

A History of the Venice Presbyterian Church

By Ora Brown

This history of the Venice Presbyterian Church was written for and presented to the Women's Association of the church in 1967 by Miss Ora Brown. Miss Brown was born in this community November 4, 1885 and was an active member of this church until her death on December 26, 1972. She was an inspiration to all who knew her, in her public school teaching career, in her church activities, and in her daily life. In December of 1972 "Miss Ora" presented highlights of this history to the High School Sunday School class. Her summary reminded the young people that their church was not buildings, or history; but people and their service.

The Women's Association wishes to make this available to others in living memory of Miss Ora Brown.

The Venice Presbyterian Church

I was asked to give a history of the women's organizations of the Venice Presbyterian Church, but I find that the work of the women is hard to separate from the activities of the church.

There were a number of homesteads in what is now Venice in 1800. At that time and for a few years afterwards the area was infested by renegades and lawless men. When Mr. Jeremiah Butterfield made his trips to New Orleans and Cuba with hogs and produce on flat boats, he left his wife in care of friendly Indians, and Mrs. Butterfield was probably our first home missionary as she administered nursing aid to the Indians and fed them when they passed by her cabin located between the Butterfield cemetery and Dry Run Creek.

With the influx of desirable settlers, lured by the fertile land of the area (the land sold for \$1.25 per acre), the need for education necessitated the building of a school house. The first school, located in what is now Meadowbrook Park, was a log structure 20 x 30 ft. with a stone fireplace and puncheon floors. I. R. Anderson was the first teacher. He was paid fifty cents per day and his board.

In 1817 the Village of Venice was laid out by Dr. Benjamin Clark. His own home was the two-story frame house at the end of Main Street, locally called Back Street. Other dwellings faced both sides of the street, but most all have been replaced by modern homes. Religious services were held in the log school house. The last such log school was located east of the Presbyterian Church. It faced Route 128.

In 1826 Abner Lutes donated an acre of ground for the erection of a church building, as the school houses were inadequate for the growing population. A two-story brick building was erected on the site of the present building. It faced Route 128. A gallery ran around three sides of the interior, and the choir sat in the back part of the building. The Presbytery of Cincinnati organized the first Presbyterian Church here in 1828. There were thirty-five charter members.

The first minister was Thos. Thomas. He was of Welsh descent, and was educated for the ministry in England. He came to Cincinnati in 1818 with his family and became an itinerant preacher, organizing small churches in Southwestern Ohio. In 1829 he came to Paddy's Run with his family and became the

pastor of a congregation of Independents there. After eight years at Shandon he became the first minister of the newly organized Presbyterian Church at Venus. Dr. Clark gave the name Venus to the village. Due to another Ohio post office named Venus, the name was changed to Venice and the post office to Ross. He died in 1831 and is buried in the local cemetery. Dr. Clark had donated an acre of ground opposite the church for a cemetery in 1817. In 1824 it was moved to the present location. The church changed to Oxford Presbytery and then later to the Dayton Presbytery.

By 1856 there was need for a larger building owing to increased interest and growth in membership. In addition to local membership, residents of both Colerain and Crosby Townships in Hamilton County were active members of the Church. A petition was circulated for financing the new structure. It read as follows:

“We, the Subscribers, promise to pay to the Trustees of the Union Religious Society of Venice and its vicinity (commonly known as the Presbyterian Church) the several sums annexed to our respective names for the purpose of erecting or building a new church edifice. To be paid as follows: One-fifth of each person’s subscription to be paid the first day of March, 1856; one-fifth on the first day of June 1856; one-fifth on the first day of September 1856; one-fifth on the first day of December 1856; and one-fifth on the first day of March 1857. The building to be sixty by forty feet on the outside with a basement story under the whole house to be used for church purposes, such as Sabbath School, lectures, secular meetings of the church, etc., and for a school room for the neighborhood where the higher branches of learning can be taught, other than can be obtained in the common district schools. And it is further agreed that said basement story may be used as a public hall for literary and scientific lectures, political meetings and other meetings of a moral and beneficial nature to the community of the neighborhood. Provided, and it is hereby distinctly declared and understood that none of the meetings shall ever interfere with any meetings of the Religious Society above named. And that the house is at all times and always to be under the control of and only to be used by the consent of aforesaid Trustees, or a majority of them. Venice, December 22, 1855.”

F. Anderson, G. S. Clark, N. C. Wade, N. Wade and I. A. Boal composed the Building Committee. I. A. Boal was treasurer. In auditing his book, the examiners stated, “he has received in case as subscriptions, \$1,890.12 and has paid and produced vouchers therefor the sum of \$2,082.53.” February 1857.

The treasurer’s record showed most of the contributions were for \$5.00 to be paid in five installments. Many were for \$2.50 and \$3.00. Some were \$1.00 subscriptions. Unfortunately, a few failed to fulfill their financial obligations, but services rendered were often taken as payment. One item stated that fifty cents was paid to one for hauling sand and fifty cents to his wife for scrubbing. Larger contributions were for \$50.00, \$100.00, \$150.00 and \$200.00

Bricks for the building were burned in Mr. Seller’s brickyard located adjacent to Wade Burn’s farm, Mr, Seller was paid \$1.00 a day for laying bricks. Plasterer’s wages were \$1.00 a day, and painters \$1.50 a day. Shingles cost \$2.50 a bundle. Vouchers for \$1,142.88 on the examination of Mr. Boal’s book in September 1856 added to that of February 1857, show the treasurer paid out \$3,223.81 for the erection of the present building which replaced the former brick building. Mr. Seller was paid \$277.95; \$140.00

was spent for shingles; \$.20 was paid as interest on a note to Hedges. The face value of this note was \$100.00. Two kegs of flooring nails was \$8.25.

A. A. Gilliland was pastor from 1839 to 1859. It was during his pastorate that the present structure was built. One of his daughters married C. Wade and another Lester Frost, the father of Henry G. Frost. During the pastorate of I. M. Hughes, 1859-1870, a secondary school was conducted in the basement with the pastor as teacher. One of his pupils was C. B. Halderman, one of the world's greatest mathematicians. Through his own efforts and without any more formal education, he became a Fellow of the Royal Society of England.

William McMillan was pastor from 1881 to 1889. He was married to Sarah Wade. His son, Dr. Wade McMillan, located in Oxford.

In 1868 the following notice was published:

Notice is hereby given that at the February Term 1868 of the Common Pleas Court of Butler County, Ohio, the following order was entered:

Siebert S. Clark

Thomas Boal

O.H.P. Van Dyke

William H. Scott, Trustees, Ect.

This day came the parties and this cause came on to be heard on the petition, and it appearing to the court that proper notice of the pendency of this proceeding has been given by publication, and that prayer of the petitioned ought to be granted: It is ordered that name of the said, "Union Religious Society of Venice and Vicinity" be changed to that of "The Venice Presbyterian Church" and that after filing and publication of this decree as required by law; said corporation shall be named and known as "The Venice Presbyterian Church"; and it shall be subject to all the restrictions and have all the powers as if such change had not been made; and no right of said corporation or any individual shall be in any wise affected by said change,"

I have not found any record of a women's organization of the church before 1890, although the petition for soliciting funds for the building of the church mentions societies whose purposes "to promote sociability and to keep up all needed repairs of the church and manse."

With the many tasks resting on the shoulders of the women at that time, there was little time for organized women's group. In 1890 a society called the Industrial Circle was organized. It's officers were: President, Mrs. Sarah Reese; Treasurer, Mrs. Amelia Willey; Vice-President, Mrs. Martha Garbold; and Secretary, Mrs. Carrie Hoover. Its members was not restricted to church membership, but most ladies of the organization were members of the church. Long-standing members, in addition to the above officers, were Mrs. Alice Wade, Mrs. Hansford, Mrs. Dot Davis, Mrs. Nannie Wade, Mrs. Thos. Shroyer,

Mrs. Maggie Van Dyke, Mrs. Etta Anderson, Mrs. Johanna Hedges, Mrs. Steve Willey, Mrs. Clark Brown, Mrs. J. W. Butterfield, Mrs. Martha Brown, Mrs. Amelia Butterfield, Mrs. Marie Burns, Mrs. Atherton and Mrs. William Clark.

Reverend Arthur Bournes, just graduated from Moody Bible Institute and serving his first pastorate here, did not give much encouragement to the society, as he did not subscribe to their methods of raising money and the society began to fall apart at the seams from that time on.

In 1919 a new women's organization under the name of Ladies Aid Society was organized. This organization, through suppers, furnishing lunches at farm sales and other projects, raised money for the repairs of the church and manse and bought dishes, silver, and other equipment for serving food. In 1928 they raised \$1,000.00 with expenditures of \$700 and \$268.00 for repairs at the manse. Active members were Mrs. Helen Smith, who served as president several times, Mrs. Dora Hornung, Mrs. Kate Hornung, Agnes Brown, Susie Shaw, Mrs. Leda Timberman, Mrs. Flora Timberman, Frieda Bevis, Mrs. Dollie Purdy, Mrs. Mattie Garbold, Mrs. Mayme Taylor, Mrs. Jean Brown, Mrs. Dollie Clark, Mrs. Mildred Shaw and Mrs. Fannie Wade.

Under the pastorate of Reverend Laten Carter, the present women's organization replaced the Ladies Aid. Mrs. Minnie Rhea Carter ably directed the organization into workable groups with efficient officers. A look into the program for 1967 shows how well organized the society is for Christian service, Community betterment and closer touch with Presbytery and Presbyterian goals. Under the leadership of Mrs. Hazel Craig, Mrs. Elda Emerick and Mrs. Roland Bevis, the presidents in the beginning years of the organization, it attained a momentum which later presidents and officers have maintained. Fund raising is largely through the funds raised by the annual Country Christmas and voluntary contributions.

While the Industrial Circle was a church sponsored organization, it filled a social need for the women of the church. "Socials" were held from time to time and all day meetings were held in member's homes. It was organized when times were hard, particularly for farm families. Fund raising was by selling handcrafts, particularly sewing. One item which always found a ready sale was the bright pink, blue, yellow gingham sunbonnets, machine quilted with ruffled edges. Proceeds from projects such as this helped finance repairs at the church and manse, as well as with janitor fees, and even sometimes, the minister's salary,

The Ladies Aid operated on higher financial proceeds for it came into being during the opulent years following World War I.

In 1879 a Home Missionary Society was organized. Mrs. Margaret Scott, mother of Frank Scott who operated the General Store for years, was elected president; Mrs. Mary Davis was vice-president; Mrs. Hoover, secretary and Mrs. Maggie Wade, treasurer.

The society pledged themselves to pay \$40.00 annually to aid in supporting two missionary teachers in Utah. This pledge was kept for many years. In addition, they made clothing and comforts for missionary schools in Utah and contributed to the Omaha Mission and other worthy organizations. At one time there were twenty-six members. Mrs. Davis had been a missionary teacher in an Indian school in Indian

Territory where she met her husband. She adopted an Indian girl, educated her at Oxford College. The girl, Mary, went back as a missionary worker to her own people. She often visited her foster mother, Mrs. Davis. Mrs. Davis was a sister of Adam Burns and grandmother of Margaret and Homer Davis who lived here during their childhood. She was an aunt of Reverend Arthur Bournes who was pastor here at the turn of the century.

Probably the society was the inspiration of the missionary efforts of the Garbold family, which send Reverend Garbold as a missionary to Japan and his sister, Eva, to the Appalachian Mountain region as a teacher in North Carolina. She taught her both before her marriage and after the death of her husband. Later, she joined her mother in Japan. Another sister, Mrs. Mattie Garbold Griffith, and her husband were sent by the Home Mission Board to the Dakotas where they reared their family. They spent the remainder of their lives in this field.

Mrs. Margaret Wade, widow of Reverend Matthew Wade, was one of the secretaries of the Home Mission Board and was located in New York City. She later spent two years in missionary work in Sitka, Alaska.

I recall hearing some of the other members of the community tell of the crusading efforts of some of the women in an effort to rid the community of John Barleycorn and rid the village of its three saloons. These ladies shocked the patrons of the saloons by entering the strictly masculine realms with their tracts and lectures. Whether they were affiliate with an organized temperance group, I am unable to tell. Their numbers include both Presbyterian and Methodist women.

As I look back over three-quarters of a century, I realize what a great contribution these womens' organizations have made to both community and church life. They worked and they worked together. They gave and they built up and left something permanent. The well-organized program of the present society, through their study and discussions of Bible literature, has created an interest in the greatest book of all time and its saints and sinners. Its officers are in touch with Presbyterian life through out America and its missionary studies with lands beyond the seas.

To all who work in this organization, *if* and *when* the work seems time consuming and burdensome, be assured the work is worthwhile for lasting Christian service and community benefit.

Ora Brown, January 22, 1967