

History of the West Liberty Christian Church

Compiled by Earl Nicodemus

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Preface: This document is a compilation of information from a variety of sources. It includes information from a church history published in 1963 by Mabel Bonar Waddell and information published on 3-8-1980 by Forest Cochran in addition to information harvested from a variety of online sources.

The roots of the West Liberty Christian Church can be traced back to the ministry of Alexander Campbell. Campbell was ordained into the ministry at Brush Run Church on January 1, 1812. His contributions to the Restoration Movement are well known. As his group of followers in the Long Run grew, they began having regular meetings in private homes around the year 1829. A similar group was meeting in the Short Creek area. Eventually, the two groups joined into a single group.

In 1833, Campbell called a meeting of the congregations to discuss the need for a house of worship. The outcome of that meeting was the construction of a brick church building located south of the old West Liberty Cemetery. The congregation continued to occupy the brick building and continued to grow in numbers. By the mid 1860's the congregation had decided that a larger church building was needed.

In 1870, the congregation dedicated the new church building which stood along Rt. 88 next to the West Liberty Cemetery where the Dorothy Sommerville house now stands. The building was constructed using timber framing which is also known as post and beam construction. The front of the building featured two doors that provided a men's entryway and a women's entryway. The gable part of the front featured a semicircular vent which added a nice decorative touch to the building. Although the exact chain of ownership for the property upon which the building was situated could not be established, it was once part of the two acres of land that had been owned by the Ohio County Court from 1777-1797.

Upon her death in 1925, Julia C. Prall left her home and a plot of land to the West Liberty Christian Church for the purpose of building a church building and parsonage. Her home was located across the street from the West Liberty Academy. Initially, the congregation decided to construct a new church building at the site of the Prall house, but they discovered that it would be less expensive to move the current church building to the new location instead of building a new one. Volunteers from the West Liberty Christian Church and others dismantled the Prall house in 1947 or 1948. The salvaged materials were sold for around \$250.00. After the Prall house was removed, volunteers from the church constructed a “carefully measured foundation” was constructed for the church building on the site. The foundation was elevated to provide a basement for the building.



The congregation contracted with a gentleman named Ben Wade from Wellsburg, WV for moving the building. Mr. Wade was an 80 year old retired contractor. The building move started without incident in 1949. However, the weather did not cooperate and the building became bogged down in the mud on the DeGarmo property. It was necessary to leave the building in that location all winter until the following summer when things dried out enough to resume the move. To make matters worse, Mr. Wade ran out of money to pay his workers and they all walked off of the job. In the summer of 1950, a group of local farmers brought their tractors along with cables and other equipment and resumed the move. Mr. Wade stayed and helped to oversee the move. Some of the farmers who were involved were Stanley Sonda, Harry Cox, and G.W. Bonar.



The ladies of the church conducted various fundraisers to help to finance the movement of the church and the addition of the kitchen and vestibule. They also helped to finance the installation of the Celotex wall panels and a new floor for the sanctuary sometime in the late 1950's during the ministry of Andrew Leitch. The oak pews were also installed during the time of Dr. Leitch's ministry between 1957 and 1961.

The building opened at the new location in 1950. An entryway was added to the front. An addition was added to the rear of the building in which provided a kitchen in the basement along with classrooms, a baptistery, and a minister's office upstairs.

On July 17, 2002 part of the ceiling structure of the church building suddenly collapsed into the sanctuary. It included the central beam and the ceiling joists for the back half of the ceiling structure.



A weight watcher group was meeting in the basement when the collapse occurred, but no one was hurt. However, the building was so badly damaged that repairing it was not practical. The congregation began meeting in the West Liberty Elementary School and the damaged building was razed in the following year. After receiving the insurance payment and securing a \$250,000 loan, the congregation contracted out for the construction of the shell of the new building. Then, members of the congregation and other volunteers took over the job with Jim Rinehart managing the project. When the downstairs of the new building was sufficiently completed, the congregation began holding services in the basement as work continued on the upstairs of the building. On September 19, 2010, the new building was dedicated.



The Saga of the Bell



The story of the West Liberty Christian Church Bell is worth including in this document. Cast in Pittsburgh in 1890, the bronze bell called the faithful to worship at the West Liberty Christian Church for many years until 1949 when it was taken down so that the church building could be moved from its original location by the old West Liberty Cemetery to its new location across from the West Liberty Academy. The three hundred pound bell ended up in the bed of a pickup truck owned by a parishioner named John Raniger. After hauling the bell around for a couple of weeks, he and Bill Gray hooked a chain around a tree by the church and drove forward pulling the bell out onto the ground. For a several years, church caretakers mowed around the bell when tending the lawn. Tired of the inconvenience, Bill Gray dug a large hole, and he and John rolled the bell into the hole, and covered it up. Only a small tip of the hanger protruded from the ground to give away the location. Just enough stuck out of the ground to be occasionally struck by a careless lawnmower operator. The bell remained buried for a few years until the 1960's when Elkhorn Valley Christian Service Camp needed a bell. It was then dug up and transported to the camp. Although the camp never used it, the bell remained there until the summer of 2000. During that summer, the church held a jubilee to celebrate its 160th anniversary. During the festivities, the saga of the bell was told. Church members wondered if anyone knew what had happened to the bell since the camp never used it. Dennis Arnold reported that it was still at the camp. The church asked if the camp would give it back since they were not using it. The camp board agreed to allow the church to bring it back home to West Liberty. Dennis Arnold and Earl Nicodemus went out to the camp to retrieve the bell. The bell was located deep in a briar patch at the edge of a field by the woods. It had been at that location for many years. Years of exposure to the elements had tarnished the brass to a pale green. Using

the camp's backhoe, the bell was retrieved from the briars and set it into the back of Earl Nicodemus's truck. The Nicodemus family constructed a wooden frame to hold the bell. At the Christmas eve service in 2000, a twelve-year-old boy from the church, wielding a ball peen hammer in place of the missing clapper, rang the bell for the first time in over fifty one years. It was an emotional moment for some of the older West Liberty Residents who had not heard the bell rung since their childhood in 1948.

The with the aid of a chain hoist over a branch in a tree, the bell and its wooden stand were returned to the Nicodemus yard until after the new church building was completed. Larry Capp fabricated a mounting bracket for the bell beneath the new church sign where it is now permanently displayed. The bell is badly worn from years of use and has a small horizontal crack. As a result, it is out of tune, so it is no longer in use.

West Liberty Christian Church Ministers

Early ministers included professors and students from Bethany College. Some of those early ministers served for only a year or so. Most of the information for this listing was provided by Forest Cochran's "History of the West Liberty Christian Church.

Ministers:

Professor W.B. Taylor: Unsure of start date to 1914

Frank Baston: 1915 to 1924

H.T. Garner: 1924

Harold Smith: 6-18-1925 to 6-19-1927

W. D. Brock: 7-3-1927 to 9-1-1933

Hugh H. Brown: 9-10-1933 to 1936

S. M. Adamson: 1936 to 1937

Park Netting: 1938 to 1939

Garth Maynard: 1939 to 1940

Dale Sowers: 1940 to 1941

Louis Deer: 1941 to January 1, 1943

Irwin T. Green: January 1, 1943 to May 1, 1943

Thomas Ullam: July 1, 1943 to July 1, 1944

Irwin T. Green: September 1, 1944 to July 1, 1951

Charles T. Brown: July 1, 1951 to December 1, 1952

Paul E. Woodard: January 1, 1953 to September 20, 1953

Jack Prater: June 1, 1954 to June 1, 1956

Robert Garner: June 1, 1956 to June 1, 1957

Dr. Andrew Leitch: October 1, 1957 to December 3, 1961

Dwight Chaplain: April 1, 1962 to April 28, 1963

Clinton Gill: May 5, 1963 to January 6, 1966

Richard McBride: February 13, 1966 to August 15, 1969

Karl M. Marshall: March 1, 1970 to April 1, 1975

Paul Mullikin: April, 1975 to 1976

James P. Wilkins: June, 1976 to December, 1988

Joseph Dennis Arnold: January, 1989 to Present (April, 2016)