

HISTORY OF THE SHILOH CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 1827 - 1955
CASS COUNTY, VIRGINIA, ILLINOIS

Shiloh Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized in 1827, just 9 years after Illinois was admitted to the Union as a State. The first settlers had come to this part of the country in 1816 and the first school in the county was begun in 1827. In 1827 most of the country was uncleared and Indians were plentiful. It was only 4 years later, in 1831, that the Governor of Illinois called the first troops for the Black Hawk War. Those troops were assembled in the then small river town of Beardstown, only 10 miles from the young church.

The church records from 1827 to 1872 were lost but they are more or less complete since that time. In 1872 a manuscript written by the Rev. J.M. Berry, the founder of the Church, was found and transcribed into the present church record book. Therefore, the information regarding the early church is taken from that manuscript and from various volumes of the "History of Cass County" which were published at an early date.

The congregation which was then known as Mt. Pleasant was organized in the home of Nathan Compton, Jersey Prairie, Morgan County, Illinois, (that part of the county was later changed to Cass County) by the Rev. J.M. Berry in the fall of 1827. Abner Tining and Nathan Compton, elders from other Cumberland Presbyterian Churches, and the Rev. Wm. McCord from Christian County Kentucky, were also present. After the usual form of procedure the congregation elected N. Compton and A. Tining elders. During the same fall and winter Samuel Thompson, an elder from the Bethel Congregation, Christian County, Ky., joined the church and was elected an elder. Nathan Compton was appointed clerk of the session.

Since the church was then fully organized and had a constitutional number of members it was reported to the Sangamon Presbytery under whose care it was taken in 1827 or 1828. It was represented at the semi-annual meetings of that presbytery up to 1834 or 1835. It was supplied with preaching until 1833 chiefly by Rev. Berry and Rev. McCord. Rev. McCord died August 19, 1833 at the age of 53 years. He was laid to rest in the little country cemetery about 3 miles north of the present church building on the farm now owned by the Jacob Kruse heirs.

The same year, 1833, Benjamin Cauby, a circuit rider, moved into the bounds of the congregation and preached to this and other new churches until 1836. The next year, history records, he saw the great need for ministerial labor in the surrounding counties and rode and preached the entire year.

In the meantime, elder N. Compton moved out of the bounds of the Presbytery and elder Samuel Thompson died August 26, 1835. This left only one elder, to wit: A. Tining. It seemed that this pioneer church which had begun so courageously and which seemingly had met in the homes of its members was slowly passing out of existence. But from the very beginning it seemed the Lord had a work for that church and a place for it to fill and so He again touched the heart of Rev. Cauby who had recently purchased land in the community. Rev. Cauby erected a log meeting house on his land and when it was completed in 1837 he called the congregation together and reorganized the church on December 3, 1837.

Twenty nine people signed the following statement: "Whereas, we the undersigned believe it to be our privilege and duty to attach ourselves to some branch of the Church of God: and so far as we have read and examined the Government and Discipline of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, also believing that it agrees with our views most in accordance with the Apostolic Mode, do and have hereby ordered our names to be enrolled as members of the Mt. Pleasant Congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church". The names of the 29 members are recorded in the manuscript in the present church record.

Rev. Benj. Cauby died June 2, 1841 at the early age of 43 years. His body was laid to rest in the same little cemetery mentioned above in which Rev. McCord was buried. Large, flat stones still mark their graves. Rev. 14: 6,7 is etched on Rev. Cauby's stone.

Little did he know, or - did he dream that the little congregation he helped and encouraged for 4 short years would become strong enough to weather severe storms?

It is interesting to note that a log school house was built close to that first log church thus indicating that our forefathers realized the importance of education along with religion.

Not much is known of that little church from that time until 1872 when its name was changed to Shiloh. It is known, however, that it continued to grow and prosper and in 1857 a frame church made of all mill sawed, white pine lumber about 30' X 40' was erected about 200 yards north of the log church. The new church had plank benches and was valued at not less than \$500.00. This church remained the place of worship until 1888 when the present church was erected a little more than a mile north of the second church in order to be nearer the center of the congregation.

A story has been handed down by word of mouth that when the last church was built in 1888 there was still a debt on it when the people wanted to dedicate it. It seemed they had tried every possible way to raise the money but it was not forthcoming. Finally, elder Henry Campbell, who had deeded the ground, free, to the church, said he would pay off the debt, which was reported to be around 250.00, if the congregation would give him the old frame building which they now had ceased to use. This was agreed to and the new church was dedicated free of debt in 1889. Lumber from that second church still stands as a double corn crib on the farm which still belongs to the Campbell heirs.

There was a Sunday School in that first log church but several years later it was moved to a school house about 3 miles north of the church where it remained until 1888 when it was brought back to the new church. Sunday School membership at that time was reported to be about 25.

History states that a new organ in the church added greatly to the music.

The records show that a Missionary Society was in existence in 1883 and that offerings for Foreign Missions and Old and Disabled Ministers were sent more or less regularly.

There was a Pastor's Aid Society as far back as 1877 and the Christian Endeavor Society was organized in 1890. A children's band was organized in 1915.

World War II took 35 of the church's young men but through the goodness of the Lord all but one were spared to return to their homes. They were scattered in every part of the world but we believe that those boys, most of them trained in the Church, Sunday School and Christian Endeavor were true witnesses for Christ.

It appears from the records that the church, from the very earliest years, had one half time preaching until January 11, 1942 when it went to full time preaching including Sunday Evening services. Growth since that time has been marked.

A full basement and a furnace was put under the church in 1938. In 1944 the church purchased a 10 acre tract of land adjacent to the church. The manse on the farm has 4 rooms and a bath. Men of the church donate their time and equipment to tend the land and proceeds from the farm are put into the church budget.

The interior of the church was completely remodeled and redecorated in 1943 and in 1950 a new hardwood floor and new pews were installed. In 1954, an educational annex was added to the rear of the church, the basement extended under it and the coal furnace replaced with an oil furnace. The art glass windows, some of them memorial, were installed in 1952. New hardwood floors have also been laid and many improvements made in the manse since it was purchased.

Rev. W.O. Talley, a graduate of Bethel College Seminary, McKenzie, Tennessee, is the present pastor. The church now has a membership of 95, the Sunday School 90, with an average attendance of 60. There is an active Men's Fellowship, Missionary Society and Ladies' Aid. The children are organized into Pioneer and Crusader Groups. The Sunday School is departmentalized with classes for all ages. The church is on a budget system under the supervision of a board of deacons.

The church property is now valued at \$20,000.00. The congregation last year contributed something over \$2,000.00 to denominational and other purposes.

The model of the church, built to scale, which is on display for your pleasure was built by Norman K. Leonhard who is presently serving as treasurer of the board of deacons. It is complete in every detail except for the educational annex which was added after the model was built.

"Old Shiloh" as this church was fondly referred to by "old timers" was, it seems, the first church group to be organized in this entire county. In this very brief history of the organization and the growth of the church it must be remembered that it was not a steady growth nor was it without storms, but it must also be said that at no time in its history has the church shown more progress or been in a better financial condition than during the past 3 or 4 years. At a time in history when it seems country churches are becoming extinct, Shiloh continues to prosper because the people have a mind to work together to the glory of God for their church, their community and their families.

Shiloh Church is located 3 miles west of Virginia on Highway 67. Anyone traveling through this section of the country on Sunday is invited to attend services. Visitors are always welcome at any time.

January 27, 1955