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THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CHAPEL HILL

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The village of Chapel Hill began when the University began. Its lots were laid off and offered for sale when the foundations of the first university building (the old East) were laid. This was in the fall of the year 1793, and in the century that has elapsed the life of the University has been the life of the town. Its temporary prostration (in the dark days of Reconstruction) was the prostration of the town. The builders of the Presbyterian church in Chapel Hill and for many years its chief officers were all officially connected with the Institution, so that a history of this church, more than that of any other in the place must necessarily make many references to the University.

The three first Presidents of the University were Presbyterians (the two first were ministers) and their administration extended through the first seventy years of its existence. The first church organization in Chapel Hill was Presbyterian, under the auspices of either President Chapman or President Caldwell. As the records of Orange Presbytery from 1770-1795 and also those from 1812-1827, were unfortunately burned, our information as to the church here is very meagre till about 1830, and for some years after that date. We know there was a church regularly constituted. In the report of Orange Presbytery to Synod, 1827, Chapel Hill church is enrolled with a membership of twenty. Dr. Caldwell, who had been ordained to the ministry in New Jersey previous to his coming to North Carolina in 1796, was stated supply.

It would be interesting to have the names of these twenty members. Charles Chalmers and Thomas Taylor are mentioned as elders between 1820 and 1830, and later Andrew Macaulay.

Elisha Mitchell became a Professor in the University in 1818, and [was or] dained by Orange Presbytery in 1821. James Phillips was Professor [in 1827 and] was licensed to preach in 1833, and ordained 1835. There is no date of the admission of either of them to the church as members. There is a note of the admission of Mrs. Julia

Phillips in July 1826, "by certificate."

The church is reported to Synod with tolerable regularity after the year 1827, and its assessments marked as paid. Dr. Caldwell remained stated supply till his death in 1835. The report for 1836, mentions Rev. B. Mitchell as stated supply, and he continued to be, with some intermissions, for many years. Now and then a slight increase of membership is noted.

The church session-book, if indeed any was kept regularly till 1845, has long since disappeared. The Presbyterians had everything in their own hands for the first forty years of Chapel Hill. A Sunday-school was established in 1826, by members of the faculty, assisted by their wives and some of the pious students of the University. This was held in Person Hall, then used as the college chapel, and the only place short of Hillsboro where divine service was held. Sunday morning preaching, conducted by Dr. Caldwell and his professors, was attended not only by the students whose attendance at that hour was compulsory, but by all the village. There the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were administered for many years.

Under the revival preaching of Dr. Nettleton in 1830, and of Dr. Baker in 1835, a deeply serious impression was made on the community. Early in the thirties, a small wooden church building was erected, chiefly at the expense of the faculty, on the spot where the Presbyterian church now stands. This was for use at Sunday evening service, Sunday-school and weekly prayer-meeting, and no sectarian doctrines being broached, the religious life of Chapel Hill was conducted on a strictly union basis. The Rev. Dr. Hooper (Baptist), Rev. Dr. Green (Episcopal), Rev. Dr. Deems (Methodist) and the Rev. Mrs. Caldwell, Mitchell and Phillips, ministered here by turns to the small congregations assembled. Ex-Governor Swain succeeded Dr. Caldwell in the Presidency in 1835.

As the University grew the village population also increased, and this primitive way of worship was felt to be a little too broad to suit its wants. About 1840, the Methodists organized and provided themselves with a separate place of worship. In a

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few years the Episcopalians followed their example and under the guidance of Rev. Dr. Green of the University soon built a handsome church edifice. This was completed in 1848.

The Presbyterians had not looked on with indifference at seeing themselves gradually outnumbered by other sects—the Methodists and Baptists especially having taken possession of a large portion of Orange county, and outgrowing all others with great rapidity. They drew up together and blew upon the Presbyterian coal. In 1845, they reformed their session—electing President Swain and Charles Phillips elders—Dr. Mitchell being moderator and resolved that their time had come when they too must light their own camp-fires and display their own especial church banner.

The importance of Chapel Hill as the seat of the State University was growing with the growth of that Institution. The sons of Presbyterian families must not be allowed to spend the four years of college life with no opportunity afforded them of hearing defended, explained and enforced the grand tenets of that masculine form of Christian faith first delivered to the saints by Paul of Tarsus, and handed down the centuries by the Carthaginian saint, and John of Geneva.

The Rev. Dr. James Phillips whose attachment to the faith and forms of Presbyterianism was ardent and uncompromising had been chiefly occupied since his entrance in the ministry in preaching to the country churches at Little River, Fairfield and New Hope. To this last named he was especially attached, riding out there (seven miles) every Sunday morning and finding a great pleasure in ministering to the congregation for many years. He became prominent now among the handful of Chapel Hill Presbyterians in forwarding this resolve to erect a church building of their own.

After due consultation with the leading men of Orange Presbytery, and receiving the formal sanction of that body, Dr. Phillips undertook to secure the sum requisite by personal solicitation through the State. To this end he devoted his vacations from the duties of his professorship for several years, summer and winter, to visiting various sections and calling the attention of our church people to the importance of

the work. By 1848, he had collected and placed in bank the sum of \$3,589, and it was resolved to commence the building. President Swain, Dr. Mitchell and Charles Phillips being the building committee. The plan was furnished by A. R. Davis, of New York, a then well known architect, recommended by A. R. Davis, of New York, a then well known architect, recommended by Mr. James Donaldson of that city who had signified his interest in the new church by the handsome subscription of \$500. Of the whole sum subscribed (\$3,544) \$3,589 was collected, and of this, \$1,400 was contributed by three members of the Chapel Hill Church, Gov. Swain and the Mitchell and Phillips families.

A lot of one acre, about the most eligible in the village was purchased from the trustees of the University upon the explicit understanding that the service of the church should be so arranged as never to conflict with the regular Sabbath forenoon service in the college chapel.

Attendance upon chapel worship was obligatory in those days upon all connected with the University, and the absence of a student was marked to his discredit as much as if from a recitation. The trustees of the early days of the University were men of various religious beliefs, but they were united on one point--that the young should be trained in the way they should go, and that one way was the hearing of at least one good sermon a week. They were persuaded that the average college boy, if left to the freedom of his own will, would prefer a very late breakfast on Sunday morning and a subsequent lounge among his fellows, or the reading of a novel, to any pulpit delivery whatever in either his mother's church or his father's. The resolve was fixed to continue divine service in the college chapel at all hazards. The heads of the Presbyterian church being all officially connected with the University readily assented and gave the required pledge.

The church building was finished and dedicated Sept. 23rd, 1849. A very large congregation of all classes and creeds was assembled. Many came in from the country, and our Methodist brethren with kindly courtesy suspended their own services for the

day and joined with us, and surrendered their own pulpit to the visiting Presbyterian ministers.

Rev. Dr. Lacy preached the introductory sermon in the Methodist church, Saturday 22nd. Rev. John A. Gretter gave the dedication sermon and prayer Sunday morning from Hagai 2:9--college worship being courteously suspended for the occasion. Dr. Lacy officiated at the communion service, and again in the afternoon. Dr. Mitchell read a paper setting forth the motives which had prompted and secured this house of worship--pledging it not to conflict with Sunday morning service in the college chapel, not to assume any unbrotherly attitude towards other churches, but to assist in the advancement of Christianity, to maintain the doctrines and discipline of our own faith, and to afford religious instruction and guardianship to those young men of the University who preferred to receive it from us.

Dr. Phillips had the happiness to admit by baptism the first infant member, his own first grand child, Julia Vermeule, daughter of Charles and Laura (Battle) Phillips. (The first funeral service in the new church was that of this little one, called just as she had completed her second year of mortal life.)

Mrs. Charles Phillips and B. S. Hedrick then a student in the University were the first adult members received on examination Sept. 22d. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kirkland were received from New Hope a month later.

There were not twelve communing members in the church then constituted. In February, 1851, the roll shows but twelve, but these twelve contributed \$244 to the Church Boards. In 1853, there were but twenty-three members. "However"--and here we quote Rev. Dr. Rumble as good authority:--"It may be said of this church, as of Presbyterianism elsewhere in the State, that its members and adherents have been among the best and most influential men and women in society, whose character, education, and standing, second to none, gave their church a prominence and weight altogether disproportionated to its size."

And now a good step having been well taken, calculated to advance the best interests of the community and of the college, the Presbyterians most concerned did not allow their elation or enthusiasm to evaporate. They went on with the work. The ladies, under the lead of Mrs. R. J. Ashe, eldest daughter of Dr. Mitchell, formed a very active and successful sewing society, the proceeds of which within a year provided a carpet, chandeliers, window shades and pulpit sofa for the church. Several students of the University presented a handsome pulpit Bible. Charles Mitchell gave the pulpit cushion. Mrs. Anna Ashe gave two venerable chairs of colonial origin. Dr. Mitchell gave the tone wall enclosing the yard, and Miss Cornelia Phillips gave the stone pillars and gates.

Dr. Mitchell was appointed stated supply, and Messrs. David L. Swain, Charles Phillips and Joseph Kirkland were ruling elders. No salary was paid to those members of the University faculty who ministered to the church. This allows for the liberal contributions to the church collections averaging \$20 to the member. In 1853 there were eleven families, giving twenty-three communicants. Collections for the year amounted to \$383. The Sunday-school numbered twenty. In 1859 the members were forty-eight; Sunday-school thirty. There was a steady though not large increase of membership, the congregations at the Sunday services (always in the p. m.) and at the weekly prayer-meetings were always respectable, always attracting the best scholars and most thoughtful young men from college. No special revival of religious feeling is recorded till 1856, during a second visit after an interval of twenty-three years from the venerable Dr. Baker of Austin, Texas. Eight were added to the church at this time, and fourteen soon after. A number of these were from among the students; not all, however, who were seriously impressed here united with the church here, preferring to go to their own homes. Some of them joined other denominations and became useful and honored among them.

In 1857 Dr. Mitchell met his death among the gorges of Black mountain where he was engaged on a scientific exploration. He had resigned the work of stated supply

the year before, and Dr. Phillips had been chosen to succeed him. This he was able to undertake as there were no forenoon services here, and he always returned from New Hope in the afternoon. The increase of the village population had increased the church membership and there were some plainly dissatisfied with the arrangement which kept the church closed on Sunday morning while every other denomination enjoyed its own services. The new comers were unwilling to go to the college chapel where they had to worship under the critical eyes of four hundred young men, and hear every Sunday a sermon from a minister of one of the four different denominations who preached there in rotation. They appealed to the University trustees and authorities to make a change, lest "one good custom" too long adhered to should corrupt the whole.

A general move forward was made on this line and it was felt that the point should be yielded. The trustees passed an ordinance abolishing chapel Sunday morning worship, and the Presbyterian church had the yoke of conformity to it lifted from its neck. The congregation had already called a pastor. The Rev. J. B. Shearer (now President of Davidson College) was unanimously elected and installed Feb. 6th, 1859. The amount raised by the church that year was \$1,353, of which \$1,000 was for the pastor's salary; which proves that the church was willing to pay for its new privileges of pastoral services and Sunday morning worship.

Mr. Shearer remained till June 1862 when his pastorate was dissolved and he returned to Virginia. The church was then served by Dr. Jas. Phillips as stated supply till his death March 14th, 1867. His son Dr. Charles Phillips, licensed in Pittsboro, 1857, ordained at New Hope 1866, was chosen to succeed him and remained stated supply till the disruption of the University in '68-'69, and his departure in '69 to Davidson College. President Swain died in 1868.

In consequence of the war and the evils resulting upon its close, the church was at low ebb for several years thereafter. An exodus of very nearly all the best citizens of Chapel Hill took place. In 1868 only one deacon was left, Mr. Franklin Davies and there was no acting elder. In February, 1869, just before his departure

to Davidson, Mr. Phillips ordained Thos. M. Kirkland and H. C. Thompson elders, and committed the church into their hands till better times. The Sunday-school was kept up, Mr. Thompson superintending. The church dues and assessments were paid, and at intervals a minister was detailed by the Presb tery to visit the deserted village and report upon the condition of things.

From 1869 to 1873 there was little or nothing recorded. The Rev. Mr. Hines, the Rev. Mr. Faucette, and the Rev. Mr. Dalton were the visiting clergy who came occasionally to open the church and administer the sacraments. In June, 1874, the Rev. P. H. Dalton appears as moderator of the session admitting one member on examination, Miss J. J. Spencer, who had been baptized in infancy by her grandfather, Dr. Jas. Phillips. The following September the church had begun to rally in common with the whole community from the prolonged period of stagnation and depression due to the distracted condition of public affairs. A tribute of love and gratitude is due this faithful servant of God lately called to his reward for his affectionate, self-denying labor of love among us at this trying juncture. His service ended in October, 1879, at which time Messrs. Thompson, Kirkland and Dr. A. R. Ledoux were elders, Messrs. F. Davise and Wm. B. Phillips deacons, and communing members numbered twenty-six. The University was reorganized in 1875, public confidence was restored, business revived, and from that time to this the Presbyterian church has partaken of the general prosperity.

The Rev. J. L. Currie was called to be pastor in 1880. Inded Sept. 1883. Rev. S. F. Wilhelm pastor from May 1880 to July 1888. Both of them now gone up higher. Rev. J. E. Fogartie pastor from Nov. 1890 to Dec. 1893. Rev. D. J. Currie pastor from May 1894 to -----.

Mr. Currie finished his course in Columbia after receiving the call to Chapel Hill, began his work there in May, was ordained by the Presbytery at a called meeting in September, and next day (Sept. 30th) was installed by Rev. Dr. J. Henry Smith of Greensboro.

The church roll now stands with sixty-four names, ten of whom are non-resident.

Thirty have been received into membership in the past two years. The elders are T. M. Kirkland, F. P. Venable and J.A. Holmes. The deacons J. L. Love (non-resident), E. L. Harris, T. J. Wilson, M. A. Alderman and Geo. F. Butler.

This field is still, as fifty years ago, a most interesting and important one. None in the State more so. As long as the State University exists, the importance of an educated, active and devout ministry here cannot be overestimated. The pastors of the different churches recognize their duty in respect to the students; they visit them in their rooms, look after them in sickness, and endeavor by all means to win to seriousness and to regular attendance on religious services the careless and thoughtless ones.

It will be a sad day for North Carolina if she ever agrees to let University lights be put out, and a still sadder day will rise on the University if the Church of God shall ever neglect to cherish the sacred flame on her altars in Chapel Hill.

Cambridge, Mass., Sept. 23, '96.