

History of Catoctin Presbyterian Church

by Ellen D. Parks, June 2002

Catoctin Presbyterian Church is thought to be the third Presbyterian body to form east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. While the first settlers in Waterford were actually Quakers, the first Presbyterians in Loudoun County arrived in the middle of the eighteenth century. These, the future members of the early Catoctin Presbyterian Church, were a Scotch- Irish group from Pennsylvania (CPC Early Years).

In the year of 1760, Reverend Amos Thompson founded two churches in Loudoun County: Gum Springs and Kittoctin, or, as it is now spelled, "Catoctin" (Highlights). Rev. Thompson was born in New Haven , Connecticut in 1731 (Bulletin). He graduated from New Jersey College, as Princeton was then called, in 1760. He was ordained in 1764 and married Jane Evans in 1768 (Marsh). In 1769, Rev. Thompson received a deed for "an acre of land with a house thereon" for Catoctin Church. It was one mile south east of Janney's Mill, now called Waterford, on the road to Clark's Gap (Highlights). The first church building was made of log and probably also used as a community center, school, and burying ground (Divine).

Reverend Thompson left his two churches to serve in the Continental army in 1776 (Highlights). In July of that year he had begun work as a chaplain with Stevenson's Maryland and Virginia Rifles and was commissioned in September (Marsh). From that time until 1780, Donegal Presbytery furnished supply pastors to fill the pulpits of both Catoctin and Gum Springs (Highlights). In 1780, Reverend David Bard, native of Leesburg, was called to be the permanent pastor of Gum Springs and Catoctin. His salary was 200 bushels of wheat, 50 of rye, and 250 of Indian corn. He resigned after two years, after which no reference is ever made again to the existence of Gum Springs Church (Highlights).

In 1814, the Presbyterian society bought two lots of land for Catoctin Presbyterian (Highlights). The lots were bought at a public auctioning of a section of Southern Waterford by the executors of Mahlon Janney. The Presbyterian Society was represented at the auction by these three trustees: Edward Dorsey, Joseph Talbott, and Nathaniel Manning (Divine). On this lot the Presbytery built a brick church (Highlights). The only information as to the architecture of the original brick church is that it was built with a gallery around three sides (Divine).

In 1804 a Leesburg Presbyterian Church formed. From 1814 to 1834 it shared a pastorate with Catoctin Presbyterian. In 1834, the Catoctin congregation chose to join the Leesburg Church. However, in 1852, eleven of these members were granted the request to be dismissed and form the Catoctin Church again (Highlights). The eleven members were Washington Vandevanter, Rodney Braden, Eliza Braden, Enos Hamilton, Angeline Rancon, Cecelia Vandevanter, Maria Hamilton, Nancy Hamilton, Mary Hamilton, Elizabeth Tavennor, and Amelia Hamilton. They did not return to the Catoctin Presbyterian Church building but instead worshipped at the non- denominational Catoctin Free Church for nearly twenty years, sharing a pastor with Leesburg (Bulletin September 23).

While Waterford Presbyterians were worshiping in Leesburg and the Free Church, the unoccupied building was probably used as a church by other denominations without a building, perhaps the Baptists or Methodists. It was Reverend Henry Branch who discovered that the building in fact belonged to the Presbyterians. In 1874, the Catoctin Presbyterian congregation moved into the building with him as pastor until his 1882 resignation (Bulletin).

In 1878, the church building caught fire (Bulletin). One can assume that many of the records that may have been made on the history of Catoctin Presbyterian up to that time burned, or else the early congregation was notoriously bad at taking notes. The church was rebuilt on the same site with the same

bricks in 1883 (Highlights). For six months while it was being built, the congregation met in the Baptist Church next door (Bulletin). The present church building was dedicated on May 17, 1883 (Turnbull). The following excerpt on the dedication of the new church appeared in the Loudoun Telephone:

25 May 1883:

"Dedication Services of the Waterford Presbyterian Church.

The Dedication of the new Presbyterian Church, at Waterford, last week, proved a very interesting occasion. Everything was to the mind of the most exacting; the weather was fair, the preaching excellent, the congregation large and attentive and the church commodious and comfortable. The Presbyterians, always proverbially conservative, have taken a 'new departure' in church architecture, new in Loudoun County at least. They have adopted the modern Gothic style, with pointed ceiling and open framework and exposed roof, on the interior, all of which is finished in the best North Carolina pine. All the wood work of the interior is of the same material, dressed and varnished, which gives a very pleasing effect to the eye. The interior is light and airy, with excellent acoustic properties. The exterior of the building is broken by buttresses on either side, and on the front at either corner, by an arched and covered door-way, opening into a central vestibule. The church was dedicated free of debt, nor was any collection taken the day of dedication. The estimated cost of the building is about \$4,000, part of which was provided for by the material of the old church, while the balance was contributed by generous friends, most of whom reside in the County." (Rebuilding).

A month after the dedication, Rev. Turnbull, then pastor, made known that he intended to live in Waterford, near the church. A year later the manse was built next to Catoctin Presbyterian. Rev. Turnbull resided there until he resigned in 1889, due to ill health (Bulletin).

In 1880, Catoctin Church adopted an outpost. Elder William H. Lockett, Joseph Shroy, C. Frank McKimney and others started a Sunday School and prayer meeting house in the Oak Hill school house, just outside of Locketts. Rev. Turnbull was invited to preach at the school house and the congregation of twenty people were considered Catoctin Church members. The schoolhouse church received money and materials to build a church. It was dedicated Faith Chapel on August 9, 1885. There was a debt of seventy-nine dollars when it was completed, but an offering on the day it was dedicated yielded eighty-nine dollars, erasing the debt. As an outpost of Catoctin Presbyterian, it shared a pastor for thirty-two years, until 1917. At that time, it was rededicated as a separate congregation but continued to share a pastor with Catoctin. It was not until October 19 of 1923 that Faith Chapel became a separate church and called its own pastorate (Bulletin).

In 1954, Reverend Albert E. Simmons succeeded Reverend Donald Campbell (Bulletin) as pastor of Catoctin Presbyterian. He was unmarried at that time and, according to Mrs. Mary Brown, "Everyone was happy when he found himself a very lovely wife, and doubly glad when she was a musician". The new Mrs. Mary Jean Simmons taught and played music at the church (Brown, Personal Interview). She also enlarged the church choir, which up until then had been just one or two people who volunteered to sing on Sunday. (Carr, non-sermon). The choir has grown to be very active and a large part of the church life.

Another active group in the church is the Women's Circle. In 1885, it was founded as the Missionary Society, a small group of ladies with "a missionary spirit". This became the Circle Plan Auxiliary, organized by Mrs. Oscar Wilkerson in 1925. In 1940, the Auxiliary "Built, furnished, and used with joy" a cottage in Massanetta. The cottage was maintained until September of 1969, when it sold for \$3800. In 1949, the name of the Auxiliary was changed again to Women of the Church. (Bulletin).

Until the addition of the Education Building, Sunday School met in the sanctuary. The youngest children sat in a circle of little chairs up by the pulpit. The young men's class was in one corner, while the ladies'

Bible study was on the right hand side of the church. Some of the older children met in the very front of the right hand pews, and three-fourths back in the middle pews were the older girls (Brown, Personal Interview).

In 1948, a fund resulted in the Religious Education Building. It was dedicated on November 26, 1950 (Carr, Observer). Two years later, in 1952, memorial windows were installed. They were designed by B.F. Biehl of Canaden, New Jersey (Nix). The stained glass windows were mostly donated by families as memorials, indicated by plaques under each one. The windows were never dedicated since Reverend Ferguson had left Catoctin about a month before, and there was no pastor (Nix).

That time period also saw changes in the manse next door to the church. The first manse was built the year after the church was, and over the years the church continued to add on to it until it looked like a regular old Victorian house, much like its neighbors. It had a porch around two sides and a butler's pantry where some of the church kitchenware and the like were kept. However, around 1951 the church was seeking a pastor, and some of the newer people in the church thought the church would be more attractive to a future pastor if it could offer him a better house. The older members were strongly against tearing down the old manse. Nonetheless, in 1952, the old manse was destroyed and the present brick manse was built (Brown, Personal Interview). Around this time, the church property was also very different. There was a walk from the church straight up to the manse. Originally, the church yard had a hitching rail around two sides, with a mounting block right in the middle (Brown, personal Interview).

In 1963 the Women of the Church established the Henry Clapham McGavack Memorial Library. It was established at Catoctin Presbyterian Church through donations from Dorothy McGavack, given in memory of her late husband. The library's purpose was to "provide helpful reference and study material... as well as character building material for all ages" (Bulletin).

The heating systems have also undergone quite a few changes in the last 237 years. At first the sanctuary was heated with two pot-bellied stoves. Those were replaced by a coal-powered furnace. According to Mary Brown, usually one dedicated church member would come early and start the furnace. She says, "Everything was [volunteer] way back then. Most everybody were farmers. You didn't have money, you gave your services." (Brown, Personal Interview). Following this, radiators were installed throughout the church and the new school addition. In 1999 a new heating and air conditioning system was added (Brown, Personal Interview).

1984-1987 brought hard times to the church. The income was less than \$30,000, and Presbytery had to support Catoctin Presbyterian to keep the doors open. According to Bob Carr, "It was the choir and the women's group that held us all together" (Carr, non-sermon). Fortunately, the church pulled itself together again and saw many milestones over the next few years. In 1989 it hired a woman pastor for the first time- Reverend Martha Z. Miller. Between the years of 1990 and 2000, the church hired for the first time a paid Administrative assistant and paid choir director. It also saw an increase in attendance and the congregation included more children (Carr, non-sermon). A Youth Group formed sometime around the early to mid- 1900's. Originally, the youth were from not only the church but the surrounding community. The group met at the homes of various members, perhaps more than they met at the church. Mary Brown remembers the gatherings were often the only time teenagers got out of their houses except for school (Brown, Personal Interview). Today, the church youth meet once a month before church and participate in mission, fund-raising, and recreational activities.

Despite the changes of over two centuries, Catoctin Presbyterian Church continues to be a center of faith for the people in the Waterford community. History, tradition, and a close knit fellowship are still important parts of the church today. Perhaps the best words to describe Catoctin Church, past and present, were written in 1782 by John Fawcett, now a favorite hymn:

Verse 1

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love.
The fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.*

Verse 3

*We share our mutual woes.
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear. (Hymnal, 438)*

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