

The Venice Presbyterian Church

1823-1900

For several years after the village of Venice had been laid out in 1817, and a number of homes had been built, religious services were held in the log schoolhouses, but a desire for a church building and a real church home was manifested in the hearts of a few of the religiously inclined citizens, and plans were soon formalized.

In 1826 Abner Lutes donated an acre of land for this purpose and a two-story brick building was erected, almost on the same site as that of the present edifice, but facing Hamilton Pike. A gallery ran around three sides of the interior, and the choir sat in the back part of the church.¹

The Venice Presbyterian Church came into being through the efforts of the Rev. Thomas Thomas. He was born in Wen, Shropshire, England, in 1777, of Welsh parentage. When about twenty-six years old, a London philanthropist sent him to Hoxton Academy, preparatory to entering the Gospel ministry. In 1818, he with his wife and five children sailed from Liverpool to America. After enduring many dangers and hardships they reach Cincinnati. In 1820 he removed his family to the Welsh settlement of Paddy's Run, now called Shandon, where a congregation of "independents" had gathered, and over which he became pastor. He remained there for eight years, when he became the first pastor of the Venice Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Thomas met with those who were interested in forming a Presbyterian Church in Venice on the "second Sabbath in September,"² in 1828. There were thirty-five members in all, eighteen who had been regular members at previous meetings and seventeen who were received for the first time.

"As the members were comparatively strangers to each other and the male members not numerous, it was judged most prudent to omit the election of elders"³ until a later date. However, the male members met on September 15 and elected three trustees, Enoch Bond, Nehemiah Wade, and James Comstock.

On March 24, 1829, Roger Sargent, David Gibson and Nehemiah Wade were elected as elders. By the year 1832 the number of elders was increased to four with the name of David Gibson being dropped and James Hannah and John Green being added.

On October 5, 1830, the congregation had made arrangements for the purchase of a house for the parsonage of Rev. Thomas. Until the purchase was completed, the congregation decided to pay a rent of \$48.00 per year. Mr. Thomas did not get to enjoy the use of the parsonage for very long, however, as he died in October, 1831. "His remains were followed from his dwelling on Monday by a large concourse of friends to the church where an appropriate discourse was delivered by Rev John Thomson and his remains were then deposited in the church yard."⁴

In December the Rev. Samuel Smith was sent as a replacement.

About this time the church was changed from the Cincinnati Presbytery to the Oxford Presbytery, and subsequently to the Dayton Presbytery, and then in 1875 was again admitted to the Cincinnati Presbytery.

In 1835 there was a question raised as to who had the right to vote in church elections. On March 5 the congregation settled this problem by stating that all elections in

¹ "Program of Centennial," Venice Presbyterian Church, p. 4.

² Venice Presbyterian church, Session Minutes Book no, 1, p. 3

³ Session Minutes, Book no. 1, p. 3

⁴ Ibid, p. 22

the future would be by ballot and only members “in full communion” would be permitted to vote.

In June, 1835 the Rev. Peter H. Golladay was appointed for a salary of \$325.00 to serve for one year.

All during the nineteenth century in the church it seemed to be common practice to hold a three day session in conjunction with the quarterly communion service. There would be church services on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings and on Sunday morning when the communion service would be held.

On April 23m 1836, Mr. Thomas Burns was elected as ruling elder.

In January of 1839 the Session of the Church said that they felt it their duty to bear testimony against practices which they deemed immoral and sinful; “that the amusements of the dancing room, card table, and theatre are immoral and contrary to the spirit of the gospel.”⁵ The Session warned the members that it was necessary not only for them to refrain from these amusements, but that they should urge others to do so, also.

The Session of the nineteenth century took the term “ruling elder” literally, for they sat in judgment on the wrongdoing of the congregation just as judges do in our courts. If a member neglected his church obligations by failure to attend services or by the performance of an un-Christian-like deed, he was sent a summons to appear before the Session to explain his lapse in conduct. Then after two notices were sent, if he did not appear, the member was quite often denied the privileges of the Church, especially communion, until a time when the Session felt he was truly repentant and reformed.

Besides failure to attend Sabbath services, a most frequent “crime” was intoxication. Other charges for which members were tried were working on Sunday, adultery, gambling, swearing, disorderly conduct, shooting in a shooting match, and anything else that the Session felt was un-Christian.

One case which was interesting involved two prominent church members who had a fight over a line fence. After many sessions and much deliberation, the Elders could not come to a conclusion as to who was wrong in the situation so the case was appealed to the Presbytery.

The Rev. A.A. Guilliland was called by the church in 1839 as pastor. During his ministry at Venice which lasted twenty years, there was a new church building erected. The building was erected in 1956.

(The Session minutes for this period are missing, so additional information concerning the church at this time is unavailable.)

There is no reference made to the stand the church took in the Civil War, but there must have been sympathy for the plight of the slaves as the Treasurer’s report shows frequent contributions to the Freedman’s Society.

The Rev. I.M. Hughes served the church from 1859-1871. On December 17, 1870 the congregation voted to exchange their parsonage for Mrs. Hannah Dick’s property.

In 1871 the Rev, J.B. Mortan was called and stayed until the spring of 1872, when he was replaced by Rev. John Daniel. The elders at this time were Nehemiah Wade, Thomas Burns, N.C. Wade, I.W. Anderson, and I.A Boal.

Again, in 1874 a new minister, Rev. D.R. Moore came to serve the church. In this year there were only four elders as one had been asked to resign,

The man was rumored to have been involved in an un-Christian-like incident and was tried by the Session. There were witnesses, however, that exonerated him. Nevertheless, the Session asked him to resign because he had given the appearance of evil and they felt this was grounds enough for his resignation, Some time later, though, the Session reversed its decision and reinstated him to office.

⁵ Session Minutes, Book no. 1, p. 121

As the number of active elders was only three in 1874, there was an election held in December of that year at which time four new elders were elected; H.W. Scott, George W. Dick, William Simms, and G. Wade, Jr.

It is interesting to note that in 1875 a special offering was taken for the "Kansas Sufferers." Also in this year a revision of the church roll was begun.

In 1876 this revision was apparently completed and the membership is recorded as 172. The Session report of April 4 of this year showed the activities of the church included the Sabbath Worship Service, Sabbath School, a congregational prayer meeting, and a young people's prayer meeting, "attended by a group of young men that shun all other meetings."⁶ There was also a Women's Benevolent Society listed.

The Rev. John Haight came to minister to the church in 1878 and stayed until the summer of 1881 when "relations with the Rev. John Haight...were dissolved." The session still acted as the judiciary body of the church and tried a member in 1880 for playing cards in a public place.

Rev. William MacMillan came to serve the church in September, 1881. Rev. MacMillan's salary for the year 1883 was \$1492.00, with the average yearly offering per member being \$11.04.

On June 2 of this year another elder, William Sims, was added, having transferred from St. Louis, Missouri.

Children's Day was originated by a resolution passed by the Session on September 1, 1883. The resolution stated, "as the General Assembly has designated the second Sabbath of June as "Children's Day" on which special services for children shall be held and the vital topics, Christian nurture and conversion of the young should be pressed upon the thought of the entire congregation...said day shall be set aside."

At the Congregational Meeting held on April 7, 1884, the system of "rotary eldership" was discussed and voted down.

The revision of the church roll which was begun in 1881 was completed on July 7, 1884. There were 135 members listed.

In August of this year Dr. C.C. Hoover was elected to the eldership.

By the next year, five new members were listed and the activities of the church included a young men's prayer group, a young ladies group—the "Willing Workers," a Home Missionary Society, in addition to the main Sabbath School with its two branches at Ross and Jackson schools. The total church budget was \$1226.00.

On February 8, 1886, the Church lost a long-time elder, George W. Dick, by letter of transfer.

In 1887, "certain ladies abstained from the wine-cup in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper" and the Session had to intervene to convince them that this was improper. This year was apparently an active one in the Church as membership rose to 195.

The membership continued to increase until 1889 when 203 members were listed. In July of this year Rev. MacMillan left the church and a new pastor was not obtained until September, 1890, when Rev. J.A. Markham was called to serve the church.

The death of N.C. Wade was reported in November, 1890, and in December three additional elders were elected: Israel Atherton, A.C. Turner, and J.J. Hansford.

On January 15, 1891, Miss Carrie Kraus, the present oldest living member, was received into the church.

In February, 1891, it was reported that the territory of the church had been laid out for an evangelistic campaign. Subsequently, a revival, the first recorded, was held in the early months of 1891 with forty-three conversions recorded.

This year there were three branch Sabbath Schools reported along with the regular organizations of the church. Also, this same year, three young ladies of the church applied to the Missionary Board for work in the South.

⁶ Session Minutes, Book. N. 3, p. 25

In May, 1891, Rev. Markham was released to attend a mission church in Cincinnati and Rev. W.A. Echols was called by the church. His salary was \$960.00.

The Session voted to use unfermented wine for communion in March, 1892. There seemed to be great stress placed on temperance during this period for at the September 3 Session meeting, it was announced that they would comply with the action of the General Assembly, in observing the third Sabbath of September as Temperance Day. Nevertheless, the most frequent offense of the church members appeared to be intemperance.

The Session seemed to be growing more liberal in its treatment of errant members toward the close of the nineteenth century, because in February, 1893, they resolved to try to be patient and to talk with a person in the hope of reforming him, when he had been guilty of "sinning." Formerly, the Session would probably have denied him communion, if not excommunicated him altogether.

In the yearly Session Report of 1893 the "mission" Sabbath Schools were no longer listed and it was decided to again revise the church roll. When this was completed, the record showed 178 active members. In May of this year, Dr. C.C. Hoover, an elder and long time active church member, died.

Rev. Echols left the church in April, 1894 and was succeeded by Rev. D.B. Whimster at a salary of \$300.00 and use of the manse.

A committee was appointed at this time to study the effects of dancing on the church and community. As a result of this study, the minister was instructed to preach a sermon on dancing.

By now the women of the church had three organizations: Home and Foreign Mission Society, The Industrial Society, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which were active in the Church.

A petition was drafted in January of 1896 called the attention of the President of the United States to the "great and unwarranted destruction of life and property in Armenia by the Mohammedans."

During this year, the church again had a revival but there seemed to be a slump in the church's vitality during this period as the membership had dropped to 114. The minister attributed the greatest drawbacks to the church's progress to the gambling, Sabbath desecrations, open saloons and mammon worship.

In September of 1897 Rev. J.M. Simonton was called to the pastorate of the church, but he was forced to resign due to ill health in September, 1898. He was succeeded by the Rev. A.P. Bournes in 1899.

Ray Gorbold, the first candidate for the ministry from the Venice Presbyterian Church was recommended to the Cincinnati Presbytery in 1899. After graduating at Lane Seminary, Cincinnati, he desired to go to Africa, but the Board would not send him, as a medical examination revealed heart trouble. Mr. Gorbold possessed a courageous spirit and an indomitable will, and went at his own expense to Japan in 1902. After two years' labor there, his health seemed so much improved that the Board commissioned him, and he continued his work in Japan until the time of his death, which occurred in 1915.

Miss Evangeline Gorbold went to North Carolina in 1898 and taught in the mountains of Asheville for about nine years. She then married Rev. William Benedict in 1904. The wedding took place in the Presbyterian Church in Venice, the bride's brother, Ray, being the officiating minister. Mr. and Mrs. Benedict went to Pennsylvania, where he had charge of a church in South Altoona; they lived there until 1909, when the Lord called Mr. Benedict home. Mrs. Benedict then returned and resumed her Home Mission work in North Carolina, where she remained for two years, after which she went to Japan for two years at her brother Ray's request.

She returned home because of the ill health of her parents and was reported living in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1928,⁷

⁷ Centennial Program, Venice Presbyterian Church. P. 6

Others who have entered the missionary field from the Venice Church include Miss Mary Burns, who served at the Wapanucka Institute in Indian Territory starting in 1852 for three years and Mrs. Margaret C. Wade, who was missionary to the Omaha Agency, Nebraska, from 1881 to 1891. Later she was one of the secretaries of the Home Mission Board and was located in New York City. Still later, she spent two years in mission work in Sitka, Alaska.

At the turn of the century the Church was again in the process of revising the roll. The communicant members totaled 125 and the Sabbath School membership was listed as 190.

The minister stated that the "main difficulties in the way of the progress of religion seem to be the open saloon and its attendant evils and a degree of disregard for the sanctity of the Sabbath."⁸

⁸ Session Minutes, Book no. 4, 1899. P. 120