

The History of First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)

Albany, Kentucky

The First Christian Church of Albany, Ky. was founded as The Church of Jesus Christ at Paoli, Ky. on Dec. 21, 1834 with sixteen charter members. Raccoon John Smith, the Campbellite Baptist preacher who, representing the Disciple faction, united with Barton W. Stone who represented the Christian faction, on Dec. 25, 1832, influenced the charter members. Smith had come from the Stockton Valley area, and although left it to preach across a wide area, he returned to give much encouragement, pastoral leadership, and shepherding.

The first officers were elected on May 3, 1835. They were O.T. Ragland and Isaac T. Reneau as Elders and F.W. Talbott as Deacon. Further organization took place on Feb. 5, 1836, when it was decided that the Church would meet on the first day of each week (Sunday) at 12:00 noon at the home of Rebecca Talbott. F.W. Talbott was to lead the singing. Later, Isaac T. Reneau and J.H. Young were each given a letter of recommendation to other Churches, which for all purposes, was to make them Ordained Ministers. They were then recognized by others to preach. Isaac T. Reneau then was ordained as an evangelist and worked for the Ky. Christian Missionary Society, which was the forerunner of the Christian Church in Kentucky. However, he continued to be involved in, and concerned about, the Christian Church at Paoli, having moved back to the old Wood homeplace so that he and his wife, Mary G. Wood Reneau, could care for her mother during the Civil War. His children were active in the Church at Paoli. His grandchildren and great-grandchildren were active in the Albany Christian Church, with the last of them being Betty Reneau.

It is not known the exact date of the Church moving to Albany. One theory is that it was after the founding of Clinton County in 1836. Albany became incorporated and became the county seat in 1837. A second theory is that it was after the death of Rebecca Talbott on Sept. 1, 1845. A third theory is that it was after the Civil War when all of the Churches and families had such a difficult time, especially with the guerilla warfare in the area. In 1873, property near the present Church was bought as shown in the deed recorded in Deed Book C, page 527, by James M. Bristow, Clinton Court Clerk, from James M. Bristow to W.F. Harrison and B.F.T. Hancock, Deacons of the Church. A frame, one-story building was erected and the First Christian Church began holding services.

In March 1926, the entire block on the south side of the courthouse burned when a fire began on the opposite corner of where the present Church is now located. It first burned up the street that is now Washington Street, then the street behind the courthouse, Jefferson Street, and back down Cross Street where the Church sat to the corner of Cross and Water Street. The Church building, at this time, was located between two residences and a bit North of where the present building is located. All of the buildings on the three streets were of wood and with no water supply or fire department available, all burned to the ground. The Church was one of the last structures to burn, giving its members and

friends time to carry out all of its furnishings and even pry out its windows. These windows had small colored sections of glass around the larger center glass in each section. Also the bell from the steeple was removed. Everything was stored in the top floor of the Albany Mill owned by Plato Hancock. The pulpit and Communion table was made by Bro. Reuben Smith and are still in use today. The Church made plans to meet in the county Courthouse for both Sunday School and Church until a new Church was built and was ready for occupancy.

No time was lost in making plans for the future. On April 10, 1926, a committee was appointed to take the necessary action to build a new Church. The committee was composed of Plato Hancock, J.E. Morgan, W.A. Dicken, Dr. E.W. Smith, and C.P. Huff. The property on the corner of Cross and Water Streets was actually given by Plato and Willie Hancock, for the sum of \$450.00, but was returned to the Church by Plato and Willie Hancock as their beginning pledge to get a new Church built. The former property was sold to have some aid in the new building. A large basement was dug and concrete walls were built some seven or eight inches thick. Mr. Jesse C. Ewing, a member and a carpenter, oversaw the project, even though he was unable to do much of the work due to ill health. He liked to tell how he asked anyone in the community who wished, to bring a bag of cement to donate to the Church. He kept pouring it into the walls as long as it was being given. The Church Record Book shows that occasionally a bag of cement would be bought. A large Sanctuary was built over the basement, the inside being plastered walls, wooden floor, and an inset chimney toward the front. At the front of the Sanctuary was a raised platform for the Chancel area behind which was a large archway in the center and two Sunday School rooms on each side. In each of these rooms was put one of the windows saved from the frame Church, having the colored glass around the center window. This Chancel area was completed by one step from the floor in the center and rails on each side. The outside of the Church was brick with a metal roof to cover the Sanctuary. Each side of the building had five windows and two on the side facing Cross Street where the entrance had double doors. A large porch was added to back of the Cross Street entrance with the roof supported by two large round columns on each corner. Several steps led to the street with thick, slanting poured cement sides, that were often used as slides by the children of the church.

The bricks for the Church were made by men on the J.O. Cole farm. Wooden molds were made, red clay was formed in them, and then emptied out. The bricks were then burned at the farm and hauled over to the Church by wagon and mules. The original roof is still on the Church, having been nailed on by an 18 year old boy, Hall Ewing. He was the youngest man who helped to build the Church. He was later Song Leader and Supt. of the Sunday School before moving to Akron, Ohio during World War II. He later returned after retirement. The large round columns supporting the porch roof are made of bricks with the outside ones carefully shaped to fit for the circular shape and concreted around. I discovered this when the recent remodeling was being done. One of the columns had to be scraped a bit due to cracking of the concrete before being re-concreted showing the bricks in it. An entrance to the basement is on the side next to Water Street and goes into the room under the porch with two steps to go down into the Fellowship Hall. The stairs that lead from the upstairs to the basement inside are at the back of the Church just North of the double doors. Second-hand pews were bought from a Church in Lawrenceburg and moved to Albany including long ones for the center aisle and shorter

ones for the aisles on each side. They had bookracks with beautiful scroll decorations. The Communion Table and the pulpit were brought from storage, along with all else that was needed. The new Church was ready for occupancy, and to become the Beacon Light of the corner of Cross and Water Streets where it has been for these many years.

Many people helped to bring about the building of this Church and in such a short period of time. Mr. Jesse C. Ewing oversaw all of the work. Others who helped in the work were Plato Hancock, J.E. Morgan, Dr. E.W. Smith, J.O. Cole, W.A. Dicken, the Talbotts, and lastly, the good women of the Church who took lunch to the men who were working. They gave their time, money, and prayers. Reuben Smith had already made the Communion Table and pulpit as has been mentioned. Rev. W.L. Smith, grandson of Raccoon John Smith, was with them to encourage. He served as Pastor some of this time. Persons all over Clinton County, and elsewhere, gave money regardless of how small or great, from \$0.25 to dollars. The Church borrowed \$10,000.00 from Citizen's Bank of Albany and \$400.00 from G.W. Grider. Unfortunately, the bell from the frame Church disappeared and was unavailable to be placed in the new building to call the people together to worship.

On November 6, 1927, the first services were held in the Church with Rev. Kirby Smith holding the first service, both morning and night. It is stated in some histories that Bro. W.L. Smith held the first service, but he died on Feb. 11, 1927, before the church was completed. J.P. Perkins had died on Nov. 18, 1926, and Bro. Reuben A. Smith died on Nov. 27, 1927, only three weeks after the first service. Three of the main influences had now passed away.

Throughout the years, just as the memberships and ministers changed, so did the building as work was done. Improvements were needed for its upkeep and/or programs. In the 1940's, when J. Ryan Nevius was Minister, a Baptistry was built in the floor of the Chancel area. A partition was built across the back of the Sanctuary, making for a vestibule or entrance hall before entering the Church proper with large entry doors for the two aisles. Over this was built a balcony with the stairway over the basement stairway. At the Water Street side, was built a small room for a classroom, study/office, or library. It presently has been fixed for a library with a comfortable chair for sitting and reading. The Sanctuary was left with four windows on each side. The original bubble glass of each was replaced with painted colored glass. The glass was given by Miss Jennie Mae Talbott in the 1940s, a member of the Church. All but one had to later be replaced with other painted stained glass. Restrooms were built under the porch in the basement. In the beginning, the Sanctuary was heated with a wood/coal stove vented into the top of the inset chimney on the right side facing the Chancel area in front of the side row of pews. Later, a coal furnace was installed in the basement just below this area with a very large square register in the floor in front of the pews. As time went on, the necessary upkeep was completed, such as painting, cleaning the entire building, replacement of hymnbooks, etc. Christian Worship hymnals were bought in the 1940s, only to be destroyed later by one of the Independent ministers who finally caused a split in the Church in the late 1950s. The first carpet installed was up the two aisles, across the Chancel area, and across the vestibule. Drapes were hung from the archway to separate the back of the Chancel area from the rest of the Church when it was needed. The original lights dropped down with chains from the ceiling with a large, single bulb

covered by a large, gold-decorated white globe. In the 1970s, one of the Ministers replaced these with a cheap type of light that held several small bulbs that were a bother to replace when needed. The coal furnace had to be replaced eventually, and two gas furnaces were installed; one was for the basement so that the upstairs would not have to be heated when not in use. The upstairs was also air-conditioned. In the early 1990s, re-decorating of the Church was done with the color of the walls, carpet, and other accessories being changed to green. The pews were padded and a new Communion and offering ware and new organ was bought. A new grand piano was given to the Church. A set of the paraments with the four colors was also given, and Bibles and the new Chalice hymnals were bought. Then in 2002, the decision was made to completely re-do the Church, both inside and outside. A committee was formed consisting of Mrs. Deanie Dyer Williams, Mrs. Lola Dyer Sloan, and Dr. William C. Powell. Mr. Joe Martin, of Martin, Durr, and Caldwell, and a design associate for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, was contacted and came to help with advice about what needed to be done. He made the plans for a complete renovation inside and outside of the facilities. Local contractors did the work, the main one being Shelton Brothers' Builders. The Sanctuary was done first, with the Church services being held in the basement. Re-wiring of the entire building was completed. New chandeliers were installed in the Sanctuary, with the pews, Communion Table, pulpit, lectern, and other furniture being re-finished. The missing decorative pieces of the pews were replaced. The floor was sanded and re-finished. A framework was built over the inset chimney with additional ones built and placed between the windows to match. The walls were painted a light tan with coordinating colors elsewhere. The Chalice area had new wine drapes with matching window treatments. Wine-figured carpet was installed in the Sanctuary, up the aisles, and in the vestibule. The room at the end of the vestibule was made into a library with built-in bookcases, an upholstered chair, table and a lamp. New lights were installed in all other areas where they were needed. In 2003-2006, the remainder of the Church, the basement and the outside, was completed. The entire basement was torn out, with new partitions enlarging the Fellowship Hall and changing some of the Sunday School rooms. The kitchen was re-done with built in cabinets and new appliances. A single handicapped restroom was built to replace the two small ones. A new gas furnace/air conditioning system was installed. An arch was made at the entrance into the basement, making the entranceway higher with handrails along each side of the steps. The entire outside concrete walls steps, porch, and columns were sandblasted and re-concreted where repair was badly needed. The center handrail down the steps and railings around the porch were cleaned and repainted. New double doors were installed at the entrance of the Church. The steps and porch were covered with brown tile. A Rededication Service was held on Sunday, May 7, 2006, with Dr. Michael Gatton, Interim Minister for almost three years, leading the Morning Worship Hour, and Dr. Gregory Alexander, Regional Minister of Kentucky, leading the Afternoon Service. This was just a few months short of the 172nd Anniversary of the Church (Dec. 21, 2006).

The first Parsonage owned by the Church was bought in the early 1940s. Rev. T. Howard Stark, Pastor for one year in 1941-1942, and his wife lived in the parsonage of the First Methodist with their Minister, whose wife was deceased. The first Parsonage was a very small, two story frame house on Burkesville Road, having a low lying lot on

the west side of it. This property is now part of the Albany Elementary School playground. The second parsonage was bought in the 1960s, following the sale of the first to the Clinton County Board of Education. The second parsonage was kept for only a short time. The present parsonage is located on Circle Drive in the Nolan Subdivision. This is part of the land that was the J. O. Cole farm where the bricks for the Church were made. The parsonage also underwent extensive renovation during the years that work was being done on the Church. In November 1990, the Church bought the Wisdom Garage building which sits next door to the Church, and where the frame Church had been located. This was done with the idea that the Church might expand across this area, but this was not done. The old building was torn down and now provides a parking lot for the Church and City Hall during the week. The most recent, and last, property bought by the Church is a two story brick building on Washington Street, known as the Barnes Building. The back of it joins the backside of the parking lot. It has some apartments upstairs and two adjoining store spaces downstairs, both needing much work. It served as a Boy and Girl Scout Center for about a year, and now is a Thrift Store with clothing that can be bought very cheaply or even given to persons in need.

The Albany First Christian Church, from its founding, has been an Ecumenical and Missionary group of people sent forth to practice and to teach others to practice the Gospel of Jesus Christ – to love God and to love one another. All are welcome to come and worship. It is cooperative within as all decisions are made by the majority of the members, including the calling of a Pastor/Minister. It belongs to the Brotherhood known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) participating at the local, regional, and world levels in its Educational, Evangelism, and Outreach programs. It gives to the several special Outreach offerings taken each year. It uses the materials for Church School and other things as the Christian Women's Fellowship, youth camp, and conference. Many youth and adults have attended camps, retreats, District, Regional, and General Assemblies. It was most fortunate in 1947 to have one of the two Rural Laboratory Training Schools in the United States to train teachers for leadership in the local Church with Mrs. Mossie Wyker as the Inspirational and Worship Leader. On the local level, the Church supports and participates in the work of the Clinton County Ministerial Association with the programs of the special ecumenical services at Easter and Christmas, helping in the Hospital and Nursing Home Chaplaincy programs and worship services, some ecumenical Vacation Bible Schools, the Nursing Home ministry of giving lotion to the residents at Easter, holding special services for the community such as Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve Communion, and participating in joint Cantatas. It has served the community as a place where various groups can meet. Music teachers have held their recitals, and previously the Lions Club met two times per month with the Willing Workers fixing and serving meals. Currently, Narcotics Anonymous meets one time per week, and Alcoholics Anonymous meets two times per week. In the 1940s, the youth of the town and country had a place to go for a recreational center – at the Church in the winter and at the Parsonage in warmer weather for tennis and volleyball. The Church gives world wide through the Love Gifts and many kits sent by the Christian Women's Fellowship; participating in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. Indeed, the Church does reach out to others.

In its long history, there have been many Ministers who have served First Christian Church, some part time and some full time, along with those who have been Interim Pastors/Ministers. The beginning influence and source of encouragement in its early days was one of our Brotherhood founders, Raccoon John Smith. Others were Isaac T. Reneau, Dr. O. T. Ragland, Jonathan H. Young, Rev. Baugh, Bro. W. L. (Billy) Smith (Grandson of Raccoon John Smith), H. C. Bell, Payton A. Canary, Rev. Sales, Robert Glenn, Kirby Smith, T. Howard Stark, Elbert L. Hanes, J. Ryan Nevius, Charled M. McKay, Gene Reynolds, William Cook, Lawrence and Evelyn Hay, Richard J. McLean, William D. Eisle, William S. Latham, John A. Black, William M. Guthrie, Roger Hupp, J. Ryan Nevius and wife Eva (a second Ministry which was for three years), Bruce Merton, Phillip M. Nevius, Michael Welch, Glenn Clements, Charles and Linda Yarborough, Russell Westbrook, and Richard James. There have been several who have served as Interim Ministers, some just one or a few times and others for longer periods of time. These include Arthur N. Wake, Thomas Phelps, Dr. Mel Bonner, Carl and Ann Rothschild, Greg Widner, Dr. Arthur Digby, Bob Franz, Carl Hamm, William and Mary Lee Moxley, Robert Stauffer, Paul Stauffer, David Kendall, Dr. Michael Gatton for almost three years, and Garth Lehman who is currently serving.

The greatest gift given by the First Christian Church are its people and especially those sent out as Timothy's to minister wherever they went. Some are Lay Members who have stepped forth and served with Him. They are Martha Ewing Glenn, who married Robert Glenn. Isaac O. Reneau was President of the Clinton County Sunday School Convention for a number of years, going around to the churches and speaking. Dr. William C. Powell has stepped in at various times, both at funerals and filling the pulpit, especially during a two month period of alternating with Betty H. Reneau. The Timothy's who have become Ordained include Isaac T. Reneau, Dr. O. T. Ragland, Jonathan H. Young, Oren N. (Ned) Reneau, ordained by both the First Christian Church in Albany and the Buckner Christian Church where he served while in Seminary, Betty Hadus Reneau, who served some churches in Arkansas and Missouri as Minister of Christian Education and supplied the local pulpit, as well as officiated several funerals and a wedding after returning home, and also in the ministry in Speech Therapy in the public schools. Also included in this list would be Phillip Marion Nevius, Michael Welch, and Linda Yarborough.

Some other persons must be recognized because of their deep ties to the Albany First Christian Church. One is Joseph Wickliffe Reneau, the seventh of the nine children of Isaac T. and Mary G. Wood Reneau, who became a member of the Church by Letter of Recommendation on May 31, 1867. He later became a Minister in the non-instrumental Church of Christ after going to Barren County. His wife was Nancy Arimetha Smith, granddaughter of Raccoon John Smith. He was a Minister from 1889 until his death on January 18, 1926. Another is Mary Hulda Allen, who was a Minister of Christian Education in Bowling Green, Ky., for many years, then to Illinois, and last as a Pastor in Tennessee. She was the daughter of William and Lea Beard Allen, granddaughter of

William and Mary Bayless Reneau Beard, great-granddaughter of Isaac T. and Mary G. Wood Reneau, niece of J.O. and Elizabeth Beard Cole. The third is Ralph Ewing Glenn, son of Robert and Martha Ewing Glenn and the grandson of Jesse C. and Olivia Lollar Ewing. He pastored some churches and held various positions at varying levels in the Brotherhood before going to become Regional Minister of the Southwest Region before his untimely death on Oct. 2, 2002.

Much of the information for the story of the Albany First Christian Church came from the old Record Book and various papers that were kept by the Isaac T. Reneau Family through the years. These were given, along with the microfilms of the papers in the possession of O. N. Reneau, to the Lexington Theological Seminary in 1956 so that they might be preserved for others. Older members of the Church who took part in its rebuilding and work gave other facts to the author via oral history. Last, seventy years of it has been experienced by the author as her family and she have been a vital part of these last years.

The Beacon Light on the corner of Cross and Water Streets still burns. We sincerely pray that it will continue to do so for many years to come so that to guide many in a walk with God.

07/31/2007

Betty H. Reneau

9/2021
Additions/Corrections

The fence that bordered the entire block began on a house on a part is now Washington Street near where the old town theater was built.

The Church no longer owns a parsonage - the one on Circle Drive was sold when we no longer had a Minister living in the Community.

Additional Ministers have been ~~Ray~~ ^{Ray} McCormick, Richard James for a 2nd time, and Phillip Perdue presently serving as an interim Minister.

Narcisbery no longer meet at the Church.

A new roof was put on the building after this was written.

The Beacon Building does not have the ~~historic~~ stone anymore - it is used for storing things.