

A Moment in History

1844-2019

The following excerpts from *If These Walls Could Talk: A History of The Midway Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* by Margaret Ware Parrish, July 1998; *The Bluegrass Clipper*; and other sources appeared in the church bulletin on Sundays in the weeks leading up to the 175th Anniversary Celebration as a way to share and recall the history of Midway Christian Church.

May 5, 2019



Midway Christian Church traces its roots back to few area churches: Grassy Springs, New Union, or Georgetown. "Today, these places can be reached in ten or fifteen minutes by car; however in those days the only means of transportation was by horse and buggy. In good weather, the drive was enjoyable, but tiring. At other times, cold-driving rains made the trip terrible...[So a group of people from the Midway area] decided to try to establish a church of their own here. Since they had no building, they began having services in an unfinished woolen mill on a site now occupied by a brick building at 206 Main (Railroad) street. The church was originally known as the Midway Church of Christ. The first meeting was organized on Saturday, before the third Lord's day in July, 1844."

May 12, 2019

The first minister chosen to lead Midway Christian Church was Dr. Curtis J. Smith. He had been educated as a Presbyterian minister but later changed denominations. The church was started with 32 charter members. As the membership grew, so did the desire of the people to have a church of their own, so work was begun and the building was finished by December, 1844. It was of Greek Revival design and had four pillars across the front.



May 19, 2019

In 1859, something happened that threatened the very existence of Midway Christian Church. In the early days of the Disciples, no musical instruments were allowed in church. In many things, Dr. Pinkerton was an innovator and he believed music could enhance the spiritual life of the church.



In some way, he managed to procure an instrument known as a melodeon which he intended to use for services. In order to prepare his people he informed them that their singing was so bad that even the rats were fleeing the church. Shortly thereafter, the instrument was moved in and was played by Tom Parrish, son of James Ware Parrish. There was much controversy concerning this as many people considered it the instrument of the devil and the church was rapidly becoming divided. One man, Adam Hibler, decided the only way to end the discord was to have the instrument removed, so one night he and his servant Reuben took the melodeon out of the building. All accounts seem to agree that it was taken out through a window. The melodeon was never seen in the church again, but it did reappear years later and is now on display at Midway University. This is what we refer to as the "melodeon incident" and would eventually lead to a split in what is now the Church of Christ (non-instrumental) and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). (For more information: www.midway.edu/about-midway/our-story/the-melodeon)

May 26, 2019

Some of the earliest Board minutes from Midway Christian Church include:

- February 24th, 1879: Brother Taylor was authorized to purchase a keg of wine for the church.
- May 1st, 1882: Upon the motion of Brother Parrish, Brother Lucy was requested to call attention to tobacco spitting on the floor.
- July 1st, 1882: The financial report shows that the amount collected to date was \$351.45 and the amount spent was \$350.11, leaving a balance of \$1.14!
- September 4th, 1882: It was suggested that the church mortgage the vacant lot and erect a parsonage.
- November 6th, 1882: A contract for the parsonage has been let to D. Lehman for the cost of \$2050.
- January 4th, 1893: A Week of Prayer (January 8-13) will be observed by the three Midway congregations with union services. They will meet at the Presbyterian Church on Monday and Tuesday, the Baptist Church on Wednesday and Thursday and the Christian Church on Friday and Saturday.

June 2, 2019

Soon the congregation began to notice that their church building had become shabby. Repairs were obviously necessary and funds began to be solicited when the following article appeared in the Clipper in June of 1887: "An effort is being made by the Christian Church of this place to raise funds to erect a new house of worship. The church now in use is one of the first buildings in Midway and is badly in need of repair." That article probably convinced the members that it would be easier to build than to repair, but keep one thing in mind---at this point the church was only approximately forty-four years old!

On Sunday, March 31st, 1895, the question of building a new structure was put before the congregation, who approved the idea provided the money could be raised. The decision to build rather than repair may have been strengthened by an event in early January which the Clipper describes... "No services were held at the Christian Church Sunday due to the falling of the chandelier. The large center fixture fell from the ceiling just after the lamps had been lighted for evening services but before the congregation had assembled. All lamps were extinguished by the fall and the chandelier was badly damaged and the chimneys were broken."



June 9, 2019

Second Christian Church's founding story begins in 1832, long before Midway Christian Church ever existed. "According to the history of the Second Christian Church, by Katherine Johnson, the slave [sic] members of white churches of New Union, Grassy Springs, and Georgetown grew so large that the Elders organized them into a separate congregation and the meeting place was on the property where the Kentucky Female Orphan School was later built between 1830 and 1840...[This earlier starting date] is also supported by the experiences of the wife of the slave [sic] called Alexander Campbell. Her name was Rosa Campbell and she was born in Fayette County on March 6, 1829. Rosa Campbell had a card produced around 1910 to sell for ten cents to assist in paying the indebtedness of Midway Church. The present 1906 red painted brick Second Christian Church is the church she is referring to. Rosa Campbell remarked that she joined the Christian Church under Elder John T. Johnson (white) at Midway Kentucky. She was baptized at age 16 in



1845. Note she was not baptized by Dr. L.L. Pinkerton who was the pastor at Midway Christian Church. That indicates she joined another Christian Church in Midway, and the only other Christian Church in Midway was the Black [sic] Christian Church. Since the church was being led by white elders and minister at this time, then this indicates that this was before her husband Alexander Campbell became pastor of “Historic” Second Christian Church....From her card, we know that a lot of slaves (300) became members of his church in Midway”, (Brenda Jackson, 2019)

However, according to *If These Walls Could Talk: A History of The Midway Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, in the early days of Midway Christian’s past, it was the accepted practice for [African Americans] to go to church with their masters [sic]. “From clippings and word of mouth, we have two different views of the interior of [the earliest church structure of Midway Christian Church]—did the [African Americans] ‘stand around the wall’ as some said or did they sit in the balcony? Judging by the height of the early little church it would seem unlikely that it was tall enough to have a balcony. By the time the “new” church was built it had already become successful and had a large congregation. Dr. Pinkerton, however, was not thinking of sheer numbers as he looked out across his congregation. His thoughts were that the whites [sic] were making all the decisions and were leading all the services. This was not right, thought he, for many of the [African Americans] were quite capable and should be making their own decisions as to their worship services, not being forced into the white [sic] mold. With this thought in mind, he requested the permission and blessing of the whites [sic] to permit the [African Americans] to form their own congregation.

All of this brings us to the present moment....On February 22, 1998, both Historic Second Christian Church and Midway Christian Church gathered for a service of unity. This tradition of combining worship services has continued for many years and is one that all look forward to as we remember our connection as brothers and sisters in faith.

6/16/2019

More excerpts from the earliest Board minutes archive:

On Sunday, May 5th, 1895, the committee tasked to oversee the building of the new church announced that about \$8000 had been subscribed and that, in their opinion, it was safe to begin planning the new church building.

On May 9th, the committee met with Martin Gratz, an architect from Lexington. He was to furnish plans and supervise the construction of the building. The total cost of the project was expected not to exceed \$7000 if they used materials from the old church, and use them they did! J.W. Parrish was appointed a committee of one to get the old church torn down.

On May 18th, Mr. Parrish reported that he had contracted with R. J. Sacra to superintend the removal. He was to be paid \$2.00 a day and would hire hands who would work under him at the lowest possible price. Among the “hands” he hired were town boys who were paid \$.05 an hour to clean the brick which would be used in the foundation of the new building.

June 6th, the Secretary of the Board reported he had applied to the Mayor and City Council for a building permit for a “new church to stand where the old one stood. Said building to be one story and built of brick-slate roof and galvanized iron cornice. Size of building 79 feet long by 49 feet wide set back 22 feet from the fence”. The permit was approved by the city.

June 23, 2019

More excerpts from the earliest Board minutes archive:

August 22, 1895

The Midway Christian Church cornerstone was not laid last Sunday on account of the fact that it did not arrive in Midway until the following Tuesday. Next Saturday, August 24th, the stone will be put in place, rain or shine. The new church will cost about \$12,000 and will be of modern stone and brick. The main auditorium will have a seating capacity of about 500, with a large classroom which can be thrown open when there is an overflow. A library, four smaller rooms and a baptistery will also be built. It is expected the new house of worship will be completed by the end of the year.

August 29th, 1895

The new Christian Church cornerstone was finally laid last Saturday but the speech making was removed to the Opera House due to a steady rain. Articles placed in the cornerstone included a Bible; copy of the New Testament from W. S. Broadhurst; picture of old church; copies of Blue Grass Clipper, Christian Visitor, Christian Guide, Christian Standard and Christian Evangelist; names of building committee, architects, official board, church membership; a writing stating how the lot came into the hands of the church; a card given by the Rev. Enoch Johnson on which appropriate Scripture was written; a picture of the pastor Elder M.D. Clubb, all of which was placed in the stone by W. M. Shipp.