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FOR

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BY

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THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH EDEN, ILLINOIS.
Rev. SAMUEL WYLIE, Pastor

Historical Sketch of the Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Southern Illinois.

SAMUEL WYLIE, the writer of the following sketch, a native of Ireland, removed to the United States of America, in 1807, and in 1811, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the University of Pennsylvania; after which, entering the Divinity Hall in Philadelphia, under the Presidency of the Rev. S. B. Wylie, D. D., in 1815 by the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, he was licensed to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He visited the Churches in many of the States in the summers of 1815 and 1816, returning and spending the winters of each of those years in the Theological School in Philadelphia.

Finding in the Eastern and Middle States, many owning small farms, or renting land and labouring under great disadvantages, who, by selling and removing west, could have large farms; and religious families, by locating near each other, could have their churches and schools convenient, and so be profited in worldly goods, in intelligence, and in grace. Influenced by the above reflection, the summer and fall of 1817 were spent in exploring new countries, travelling west as far as any settlements were found. Illinois was a wilderness from Vincennes to St. Louis, sometimes over twenty miles from house to house. Crossing the Mississippi at St. Louis, the course was continued west as far as Franklin and Boonsville, Mo.

Leaving Missouri in November, and passing through Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee to Chester, South Carolina, there spending the winter; in spring left for Pittsburgh, where, in May 1818, the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church was in session. He (S. W.) having reported to Synod his travels, and the prospect of Church extension in the West, was ordained to the office of the holy ministry, and sent a missionary to Southern Illinois.

In the summer of 1818, Delegates met in convention, in Kaskaskia, to frame a state constitution, there being then some over 40,000 inhabitants in the Territory. At the same time S. W. began his missionary operations in Randolph, and parts of St Clair, Washington, and Perry Counties. During the sessions of the Convention he was often present, and in conversation, privately, with the President (Judge Thomas) and other members of the Convention, urged the propriety, duty, and necessity of owning and honouring the God of nations, and regarding his law as supreme; as now they were laying the foundation-stone on which the edifice of a great state was to be reared.

A petition signed by Robert Thompson and others, members of the Associate Reformed Church, near Kaskaskia, was brought before the Convention, praying that the Bible be recognized in the constitution as a Divine Revelation,—the Law of God, the paramount Rule, and Jesus, the Messiah owned as Head and Lord of all. The Convention was composed of diverse materials; some Christian

men, some respecters of religion, and one or more openly avowed infidels. The first motion to dispose of the petition was "that it be laid on the table till the fourth of July." This motion failing, it was referred to a select committee, which not having been called on to report, near the close of the session asked to be dismissed. These items are stated in the journal of the Convention.

There being no members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Illinois, S. W., on request, agreed to make his principal preaching station with a Society of the Associate Reformed people, who, at a still earlier date, had removed from South Carolina.

Emigrants of the Presbyterian order aimed for the settlement where the gospel on the Bible plan of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms Larger and Shorter, was regularly preached. In 1821 a congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church was organized, and called Rev. S. Wylie to be their pastor. He accepted their call, having thirty-five names annexed to the call; and settled with a salary of \$208. The congregation claiming only half the services of their pastor, missionary operations, to a considerable extent, were still continued; including an area whose diameter would be from twenty-four to thirty miles.

The congregation increased in a few years, till over 350 communicants; their distant societies were becoming strong, claiming, and obtaining organization; and some of them now are settled congregations. Salem on the north was first set off and organized; then, Hill Prairie, N. W., and Concord, S. E., being organized, called and obtained for their pastor Rev. M. Harshaw, who ministered to the joint charge for some years; and having given up Hill Prairie, continues the Pastor of Concord. Grand-cote, N. E., was organized, and in connection with Unity, called and enjoyed the pastoral labours of Rev. James Pearson, till his removal by death. Unity and Hill Prairie have been enjoying the pastoral labours of Rev. N. K. Crow, for nearly two years. Bethel, the original stock, and first congregation under the pastoral care of Rev. S. Wylie, worships in Eden. The congregation is compact; few members distant, it numbers over 280 communicants.

There was a division in the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1833, which affected all or almost all the congregations of the body; Eden and its neighbouring congregations also suffered. The separating brethren are known as the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the original body as the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Of the separating brethren there are four congregations and four ministers,—two settled, and two not settled. The Associate Reformed have had seven congregations, and four ministers,—three settled, and one professor in the Seminary. The Associate have one congregation.

In May, 1858, a union was effected between the Associate and Associate Reformed, and hereafter to be known as the United Presbyterian Church.

CHURCH OFFICERS.—Sessional records of some of the earliest

years after the church organization have been lost, or are not forthcoming. But three, whose names were on the call accepted in 1821, are in our congregation, and two of those are now members of our session.

Our session at first was organized with two Ruling Elders, namely: Samuel Little and William Edgar, who had been ordained in Tennessee, and removed to Illinois in 1820.

William Edgar was a man of quiet, sober habits; aiming in all that he did at a blameless and holy life. Samuel Little was a man of more extended information in matters civil and religious, zealous for soundness in doctrine and strictness in discipline in the house of God. From that small beginning with two Ruling Elders, our members in session were increased from time to time; some elected in the congregation and ordained, and some who had been ordained in other places elected by the congregation.

James McClurkin, a member of the Associate Reformed Church, took great interest in helping strangers to find out good locations, leaving his plough and for days searching out lines, and pointing out good lands. He soon joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and being elected was ordained a Ruling Elder. His widow is still with us, an honoured and godly mother in Israel.

James Monford, a ruling elder from South Carolina, became a member of our session; after his death his son David Monford became a member of session, and when Grand-cote congregation was set off from us, he and James Wilson, another of our Elders, belonged to it.

Samuel Nesbit, William Jamison, and William Pattison were at one time elected and ordained. William Jamison is long since dead; William Pattison with a large family of sons removed to Oregon, and afterwards to Washington Ter., near Olympia. Samuel Nesbit is still an honoured member of our session, he is fast nearing his four-score.

James Wilson, Sr., whose family and connections were the first Reformed Presbyterians that came to this settlement, had a large family of sons and daughters. He laboured much for the good of the infant congregation, and died in a good old age, in the full assurance of faith. Three of his sons have been members of our session. His youngest son, Henry Wilson, a youth of exemplary piety, after having ruled faithfully for a period in the house of God; was early called home to be present with the Lord, leaving a widow and six children.

James Wilson, as stated above, is a Ruling Elder in Grand-cote congregation. John, the eldest son, is still a member of our session. John Richman, ordained in our session, became a Ruling Elder in Concord congregation, when it received organization.

John Fulton, ordained in Ohio, was chosen a member of our session, and remained an active and useful member till removed by death. His son David Fulton has been, and still continues, a very useful and active member of the Board of Trustees.

John K. Tailor and Thomas Blair, ordained in Tennessee, having

been elected in the congregation, were members of session for some years, both men of piety and sound judgment; both rest from their labours. Thomas Armour, a member of session for several years, has for a long time been numbered with the dead; a son of his is now in the ministry. John Campbell, formerly an elder with us, is now in the Unity congregation.

Charles McKelvey, elected and ordained a Ruling Elder with us; was a meek and unassuming Christian; a man of sound judgment; labouring always for the peace and prosperity of Zion. He died in 1856, leaving the widow and a numerous family, to be comforted in sorrow, by knowing that for him to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord. His eldest son, Rev. H. A. McKelvey, is a missionary in the State of Minnesota.

There have been in all, twenty-seven (27) Ruling Elders in our session, from its organization. The session at present is composed of ten Ruling Elders, with the Moderator.

Names of Elders:—James Blair, Samuel Nesbit, John McCaughan, John Wilson, Robert W. Marshall, M. D., James Craig, William McHenry, Joseph McHenry, James Crawford, and Samuel L. Boyd.

Names of the members of the present Board of Trustees:—Bryce Crawford, David Fulton, John Watson, Samuel McKelvey, Robert McLaughlin. The congregation have no Deacons.

Within an area of something over twenty-four miles diameter, all embraced in the first missionary ground of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, are,

Of General Synod of the Ref. Pres. Church,	3	Ministers and	5	organized congregations.
Synod,	“	“	4	“
Asso. & Asso. Ref., now United Pres.,	4	“	“	7
Presbyterian, O. S.,	2	“	“	3
Presbyterian, N. S.,	0	“	“	1
In all,	13	“	“	21

God has given the inhabitants of this land his best and richest blessings; the Bible “a light to the foot and a lamp to the path;” the Gospel, calling sinners to repent, and directing them to Jesus. May not the dwellers of this land say, “The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad?”

Rapid has been the advance of Illinois since it became a State, especially in the last half-dozen years. Population in 1818 scarcely reaching 40,000, now, largely over a million; then, no graded roads or turn-pikes, now, a net-work of Railroads overspreads the state; then, only a few small towns and villages, now, large cities and flourishing towns; then, the interior of the state far removed from market, now, market brought to the door; then, few schools, now, colleges and public schools adorn the state.

The present advancing state is but the dawn of an opening and brighter day. Honouring the Lord, he will exalt the nation. “They that honour God he will honour; but they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed.” “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” “O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.”

Eden, Illinois.