

SALTSBURG PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

The first Presbyterians in the vicinity of what is now Saltsburg came into this section shortly after the opening of a land office in 1769 for sale of these lands, but it is very difficult to obtain any definite information of the time of first preaching. There appears to have been preaching at Unity in 1766, with the exception of an occasional sermon in the new settlements, there does not appear a record of the establishment of a pastorate in what is now Indiana county till the call of Rev. Joseph Henderson to Ebenezer, and even that time is uncertain, yet we learn he took charge of that congregation in 1799. Of his labors, as well as those of the church, we give sketch elsewhere. Those living in the vicinity of the river in these years, and until 1824, worshiped with the congregations at Poke Run, Congruity, Salem or Ebenezer, and received their training under the ministry of Revs. Porter, McPherson, Henderson, Davis and Laird.

It was no uncommon thing in these early days for them to go several miles to divine service, carrying their rifles for protection, and remain for two discourses, returning home without having seen fire, for, as we have seen in the history of these early tents and log churches, there were no arrangements for fire. The first record we have of a distinct religious movement in the neighborhood was the organization of a little Sabbath school in the early part of the present century. The school was taught by Messrs. Robert and John Robinson, "and is believed to have been kept up until finally transferred to a little log schoolhouse at the end of the present railroad bridge." This little Sunday school and prayer meeting was the germ from which the present Sabbath school grew, and was probably one of the earliest movements of this kind in Western Pennsylvania."

A small stone building was erected at a cost of about \$600, and opened for worship in 1820. Joseph W. Henderson conducted the first service, standing upon a work-bench for a pulpit, and as the floor was not yet laid, the hearers sat upon the hewed sleepers, with their feet upon the ground. There was neither glass in the windows or fire in the house, and the day was uncomfortably cold. This building was completed and furnished with pews in the spring of 1831, and destroyed by fire a few days later, April 1st, 1831.

The congregation was organized, by order of the Redstone Presbytery, by Rev. Thomas Davis, August 1st, 1824, and John Robinson, John McKee and Wm. H. Wray were chose elders, and the two latter ordained, the former having served in Ebenezer congregation; and soon after Andrew Love, Esq., was added to the number. There is no record obtainable of names or number of constituents, probably forty members in all.

The first pastor was Rev. Joseph Harper, who served the church in conjunction with Warren (now Apollo) until 1829. The number of members at the close of his pastorate was about 100. Saltsburg, laid out lots in 1816-17, by this time had twelve or fifteen houses. Of the 100 members of the church at the close of his pastorate there were but eight left in 1870, and we give the names; Elizabeth Robinson, Robert Henderson, Kezia White, Samuel Patton, Adam Robinson, William Lemon, Francis Love and John M. Robinson.

Rev. Watson Hughes, commenced his labors of the church soon after Rev. Harper left, and continued to serve the two congregations until 1838, when Warren was relinquished, and his time devoted to Saltsburg, serving it until 1845, when poor health and loss of voice caused him to sever the relation. The membership at the close of his labors was 219. The highest point his salary ever reached was \$475, and the habit of those days was to fall below the amount pledged, so we learn that at the close of his labors, the church was owing him \$500. During his pastorate, however, a substantial brick church was built 60 x 75 feet, but much time and money was spent since in improvement, which has resulted in a very handsome and comfortable edifice, and beautiful surroundings.

Rev. W. W. Woodend, succeeded Rev. Hughes, in the Pastorate, and was ordained and installed January 14, 1846, having served the church from April, 1845. During his ministry the growth has been steady, and we are indebted to his history of Saltsburg church, for most all the facts of this sketch, and from his reports we obtain the fact that up to 1870, during the twenty-five years of his ministry, 800 souls were received into the church, and with, decrease by death and removal, still numbered at that time 371, or net gain of 152. The average amount contributed to benevolent objects during that time, was \$326 per annum.

Of the late events in this church, records have not been furnished us, but it is known that an unusual interest was manifested in 1876, and the accessions for that year alone must have reached over one hundred.

In addition to the labors of the church, the pastor served as Principal of Saltsburg Academy for several years.

We note changes in the session: – Alex'r White was elected elder in 1834, and died October 21, 1843. William McIlwain and Samuel Patton, elected in 1840, and James Rhea and William Moore, July 22, 1849; Thomas McKee, May 23, 1852. James B. Robinson, James Rodgers, and Isaiah White, were ordained and installed, December 3, 1858; S. B. Mercer, James Ewing, Johnston Glass and Daniel Rhea, September 8, 1867.

John McKee, of first session, died August 18, 1849; Andrew Love, March 16, 1851, in his 67th year; W. H. Wray, dismissed April 24, 1854, to Ebenezer church, died January 1, 1869; John Robinson died April 25, 1856, aged 84 years.

Of those afterwards appointed, Isaiah White, was killed in battle of Spottsylvania, Va., May 10, 1864; James Rhea, died November 29, 1867.