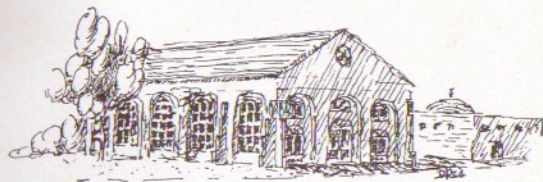
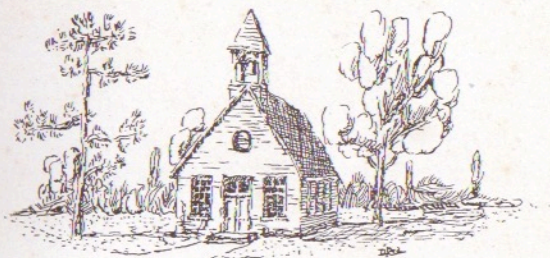


A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
HOUSTON
TEXAS

1839 - 1939



1939
Wilson Stationery & Printing Company
Houston, Texas



(Top)—First Church building, drawn from description of building, from 1842 to 1862. (Center)—First Church building, from sketch, brick building 1867. (Bottom)—First Church building, from photograph, stone building, erected 1894 and dedicated about 5 years later, when free of debt.

appreciative of this special provision and came in such numbers that the Session organized a Sunday School to be held Sunday afternoons. Elders Bailey and Burke were appointed as a committee to organize the colored Sunday School.

The choir was placed again in the center of the Church and Mr. A. Adey employed to play the melodian, at \$25.00 a month. The members were requested to buy hymnals; and the publishers were requested to keep a depository at Elder E. H. Cushing's Store, where the members could supply themselves.

In 1867 the Church officers reported the "Church debt as \$9,001.00."

At a congregational meeting in June, 1868, a report of the Board of Trustees was read by Mr. MacGregor—none of the Trustees being present. You recall the Session had disavowed responsibility for the fiscal affairs of the Church. This was the first report of the Board of Trustees since the burning of the old Church in 1862. The Board consisted of A. J. Burke, E. H. Cushing, G. A. Forsgard, Robert Stuart and Wm. Christian. These Trustees, in making their report, stated that the new brick Church building, now complete, had cost about \$30,000; that there was a debt of \$8,900 against the property, of which \$2,900 was pressing, *one thousand two hundred* of which was due workmen. The collections from the pew rent did nothing more than meet expenses and pay the Pastor's salary. Then it was that Mrs. A. C. Allen donated \$300 for pressing obligations. Later the Pastor offered to go to the States to solicit funds.

February 28, 1870, the Trustees requested financial aid from outside citizens to help in paying off the debt of the Church. They further requested the Pastor, who had offered to go as an agent to the States to get donations, to reduce his salary and charge only his actual expenses,

said expenses to be paid from what he collected. ("Some trading".) Following this, Reverend W. C. Summerville, on October 20, 1870, resigned and went to Canada.

In July, 1871, arrangements as a temporary Supply were made with S. Fraser (Frahe). These arrangements terminated in September, 1871.

Reverend J. J. Read

The Session called Licentiate J. J. Read of Port Gibson, Mississippi, to be their Pastor on September 18, 1871. He entered upon his labors November, 1871. He was a young man, recently graduated from Columbia Seminary and entered upon his work with energy and holy zeal. Reverend J. W. Miller, D. D., was present when Reverend J. J. Read preached his first sermon in Houston and reported that it was a "pleasant, good sermon."

Some members of the Session saw to it that the young Pastor was *instructed* to read the following from the pulpit: "Whereas it does earnestly and solemnly enjoin upon all its Sessions and Presbyteries under its care the absolute necessity of enforcing the discipline provided in our constitution against offenses—under the word offenses including the attendance by members upon theatrical exhibitions and performances and promiscuous dancing—against intemperance and against availing themselves of the expedients for evading pecuniary obligations now permitted by the laws of the country, in such manner as cannot be justified by the conscience enlightened by the spirit and word of God and as must dishonor the cause of Christ". The Session endorsed these deliverances and asked the new preacher to make such remarks on the subject as he might deem expedient. The writer is truly glad that he was not in that young preacher's shoes: he can but imagine the affect of this "machine gun explosion" upon the minds and hearts of the saints.

In reviewing the records of Reverend J. J. Read's services and from personal knowledge of the man, the writer came to the conclusion that he was a very pious person absorbed in the preaching of the gospel and an enthusiastic worker for the welfare of the Church, but unfortunately a poor psychologist and not too practical. The Church, however, prospered under his administration and it grew in numbers and zeal. The membership was almost doubled under his leadership.

Reverend J. J. Read accepted a call, December, 1876, to Andrews Academy in Indian Territory and spent the rest of his days working among the Indians.

(He was elected Moderator of the Texas Synod in 1894.)

Relationship was one of the things about the Reverend J. J. Read which interested the young people. It came about this way: The Reverend Mr. Porter (Presbyterian) lost his wife, she leaving a little girl. He married again and shortly thereafter died, leaving the little girl and a widow. Now Governor Frank Lubbock, a widower, married the widow Porter and the Reverend J. J. Read married the young lady, Miss Porter. What kin was the Reverend J. J. Read to Governor Frank Lubbock?

CONDENSED RECORDS

Just prior to the calling of Reverend J. J. Read, the Session complied with the General Assembly's requirements to take charge of the Sunday School. According to "instructions" the Superintendent was elected to hold his position, subject to the approval of the Session, and make his report yearly. Further, no one in the Sunday School should be a permanent teacher unless approved by the Session.

Mr. Donald MacGregor was the inspiration for these acts and was elected Superintendent. Mr. MacGregor

served about one year during which time nineteen scholars and eight teachers joined the Church, on profession of faith. He was followed by Mr. H. D. Taylor who had been Assistant Superintendent. After the first eleven months of service Mr. Taylor was complimented by the Session and was re-elected each year until he had served for twenty-two years.

The Trustees placed a debt on the Church of \$5,000 in 1871, much to the distress of the congregation. Reverend J. J. Read made the mistake of trying, as a committee of one, to raise the money to pay this debt. And further, the pew rents being poorly paid, collectors were appointed. Still it was necessary to solicit contributions to pay running expenses, not to mention the bonded debt. The Trustees further had to replace the Church floor, for it had caved in. The Trustees, without consulting anyone, increased the Pastor's salary from \$1,500 to \$2,000 since he had taken unto himself a wife. Apparently this increase in salary caused much dissatisfaction in the congregation.

On December 27, 1871, a congregational library was established and conducted under the direction of the Session.

On October 29, 1872, an over-zealous Session ordered that on the last Sunday of each month the usual Bible Lesson should be omitted and there should be a review of the Child's Shorter Catechism in the Sunday School. Questions recited on the preceding Sabbaths during the month should be reviewed. There should also be a Teachers' Meeting on the Friday evening preceding. The Session further recommended that the teachers visit the members of their classes, and that they conduct a Prayer Meeting, twenty minutes before the hour of Sunday School. The Prayer Meeting proved a failure and on November 18, the Session rescinded their order and re-

turned to the old method. They must have forgotten the Superintendent.

Reverend J. R. Hutchinson was given permission to labor on the North Side under the direction of the Session.

In 1873, January 10th, "the Pastor with one of the Elders was directed to visit a kindly admonition to several of the Church members who had indulged in acts of worldly conformity." Good results followed. This practice seems to have gone out of use.

Mr. A. Adey, on May 26, 1873, was invited to play the organ at \$25.00 a month, and the choir was asked to occupy the front pews set aside for it. Later that same year, Mr. Adey resigned as organist, because the Session endeavored to instruct him in playing the organ. On August 5th, the resignation was accepted.

Again, June 28, 1873, Donald MacGregor presented his resignation as Active Elder. In July, the same year, the Session declined to accept it.

September 11, 1874, Donald MacGregor presented his resignation as Ruling Elder, with the view of entering the ministry. November 20, 1874, he was granted permission and invited to labor in the mission fields within the bounds of this Church and was ordained as Pastor of the Chapel Hill Church.

The choir had long been a delicate subject, so the Session had the Reverend J. J. Read appointed a committee of one to make provision for it. He suggested that the remuneration for the choir and organist be raised by private subscription. This was unsatisfactory. Then Elder C. W. Sedgewick came to the rescue and offered to play the organ, gratis. On March 2, 1875, Miss Helmina Plough was elected organist at \$30.00 a month. On April 6, 1875, Mr. C. W. Sedgewick again offered his services, gratis. This time the offer was accepted and

he served in that capacity very satisfactorily for many years.

On June 1, 1875, Mr. and Mrs. A. Adey were dismissed to the Episcopal Church by "open letter."

November 19, 1875, Reverend Donald MacGregor reported the organization of two churches (names not given) on the 12th of that month.

Reverend James H. McNeely, D. D.

The situation when James H. McNeely, D. D., was called in January, 1877, from the Edgefield Church near Nashville, Tennessee, was as follows: The Church's financial affairs were apparently run on the principal of "let George do it." The rotting of the floor of the Church caused many to fear that the roof might cave in, something the Trustees had been dreading for about a year. They, however, were without funds to repair either roof or floor. In spite of all this, the congregation decided to call Dr. McNeely at a salary of \$3,000 per year. They gambled upon the hope that the new minister would increase the demand for pews, thus enabling them to meet their obligations. This was done in face of the fact that trouble arose when the Trustees had acted similarly in the case of raising Dr. J. J. Read's salary from \$1,500 to \$2,000 on the occasion of his marriage.

On his arrival, it appeared to Reverend J. H. McNeely that the Trustees were running the affairs of the Church without Session supervision. On January 6, 1878, he prevailed upon the congregation to conform to the Presbyterian method of electing Deacons to manage the fiscal affairs of the Church, as provided in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Church Council, found in the Church Records. Until this time these affairs had been managed by the Trustees, and the Deacons had only taken up collections on the Lord's day. It so happened that seven

Deacons were elected, and upon resolution by the congregation, they were also made Trustees. As Trustees they represented the congregation in its relation to the commonwealth and acted as custodians of the property. The congregation gave the retiring Trustees a vote of thanks. The Deacons, although instructed in their duties by the Pastor, were so little versed in financial affairs that the money from the rent of the pews continued to be insufficient for the current expenses of the Church.

In 1878, after three years' discussion, the Deacons covered the roof with asphalt and put hog chains as rods to hold the walls together.

After about a year there was \$525.00 due the Pastor, \$55.00 due the Sexton, \$1,500.00 due on the long borrowed debt; and besides that the sum of \$426.26 recently borrowed. The Pastor whereupon told the Board of Deacons and Elders of the large amount still due him, and of his desire to build a home in Houston. (There was no Manse.) This he could not think of doing unless his stipend was promptly paid. The Session, after deliberating from February until July, advised Dr. McNeely to return to his sick wife in Tennessee and remain there as long as needed. So in September, he resigned and spent the remainder of his days in active pastoral work in and around Nashville. After the death of Reverend E. D. Junkin he was again solicited as Pastor of the First Church, but courteously expressed his regrets at not being able to serve.

Dr. J. H. McNeely's pastorate was signally blessed with evidences of having effected a marked increase in the membership of the Church. In the two years and eight months of his active pastorate, the membership had grown from 166 to 264. In spite of all that, the Deacons about starved him out.