

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NORTHERN INDIANA COUNTY

[From Notes of Robert McIsaac.]

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of the United States profess to be not only lineal descendants of, but identical in doctrine, worship, discipline and government with the Church of Scotland at the time of what is called the Second Reformation, culminating about the year 1863, when the "Confession of Faith," "Larger and Shorter Catechism," "Directory of Worship, and form of church government known as Westminster Standards, were adopted by the General Assembly of the Scottish Presbyterian church, and the National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Covenant of the Three Kingdoms were sworn to by the church, people and government of those lands. Consistent with their principles, they refused to concur in the revolution established under William III., in 1890*. They still remain as distinguishing principles, "that civil government is an ordinance of God – that Jesus Christ, as Mediator, is the ruler of nations; that the Bible is the supreme standard of national as well as individual morals."†. In order to maintain practical testimony for what they believe, they refused to vote or hold office under any government which, in its constitution or fundamental law, denies or ignores these principles.

About forty years ago, a part of Montgomery township, near the present village of Smithport, now Banks township, was offered for sale by Mr. Roberts, Of New York, and residents of New York city were induced to purchase and emigrate, among them a few families of Reformed Presbyterians.

The first of these were Samuel Becket, James Graham, and James Harbison, who arrived in 1842, followed by Peter, James and John Sharp, Oliver Martin and others. These soon organized into a society, holdings meetings for conference on religious subjects, and prayer, on Thursdays and Sabbaths. In a short time they were discovered and visited by preachers of their own faith, and among others the named Revs. Dr. Milligan, A. M. Milligan and Joseph Thornton.

Rev. R. J. Dodds, a young man who had been ordained to the ministry with the intention of becoming a missionary to the West Indies, preached to the different societies in Armstrong, Jefferson, and the north part of Indiana county, and was called by, and installed over these societies in June, 1852; the congregation called Rehoboth, embracing an area of forty square miles, outlined by Kittanning, Armstrong county, west; Cherry Tree, south; the Susquehanna river, east; Warsaw, Jefferson county, north. He was a man adapted to such charge; of great physical endurance, and mind well stored with both literacy and theological matter; could accommodate himself with cheerfulness to the varied circumstances of the people of his charge, and soon became a universal favorite among his own, and other religious societies. Another society of Reformed Presbyterians had sprung up in the Mahoning townships before Mr. Dodds was called. Andrew Pollock and family came from Ireland in 1844, and sometime afterward, Mrs. William Thomas and Robert McFarland, from West Mahoning township. Then James Gailey and wife, from Cherry Tree, joined; others followed, and soon there were preaching stations at Beatty's Work's and Carr's school houses.

The summer on 1856, the synod of the R. P. Church resolved to establish a mission in Syria and Rev. R. J. Dodds was selected as one of the missionaries. He preached his farewell address to his people in Indiana county, August 3d, 1856, and the same year went to Syria. The societies depended upon supplies till 1859, when Rev. T. M. Elder was called, and ordained April 19th. Under the pastoral charge of Rev. Dodds the building of five new churches was completed, all of which have since been built, for until this time there was but one building within the area of the charge and that one in Armstrong county. The first built in this county was in Montgomery township, called "Bear Run" Church, opened for services about 1860. The second near the line of east and north Mahoning townships was opened, August 25, 1861, and was called Oakland.

Samuel Becket was the first ordained elder at Bear Run, which office he held to his death in 1866. In 1860, Peter Sharp, of Bear Run, and Robert McIsaac, of Mahoning, were chosen elders, and James Graham and William Martin, of Bear Run, deacons. In 1861, the congregation was divided into two charges; Bear Run was united with the societies in Jefferson county, and Mahoning with Rehoboth, in Armstrong county.

Rev. A. J. McFarland was ordained pastor of the former in February, 1865, and Rev. T. M. Elder continued in charge of the latter until April 1st, 1866, when he resigned. Rev. McFarland next gave up his

* William and Mary, in 1689, established Episcopacy in England and Ireland, and Presbyterianism in Scotland. – ED.

† See action of Synod in 1869.

charge in Jefferson county, and it became a mission station for some years, when the connection between Rehoboth and Mahoning was severed, and in 1871 the two societies in Indiana county, with three elders, Peter Sharp, James Graham and Robert McIsaac, and one deacon, William Martin; James Graham, sr., having died.

The pulpits of these two societies were occupied by different preachers till September, 1874, when Rev. J. F. Crozier was called, and in conjunction with Rehoboth the call was accepted, and he was ordained November 18th, 1874. This pastoral relation continues with good feeling and happy results to the present time.

Rev. R. J. Dodds, D. D., revisited his native country in the fall of 1865; passed through his old congregation, visiting most all his old friends, and returned to Syria in the fall of 1866, where he died December 11, 1870, universally beloved and lamented.