

# JOURNAL

OF THE

## Presbyterian Historical Society

---

---

VOL. III.

JUNE, 1905.

No. 2.

---

---

### PRESBYTERIANISM IN ARKANSAS.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. JAMES WILSON MOORE.

At the spring sessions of the Presbytery of Arkansas, in 1858, the following resolution was passed:—

*Resolved*, that the Rev. J. W. Moore be requested to prepare a discourse on the history of our Church in Arkansas, to be delivered at our next spring meeting.

In consequence of this appointment the following was prepared and read before both Presbytery and Synod.

A resolution was also passed by Presbytery that the writer forward a copy of his discourse to Dr. C. Van-Rensselaer, to be placed among the Historical Records of our church.

J. W. MOORE.

As an apology to those present who were not at our last meeting of Presbytery, I would state that I was then appointed to deliver a discourse on the history of our church in Arkansas.

I consented merely from deference to the will of my brethren, as I was aware that the task of collecting materials scattered over so large an extent of territory, and during so long a period of time, would be attended with much difficulty, and I feared I could say but little to edification or profit.

<sup>1</sup>This paper is printed from the original MS. in the possession of The Presbyterian Historical Society. It has the advantage of being a sketch at first hand of the subject of which it treats, and appears not to have been known to the compilers of *The History of Presbyterianism in Arkansas* (see the JOURNAL, Vol. II, p. 211). In that volume will be found a portrait and sketch of Mr. Moore, there styled "The Father of Presbyterianism in Arkansas."—ED.

And now, in attempting to perform this duty, I must be permitted to make free use of the first person singular, as I cannot regard myself of the plural number, nor can I afford circumlocutions. And while I could not with propriety imitate Æneas before Dido, and say, *Magna pars quorum ego fui*, in regard to the early transactions of our church in Arkansas, neither could I with truth ignore the whole of the Trojan hero's words; as I may with truth say, *Parva pars quorum ego fui*.

It may perhaps be proper, as an introduction, to give a short sketch of the state of society as it existed at the time our church was introduced here.

When I reached the territory of Arkansas, in January, 1828, as a missionary of the General Assembly's Board, having been ordained by the Presbytery of Northumberland for that purpose, I found the Quapaw Indians in possession of the southeastern portion of the territory.

Their warriors, and their squaws with their papooses at their backs, were often seen lining the southern banks of the Arkansas, and in silent amazement gazing upon the first steamboats as they ploughed their course past the green canebrakes, and massy cotton woods, which then stood almost everywhere untouched by the hand of civilization. Their distinguished chief, Saracen, whose exploits of daring, and whose deeds of humanity have been seldom surpassed, was then living, and said to be nearly an hundred years of age.

A few French Roman Catholics were also then living on the lower Arkansas and around the old Post. That Post, more than a century before, had constituted a link in that magnificent chain of fortifications stretched by the emissaries of the Man of Sin from the northern lakes to the Mexican gulf, as a means of riveting the fetters of his spiritual despotism upon the choicest portion of this great continent. But God, in remembrance of his covenant promise, broke these bands asunder, and delivered over this territory to his Son.

The Cherokee Indians at that time occupied the territory as far down as Point Remove bayou. Old Dwight, situated on the western banks of the Illinois bayou, in what is now Pope County, was then a flourishing mission station, under the

superintendence of our beloved fellow Presbyter, the Rev. Cephas Washburn.

As regarded the white settlements, they were very few, and widely separated. With the exception of Little Rock, there was not a place in all Arkansas, where, on an ordinary occasion, a congregation could be collected that would now be regarded as even tolerably respectable in numbers.

A word here respecting the character of the first settlers may not be out of place. I am aware that the opinion has very generally been entertained abroad that the first inhabitants of Arkansas were a class of desperadoes—outlaws and refugees from justice—that there were some of this description cannot be denied. But nothing could be more unjust or untrue than to ascribe this character to the inhabitants generally. A more hospitable, noble hearted, or honorable set of men or women could nowhere be found than were a large proportion of those who first made openings in the wilds of Arkansas.

Owing to the fact that there was no navigation on the waters of the Arkansas or White Rivers, and that the Mississippi bottom then presented an almost impenetrable barrier on the east, the first settlers found access only from the north. This accounts for the fact that so many of them were from Kentucky and Missouri.

Little Rock in 1828 was the only place in the territory which could be called a town. It was very new and contained only about 25 families. But few of the streets were opened, and the stumps and logs were not yet removed from them. Being the capital, it was the residence of the territorial officers. Besides these a considerable number of adventurous young men, talented lawyers, physicians, merchants and others had found their way thither—the inhabitants with few exceptions were young, and possessed a large amount of talent and chivalrous bearing.

With no disposition to draw invidious comparisons—for alas, with few exceptions that whole class of men has now passed away—I must be permitted to say that in my opinion it would be difficult now to find so remarkable a set of men as those who then took [the] lead in the affairs of Arkansas.

Our first Governor was General Miller. His name stands

connected with many of the most thrilling events of the last war with Great Britain. He and Cass, then young and panting for military glory, were the very first officers that carried the American flag across the Canadian lines after war had been declared.

It was owing to his previously ascertained character for cool and deliberate daring that during the battle of Lundy's Lane he was selected to accomplish one of the most hazardous attempts ever conceived by the heart of man. During that terrible conflict, Gen. Brown, the chief in command, rode up to Miller, then a colonel, and pointing to the enemy's principal battery, with a voice of thunder, called out, "Could you," Col. Miller, "with another regiment take that battery out of their hands"?

Miller, with his accustomed moderation and coolness, laconically replied, "I'll try, sir." Then placing himself at the head of his troops, with an unfaltering step he proceeded, in full front of the open-mouthed cannon, his men thinning around him, until he reached the summit, and there with the bayonet's point he took that strong battery out of the hands of its owners, and turning it upon them put an end to the contest.

McDonald, at the battle of Wagram, performed a similar feat, and upon a larger scale, but with the material difference that the battery he took was in the hands of Austrians, while Miller's was in the hands of British soldiers.

Like thousands of other distinguished men, he was as we say, "self-made." In the height of his popularity and honors he was accustomed to tell that when he first thought of obtaining a classical education he had but \$1.25 in the world, and that he alternately acted the pupil and the pedagogue until he made his way through. Whoever has read the history of the Little Osage capture has perceived how the heart of a distinguished hero could sympathize with the sufferings of an unfortunate savage child. He was then Governor of Arkansas.

Major-General Izard was our second Territorial Governor. He had been educated for the army in the first military schools in Great Britain and France. He stood high in the confidence of the nation. He at one period during the war of 1812 had

the entire command of our army on the northern frontier. He was pre-eminent as a gentleman and a scholar. He was friendly to our church, being a contributor and an attendant when his health would permit. He died a few months after my arrival, and his remains were deposited in the old graveyard. It fell to my lot to speak at his funeral.

The third territorial Governor was John Pope, of Kentucky. He had been very eminent as a lawyer and statesman. Some idea of his talents may be formed from the fact that he was long a successful rival of Henry Clay. He was a regular attendant upon our church and a liberal supporter. His excellent wife was among our earliest and most devoted members. I once heard him introduce her to a Methodist presiding elder, as "an elder in the Presbyterian Church."

Robert Crittenden, a man of the highest order of talents, was the first Secretary of State. Chester Ashley, Henry Conway, Robert C. Oden, Thos. P. Eskridge, and many others would have done honor to any community in our land by their talents and professional skill.

It will perhaps seem strange when I say that not one of all these was a member of any church at the time I arrived in Arkansas.

For some years they lived together in harmony, but at length a spirit of the most determined rivalry sprung up among them, accompanied in many instances with the most deadly animosity, which, in consequence of a false sense of honor, led not a few of these otherwise noble-minded men to throw away their lives, and to die as the fool dieth, before they had lived out half their days.

The entire population finally became divided, and ranged themselves under two distinguished leaders, and never were Caledonian clansmen more devotedly attached to their Highland Chieftains than were the early Arkansians to their respective leaders.

At the time I reached Little Rock the very females were, with few exceptions, scarcely on speaking terms with those of the opposite party.

There was not one organized church of any denomination in

Little Rock when I reached it. It was perhaps owing to this fact that party rancor so fearfully raged among them. No minister of the gospel resided there; and I think I was told that there had not been a sermon preached in the place for a year previous to my going there. On the day after my arrival a distinguished civil officer, by whose right hand another had lately fallen, remarked to me: "I am glad you have come to reside among us. Had there been one of your profession here at an earlier period to have acted as mediator, some unhappy scenes might never have occurred."

The religious community in Little Rock stood as follows: There were three Baptists. Two of these females; the other a male servant. There was one Methodist, one Congregationalist and one Presbyterian. None of these, however, considered themselves in any church organization.

I may here state that besides the Presbyterian here mentioned there was but one other in the whole territory at that time, so far as I could ever ascertain.

I would here state in gratitude to the Head of the Church and in honor to the early citizens of Little Rock and the territory that they received me cordially both as a minister of Jesus Christ and an officer of the Presbyterian church with every evidence of hospitality and respect. Both parties, forgetful of their animosities, came together on the Sabbath to listen to the Gospel, though with few exceptions each man was armed with a deadly weapon. I was afterwards told there were probably forty men armed thus in my first audience.

The simple, and as I trust, faithful exhibition of Divine truth soon evinced its effects as the power of God in breaking down the strongholds of hatred and prejudice. In two or three months a number of persons became deeply impressed with the truth that by nature and wicked works they were undone sinners. Most, if not all of those, were soon led by the Spirit of all grace to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

A weekly prayer meeting, a Sabbath school, a Bible class and a monthly concert were soon established and sustained with great regularity and interest.

The Bible class embraced with two or three exceptions every

female of sufficient age, in town, including the Governor's wife, and also several gentlemen of education and talent. This Bible class contributed more than any other means, (Preaching perhaps excepted) to break down the spirit of discord and to produce religious impressions.

Finding that a number of persons entertained a hope in Christ and a desire to be connected with the Presbyterian church, I announced my intention of organizing one on the 28th of July, 1828. But no sooner was this known abroad than a spirit of opposition sprang up such as I have neither the ability nor the desire now to describe. There seemed to be a determination that whatever else might be tolerated a Presbyterian church should not. One preacher in particular who came from a distance succeeded in stirring up the most bitter opposition. He took great pains to have it believed that the Saviour, in the tenth of John, in speaking of some who entered not by the door, but climbed up some other way, intended Presbyterian ministers. Water, according to him, was the true Door. But I verily believe that no people since the age of miracles had ever more visible evidences of the Lord's presence and support. We were always mercifully sustained while our enemies were often put to shame. I organized the church on the day appointed, viz., July 28th, 1828, composed of seven members.

Owing to the fact that we had no male members at that time whose knowledge and experience seemed to qualify them for the office of ruling elder, the election and ordination of those officers were for a time postponed. The first ruling elder in that church was Dudley D. Mason, a native of New York, I believe, and the next Aaron W. Lyon, a native of New Jersey. He had a collegiate education, and had studied theology in Princeton, N. J., under Doctors Alexander and Miller. They were both men who truly took heed to themselves and to the church of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers.

The first members of that church were in a very eminent degree devoted and exemplary Christians. Greater consistency or more self-denial I have never witnessed. No ordinary excuse kept them away from regular attendance upon the stated means

of Grace. The following incident may serve to illustrate the prevailing example of all the early members. On the afternoon of our regular Wednesday prayer meeting, two ladies called at the house of one of our members with an expressed intention of a social visit. When the hour of the prayer meeting arrived, the lady of the house politely invited them to accompany her to the meeting. Upon their declining she requested them to remain until her return, as she could not absent herself from the place appointed for prayer.

Owing, as I believe, to the prevailing spirit of prayer, God was pleased in a remarkable manner to pour out his Spirit on the inhabitants of Little Rock. There was no time during the first few years of that church's existence in which I did not know of some persons inquiring the Way of Life. Nor was there a communion season, though held every three months, during that period when there were not some added on examination. This was the more remarkable as the population was then small.

Did time admit it would be profitable as well as pleasant to present sketches of some of these early members of our beloved church, as most of them have long since gone the way of all the earth.

The name of one, however, whose course was short, but whose soul large and whose desires for the upbuilding of our Redeemer's Kingdom was very strong I cannot forbear to mention. This was the Hon. Thomas P. Eskridge.<sup>1</sup> Though high in office, and associated in official duties with none but worldly men, he ever persevered in a life of eminent Christian consistency. A few days before his death, though then in health, he wrote me that he had made arrangements to support a minister at his own expense near his own residence, as he could not live without the ordinances of the Gospel.

As an instance of the light in which worldly amusements were viewed by our first members I would mention that on one occasion the Secretary of State, then acting Governor, was called upon, as chief magistrate, to marry a couple at Cantonment Gib-

<sup>1</sup> Judge of U. S. (Territorial) Courts.



son. The company being principally composed of United States officers and their families, was a very gay one. In the evening arrangements were being made for dancing. Shortly before these exercises commenced, the wife of the Secretary, though young, and formerly accustomed to such amusements, but being now a member of our church, and believing that her presence would be regarded as conformity to the world, begged leave of absence from the company, and retired to a private apartment. I may add that she was very attractive in her personal appearance as well as interesting in her deportment. But she rightly judged that they that are Christ's have put off the world with its affections and lusts.

The second church organized in Arkansas was in November, 1833. The Rev. D. L. Gray, some time previously, had emigrated from Tennessee with a colony of Presbyterians originally from South Carolina. They had settled on the eastern bank of White river, below where Jacksonport now stands. The church was organized with near 40 members.

Here Bro. Gray labored with the most encouraging prospects until sickness and death occasioned discouragement among the families composing the church. Many of them recrossed the Mississippi River, their pastor accompanying them, by which means the church became extinct. Some of the original families still remained in the same region, and have from time to time constituted a nucleus for church organizations, but these for want of permanent ministerial labor are now nearly extinct.

Here will be the proper place to give the origin of the Arkansas Presbytery. During the first year or two of my abode in the territory I remained in connection with the Northumberland Presbytery in Pennsylvania by which I had been ordained as an evangelist. I then connected myself with the Presbytery of Mississippi, at that time the most convenient as to distance. Rev. D. L. Gray, during his residence here remained in connection with the Presbytery of the Western District.

In the meantime the Rev. Alfred Wright and the Rev. Loring S. Williams, having followed the Choctaw Indians to their new homes on the west of Arkansas, together with myself, made application to the Synod of Mississippi and South Alabama to

be set off as a Presbytery. They granted our petition, and appointed the third Thursday of March, 1835, or as soon after as convenient for us, to meet at Little Rock, to be organized as the Presbytery of Arkansas.

We met on the 16th of April, 1835, and were organized according to the appointment of Synod.

At this meeting the Rev. Joel Wood, a missionary among the Choctaws, was received from the Presbytery of Albany, N. Y.

At a subsequent meeting the Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury and the Rev. Cyrus Pryington were received from the Presbytery of Tombigby.

About the year 1834 or 1835 the Rev. Hervey Woods visited Washington County, where he labored for some time. No special information has ever been received by me respecting the results of his labors.

The next minister that settled permanently among the white population was the Rev. Alexander S. Banks, from Bethel Presbytery. He reached Arkansas in the summer of 1836. He visited the northern parts of our territory, and finally settled at Spring Hill in Hempstead County. There he succeeded in building up a flourishing church, which, however, after some years, owing to the unsettled condition of the community, and various untoward circumstances, became extinct, Brother Banks having ceased to minister to it. Brother Banks united with us in 1837.

The Rev. Saml. A. Worcester, a Cherokee missionary, of Georgia prison celebrity, was received the same year from the Union Presbytery.

In the spring of 1840 the church of Little Rock becoming vacant by the removal of myself to another field, Mr. J. J. Henderson, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Mississippi, was invited by the church at my suggestion to take charge of it as stated supply. Mr. Henderson was ordained at the spring meeting of our Presbytery that same year.

At our fall meeting of this year, viz., 1840, the Rev. John M. Erwin united with us from the Presbytery of Concord.

At this meeting, 1840, a petition was presented to the Synod of Mississippi for a division of Presbytery, setting off the mission-

ary brethren, by themselves into a presbytery to be called the Indian Presbytery, and leaving those in the state (Arkansas having become a state in 1836) to retain the original name, viz, "the Arkansas Presbytery," and also to keep the records.

But before we could again meet, one of our beloved and faithful members, the Rev. John M. Erwin, who had removed to Taylor's Bay on White river, was removed by death, and another, the Rev. I. J. Henderson, had removed to Texas, so there then being but two of us left, viz., Bro. Banks and myself, we were virtually extinct. But two other brethren coming in, Rev. Aaron Williams and Rev. Benjamin Shaw, the Synod of Mississippi reorganized us in October, 1842.

Rev. A. Williams labored for some time in Washington, Hempstead County, where he organized a church. He was then called to the church in Little Rock, which he supplied for two or three years.

Rev. Benjamin Shaw settled in Chicot County, where he labored without compensation, building churches and supplying them himself, until the time of his death, which occurred (I believe) in 1848 or 1849. Rev. John T. Balch, a member of the Western District Presbytery, was received by us in December, 1842. He settled at Norristown, Pope County, where he organized a church, and remained until —, when he removed to Texas.

In the autumn of 1845 the Rev. Stephen F. Cocke was received from the Presbytery of Montgomery. He remained for a short time in Hempstead, to whence he also removed to Texas.

In the autumn of 1846 Rev. John Anderson, a member of the Montgomery Presbytery was received by us. He preached some time in Spring Hill, and after a time went to Texas.

At the same meeting of Presbytery Rev. William S. Lacy and Rev. John M. Hoge, the former from the Western District Presbytery and the latter from Schuyler Presbytery, were received by us.

In the spring of 1848 the Rev. William K. Marshall and Rev. Joshua F. Green united with us, the former from the Presbytery of Lake and the latter from the Presbytery of Ebenezer.

The Rev. William K. Marshall supplied the church in Van Buren until the latter part of —, when he moved to Texas.

Rev. Joshua F. Green supplied the church in Little Rock from the beginning of 1848 until when he became Missionary Agent for the State of Arkansas. In this he continued for two years. It was his last regular service. His death, which occurred in Memphis on his return from Kentucky in the summer of 1854, awakened a pang of grief in a thousand hearts, and caused a thousand tongues mournfully to exclaim that a great man had fallen in Israel.

In the autumn of 1848 the Synod of Memphis divided the Presbytery of Arkansas by a line commencing at the mouth of the Arkansas river, running up that river to the mouth of Fisher's Bayou, and thence due west to the western boundary of the State.

The southern portion of the State constituted a new presbytery, called the Ouachita Presbytery, consisting of William S. Lacy, A. R. Banks, Benjamin Shaw, J. M. Hoge, and John Anderson, the northern portion containing the remaining members, retaining the original name and also the records.

Henceforward my statements must be confined to the Presbytery of Arkansas.

Our next accession was Mr. William M. Baker, a licentiate from the ——— Presbytery. He was ordained by this Presbytery at its spring sessions, held at Sylvania church in April, 1849. After supplying the church of Batesville for a year or two he left us for Texas.

Rev. James Martin, from the Presbytery of Mississippi, was received in 1851. He organized and for a while occasionally supplied the church of Wattensaw. He also organized a small church in the vicinity of Hickory plains, Prairie County, which has become extinct.

In 1851 Mr. Thomas R. Welch, a licentiate of the West Lexicon Presbytery, took charge of a church at Helena, which had some years before been organized by Rev. L. P. Gaston and Rev. J. H. Gray, D. D., from Tennessee. Mr. Welch was ordained by this Presbytery in the spring of 1852.

Rev. Samuel J. Baird was received at this same meeting of presbytery from (it is believed) the Western Reserve Presby-

tery. He supplied the church in Batesville for a year or two, when he removed to Iowa.

In either this or the subsequent year the Rev. Cephas Washburn, who had for many years superintended the Cherokee missions, under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was received by us from the Indian Mission Congregational Association. He had for some time supplied the church at Fort Smith. He then removed to Norristown, Pope County, and took charge of the church there in connection with one in Dardenelle.

Near the same time we received Rev. Elizur Butler from the Indian Mission Association. He had been a companion in the Georgia State prison along with Worcester for preaching the gospel to the Indians, in opposition to certain laws of the State, which it was assumed they had violated.

In 1855 Rev. D. L. Gray returned from the presbytery of Western District and united with us.

In the same year Mr. B. N. Sawtelle, licentiate from Memphis Presbytery, was received and ordained and installed over the church in Batesville.

In the year 1856 or 1857 Rev. Thos. Fraser, from Michigan, united with this presbytery. He for some time supplied the church in Little Rock. He then removed to California.

I have now, dear brethren, passed rapidly over a period of more than thirty years. My sketch has been necessarily very brief. It may be imperfect in some unimportant points, as I have not in all cases been able to give dates with absolute certainty.

In conclusion, permit me to say, dear brethren, that while it becomes us all to take to ourselves shame and confusion of face in review of the little we have done for our Divine Master, yet a great work has been accomplished.

Our labor here has, in many respects, been peculiar. We have built on no other man's foundation, and we are still building. Let us take heed with what materials we build.

And now we cannot suppress the inquiry, what will thirty years in the future develop? To us all, and especially to the aged ministers of Presbytery, this is a solemn thought. We

will not witness it. The results of the prayers, toils and conflicts that will have passed before that period rolls round, all tending to and ending in the advancement of the Redeemer's Crown and Kingdom, will be for other eyes to behold. Ours will be still in death. May we be found standing in our lot at the end of our days !

To the younger members I can say, I almost envy your position. I can hardly withhold the exclamation, Oh, that I were young again ! Be zealous, be faithful, and you will see what our eyes have never beheld. Christ, we believe, is soon about to go forth conquering and to conquer. It is His right to reign. He will soon wear many crowns. May His kingdom come and His will be done !