visiting ministers. Rev. Robert H. Chapman was pastor for one year. He is mentioned several times in the Minutes of the General Assembly as an indefatigable worker in the home mission field, sometimes going on a circuit of 700 miles, preaching the gospel wherever he could gather a congregation. Chapman was a commissioner to the General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1820 and is mentioned as Moderator of the Winchester Presbytery in 1826. The next pastor after Chapman was Rev. Septimus Tustin, described by one church historian "a promising young man" but explains further that "during his ministration (on account of some internal dissensions) the church lost several of its most valuable members and did not recover from the evil effects for several years. At this time, the local newspaper in Leesburg carried regular ads: "Samuel Tustin—Coach Maker." We can only speculate whether Septimus was Samuel's son. He was followed by Rev. John T. Hargrave who continued as pastor until 1835 when he was succeeded by Rev. Alexander W. Campbell, then minister of the Presbyterian Church in Lovettsville and who appears to have been a stated supply here. Mr. Campbell held protracted meetings which resulted in several members being added to the Church.

He was followed, in 1836, by A. H. H. Boyd of Winchester. When the Presbyterian Church divided and formed two assemblies, called the Old School and the New School, the Leesburg Church under the influence of Dr. Boyd, went into The New School Assembly. He continued in charge of the church until 1840. In 1844 Rev. A. D. Pollock assumed the pastorate and from that time until 1849, Dr. Pollock rendered faithful service. He endeared himself to the people, became very popular as a preacher and drew large crowds to hear him.

Dr. Pollock was followed by Rev. Henry W. Smith whose pastorate as stated supply covered the years from 1849 to 1866. During Mr. Smith's ministry, on April 1853, the Session of The Leesburg Church, at their

request dismissed eleven members, with permission to reorganize the "Catoctin Free Church." The records are not available, but it would appear that the Church established at Catoctin by Amos Thompson had lapsed into inactivity about 1814. With the help of the withdrawing Leesburg members a brick Church was built above Catoctin Creek on Route 9. In time the Catoctin Presbyterian Congregation moved into Waterford. The brick building was eventually taken over by other denominations and was an active church until it was destroyed by a cyclone in 1929.

Mr. Smith's ministry covers the years of the War between the States, and the Church records are almost blank for this period. It seems entirely possible that Mr. Smith found it his duty to go to the front to minister to the armies around Leesburg.

Rev. J. W. Lupton was pastor of this Church at two separate times. His first pastorate followed Mr. Smith's in 1867. These were years of recovering from the ordeal of War. For the Church they were a period of growth and expansion. When Dr. Lupton arrived Leesburg was still sharing a pastor with Catoctin. But Dr. Lupton felt each Church should have its own pastor and worked to this end. We gather that the severance of the two Churches was brought about in a way that was agreeable to both congregations. Another reform introduced by Dr. Lupton: Church pledges and the envelope system of giving.

Dr. Lupton was followed by Rev. John W. Cannon whose ministry here began October, 1873. The Leesburg Presbyterian Church had its beginning as a mission church. Its first pastors were in reality home missionaries. It is natural that interest in missions has always played a leading part in the Church's activities. The Leesburg Church, at various times had several outpost chapels within riding or driving distance of Leesburg, at Clark's Gap, Cool Spring, Cannon Chapel, and at the home of a Mrs. Lewis. But the final results of the past efforts were felt during the ministry of Dr. Cannon. In April, 1876, the Session Minutes report that the Church building at Farmwell (now Ashburn) had been completed. This Church was built through the combined efforts of the Leesburg Church, the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, The Central Presbyterian Church in Washington and the Second Presbyterian Church in Alexandria. In 1877 Farmwell was reported as the largest Presbyterian Church in Loudoun, 200 people often worshipping there at one time.

From 1881 to 1891 the church was faithfully served by Rev. James Smith, Rev. J. R. Bridges and Rev. J. C. Dinwiddie. Rev. G. L. Bitzer's pastorate of six years started in 1892. The mission work in the chapels was being continued, each succeeding pastor making his contribution. In his effort to serve The Leesburg Church and the missions, Mr. Bitzer preached three times every Sunday.

In September, 1898, Dr. J. W. Lupton returned to the Church for his second pastorate, which lasted until 1907. His successor was the able and consecrated Rev. H. M. Moffett, who served the church from 1909 to 1912.

Dr. S. K. Winn began five fruitful years as minister in 1912. In 1913 the Church had its first contact with an International Religious Conference. That year, one of the elders of the Church, Mr. Charles Janney, attended the Pan-Presbyterian Conference in Aberdeen, Scotland. In 1916,

the four Leesburg Churches united in having Gypsy Smith come to the town for a Revival Meeting. As a result 30 people joined the Church, the largest number ever to be added during one year. Rev. W. J. King followed Dr. Winn as pastor, and was installed on December 29, 1918—to serve as pastor of the Leesburg Church and the Ashburn Church. Under Dr. King's leadership, the Young People's work took on new vitality. Because of his genuine interest in all phases of the Church's work, a general upsurge of activity was evident. Benevolent giving increased largely during his pastorate.

The first minister, with his family, to occupy the new Manse, built in 1926-1927, was the Rev. Dupuy Holladay, a very scholarly and devoted Christian leader. Mr. Holladay remained as pastor for only eighteen months, removing to Alderson, West Virginia, in July, 1928.

Rev. J. Shannon Montgomery's ministry in Leesburg began in 1929. The depression years which followed were difficult everywhere, and this church, with a heavy debt, was no exception. Mr. Montgomery's ministry was marked by his gentle kindness and selfless devotion. His sermons reflected these qualities, buttressed by extensive scholarship.

In May, 1934, while celebrating the Church's one hundred thirtieth anniversary, Mr. Montgomery delivered a Historic Address, a valued document upon which the author did extensive research. When Mr. Montgomery retired from his active pastorate, the congregation elected him Pastor-Emeritus.

The next ministers, Cliff R. Johnson and T. Robert Fulton, were graduates of Union Theological Seminary, occupying their first pulpits. Both, called to the church for their outstanding abilities, brought it a fresh vigor. Under the able leadership of Monroe Bush, the next minister, the educational building was planned and completed.

Rev. David C. Crawford, Jr., the present pastor, is the Church's 26th minister during its one hundred and fifty continuous years. On this date, May 2, 1954, the Church has a membership of 253.

Facts of Interest

The members of the Church in years past not only had many virtues which enabled them to carry on the Church in good times and bad, but like ourselves they seem to have also had short-comings. The old records show that sometimes it was necessary for the Session to discipline some of the church members. One young minister was directed by the Session to cite an elder to appear before them for neglect of worship and official duties on the previous communion day. It is remarkable what patience and kindness were generally used when it was felt that discipline was necessary.

As was the custom throughout the South, servants and colored friends not only attended the Leesburg Presbyterian Church, where they occupied the gallery, but some were members and communicants. Listed among the twenty-one members in 1850 was William O. Robey who decided he wanted to be a minister. He talked it over with the officers, who explained to him how much education would be required for a Presbyterian Minister. He concluded the road was too long and he would just start preaching. He did, and the Church he founded is now the Mt. Zion Methodist Church in Leesburg. Servants of one family were not only church members but are buried in the church yard.

From the beginning, the Leesburg Presbyterian Church has played a leading role in the life of the community. Members of the St. James Episcopal Church often held their services in this building until theirs was completed in 1812. The Presbyterian Minister was often called on to perform the Sacraments of the Church at the Old Stone Methodist Church. Both the Baptists and the Methodists have held their services here at various times.

Through the years very few changes have been made in the church building. The church originally had two windows in the upper part and two in the lower portion of the side walls. Two long windows on each side were created from the pairs. In 1906 the belfry, a gift of the Mite Society, was added. The bell was a memorial given by the family of Mrs. Anna Lewis, long an active member of the Church. In order to give greater seating capacity to the sanctuary, the alcove back of the pulpit was added.

At one time, a crystal chandelier, lighted with candles, hung in the Church. This was replaced by a painted iron chandelier holding four lamps. The present pulpit was preceded by a white one which extended across the rostrum.

Several homes have served as the church Manse. The first was the present home of the Misses Davis, known in the community as "The Triangle." In 1879, this house was sold and the residence on the corner of Cornwall and Liberty Streets was bought. In 1927, that house was sold and the present Manse built.

The Sunday School

As early as 1824 this church started training their children in Sunday School. They were taught to spell and read as well as study the Catechisms and the Bible.

After the War Between the States we find a most active group of teachers meeting each week for Bible Study that they might be better prepared to present the lesson on Sunday.

There were three outpost Sunday Schools, led by members from this congregation: one at Cool Springs, one at Cannon Chapel, and one at Clark's Gap. The minister often preached at these outposts on Sunday afternoon.

The library was most important and provided reading material for the surrounding community. These books were published by the "American Tract Society" in New York or the "Presbyterian Board" in Philadelphia. In 1883 the Ladies' Bible Class was studying the "Confession of Faith" under the leadership of their pastor.

For a period of over fifty years there were only two Superintendents: Mr. A. G. Bradfield and Mr. Charles P. Janney. Since 1925 the following men have served in that position: Mr. John R. Clemens, Mr. Josephus Carr, Mr. Cecil Duff, Mr. Roscoe B. Rhoads, Mr. Lucas Phillips, Mr. Francis Patton, Mr. Wendell Kline, and Mr. F. G. Duvall.

For many years the Ladies' Bible Class paid \$300.00 (over and above their other offerings) toward the partial support of one of our missionaries in China.

"The Presbyterian Home" and the Rally Day offering used for "Sun-

day School Extension" have been the outstanding benevolent causes sponsored by the Sunday School during the past thirty years.

A large percentage of the increase in church membership received on profession of faith have been those trained in the Sunday School.

The hopes and prayers of many faithful teachers and pupils were fulfilled when the Educational Building was completed in 1950.

Women of the Church

The reports sent to Presbytery by the Session have been generous in the space allotted the Ladies' Societies, beginning with 1870.

First there was a Sewing Society active in raising funds by making aprons, sunbonnets, children's dresses, baby sacks and various articles of fancy work. They were referred to as "having displayed a laudable activity and ready to assist in any good work."

By 1878 they desired to make some improvements in the edifice (these improvements being described elsewhere in this sketch). Quoting from the Sessional record of 1879, "The credit for these improvements is chiefly due to the ladies of the church through whose efforts more than half of the necessary money was raised." Ten years later, another recognition of the work of the women is given: "The Ladies of the Church deserve special commendation for their zeal, for in all that pertains to the welfare of the church they far surpass the men." By 1888 the Ladies Aid Society had organized a children's group in which they were being trained for future usefulness.

In 1905 with the aid of the Mite Society the Church and Manse were repaired, having all work completed free of debt.

Finally in accord with the recommendation from the General Assembly all former organizations known as "The Sewing Society", "The Aid Society", the "Mite Society", the "Missionary Society", were dissolved, and all of the women of the church were organized into the Woman's Auxiliary, consisting of three circles.

Now known as "The Women of the Church", the ladies of the congregation continue to study, give, and pray for all the causes of the Church. Free will offerings from this group last year, 1953, amounted to \$1,269.84.

Conclusion

The Leesburg Presbyterian Church was more than fortunate in the three men who played the leading part in its establishment. David Bard, Amos Thompson, and James Hall were all graduates of The College of New Jersey, where undoubtedly they were taught and influenced by that great preacher, patriot, and educator, John Witherspoon. Witherspoon's religious beliefs translated themselves politically into support of a democratic society based on the rights of man and the necessity of education for an enlightened electorate. These graduates of the College of New Jersey had been imbued with this spirit, and it was the good fortune of the Leesburg Church to have these ideas implanted into its foundation.

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