

BETHEL AND HER PEOPLE

The history of the founders of Bethel is very meager. It is known that the church was organized with the following men acting as officers or elders: Allen Graham, David Reed, Robert Sutton, Andrew Fee, and Andrew Griffith.

The Graham family is still represented on the old homestead near our East Union church in Buffington Township, in the person of Allen Graham, a namesake. It may be added that the homestead has never been out of the hands of a Graham from the time it was first taken up in the 18th century.

Thomas, a son of Andrew Fee, was later an elder in Bethel and Gillis McLaughlin, treasurer of the Heshbon church is a descendant of his. There is little known about the families that composed the charter membership but we know that they must have been widely scattered for the parish then included the greater part of four townships. At the first, services would only be held once in six weeks or two months, depending upon the number of supplies Presbytery had on hand with which to cover the territory. However, the Communion seasons were more regular and would consist of at least five sermons, one on Friday, Saturday, Monday following, and two on Sabbath, one in morning and one after the noonday lunch. At the Monday service the congregational business meeting would conclude the program. People would not miss the Communion services then any more than the average boy would miss a meal, and so those who lived some distance from the church would make arrangements to stay with some friend nearer the church during the entire season, thus combining the social and spiritual fellowship. In those wilderness days the mode of travel was on foot or horseback, and it is truly wonderful how many people one horse's back would accommodate in an emergency.

These were also the days of the different social and domestic customs. The young men and ladies would go barefooted at home and it would be a real trial for them to wear shoes once in four or five weeks for half a day, so they would carry their shoes with them till they got within sight of the church and then put them on. Some years it was also difficult to buy shoes and in such cases they would either go without or take turns going to church and wear each others shoes. This would involve selecting shoes for the largest feet and rest of the family when it came their time to go, would have to move around in them the best that they could. At a Presbytery meeting in Bolivar, in 1918, the writer heard some of the older people of the Presbytery recalling incidence of their youth, when as young men and maidens, they would thrust their bare feet beneath their bench, little thinking that the sadly calloused soles were, to the eyes of those behind them, any less an object of interest and wonder than would have been the more delicate anterior view of those same pedal extremities if extended in the ordinary manner to the kindly gaze of those in their own seat.

The loyalty of the people of Bethel, to their church, has become almost proverbial. In many cases those who have left the locality retained their membership with their first love so long that it was difficult up-to-date roll of the church members. Being worthy sons of their Scotch-Irish forebears they brought with them a zeal for pure

worship and strong convictions. This has had such an influence on the entire community as can never be estimated rightly in the present time but “her children shall rise up and call her blessed.” In the matter of liberality it is Bethel’s boast that she has never failed to pay her minister his salary or more, and missions have always received a place in her budgets.

Other families, connected with Bethel since her organization, of which there are descendants still in this locality, or of which we have some record, are too numerous to note in detail. Some of the more important are briefly mentioned, however.

Cornelius Hutchinson came to America from England just before the war, fought against his native land, moved to Indiana County immediately after the war and was connected with our church for several years. His grandson, by the same name, was an elder in our church from the time of the civil war till his death in 1891. Descendants of the family are yet in the community but being much nearer to Armagh are members of the Presbyterian church of that place.

Another early family that has been connected with Bethel for more than a century, and perhaps one that has had a greater influence upon Bethel than any other one family, is that of John McCrory. Grandfather McCrory came to this country from Armagh, Ireland, in 1814, when a young man of 26. He was a man of strong character and of strong religious convictions and was soon made one of Bethel’s elders, in which capacity he faithfully and efficiently served till his death in 1867. While he has been gone for over fifty years his name is frequently mentioned as a Christian’s ideal. His son David followed closely in his steps; was an elder also and has left to Bethel’s more recent members the rich and priceless heritage of the saintly life. David McCrory’s children are officers or members in our Johnstown church, and Grier, a grandson, is a minister at Henderson, Illinois.

A daughter of John McCrory married Joseph Mack, and from this branch of the family Bethel is profiting mostly at present. Hugh Mack, J. A. Mack, and Mrs. C. N. McKelvey, officers in our church are all grandchildren of John McCrory, being children of Elliabeth (McCrory) Mack and Joseph Mack.

John G. McCrory, president of the McCrory stores, is also a grandson of John McCrory and has a summer home near the old homestead. His father, who gave promise of leading the same kind of a Godly life his father lived, died in the civil war. At this time when the war is raging and strong character is as much in demand as ever in the history of the world, it should be not counted untimely to give one experience from this man’s life, which has been verified by several eye witnesses in the writer’s hearing. Mr. McCrory had been accustomed at home to have family worship every evening and upon going to war he thought it necessary to continue to observe this devotional hour. At first there were several of the home boys that would gather with him to sing and pray, but the men in the adjoining tent made so much fuss about it that they were compelled to eliminate the singing and after some time most of the little prayer group had deserted.

However, Mr. McCrory always had his own devotions irrespective of others' company or objections.

The Mack family was one of first families in our vicinity and is now represented by two branches which Hugh Mack and D. D. Mack are respectively exponents. This family has always been staunch supporters of the church and have always composed a substantial part of the members, there now being twenty-one members in the Bethel and Heshbon churches.

Uncle Davy Mack, now in his 79th year, Bethel's oldest member, observed his golden wedding anniversary December 1, 1918. Uncle Davy likes a good story as well as ever and told this one himself. One evening at the Young People's meeting, the leader was calling on some to pray when a mouse ran up uncle Davy's trouser leg and just as he got a good hold on the varmint, his name, too, was called. Uncle Davy just sank his nails a little deeper into the ribs of the animal, made his prayer and then proceeded to murder the pest.

Robert Hood was one of the early elders as was also one of the Mabons, but their descendants are now connected with the New Florence church. Other of the elders are Andrew Brown, William Reynolds, John Dick, Smith Dick, Joseph Mack, Robert H. Hutchinson, Robert G. and Robert D. Mack and the present elders, William Campbell, Frank Campbell, John Mabon. Armor Clark and Hugh Mack. This is only a partial list of the elders; others whose work was just as worthy and possibly more so, are omitted due to inadequate information. The names of other families are known, however, some of whom have been officers of the Church, as for instance, the Huls, Pattersons, McMichaels, Calhouns, Dunlaps, Clark, (perhaps a forebearer of our present elder), Wallaces, of which lineage Mrs. P. L. Rehn comes, St. Clairs, McCartneys, McClains, Tombs now of the Presbyterian church of Armagh, Graham, and the Auls whose name is yet in the Heshbon church. The Dick family is yet with us, being represented by the E. E. Dick, the Harry Dick and Miss Bertha Dick branches.

As to the membership the church reached its zenith in 1869 when there were 269 members enrolled, but since that time it has slowly receded in numbers due to several conditions. Several other churches have been organized and have taken many from us. New Florence, Bolivar, Blairsville, Mechanicsburg, East Union, Fairfield United Presbyterian churches have all received some aid from Bethel as well as eight other churches outside our faith. Then, too, there has been in these last decades a decided movement away from the farms of our locality, due to the higher wages and better educational advantages of the city. The selling of the coal lands made it possible for many to leave that otherwise would have yet been worshipping at Bethel. In addition to these facts noted, there was also an exodus from our church by way of Titusville to Vinton, Iowa, of some five families of St. Clairs and their sister Mrs. Robert McCormick.

Mr. Clark the father of our elder, was a one time care-taker of the church in the days when the members believed in a liberal use of the weed. Of course the services were long and it was expected that the men would make themselves as much at home at

church as in their own homes and consequently the longer the services the greater the amount of discarded tobacco and its byproducts that would be unceremoniously deposited in the aisles and before each male member. To all this Mr. Clark strenuously objected but he didn't know whether it would be best to try to get the pastor to shorten his sermons or to get the men to refrain from the excessive use of the delicacy during worship service. Having a somewhat extended knowledge of both pastor and people he decided that neither plan would work, so he made a ruling of his own to the effect that every man that chewed tobacco in church services had to either swallow the juice or provide his own spittoon, and in case it got full to empty it. The next Sabbath some brought spittoons but more brought the old fashioned augers and bored holes in the floor which served not only the purpose of drainage but also as a diversion during the tedious service, to those who would stage a contest to see who could hit the hole the most times in succession.

The Y.P.C.U. was organized in Rev. Campbell's pastorate but was of short duration. Its reorganization took place in March, 1915, due to the stimulus found in J. Orwin Mack and C. N. McKelvey. In 1916 the Presbyterial Convention was held at Bethel, and there resulted so much interest the following year that Bethel took the Silver Loving cup in 1917 and tied for it in 1918. The society was reorganized again in 1918, and the membership is based literally upon the spirit and letter of the pledge. As a result the meetings are more interesting and more vital though there are less members than formally. The society so far this year, that is since July first, has given \$50.00 to French for Mission, and a like sum to the W. E. P. F., thereby entering the Rainbow division as the first Y.P.C.U. in our entire church. The society now has about 57 members and is under the leadership of Miss Bertha Dick, Mrs. Armor Clark, Cloyd Dick, and Miss Madie Wagner. Paul Campbell, one of our most efficient members recently succumbed to the influenza and has left a vacancy which shall be hard to fill both in church and in the Young People's work. Paul had not only ability but was willing to do all he could.

The missionary spirit of the church is propagated through the Woman's Missionary Society and is strong throughout the congregation. The recent Thank-offering amounted to about \$125.00. The officers of the organization are Mrs. D. W. Mack, president; Mrs. C. N. McKelvey, treasurer; Mrs. P. L. Rehn, secretary.

In 1918 a movement was started by Hugh Mack and Samuel Campbell looking toward to incorporating of the cemetery. This was accomplished and now means are being provided by which the cemetery will be better cared for in the future. The burial ground is the oldest in the country—its first burial taking place about 1808 or soon after. The oldest grave marked is 1819 but there are a number of graves in one plot with crude markers, some of which are known to antedate the year 1819 and most of them may. The plot of the ground has not always been regarded and thus the lots present an irregular appearance and it is impossible to definitely ascertain all the graves. There have been perhaps two-thousand people laid away in those few acres.

The first burial has a history. A stranger came to the store at Clyde one stormy night needing clothes and food and medical care. He was cared for as best they could but

died in a short time and was buried in the new cemetery which had just shortly been laid out near the church. They were quite systematic and made the grave near one side but it was later discovered that the grave was not within the actual boundary of the cemetery, so the body was raised and placed within the new and surer survey. The location of the grave is not known.