A HISTORY OF THE BATAVIA FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1829-1991

by

Harris Wright

In the spring of 1990 I was invited by the Session to write a short article of not more than three hundred words on the history of our church to be included in a book which the presbytery was publishing.

I was glad to accept the invitation, but I soon found that it was impossible to tell the story of our church in so few words. I completed the assignment by leaving out all that was interesting about the church and writing only the bare facts. In preparing the article, I found so many interesting things about the church that I could not use that I decided to write a more complete history of the church to appear in my column, “Wright Answers”, in the church newsletter, FIRST Edition. Since that series was completed, I have continued to work on the project and this report is the result. It will be placed in the church archives for the benefit of anyone who wants to look into our church’s history in the future.

Since most of the earliest settlers in the Batavia area were members of the Methodist Church, a church of that denomination was the first to be established here in 1807. The Presbyterians were soon to follow. Occasional Presbyterian services were held in the court house with ministers sent as missionaries by the Presbytery of

Cincinnati or by pastors of nearby Presbyterian Churches conducting the services.

On Saturday, December 19, 1829 a meeting was held in the County Court House to organize the First Presbyterian Church. Present at the meeting were: Rev. R. B. Dobbins of Williamsburg, Rev. Thomas Cole of New Richmond and Rev. Jonathan M. Rowland, who was to become the first pastor of the Batavia church. Eight Batavians also attended the meeting and became the first members of the new church. They were: Robert Townsley, Brice R. Blair, James Dennis, Mary Dennis, Margaret Wood, Nancy Townsley, Caroline Fishback, and Eliza Vorhes. Brice R. Blair and James Dennis were elected to be the first elders.

The next day, Sunday, December 20, the first service was conducted by Rev. Rowland also at the court house. At this meeting communion was served and three children were baptized. Batavia had a Presbyterian church.

By the next year when the membership had grown from the original eight to thirty-one, it was decided to build a church for the little congregation. The building was a frame structure and as nearly as we can place it, it was located on the east side of Market Street to the south of Main Street. It was probably located just across the alley from where the bank parking lot is located today in the small area used by Creager tire as a parking lot. The building was used in an unfinished condition until it’s completion in 1833. While no longer a church, this building was still standing in 1880 and used as a carriage house by the proprietor of the Hamilton House.

By the end of its second year, the little church had 51 members and its future seemed assured, but in May of 1832 Rev. Rowland left the church and was succeeded by Rev. F. Rutherford who remained only a few months. For the remainder of the year Dr. Thomas Brainard, Dr. Lyman Beecher and Prof. Stowe from Lane Seminary in Cincinnati held occasional services.

In May of 1833, Lyman Beecher's son, the Rev. George Beecher, began to preach here and on August 7th of that year he was called to be pastor of the Batavia church. He lived at the home of Elder, Brice Blair, in the white house across the street from our present church which was for many years the home of the Parrott family and now houses the county prosecutor’s office.

During his years in Batavia, he was frequently visited by his sister, Harriet, who later married Prof. Stowe to become Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Batavians like to think that perhaps part of her book was written in Batavia, but while she learned about slavery while living in this area and traveling in the slave state of Kentucky, we know that most if not all of her book was written after she and her husband had moved to New England.

Rev. Beecher's brother, Henry Ward Beecher, while still a student at Lane Seminary was persuaded to preach his first sermon while on a visit here. This apparently happened at an unscheduled Saturday evening service. The church was

lit, the doors thrown open and the bell rung to invite anyone who wished, to attend the service.

From 1837 to 1844 the Revs. James Dunlap, Moses H. Wilder, Amos Dresser and Claudius B. Andrews each preached here for less than a year.

To give an idea of what people in the church were thinking during these years, I would like to quote a resolution which was passed by the Session when Rev. Wilder

was pastor in 1839.

“Resolved, that we will not hereafter admit as a member to this church any individual who shall make, sell, or use as a beverage, intoxicating drinks.

“Resolved, that if any member of this church shall be known to use, make or sell intoxicating drinks as a beverage, they shall be dealt with as guilty of unchristian

conduct.

“Resolved, that we will not permit any minister who is guilty of the sin of slavery, to Occupy our pulpit.

“Resolved, that we will not receive members from slave holding Churches into our fellowship, without examination.”

During the church’s early history, there were periods in which the congregation flourished and services were held each Sunday, but at other times, the congregation had no minister and few if any services were held. One of these inactive periods began in 1839 as no services were held from that year until 1844 as the church was too feeble to support a minister.

In 1844 Rev. Edward Schofield was called to the Batavia church. He served until 1850, and it is stated that his devotion to the flock during the cholera epidemic of 1849 was greatly appreciated. After Rev. Schofield left, no regular services were held for another ten years. To make matters worse, in April of 1859 the Session Minutes were taken to Cincinnati to be examined and approved. The book was lost there and not recovered until 1865.

In December of 1858 the sixteen women and two old men who had remained loyal to the church decided funds should be raised to build a new house of worship, since the old one was dilapidated. $647 was raised, but when it was decided to build the structure on a new site, some contributors objected and a new subscription had to be started. The old church site was sold in 1859 for $200 and a new lot, our present church location, was purchased from 6. F. Norris for $201.50.

On April 23, 1860 the cornerstone for the new church was laid. In it were placed a Bible, a Church Psalmist, a Confession of Faith, as well as copies of the Clermont Courier and Sun, the Christian Herald, New York Independent and the Cincinnati dailies.

The walls of the new structure were built but stood roofless for many months. By the end of the year the roof was in place leaving a debt of $300. In 1861 more money was raised and a floor was put into the building. The rather dilapidated pews from the old church had been saved and were moved into the new sanctuary.

While this construction was going on, the church attempted to reorganize itself. Perhaps the best description of this comes from the Session Minutes of May 28, 1861.

“This day, according to previous announcement, a meeting of the Presbyterian Church of Batavia was held in Robinson’s Hall.

“The Church having been for some ten years without a pastor or any regular stated meetings and in the meantime the Church Roll, Session Records, and all books and papers containing the record of membership, and history of the Church having been lost:

“The object of the present meeting was to reorganize the Church out of the remaining persons who still recognize themselves as members of the old organization.

“The following form of organization having been previously circulated and subscribed to was presented and publicly read by Rev. W.J. Essick of New Richmond, Ohio. viz: The Roll and Session Records of the Batavia Presbyterian Church having been irrecoverably lost; we the undersigned do voluntarily recognize and report ourselves as members of this church:

1. Lott Hulick 10. Mrs. Eliza Dennison

2. John Hull 11. Mrs. H. Worstell

3. Mrs. Martha P. Talley 12. Mrs. Cenith Tate

4. Mrs. Mar-y H. Swing 13. Mrs. Amera Tate

5. Mrs. Paulina H. Wayland 14. Mrs. Mary Tate

6. Mrs. Paulina C. Brown 15. Catherine Carr

7. Mrs. Clarjssa White 16. Mrs. Harriet West

8. Mrs. Amanda Boyd 17. Jane Applegate

9. Mrs. Jane Rust I8. Mrs. Marcena Spencer

“On motion Lott Hulick was elected to serve the Church as Elder. Meeting adjourned.

Rev, W. J. Essick, Moderator

(Notice that in all of these old lists of church members, all of the men’s names come first followed by those of the women.)

On May 12, 1861 Rev. J. L. French arrived in Batavia to preach. He was young and inexperienced having given only seven previous sermons. He arrived on a gloomy day and found a Church with walls but no roof with eighteen members and which had not held a service in ten years. He almost decided not to stay. As he explained later, “That these people were building a church spoke well of the confidence of God in this little band.’ He decided to stay and it was with the leadership of Rev. French that the building was completed and the congregation reactivated.

The first sermon was preached in the new church on August 24, 1861 by D. H. Allen of Lane Seminary even though the walls were not yet plastered and the bare rafters still showed. There was no furniture but the old dilapidated pews from the old church. A temporary pulpit was made from an old desk. When cold weather came, it was impossible to heat the unfinished building, and the congregation returned to Robinson’s Hall and later Jamieson’s Hall for the winter.

The church was plastered and occupied on July 27, 1862.

In March of 1862 when the congregation met with Rev. French to plan the completion of the building and the addition of a vestibule and bell tower they found they didn’t have enough money to do both. Soon afterward John Hull, a thirty-five year member of the church, died leaving his entire estate of $293 to the church. With this it was possible to do both jobs. A contemporary account describes the newly finished building as a plain but substantial brick edifice, 35 by 52 feet.

After all the work was completed, a debt of $650 remained from the total of $3,500 it cost to build and furnish the church. Rev. French led a campaign to pay the debt. He tells of visiting an elderly woman who gave to the church the money she had put aside for her funeral. At the dedication held January 2, 1867, he made a further plea for funds and collected $450. It is said that he would have received more but a heavy snow storm had hit the village the night before leaving more than a foot of snow on the ground and preventing many members from attending the service.

It is interesting to note that during this period the church had but three elders and since one of them was away in the army during the Civil War, all of these actions were taken by a session of just two members.

Rev. French, who arrived in 1861 and led the congregation into its new home, preached his farewell sermon on August 30, l868. He was forced to leave the church because of a disease of the throat. In the years after Rev. French, several ministers carne and went. The records seem to show that there was a decline in attendance for a time, but by 1879 things seemed to improve as 136 students were registered in the Sunday School alone.

French was followed by Rev. H. Ketchum who was here less than a year, and he was followed by Rev. George W. Fitch who departed in 1872 to become a missionary in China.

On May 16, 1990, members gathered to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the church. The meeting had been planned for the previous December, “but for various causes was delayed until this time”. For the celebration, a history of the church was written and presented by Milton Jamieson, a lifelong member.

Rev. William Carson, who was called to the pulpit in 1878, was the pastor at the beginning of the second fifty years. At the time of the celebration, the membership of the church numbered 113. The elders were George L. Swing, L. W. Bishop and M. Jamieson. The Sunday School had, “150 scholars enrolled and 130 in actual attendance”.

In 1884 the church made an unusual decision. To quote again from the Session Minutes, “Our Sabbath School is overflowing in members, making it absolutely necessary for us to build a chapel. This chapel we expect to build this year, and until it is built we will not seek for a pastor. We cannot build this chapel and pay a pastor, so we think it most important to build the chapel first. Our church will not die - will not cease to be a power for good among the people of our locality”.

Arid so the chapel, which is the room located directly behind the sanctuary and today called the parlor, was built and the church did survive with supply pastors until Rev. J. Straus was called in 1886. That same year a new, larger bell was given to the church by Ezra Krinks who had been sexton of the church for twenty years. Krinks is described as being, “a very loyal but very eccentric official who prided himself on keeping the church clean.” It is further says that he could light every lamp in the church with one good match and a few old ones.

The bell which he presented was previously owned by the Republican Campaign Committee. It had been mounted on a heavy wagon and hauled from place to place to be rung at political rallies. It was known to have been used in the Garfield-Hancock election of 1680 and the Cleveland-Blaine election of 1884.

The antique communion table still in use dates from the earliest days of the church. It was first loaned to the congregation by one of the founders, Mrs. Caroline Fishback, and at her death it became the property of the church. It has apparently been in continuous use since the very first services were held here.

Just how different life was in Batavia and in the church in the 1800’s may be seen from an incident reported in the Session Minutes in 1865. “The Session charges (a woman who is identified by both her married and maiden names) who is a member of the church, with the sin of falsehood and with dancing at a public ball on the night of February 22, to the manifest injury of her own Christian Standing and reputation, and to the flagrant reproach of the church of Christ.

“It was resolved:

1. That the Session will proceed without delay to a judicial investigation of the case.

2. That the clerk be directed to cite the accused to appear before the Session on Saturday, March 18th at four O’clock P.M. to answer the charges preferred against her.”

The lady didn’t appear at the time requested as she was in New York, but she did come before the Session at a later date. At that time the minutes say, “The person accused acknowledged the offences against her and professed penance there for, and promised amendment in the future. The Session then voted that no further action be taken.

At the same meeting four other women members were “cited to appear before the Session to answer charges of habitually neglecting to appear at public worship”.

On January 29, 1881, Milton Jamieson, an Elder in the Church, presented to the church a house on Fifth Street. This house was used as a manse until 1974.

In December of 1884 the organization now known as the Women’s Association was formed by Mrs. William F. Gowdy, the wife of Rev. Gowdy. Known at various times as The Ladies Furnishing Society, Ladies Aid Society and The Women’s Association, this organization has played an important part in the life of the church ever since. Its outstanding events in the early days were, A Martha Washington Tea in the winter and in summer a Lawn Fete at the home of Judge and Mrs. Hulick.

Those who attended these lawn fetes told of burning torches over the hillside, lanterns lighting the coming and going of large crowds, ladies in long summer gowns with their escorts alighting from carriages and the air filled with splendid music supplied by the band under P. F. Jamieson. Home-made ice cream and cake were served, and the ladies often made $100 or more. This was just one of several projects which the ladies used to earn money for the church.

The Hulick home was located high on the hill which one passes on entering town from the west on Main Street. The long flight of stairs which goes up the hill next to the rail road trestle, used to go to their home.

The original members of the Ladies Furnishing Society

Mrs. Josie Hulick Mrs. Anna Griffith

Miss Melle Stone Miss Dollie Dennison

Mrs. Margaret Dennison Mrs. Carrie Swing

Mrs. Helen Brunaugh Mrs. Ella Stymets

Mrs. Carolyn Fairman Mrs. Laura Heinrici

Mrs. Mary McDonald Mrs. Lida Moore

Mrs. Kate Buvinger Jamieson

The stained glass windows were added to the church in 1899. One was dedicated to the memory of Carrie Nichols Buvinger who was the sister of Hugh L. and A. B. Nichols. Hugh L. was to become the first Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court while A. B. Nichols is the grandfather of both Hugh and Jim. Another was dedicated to the memory of Maria Titus Jamieson and Kate Buvinger Jamieson, Milton Jamieson’s two wives, while the others were presented by The Ladies Furnishing Society, the Sunday School, the choir and the church.

On January 2, 1901, according to the Session Minutes, ”The Session ordered that an industrial school be organized under the supervision of the pastor and under the control and direction of the church. “For this purpose he be authorized to rent rooms from Charles Fergusen on Main Street and for present expenses he authorized to draw from the Deacons’ Fund.”

The school opened in 1902 under the direction of Mrs. Billman, the pastor’s wife, and Mrs. W. W. Dennison. It offered instruction in serving and cooking and the

fundamentals of home making to the children and older girls of the less fortunate families of the church and town. These classes continued for several years.

Over the years, revivals have played an important part in the life of the church. In March of 1874, meetings under Rev. J. B. Smith added 57 new members many of whom remained active members. 37 members were added by Don Heckman in the

1880s. During B. B. Lavenders pastorate in 1912 Rev. Stewart held an outstanding series of meetings. John Robertson a unique revival in 1918 in which his messages were verbal enactments of dramatic scenes from the Bible such as Paul’s trial before Aggrippa.

In March of 1942, the members of our church considered union with the Methodist Church. Because of World War II then going on, attendance at both churches was greatly reduced. According to the plan, the Methodist Church was to

be the worship center and the Presbyterian Church the recreation center. The plan was dropped when a member of our church stated, “The idea of Communion in any church but ours is unthinkable.” We remained Presbyterian.

Several additions to the church plant were made over the years. A kitchen, not the present one, was added in 1922. In 1949 Fellowship Hall was built and in 1962 the Van Horn house next to the church was purchased. This house, now called the Christian Education Center, houses the pastor’s study, the nursery and many Church School classrooms. In 1974 the church received title to a large house on Wood

Street as a gift from Marie Young. This house became the manse and the old manse was sold and $15,000 of the proceeds was used to renovate the new property. The Wood Street manse was sold in 1985 in order to permit the pastor to acquire his own home.

Soon after the Van Horn house was acquired, the garage behind the house began to be used as a depository for used clothing for the poor. Clara Barbara Remley, one of the ladies who started the project, gave a considerable sum of money to the church in her will, part of which was to be used to remodel the old garage. This was the beginning of our mission garage which is operated by a group of ladies from the church each Saturday morning. They collect used clothing, furniture and other household items and would either sell them at very low prices or give them to the needy or to various charitable institutions.

The Mission Garage along with the Food Pantry makes up a large part of the local mission of the church. The Food Pantry, which is headed by Ellen Woods, collects food items and money from church members and distributes these to those who need them. These two projects of the church have helped many families in the area.

Since the earliest days of the church, elders were elected for terms of a definite number of years, however it became so common to have the same elders re-nominated and re-elected time after time that election to the Session meant that the person could hold that office for life. The same procedure was followed to some extent in other church offices. In 1958 the Session voted to follow the constitution established by the 3eneral Assembly and have its elders elected to a three year term with the additional provision that no member could serve for more than six consecutive years. This provision tended to get more people involved in the affairs cl the church.

In its first years, the church had just two elders. By the time of the Civil War the number had increased to three and in 1896 this number was raised to six. In the fall of 1990, the congregation voted, at the recommendation of the pastor, Loyd Baird, to enlarge the Session to a total of nine members with three to be elected each year to a three year term. The additional elders were elected in January of 1991.

In 1984 our interim pastor, Robert Clark, suggested that we combine the Session and Board of Trustees into one body of eleven members. The congregation voted against this change.

The number of members on the Board of Trustees and the length of their term in office have varied greatly over the years. In the 1940’s, for example, the board consisted of first ten and later eleven trustees each elected to a one year term. We now have six trustees each elected to a three year term.

Until quite recently, all of the church’s elected officers were men. The job of finding the first women to be elected was made difficult by the practice of identifying many church officers in the records by initials rather than first names. I did find, however, that Emma Wilke was elected to the Board of Trustees in April of 1940. In

December of 1959, the name of Julia Bennett was one of two placed in nomination for the office of Elder by the church nominating committee. When the nominations were placed before the congregation, an additional nomination, a man, was made from the floor. This made a vote by ballot necessary and when the results were reported, the two male candidates were elected.

In 1963 Ethel Crowe was nominated for the office by the nominating committee and Margaret Jamieson was nominated from the floor. Mrs. Jamieson asked that her name be removed from consideration and the two candidates nominated by the committee were declared elected and so Ethel Crowe became our first woman Elder.

The church first became interested in the operation of a nursery school in 1970 when the YWCA asked to rent Fellowship Hall for- its nursery school classes. The necessary arrangements were made and for the next six years the Y ran a successful program using our facilities. In 1976 the Y informed the church that it planned to discontinue the nursery school. The church felt that this school was serving a real need in the Community and decided to continue the project on its own. For the next nine years the church ran its own nursery school program with separate classes for three and four year old children.

By 1983 the supervision of the school was causing a number of problems for the church, and the church was considering discontinuing the project when a private organization known as Acorn Academy asked if they might carry on the school. Arrangements were made for them to rent the Church facilities and continue the education program. At the end of the 1987-88 school year this group also was forced to abandon the project as one of the owners had to leave the area. At that time a government sponsored program know as Head Start asked about using the same facilities for its preschool classes. Arrangements were again made and many improvements were completed in the church facilities so that the Head Start was able to hold its classes in our Fellowship Hall. During the entire time the church had the use of the hail on weekends and in the months the school was not in session. In the winter of 1991, Head Start officials notified the church that their program would not be using the church facilities after the 1990-91 school year. At this time there is no plan to continue the School.

Music has always played an important part in the life of our church. A pipe organ was purchased from a church in Cincinnati, hauled to Batavia in wagons and installed in the church in 1912. The pump which forced air through the pipes of this organ was powered by water until electricity came to the village a few years later. This instrument was replaced by an electronic organ in 1936. It was in turn replaced by our present electronic organ in 1974. Donald Jamieson served as organist and choir director for nearly fifty years. He actually suffered a heart attack at the church organ during a worship service in 1972 and died on the way to the hospital. Today with Dottie Morton as organist and Margaret Krueger as director of our fine choir the tradition of excellent music at our services continues.

Our church is a charter member of the Batavia Fellowship of Churches. This organization which is made up of many, but not all, of the protestant churches in the Batavia area as well as Holy Trinity Catholic Church, holds special services each week during Lent, a Good Friday service and a sunrise service on Easter. In addition it holds an outdoor community service each summer, sponsors the manger scene in the village at Christmas time and conducts the Vacation Bible School each summer. The fellowship has also adopted a cottage at the Southwest Ohio Development Center outside of town and holds a birthday party for the occupants each month as well as providing other activities throughout the year. The group also holds regular services at the Batavia Nursing Home.

And now we have arrived in the 199Os. In the last few years the Board of Trustees has refurbished our sanctuary, renovated the exterior of the church, purchased a new piano for the sanctuary and redecorated the pastor’s study.

The many organizations of the church continue to carry on our work. The Board of Deacons was reactivated in 1996 and now ministers to the congregation in many ways. The Women’s Association has continued uninterrupted for many years while a relatively new organization, Team Builders, made up mostly of retired people, meets for lunch and discussion each Tuesday at noon, and two youth groups, one for high school and one for junior high school, carry on active programs for the young people of the church and community.

In our Church School, dedicated teachers hold classes for children of all ages from very young through high school each Sunday morning with about forty children enrolled. In addition a very active adult class meets each Sunday with twelve to fifteen people in attendance. A Bible study class also meets each Tuesday evening with various members of the group serving as teachers.

A church newsletter, in past years either non-existent or a sporadic effort, was usually another job for the pastor, sometimes with volunteer help, and sometimes with none. The present offering, The FIRST Edition, was proposed by Recca Woods and Margaret Jamieson more than ten years ago and is still published nine times a year. Its volunteer staff has grown and many members write articles to inform and encourage interest in the church’s mission among its members.

The church has had a history of fine pastors and excellent preaching. In 1985 Loyd Baird was called from the Presbyterian Church in Northeast Pennsylvania to become the new pastor of the Batavia Church. Under his devoted leadership the people of our congregation are ready to continue working for Christ in Batavia and Clermont County.

I have enjoyed this opportunity to look into our Church’s past. One of the things I have always liked best about exploring history and looking into old records is the feeling of getting to know people from the past. In working on this project, I have had an opportunity to meet many devout Christian men and women who have been leaders of our church in years gone by. Among these people two stand out.

One, Milton Jamieson, was a layman while the other, John L. French, was a minister. Milton Jamieson was a lifelong resident of Batavia and member of our church. Those of you who have read Rosanna Hoberg’s History of Batavia, written for our sesquicentennial celebration, will remember his touching piece about his feelings on leaving Batavia for service in the Mexican War. He was born on October 2, 1825 and, served as clerk of our session for many years. On June 1, 1893, he submitted his resignation from this job and after he had recorded the minutes of the meeting, he leaves the following note.

“The minutes of this meeting are the last to be recorded by me: having been clerk for about 25 years of the session of this church. The minutes are in three books, two of which are in the bookcase in the church.”

It was Mr. Jamieson who in 1881 gave the house on Fifth Street to the church for use of a manse. I had always assumed that he had presented his house to the church in his will. He actually lived in the house on Main St. which was for many years Strattman’s Jewelry Store and gave the Fifth Street house to the church long before his death. In 1903 Mr. Jamieson gave the church an additional endowment of

$2,000, a very large sum of money in those days.

In a letter which accompanied this gift, he says, “It shall be my desire that it be called the Jamieson Fund for all time to come. I wish to have the satisfaction while living of seeing the Jamieson Fund permanently established and to know that long after the family have passed away, that we are still contributing to the minister’s salary and trust that it may continue for centuries to come.”

He closes the letter with this, “And may God’s blessing ever attend this church and all those who may here after attach themselves to it.”

He died in 1907 and is buried in the Batavia Cemetery. On his monument along with his many other accomplishments it states proudly, “Elder in the Presbyterian Church”.

Rev. John L. French was in Batavia for only a few years, but it was he who revitalized the church after it had been dormant for many years and led it through one of the most difficult times in its history. He was a recent graduate of Lane Seminary when he first came to Batavia on May 12, 1661. It was a very rainy gloomy day and he found a new church building with only the walls standing and a congregation which had not held regular services for ten years. As he later told the story:

“I preached to an audience of thirty persons gathered in Robinsons Hall. I had been sent with the intention of remaining at least during the summer. I saw the enclosed and unfinished church building, regarded the feebleness of the church organization and its burden of being led by one so young and inexperienced in the ministry (having preached only seven times before that day) was very much depressed in spirit and before the close of the service had almost made up my mind that this, my first would also be my last visit to Batavia.

“But God had ordered other-wise. At the close of the service it was arranged that I would return in two weeks and that then the church would decide if they wanted me and I whether I would remain if they desired it. At the appointed time, (May 26th) I returned, and Rev. W. J. Essick of New Richmond met me here.

“After I preached in the morning, a meeting of the congregation was held, at which it was arranged that I should preach at the church four months. That arrangement has been renewed from time to time since, until more than five and a half years have elapsed, and I am here still.

“One of the voices which called me most loudly to come was the silent eloquence of this unfinished building. When I learned of the circumstances under which it had been built-the Church reduced to two male and sixteen female members-for ten years without a pastor and no prospect of securing one-that the effort to build a Church should be made in such circumstances, and so nearly succeed as it had, spoke to me of a confidence in God on the part of this little band which was sublime. This unfinished house seemed to me a monument of faith, the like of which is seldom seen. And often since when days were dark and prospects discouraging; the thought of this has given me fresh courage.

“In the afternoon of the day I decided to remain we held a communion service; the first which had been held with this Church for several years. Some two years before this the Church records had been lost, and not the scratch of a pen remained to tell the history of the Church or who were at that time its members.”

As we showed earlier in the history, it was Rev. French who reorganized the church and Sunday School, completed our present sanctuary and eventually paid off the debt. His years in Batavia were cut short by an unnamed throat ailment which caused him to resign from the church in May of 1666, but in seven years he had put our church back on its feet.

As far as we know, Rev. French was never able to return to the ministry. Several years after this time, he was known to be working in a government office in Washington, D.C.

Milton Jamieson and John French had much in common. Both were devout Christian gentlemen, both played an important part in the development of our church and both wrote histories of the church. French wrote his in 1867 on the occasion of the dedication of our present church building and Jamieson for the fiftieth anniversary in 1880. I have frequently used both in preparing this article.

Since they were both active in the church during some of the same years, I was sure that these two men must have known each other, but it wasn’t until Dick Jamieson told me that his grandfather, P.F. Jamieson’s middle name was French and that the name came from a former minister at the church that I realized that the Jamieson’s had named their son for Rev. French.

As I am about to finish this history, the church received bad news on April 21, 1991. On this day Rev. Loyd Baird announced that he would be leaving Batavia at the end of May to become pastor of a church in Connersville, Indiana.

The six and a half years that Rev. Baird has spent with us has been a high point in the history of our church. Church membership has increased, but even greater growth has taken place in attendance at worship services as the sanctuary is now full almost every Sunday.

Loyd’s ministry has been characterized by meticulously prepared and well delivered sermons, great caring for the people of the church and community, especially the sick and troubled, and a delightful if unusual sense of humor. The church has made great progress during his time with us. He and his wife, Charlene, will be missed for many years.

During his years in Batavia, many members of his previous churches have stopped here to attend worship service and hear one more of his fine sermons. I am sure that in years to come many Batavians will just happen to be in Connersville, Indiana on Sunday morning.

I would like to conclude this history with a list of the pastors who have served the Batavia Church since its founding. Drawing up the latter part of the list was quite simple. The church records for the years since about 1920 are quite complete, so in this part of the list, I have tried to include only those ministers who were officially called to be pastors of our church. Interim pastors and stated supply ministers have been, as far as possible, omitted. Thus Julian Price Love, Fred Sanner and Robert Clark who were with us for considerable periods of time between regular pastors and our present interim pastor “Casey” Wells have been omitted from of the list.

Finding the names for the earlier part of the list was quite a different story as the church records for these years are quite incomplete. Fortunately several people in the past have written church histories which included rosters of ministers, and a number of Clerks of Session have listed the pastors who served during their terms of office. Unfortunately names and dates often differ from one list to another and little distinction seems to have been made between interim ministers and regular pastors. You will notice that in the list many of the earlier pastors were at the church for only a year or two and ministers are listed for the years 1839 to 1844 and 1850 to 1855 when all other records state that the Church was inactive and had no regular minister.

On the other hand, Rev. French, who served the church for some seven years, was apparently never officially called be pastor of the church. I noticed that when he signed church documents, he normally followed his signature with the letters S.S. I couldn’t understand why he did this until I realized that for the entire time he was a Stated Supply Minister.

Because of these problems, I have tried to tamper with the names and dates on these early lists as little as possible and I have used all of the names which they contain.

I should note that R. B. Dobins, the first name on the list, was never pastor of the Batavia Church. As we stated earlier, he was the Presbyterian pastor at Williamsburg from the time of the founding of the church in 1808 until 1833 and in that capacity, he preached in Batavia a number of times before there was a Batavia Church. Six of the original members of our church came by transfer from the Williamsburg Church. Since all of the lists I found carried his name first, I left him in his place of honor at the head of the class.

A History of the Batavia First Presbyterian Church Continued

As I predicted at the end of the first church history, many Batavians visited Connersville, Indiana to hear Loyd Baird preach one more time. I was among them.

On June 23, 1991 a pulpit nominating committee was formed at the church to find a new pastor. The members were Nancy Erhardt., Marci Nichols, Philip Paian, Scott Stewart and Harris Wright. Scott represented the youth of the church.

On July 15, Rev. Marilyn “Casey” Wells became the full time interim pastor would serve until the new pastor arrived.

On January 29, 1992, the pastor nominating committee recommended Rev. J

Lukat of Baton Rouge, Louisiana to be the new full time pastor of the Batavia Church. On February 16, Rev. Lukat and his family came to Batavia, and he conducted the morning service. That evening a reception was held to allow the members of the congregation to meet Rev. Lukat, his wife Barbara and his children Ken and Elizabeth.

Three days later the members of the congregation met and voted to make Rev. Lukat our new pastor. The Lukats then moved to Batavia.

In the summer of 1992, the church decided to replace both furnaces and add air conditioning. The project cost about $25,000.

In August of that year organist, Dottie Morton, resigned. A substitute played for about six months, and in February Julie Brude became our organist.

That spring, Mike Williams volunteered to take care of the church grounds. He has continued to do this job completely free of charge since that time. He has done an excellent job and the whole church is most grateful to him,

That summer, the church voted to establish a fund to assist in making capital improvements and additions to church owned facilities. Members and friends of the church were encouraged to donate cash, stock, bonds and real estate to the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. These funds were not to be used to support the operations of the church.

In February of 1997, a church Men’s Group was formed. The group would meet at Hardee’s Restaurant at 8:15 AM on the first Sunday of each month for breakfast, fellowship and a brief worship service. The men also agreed to serve at the annual Mother-Daughter Banquet. When the Hardee’s Restaurant closed, the group moved to McDonalds.

Late in 1998, Rev. Lukat was found to be suffering from a very serious heart condition. Rev. Al Davies, a retired minister from Mt. Washington became a temporary supply pastor for the Christmas season. In January of 1999, Rev. Lukat was placed on temporary disability for three months. When he was able to return in March, he would conduct worship services only on the first Sunday of each month and concentrate his efforts on pastoral care to the congregation.

In January of 1999, Robin Wilson was selected to accompany the choir on both the piano and organ.

In August of the same year, the session decided to take part in the Jesus Video Project by mailing one of the videos to each of the 6,000 to 8,000 residential addresses in the 45103 postal zone. The cost would be about S25, 000.00. Rev. Lukat was asked to contact all other ministers and churches in the area and ask them to participate.

In the fall of 1999, it was reported that deterioration was taking place in the foundation of the Christian Education Building. It was also stated that the bui1din was perfectly safe at the time and would not be a problem for 10 to 20 years. It was felt that it would cost about $30,000 just to find out what the problem really was. A decision would have to be made at some time about whether we should repair the resent building or build a new one. The idea of building an entirely new church was also discussed.

At the October Session Meeting in 2001, Robin Wilson, who had been accompanying the choir for several years, also became choir director, and with her in charge, our rather small choir continued to give its usual excellent performances each Sunday Morning.

In November of 2000, Bob McFaddin presented to the church a communion table, paraments and communion cover in memory of his late wife, Dean McFaddin.

In October of 2002 the Stewart family held a picnic for the entire church at their home on Clough Pike, and this event has been held each year since that time.

At about this time the membership of the church began to decline. Some members moved away from the area and were no longer able to attend. Also at about this time, the National Presbyterian Church did some things to which many of our members strongly objected. One of these was to permit gay marriages. Our church joined the Confessing Church Movement, which opposed this, but a number of our members found another Presbyterian Church, which was not connected to the PCUSA, and began to attend there. Somewhat later, a number of members left our church because they objected to some of the things going on here.

Because of this decline in membership, the amount of money received from members began to decline. Members were asked to increase their pledges, and many did, but it was also decided to attempt to increase membership by adding a different type of service.

It was finally decided to hold an early morning contemporary service on the second Sunday of each month. Rev Lukat would lead the service. There would be more singing, a different kind of sermon, and coffee other kinds of refreshments would be served. These services went on for several months. Unfortunately, all of those who attended were already members of the church. Some came because they could not attend the regular service that week, and others came to the early service to help get the new service under way and then also attended the regular ten forty-five service. As no new members came to the contemporary service, the idea was abandoned after five or six months.

At a session meeting on February 5, 2004, Rev. Ron Lukat advised that he would like to be released from his call in Batavia as he accepted the position of pastor at a church located in Alexander City, Alabama, effective March 21, 2004. He had been in Batavia for twelve years.

On February 23, the session met with Barbara Havens and Joy Russell of the Presbytery office. They were informed that a committee should be formed to select an

Interim Pastor and that Rev. Jim Bernard of the Bethel Church would serve as moderator of the Session until an Interim Pastor was chosen.

An Interim Committee consisting of Denise Barone, Jonathan Kennard, Viola Sibert, Tom Miller and Harris Wright was formed to select the Interim Pastor for the church. Five Ministers expressed an interest in becoming our Interim Pastor. Several were asked to preach at our church, one withdrew for reasons of health, and that the name of Rev. Lloyd Dunavant was presented to the Session on July 12, as their committee’s choice for Interim Pastor. The session agreed with the decision and Rev. Dunavant was appointed to the position.

Also at this meeting, it was announced that on December 19th of this year, our church would be one hundred and seventy-five years old. It was also decided that the Women’s Circle would form a committee to celebrate the occasion.

At the August meeting the session discussed plans for the Pulpit Nominating Committee. It was decided that the church nominating committee should select the candidates for the committee which would be elected by the congregation, and that the committee should be made up of no more than six members.

BATAVIA FIRST PRESBYTERIAN MINISTERS

R. B. Dobbins 1829-1830

J. M. Rowlands 1830-1832

F. Rutherford 1832-1833

George Beecher 1833-1837

James Dunlap 1837-1838

M. H. Wilder 1839-1840

Claudius B. Andrews 1840-1841

Joseph Chester 1840

Amos Dresser 1842-1843

Edward Schofield 1844-1850

Isaac Delematre 1851-1852

B. T. Neil 1853-1854

John L. French 1861-1869

H. Ketchum 1869

George F. Fitch 1869-1872

A. A. Potter 1873

John B. Smith 1874-1877

E. M. Rossiter 1881-1383

W. F. Gowdy 1883-1885

J. Straus 1886-1890

E. M. Bell 1892-1897

Howard Billman 1898-1904

George Lee 1904-1908

Ernest Jackson 1908-1909

George L. Rames 1909-1910

J. W. McDaniels 1910-1911

B. B. Lavender 1911-1914

T. J. Simpson 1914-1917

W. H. Tilford 1917-1919

Edward McDill 1919

George D. McCullough 1920-1927

W. B. Bonham 1917-1929

Samuel Huecker 1930-1937

Vernon Martin 1938-1942

Walter Zeanah 1945-1946

William Tait Patterson 1947-1957

Lucian Sine 1958-1966

Herbert Bates 1967-1971

Fred Sanner 1971-1973

Bruce B. Scott 1973-1983

Robert Clark 1983-1984

Loyd L. Baird 1984-1991

Marilyn “Casey’ Wells 1991-1992

Ronald W. Lukat 1992-2004

Lloyd B. Dunavant 2004-2006

Allan C. Lane 2006-

The following notes were found in loose form in the Session Records by P. F. Jamieson.

Fellow church Members and Friends. December 29, 1929

We are assembled here today to commemorate and celebrate the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the organization of our beloved church.

Two similar gatherings have been held in this room during the past one-hundred years. On January 20th, 1867 this building was formally dedicated and at that time the 37 years of the church history was read. And the 50th anniversary was celebrated in May 16, 1880 having been postponed from the previous December.

I was at that meeting and remember seeing my father standing here and reading the history of the church for the first fifty years of service to this community. I will now read portions of the record as compiled and read at that time.

So endeth the very partial record of our first fifty years. In ringing this history to date I bring to your notice only events of the MOST importance and other matters of general interest. Usually the most interesting and appealing events in the history of an organization occur in the earlier years. This is usually the time of struggle against adverse conditions, often a struggle for the very existence. A record of sacrifice and loyal cooperation if a comparative few faithful souls – full of hope – and with a vision of a possible glorious future. So it was with our beloved country and so it was with our beloved church.

Our church began its 51st year under the ministry of Rev. William Carson. I remember him very well. My father states that he knew and remembered every minister during the first 50 years - and as I knew and remembered them all throughout the past 50 years. Together, we knew them all!

1881

In 1881 Milton Jamieson gave to this church the present parsonage on the corner of North and 5th Streets. Since that time, the parsonage has been much improved by the addition of several rooms, furnace, electric lights, bath and hardwood floors and other betterments.

1886

The Kitchen

An additional room or chapel had long been desired by the congregation and much patient effort and considerable delay, the present chapel was built and cleared from debt in 1886. A kitchen full equipped was added in 1922 and has been of great use and convenience in the social work of the Ladies Sid Society.

KRINKS

Ezra Krinks, a long time sexton of this church, and who some recall as a very loyal but very eccentric official, donated the present bell to the church in 1886. This bell was first bought by the county Republican Campaign Committee and mounted on a heavy wagon, it was taken to the big political meetings during the Garfield-Hancock and later the Blain-Cleveland campaigns. Mr. Krinks was a very painstaking caretaker and took great pride in keeping the church spick and span. It was said of him he could light every lamp in the church with one good match and some old ones. He was even known to help preserve order when necessary. He served 22 years as sexton.

Dr. Hickman of Cincinnati held a series of special meetings here in 1886 and at the close 37 new members were received into the church on profession of faith. The church had no pastor at that time. You will note the year 1886 was an eventful one. The record of that year states that the Sunday School membership was 217 and that the attendance at prayer meetings was very large. At one meeting 144 were present.

1889 Windows

The stained glass windows were installed in 1889. Two windows were donated as memorials; one in memory of Carrie Nichols Buvinger, one in memory of Maria Titus Jamieson and Kate Buvinger Jamieson. One window was donated by the Ladies Furnishing Society, one by the choir, one by the Sunday School and one by the church.

1898 – 1904 Girls Industrial School

During the pastorate of Rev. Howard Billman (1898-1904) there was an unusual interest shown in all activities of the church. In 1902 the church membership reached 227, probably the largest number ever on the church rolls. Mr. Billman established an industrial school for girls in 1901. The school was under the supervision of the pastor. Mrs. Billman and Mrs. W. W. Dennison had charge of the school and were assisted by some of the women of the church. A special room was secured for the school and a number of children and older girls from homes of the less fortunate families of our church and town were given instruction in sewing-cooking and the fundamentals of homemaking. The school was continued several years and was the means of great good.

1902 Endowment Fund

In 1902 Milton Jamieson, my father, addressed a letter to the Trustees and Elders of our church in which he informed them that he had assigned to the Trustees a note secured by mortgage and worth $2,000.00 requesting that this be used as an endowment fund. I quote part of his letter: “It is my desire that it shall be called the Jamieson Fund for all time to come. I wish to have the satisfaction while living of seeing the Fund permanently established and to know that long after the family have passed away, that we are still contributing annually to the minister’s salary and trust it may so continue for centuries to come.” He closed with these words “and now may God’s blessing ever attend this church and all who may hereafter attach themselves to it – now and forever.” This fund was formally accepted in a letter of grateful appreciation, signed by the Rev. Howard Billman and the elders and Trustees. These letters in full are spread on the church records.

1912 Organ

Our pipe organ was installed in 1912. The large vocalion (?) organ previously used was traded in on the present instrument. The balance of the fund was raised by donations by members of the church and congregation as I recall the cost of the organ was about $1,700.00. A water motor was first used, but an electric motor and blower were installed when day electric service was established in our village. The organ was improved in 1928 at a cost of several hundred dollars. This organ would cost now, new at least $4,000.00.

Sunday School

Our church history would not be complete without some mention of the Sunday school and other organizations. A Sunday School has been maintained through most of the years, although there were periods when for several years no school was held. We cannot help but believe that this school has done a great work through all these years. At time the enrollment has been over 200 with about 15 teachers. The work of these devoted men and women has left its impress for good on the life of this community and the world.

The first Sabbath school was organized in the court house in 1830 with about 30 members. Rev. Rowland was superintendent. Rev. Rutherford was the second superintendent. Rev. George Beecher was superintendent when the church first occupied the first building which stood where the Clermont Sun Publishing Co. building now stands. Then the following superintendents: Brice R. Blair, Rev. Wilder, Amos Dresser, Rev. Schofield, J. W. Lowe, Rev. J. L. French, George L. Swing, George W. Hulick, George W. Felter, M. Jamieson, L. W. Bishop, Chas. J. Jamieson, Jas. B. Swing, H. L. Nichols, J. S, Parrott, Howard Billman and P. F. Jamieson.

Our boards of Trustees have usually been appointed mostly from business men of the congregation for the purpose of administering the financial and temporal affairs of the church and we have a long record of faithful and efficient services on the part of these boards.

The exacting and often very unknown office of treasurer has been handed down with no shadow on the record through all these generations.

During the darkest days of our church history, when membership had become very few in numbers and these mostly women – these women – very poor in worldly goods, but rich in faith, courage and vision, proved their faith by their works and refused to see this church perish. At one time in 1858 with only two men members - and they both were old and feeble - this handful of faithful, loyal women started a subscription paper and obtained funds sufficient to buy this lot and build the foundation of this building. And so through the years, the women have labored for the maintaining and advancement of our beloved church. The Ladies Aid Society, formerly known as the Ladies Church Furnishing Society, was organized about 1883 by Mrs. Gowdy. It has done much for the social, physical and spiritual work of this church. A complete history of the society should be compiled and preserved.

A Missionery Society has been maintained, discontinued and reorganized several times. The present society has now been active for some years, having been reorganized in 1920 by our much loved Mrs. Nina McCulloch.

Choir

The maintaining of a choir in a small church is always a difficult problem. It is a rare combination to find a sufficient number of members, who have at heart, fair vocal ability. To this must be added some musical education. And most of all they must have the willingness to serve gratis and be interested enough to often make some sacrifice of other matters to rehearse the church music. Then it is often difficult to find voices for the different parts coupled with all this vocaliss are very often inclined to be (to use very polite language) just a little bit temperamental at times. Choirs are sometimes known as the war department. However, in spite of all the above, our church for many years has had a choir and the singers have always given freely of their time and ability as part of their service in the work. Many faithful organists have labored here in an effort to brighten and make more impressive the service of the church.

It is fitting that at this time that we should mention our oldest living members. Mrs. Caroline Fairman, 90 years of age next month, and Mrs. Josephine Hulick, in her 89th year (she died at 103), united with this church at the same time in 1863. Our most aged member is Mr. Joseph Platter a veteran of the Civil War and now nearly 97 years old. He united with us by letter in 1918.

In looking through the church records, we find that for many years (a generation ago) four men had much to do with the conduct of church activities, all were Elders, leaders in prayer meetings, superintendents and teachers in the Sunday School. I refer to George L. Swing, L. W. Bishop, George W. Hulick and Milton Jamieson.

Time cannot now be taken to mention individually the many faithful and loyal members who through the years in loving sacrifice have and are giving themselves to this treat cause. Their names are on the records of their church and recorded forever in God’s great Book of Life.

I have sometimes stood in this room alone – and in the hushed and solemn silence, have thought of the now silent voices that once beat upon these walls – proclaiming the great and everlasting truths of God. As we think of the thousands of sermons, prayers and hymns that for 68 years have proclaimed in this room the gospel of Jesus Christ, who can measure the far reaching influence for good. We can truly say the labors of this goodly line of Godly men have not been in vain.

The following is the list of Elders from the beginning to the present time in order of their election:

Brice R. Blair and James Dennis – 1829; Andrew Foot and W. F. Spence – 1832; Calvin A. Warren – 1836; John Lyle – 1837; Joseph Chester – 1866; Otis Dudley – 1846; Lott Hulick – 1861; A. J. Applegate – 1864; George S. Swing – 1866; Milton Jamieson – 1870; L. W. Bishop – 1870; George W. Hulick – 1879; Harry Dennis – 1892; Albert Heinrici – 1892; H. L. Nichols – 1893; P. F. Jamieson – 1897; Frank Davis – 1899; S. P. Reed - ; W. B. Miller - ; A. B. Nichols - ;J. S. H. Barr was elected at the same time as S. P. reed but died before the ordination service. Albert Heinrici, Sr. and Joseph Bicking were acting Deacons in this church for many years. And for many years no Deacons have been appointed. The principal work of Deacons was to look especially after the poor and needy of the church. I find it so impossible in the time allotted, to give an adequate report of the church activities through a century of time. I suggest that a committee be appointed to compile and print a complete history of our church for 100 years just closed.

Our church has lived through a tremendous period of advancement and achievement in our national life, through bloody war and pestilence, through panic and in prosperity and peace. In great national and foreign disasters and in war our church has always responded liberally to calls for aid. Our members have ever taken an active part in worthy community, state and national activities. And several of our members have held high and important office in state and nation.

In the World War (I) our service flag, presented by Mrs. H. L. Nichols, was decorated with 20 stars.

So I bring to a close this comparatively brief story of the 100 years of our church history. Through many trying years and many discouragements there has always been at least a few loyal, courageous and stalwart hearts who carried on and have preserved for us today this church of the Living God, a very precious heritage.

I love thy Kingdom Lord, The house of Thine abode.

The Church our blest Redeemer save by His own precious blood.

I love Thy church O God – Her walls before Thee stand.

Dear as the apple of thine eye, And graven on thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall. For Her my prayers ascend.

To Her, my cares and toils be given.

Till toils and cares shall end.

P. F. Jamieson

December 29, 1929