

June, 2007

Pause Ponder Profit

Local Church History Second And Walnut Church Of Christ

by James A. Brown

The church of Christ presently meeting at the corner of Second Street and Walnut Street in Paragould Arkansas had its beginning in about 1884. Some who were believed to be members at that time were: W. R. Smith and wife, a brother Tyner and wife, a brother Gardner and wife, and a sister Shannon. For awhile, these members met from house to house. In the summer of 1885 the Methodist church allowed them to use their meeting house for the purpose of holding a gospel meeting. An individual by the name of A. Alsup from Tennessee, did the preaching. Sometime during the first week of the meeting brother Alsup taught that sprinkling was not baptism. For this the Methodists refused to allow any further use of their building. It's believed that on September 6, 1885 this little group of Christians began meeting in the office of L. C. Thompson. The Thompson office was located near the railroad and at the rear of the present Akins Celebration Hall. Sometime in 1886, a meeting house was built at the southeast corner of Court Street

and Fourth Street. Around this time brothers Smith, Tyner, and Gardner were selected and appointed as elders. They would meet every Lord's day for worship. But because of the shortage of preachers and money, they had preaching once a month and a gospel meeting once a year. Some of the preachers who held meeting during these early years were: James A. Harding, James E. Scoby, M. C. Kurfees, S. M. Jones, and F. W. Smith. For the next few years the church grew and prospered, but this peace was soon disturbed.

The following narrative was written by a brother R. N. Gardner. R. N. is believed to have been the son of the brother Gardner who earlier was mentioned as serving as one of the elders. The narrative tells us what caused the disruption of peace in the congregation.

Several years after the church was established a brother Yantis, his wife and two daughters, also a son-in-law and his wife moved to Paragould. Brother Yantis was a druggist, and his son-in-law was depot agent for the Cotton Belt railroad. They were likeable people and all were talented musicians. They believed in having instrumental music in the worship. They were regular in attendance and brother Yantis led the singing. At first they did not agitate the instrumental music issue for they knew the elders and members were opposed to it. As time passed they gained friends and had influence with some members of the church and with townspeople. Several members of the church accepted their views on the music question. With this additional force and

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influence, they insisted that they were entitled to be heard in deciding matters concerning activities of the church.

They had sympathy from some of the members because they were active in the work of the church, contributed of their means and helped otherwise. They wanted to use a piano in connection with the singing. This was not permitted.

They clamored for the privilege of selecting a preacher for a gospel meeting. Finally, for the sake of peace, the elders granted their request. They chose a preacher from Missouri whose name was Davidson. He was a sensational evangelist, a pleasant man, a smooth speaker. He had large audiences. There were about forty additions to the church. Some of these were from denominations. With their numbers increased, those who favored the use of instrumental music seemed more determined to have their way even at the risk of division.

Early in the spring of 1901 the church engaged brother M. H. Northcross of Franklin, Tennessee to preach during a meeting to be held the following summer. This meeting was announced and advertised for several months before it was to begin. Brother Northcross was a preacher of long experience, a devoted Christian, loyal to the truth, kind in his preaching and a forceful speaker. He arrived in Paragould and began the meeting at the appointed time on Sunday morning. He preached a week without any special public interference by those favoring instrumental music.

On the second Sunday night of the meeting brother Northcross, brother Smith, my father and I went to church together.

Though we were early, as we approached the meeting house from within came strains of music, the tones of a piano and the voices of singers! When we entered the building we were completely surprised and astonished for the sight was so unexpected and disappointing. That afternoon the "digressives" had brought a piano into the church house without the knowledge of the elders or the congregation! In the pulpit there was a "digressive" preacher. There was a choir. At the piano was a daughter of brother Yantis.

Though they were engaged in a religious service, all of them were committing a two-fold sin: disobeying the voice of God, and unlawfully taking possession, by force, of a church building put there and paid for by Christians conscientiously opposed to what these "robbers" were doing. In firm fact they were acting like bandits holding up (not a man for his money), but a group of Christians. As effectually as with bullets they were taking from Christians who owned this property, the building so precious and useful to them. Then, though a party to these pernicious proceedings and guilty before God of sin, the imported intruding preacher got up to warn others of the danger of sin which damns the soul. When his sermon was ended the congregation was seated. What followed then was enough to make angels weep and the devil rejoice. The preacher asked if any one had anything to say.

Brother "Dump" Thompson, who the digressives claimed as one of their elders, stood up and said, "We have this building and we are going to keep it. We will put new locks on the doors in the morning and we will prosecute any one who molests or

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tampers with them." Then he pulled up his sleeves, raised his arms, clinched his fist and added a threat: "If any one of you does not like this, just come on!"

There was a short pause. Then my father arose and with trembling voice said quietly, "Brethren, I would rather you would come over and take my dwelling away from me." He sat down. The congregation was dismissed. We went home. For fifty years many of us never entered that building again.

The brethren left their meeting house in Paragould that night with the blessing of God upon them for humbly suffering such injustice without retaliating. Of this I am firmly convinced. They did not believe in having lawsuits among brethren.

When division over the use of instrumental music first occurred, the digressive element usually took the church building. In many instances, as in Paragould, Arkansas, they simply stole the property. From what I observed and learned then, I know they did this by force rather than on the principle or basis of justice and righteousness.

When the division occurred the majority of the people affiliated themselves with the Christian church. Those who remained true to the gospel again met from house to house to worship and study the Bible.

For about four years the church met in a dwelling owned by W. R. Smith, located on Second Street, on a portion of the present site of the Reynolds Building. In 1905 or 1906 a little frame meeting house was built at 213 North Fourth Avenue. For the next several years the church had a gradual growth, continuing to meet

at this location. Some of the preachers who worked with the church during these years included: Alexander Douglas, Joe T. Taylor, J. P. Lowery, R. L. Colley, J. E. Green, Tillman Prince and B. G. Hope.

When the church had outgrown the building on North Fourth Avenue, a lot, on which to build a new meeting house, was purchased at the corner of Second Street and Walnut Street. A new building was begun in August 1932, at a cost of approximately \$15,000. By November 27, 1932, the work on the building was near enough completed that the church was able to meet in it for worship. B. G. Hope was the preacher at that time and the elders were: S. A. Archer, C. L. Purdom and Earl Taylor. By 1940, the meeting house had to be enlarged to a seating capacity of more than five hundred. B. G. Hope continued to preach for the congregation until 1942. Other preachers during the forties were: F. L. Paisley, Oscar L. Hayes, R. C. Walker and J. A. McNutt.

In 1948 the church helped to establish another congregation on South Seventh Street. About 120 members of Second and Walnut agreed to form the new congregation. Some of the men and their wives who left to work with the new congregation were: Vance Greenway, James Eubanks, Neal Eubanks, Gus Eubanks, and Jack Burton. Emmett Smith became their preacher and remained with them for seventeen years, leading them off into institutionalism.

In 1965 the church at Second and Walnut helped to start another congregation, this time on East Main Street. About fifty brethren left to start this work. Some of the men and their wives who left to work with this congregation were: Paul Grogan, Sherman Clark, Jack Taylor, Glen Eubanks, and Maurice Craig. Maurice Craig was actually the contractor who built the building at East Main. Hollis Creel who was at that time the preacher at Second and Walnut agreed to work with the new congregation on East Main Street.

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Preachers at Second and Walnut from the fifties until the present include: Walter N. Henderson, Tommy McClure, Paul C. Keller, Hollis Creel, Ross Saunders, Charles Cheatham, Jim McDonald, Billy J. James. In September of 1976, Paul C. Keller, who had preached for the congregation from 1957-1963 returned and worked with the church until October 1995. After that, there was Landon Hope, Edgar Dye, and James A. Brown who continues as the evangelist with the congregation.

Gospel Meeting

Speaker: Donald Townsley

Sunday, July 22nd
9:45 A.M. 10:45 A.M. & 6:00 P.M.

Monday — Friday
July 23rd — July 27th
7:00 P.M.

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| Sunday | | |
| Radio 1490 AM. | 9:00 A.M. | |
| Bible Study | 9:45 A.M. | |
| Worship..... | 10:45 A.M. | |
| Worship..... | 6:00 P.M. | |
| Wednesday | | |
| Bible Study..... | 7:00 P.M. | |

Preacher: James A. Brown

Phone: 870-236-3371

www.paragouldchurofchrist.com