

OLD CHURCHES IN THE SHENANDOAH—THEIR DESCENDANTS IN KENTUCKY: BOTH PEOPLE AND CHURCHES

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The very word Shenandoah has a magic sound. It is of Indian origin, meaning Daughter of the Stars, and was given to the Valley before the white settlers arrived. The Shenandoah Valley, or just "The Valley" as it is more often called, is that tract of land bounded on the east by the Blue Ridge and on the west by a range of mountains known as North Mountain. Here the soil is fertile and the landscape beautiful to behold. In a recent *Heritage* this statement describing the Valley appeared: "There is a time when the sunlight touches the crest when there is too much beauty for believing."¹ Many have found this to be true.

The people who settled the Valley were largely Scotch-Irish; a misnomer really, for they should have been called Irish-Scotch since they were natives of Scotland who migrated to North Ireland to secure religious freedom. This section of Ireland was known as the Province of Ulster; was composed of nine counties and comprised one-fourth of Ireland. They were an intensely religious group whose faith had developed as a result of the Reformation movement. Such adjectives as these were used to describe them — stouthearted, conscientious, iron-veined and people made for the times.

These Covenanters worshiped unmolested in their new home for some years before religious persecution resumed. However, after a period of tranquility they were once more forced to seek a new country. This was necessary if they worshiped God according to the dictates of their conscience. In 1727 ships loaded with families from Ulster sought freedom in a new world. This new country was of course America, with the point of debarkation being Pennsylvania. The migration continued until it reached a climax in 1740 when two to four ships per day landed. This had been precipitated by the "Black Oath" which required obligations to the Church of England even when no affiliation existed.

From Pennsylvania these followers of Calvin found their way into Virginia. They denied themselves the ease and comfort of the Tidewater where the Established Church was the Church of England; choosing rather the hardship of a frontier life with the privilege of

free worship. The first Valley churches were Presbyterian, they were also country churches—the reason for both is obvious. For many years they were referred to as "Meeting Houses"; the more formal word Church being reserved for the Episcopal faith. Close to the church would be a small building, known as the Session House where the ruling elders held their meetings—these have been carefully preserved as a special sanctuary. The interior of these little buildings was usually most attractive. Another outstanding characteristic of all of these churches was an adjoining graveyard; also close by under the sponsorship of the church would be a school. Many of these old Meeting Houses with their hallowed past have observed their two hundredth anniversary. Their members were frequently called the "Puritans of the South."

The oldest church in the Valley was the Augusta Meeting House but today is usually called "The Old Stone Church," although the program for the Sunday service is headed "Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church." It is often referred to as "the mother of churches." It was established in 1737, not far from Staunton under the Presbytery of Donegal, Pennsylvania. The stone building in use today was built by the labor of the members themselves in the seventeen forties and was formally dedicated in 1749. Incidentally it furnishes the House of Worship for a boys Military School whose campus adjoins the church lawn.² From Waddell's *Annals of Augusta Co.* we find "This sacred building, half church, half fortress was the stronghold of the County and to its shelter the women and children betook themselves during the Indian forays which occurred so frequently after 1751. The Church was surrounded by an earthen embankment which gave it greater strength. Traces of this may be seen today."

On the front of the Church one can see a bronze marker erected by the Beverly Manor Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution which reads in part, "This is the oldest Presbyterian House of Worship in Virginia. It is an eloquent memorial to the Scotch-Irish folk who settled in this part of the Valley."

As you probably know the word Presbyterian comes from the Greek word *Presbuteros*, meaning elder and the name was so chosen because the Church is governed by its elders. Among the first elders whose descendants came into Kentucky and helped to establish new Presbyterian churches in a new wilderness were:

John McClanahan

Robert Poage

Thomas Frame

John Anderson

James Allen, who signed the "Petition for Religious Freedom."

Alexander Walker

Alexander Blair

Alexander Crawford

David Bell

This was considered a bold step at the time as it did not become a law until 1785. An act was passed by the General Assembly of Virginia recognizing Religious Freedom at that time.

Almost as interesting as this 222-year-old Church is the graveyard (perhaps only if you have a yen for old graveyards — an acknowledged weakness of the writer). Here is a monument inscribed as follows:

Sacred to the Memory of
Robert Poage
Immigrant from Ireland 1739
Elder in Augusta Church 1740
Justice-First Commission of the Peace
Augusta County 1745
Died in 1774
And to the Memory of his wife
Elizabeth Preston

It was he who gave the land on which the church was built, it being part of his estate, now known as "Merrifield."

Buried in this graveyard are thirty-one Crawfords. Descendants came to Kentucky, established the Olivet church in Shelby County. A son was pastor of a Fayette County church; many others were devout members of some pioneer Presbyterian group. It was usually the third generation of other families as well as this one who came to Kentucky and often they came from a county which had originally been a part of Augusta but no longer bore that name. Because of the size of the families there was always need for more land and it was the custom of the times to follow the frontier — that is the newer sections of the Valley, such as Rockbridge, Botetourt, etc. — later Kentucky was the frontier.

Here we find the graves of eleven Bells, four of whom were Revolutionary soldiers. There were several marriages between the Bells and Allens. One of them was Susan Bell who married William Allen and settled in Lexington, Kentucky; and they were members of the Mt. Zion Church. Their oldest daughter, Peggy, married Matthew Jouett, the early Kentucky artist and their daughter married Oliver Frazer, another artist.

A stone found here reads:

John Cochrane
born County of Armagh, Ireland

a man of high character and sternly worth qualities
which he transmited to his number of able descendants

This monument was erected by the Cochran family. The Cochrans who came to Kentucky were some of her most valued citizens and like the Allens and Bells were Presbyterians.

John McClanahan and wife Mary (as usual no last name) were buried here, but their tombstones disappeared between June and September of 1952.

Another family prominent in Presbyterian circles interred here is the Kerr. Sara Kerr married Rev. Peter Hoge and they are the ancestors of the Kentucky Hoges. The Hoge name is famous for its Presbyterian ministers. The immigrant William came from Scotland in 1682, and eventually settled on the Opequon. His grandson Moses, president of Hampton-Sydney College, married Elizabeth Poage and they became the parents of three Presbyterian ministers. Each generation of each line seemed to produce one or more ministers.

The final resting place of "Old Stone's" first two pastors is the church graveyard. Their names were John Craig and William Wilson. The latter is of special interest to Shenandoah-Kentucky Presbyterians as he was the brother of Robert Wilson, an early Kentucky minister about whom we will hear more later.

The second oldest church in the Valley was called Tinkling Springs, established in 1740, and is close to Waynesboro. The first building was constructed of logs, the second of stone, while the present one built in 1850 is of brick, and has great charm. The first pastor was Rev. James Waddell, the famous blind preacher. The names of the early elders with Kentucky affiliation are (surnames only are used because often more than one member of the same family served):

Patton	Campbell	Breckinridge
Trimble	Stuart	Johnston
Christian	Walker	Logan

It was the last named family who led the migration to Kentucky; Logan County being named for General Benjamin Logan. His son William (named for his Uncle William, charter member of Tinkling Springs) was said to be the first male white child born in Kentucky.

Like the Old Stone Church (perhaps even more so) Tinkling Springs has an interesting cemetery. A monument was erected to John Preston in 1855 by his descendants. It is believed he was one of the original members of the Session, but the first records have been lost so there is no proof. He married Elizabeth Patton. Their descendants came to Kentucky — ministers, lawyers, statesmen — and all brought honor to their name.

The early Breckinridges are buried at Tinkling Springs. Alexander Breckinridge proved his importation in 1748 — he had five sons and

two daughters at that time. His son Robert moved to Botetourt County; married first Mary Poage, daughter of Robert, charter member of "Old Stone." Their two sons settled in Louisville. After her early death he married Letitia Preston; their son John went to Lexington, married Mary Hopkins Cabell and became the parent of four distinguished sons, three of whom were Presbyterian divines, the fourth a prominent lawyer and the father of John Cabell Breckinridge, Vice-President of the United States.

A family Bible states there are thirty-six members of the Christian family buried here but the graves cannot be located as time has eroded so many names. A number of Christians came to Kentucky, one of whom was William. Christian County was named in his honor.

An interesting custom observed at this Church (as well as at Old Stone) reached back to the Church of Scotland. This was the use of "Tokens." When time for quarterly communion arrived all members were examined. If their conduct warranted they were presented with a metal token and only those with tokens were allowed to partake of the Sacrament. The Church is the proud possessor of one of these tokens.

It is thought one reason the Dissenters (Presbyterians) were allowed to worship without interference in Augusta County was because Governor Gooch had Scottish ancestry. When the first Court of Augusta County was appointed by him on December 9, 1745, they were found to be men of the Presbyterian faith. Douglas Southhall Freeman said "A Justice of the Peace was a post of great honor and power and they formed a society of their own." They served without pay. The following "Gentleman Justices" of the first Court (with Kentucky descendants) were:

Robert Campbell	James Patton
Robert Poage	John Christian
James Kerr	John Brown
James Bell	John Anderson

The New Providence Church was another early church (it was so named because there was already a Providence Church in Pennsylvania). Like most Valley churches the first building was of logs, then stone, while the one in use today is brick. It has high Doric columns with a deeply recessed portico. We find these names among the early members:

Logan	Houston	Montgomery
Wallace	Brown	Stuart
McClung	Steele	Walker
Moore	Poage	McPheeters

there were many McPheeters ministers (both in Virginia and Kentucky) whose origin sprang from this Church.

Rev. Robert Stuart who played such a vital part in early Kentucky was one of this congregation.

The first pastor of the New Providence Church was the Rev. John Brown. He married Margaret Preston; they came to Kentucky and became the ancestors of many outstanding men in this state. One of them was Hon. John Brown, Kentucky's first Senator. It was he who built "Liberty Hall," now a shrine, owned and operated by the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Kentucky. In the hall is a marker with the following inscription:

December 5, [P.B.K.] 1776
to keep in remembrance the name
of
John Brown
son of
Reverend John Brown and
Margeret Preston Brown
Born September 2, 1757, Augusta County, Va.
Died August 28, 1837, Frankfort, Ky.
Educated at Liberty Hall Academy
Princeton and College of William and Mary
This marker erected December 7, 1940
by the United Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa
to commemorate the 162 anniversary of the
initiation of John Brown into Alpha Chapter
at College of William and Mary,
December 4, 1778

New Providence as well as the other Valley churches has an adjoining graveyard. This is one of the most interesting monuments —

In Memory of Reverend Samuel
Brown 1746-1818
Pastor of New Providence Presbyterian Church
1796-1818
Mary Moore his wife
1766-1824
Captive of Abbs Valley
daughter of
Captain James Moore and Martha Poage
Through faith in God they reared a
Family including five ministers, two elders, etc.
Though he slay me yet will I trust him
Erected by their descendants 1818

Mary Moore is the subject of a delightful article entitled "The Presbyterian Call System" — a typically gay New Yorker story written by a descendant.³

In an enclosure can be found eight marked Poage graves, and others whose names have disappeared with the years. This is the family of John Poage, brother of Robert of "Old Stone." The "Captive of Abbs Valley" was a granddaughter of his.

We will discuss the Timber Ridge Meeting House and Timber Grove Church as one. They were located close to each other, not far from Lexington and organized in 1753 and 1754. The roster of members were related and in 1758 the two churches united. It has been said that the faith implanted in their members was so strong that to this very day their descendants lead exemplary lives. Here we find these names:

Walker	Stuart
Houston	Paxton
McDowell	Lyle

Elder Daniel Lyle was the grandfather of two early Kentucky ministers — John and Joel.

While this Church is not in existence today we find one of Virginia's most famed graveyards close by. It is called "The McDowell Burying Ground" and has been restored by the joint effort of the Blue Ridge Garden Club and the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Virginia. This was the first graveyard in Rockbridge County. Captain John McDowell and his comrades were slain in an Indian raid and were buried here in 1742. Also interred here is Ephraim McDowell, stone marked 1775, and states he was one hundred and four years old. James, the last McDowell to live on Timber Ridge, was buried in 1855.

Ephraim McDowell of this same family came to Kentucky at the age of fourteen with his parents (mother was Mary McClung, another staunch Presbyterian family). He studied medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland, and located in his home town of Danville where he had a large practice which embraced the whole state. He brought great acclaim to his adopted state as he made medical history as the originator of the ovariectomy. His home is now a shrine, open to the public and owned by the Kentucky Medical Society.

In connection with the Timber Ridge Church was a school. It was built in 1776 and became the nucleus of that famed Virginia College known today as Washington and Lee. Lexington was the fifth move for the little school but each time it was Presbyterian-sponsored and continued to be until 1785 when it divorced itself from denominational control. The history of this College reminds one of Transylvania

which in the beginning was also Presbyterian and likewise moved its locale several times. To quote Dr. Thomas D. Clark "It was solely Presbyterian interest which created and maintained the infant school" (Transylvania). Dr. James Hopkins puts it like this, "among the religious denominations in pioneer Kentucky only the Presbyterians were interested to an appreciable extent in education." The Valley influence was felt at Transylvania, however it is only in a minor part that it can take credit for the founding of the oldest College west of the Alleghenies.

Cooks Creek is the last of the Valley churches on our list. While the building was not erected until 1771, it was established in 1759, as proved by the Session Book which exists today and in good condition. Members of this church with Kentucky descendants were:

Gordons	Lairds
Shanklins	Houstons
Hopkins	Frazers

These worshippers were the most conscientious followers of John Knox. Special emphasis was paid to the observance of the Sabbath. From this small group have sprung many missionaries and ministers with a number at the present date. Of all the Valley churches under discussion the members of Cooks Creek more nearly kept to the letter the rules and regulations of their Covenanter ancestors.

And now we come to the second part of our story — a sketch of the early Presbyterian Churches in Kentucky; that is, the ones whose origin was Shenandoah-Presbyterianism. In genealogical terms it may sometimes be what is known as a "Collateral line." Dr. Sanders, Kentucky's Presbyterian historian says "A church like a person has an interesting ancestry." If one has done research along this line he is quick to agree.

Judge Samuel M. Wilson in his *History of Kentucky* makes this statement: "It may be fairly doubted whether any body of religionist has made a deeper impression on the life of Kentucky than the Presbyterians. A large number were Scotch-Irish, mainly drawn from Augusta County. Then as now the Presbyterians were staunch advocates of the cause of education and wherever they settled the school-house was erected as a close neighbor to their place of worship." Someone else described it more tersely: "They took with them their kirk and their school."

Historians agree that Rev. David Rice (known as Father Rice) was the first Presbyterian minister in Kentucky.⁴ Although we must confess he did not come to Kentucky from the Valley he did study under Rev. James Waddell, the famous blind minister who was known as "the instructor of preachers." (He later was graduated from Princeton,

known then as the College of New Jersey.) In 1783 he established three churches in Kentucky — Concord (Danville), Cane Run, and Dicks Run. When Father Rice organized the first Presbytery in Kentucky he secured the services of three Valley ministers; namely Adam Rankin, James Crawford, and Andrew McClure. These four ministers and five ruling elders met in the Courthouse in Danville on October 17, 1786, and organized Kentucky's first Presbytery to be known as Transylvania Presbytery.⁵

In 1784 Rev. Adam Rankin organized the Pisgah and Mt. Zion churches. Both were near Lexington and Pisgah continues as a Presbyterian House of Worship under its original name, so called in honor of the summit from which Moses viewed the Promised Land. The first pastor was the Rev. John Brown, father of three famous sons, one of whom (the Hon. John Brown) has previously been mentioned. Here a school was established by the Transylvania Presbytery, the plans having been made on April 24, 1794. Funds were solicited from all Presbyterian Churches in Kentucky (as well as other interested individuals) and the school building was located in the churchyard of the Pisgah church. It was known as Kentucky Academy and was the embryo of one of the twelve oldest colleges in our country now called Transylvania.

Mt. Zion was the nucleus of the First Presbyterian Church of Lexington. While the roster of early members was largely Scotch-Irish they came to Central Kentucky from Pennsylvania and not the Shenandoah Valley. However, their first minister, Rev. Adam Rankin, and subsequent "Supplies" were Valley men — these were Dr. Campbell, Rev. Lyle, Rev. Robert Stuart, and Rev. James Crawford. The last named was the first Presbyterian minister ordained in Kentucky and was pastor of the Walnut Hills Church. Mt. Zion, or the First Presbyterian Church of Lexington as we know it today, celebrated its One Hundredth Seventy-Fifth anniversary in March of the current year.⁶

"Walnut Hills" is the oldest Presbyterian building still standing in Kentucky. The church was organized in 1785 and the present structure was built in 1801 on land donated by Levi Todd. The Todd family contributed much to early Presbyterianism in Kentucky (honesty forces one to admit this although they came to Central Kentucky from Pennsylvania and not via the Valley). Rev. James Crawford founded this Church and remained the pastor until his death in 1803. He and his wife (the former Rebecca McPheeters) are buried in the churchyard. He was the son of Alexander Crawford and Mary McPheeters and was born in Augusta County. When he was twelve years of age his

parents were killed by the Indians. They were buried at Glebe Burying Ground (established in 1746) as were other McPheeters and Crawfords. The interesting thing about this graveyard is that a church has never been built on the two hundred acre tract which was obtained for this purpose. Most of the people buried here were members of the Hebron Church.

The second minister at Walnut Hills was Robert Stuart, son of John Stuart and Elizabeth Walker. There are no more devout or interesting families than the Stuart and Walker. The writer regrets there is lack of space to take up some of these lines in detail. Rev. Stuart came to Kentucky as a professor at Transylvania, married Hannah Todd and they became the ancestors of a number of Presbyterian ministers, one of whom is Dr. Robert Stuart Sanders of Lexington who has done work of inestimable value in recording the histories of the early Kentucky churches. Both of these Walnut Hills pastors taught a school close to their Church. Thus we see once more the pattern being repeated in Kentucky which had been established in Virginia — the Church, the school, the graveyard.

The next Presbyterian Church in Kentucky was located at historic old Washington. Regular meetings were held in the homes as early as 1796 but it was not formally organized until a few years later by Dr. John Poage Campbell. In his *History of Kentucky*, Lewis Collins says of Dr. Campbell that "He was unquestionably the most brilliant in the constellation of missionaries." (There were eight who came to Kentucky.) He was born in Augusta County, reared by his uncle, Major John Walker. He was married three times and each wife was a member of a pioneer Presbyterian family — they were Sarah Crawford, Margaret Poage, and Isabelle McDowell. Although he spent his last days in Ohio, he left many descendants by each wife in Kentucky.

The first pastor at Washington was Robert Wilson, called by his flock "Father Wilson." It was the custom of the times to so refer to a beloved minister. He organized a number of nearby churches and he and his wife are buried in the old Washington Cemetery. She was Elizabeth Harris, sister of Abigail Harris who married Dr. John Johnston. Their son, Albert Sidney Johnston, was born at Washington and his birthplace there was restored by Limestone Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1955, and opened as a shrine at that time.

And now we come to the era of the Great Revival (sometime called the Great Awakening). Many Presbyterian churches were born at this time. Andrew McClure organized Salem Church in Clarke County in 1797, and the Paris Church in 1800. Olivet Church in Shelby County,

New Providence in Mercer County; and a number of other churches were formed.

Rev. Robert Wilson organized the Bethesda Church, known today as the First Presbyterian Church of Ashland. The pioneers of the town had held meetings in the homes as early as 1799, but it was not until 1819 that a log building was erected. The first twenty members belonged to the Poage family and were lineal descendants of Robert Poage, founder of Old Stone Meeting House.

One worthy divine made this remark: "There seems to have been some suspicion on the part of certain non-Presbyterian Churches that the Presbyterians were of an unbending and intolerant disposition." If this were true, one does wonder that it was so. Such rugged individualistic people would inevitably clash on matters of principle. In Virginia the two divisions were called Old Side and New Side. In Kentucky there were a number of splits—they adopted different names but each group solemnly believed theirs was *the* Presbyterian Church. In 1801 an entirely new denomination was born at Cane Ridge to be known henceforth as the "Christian Church." Whether or not the Presbyterians were of a more intolerant nature than some other churches might be a moot question but with this fact all will agree—that the Presbyterian folk did not surrender in the interest of expediency but took a stand for right as they saw it, regardless of consequences. Furthermore, it might be added at this time that the Presbyterian Church would never attract the socially ambitious—yesterday or today.

The present-day observance of the Sabbath may not be as strict as in the Valley days. It could be that the old established customs are not so rigidly kept as in days of yore. However, today's Scotch-Irish descendant likes to feel that the honesty, sincerity, and integrity of the early Calvinists have passed to each succeeding generation. While he realizes he lacks the saintliness of his forebears he has that inner compulsion to attend the church service, not only to receive the minister's message but to gather strength in Christian fellowship with other worshipers. Only in this way does he feel he is keeping the faith of those who have gone before him.

FOOTNOTES

¹ From article entitled "Sheaves of Golden Grain" by Dr. Marshall Fishwick, professor at Washington and Lee, author of *The Virginia Tradition* and other books.

² Augusta Military Academy, an old and excellent boys' preparatory school.

³ St. Clair McKelway has written some dozen articles in the *New Yorker*, ranging from 1952-57. They are well worth searching for if you have missed them.

⁴ *The Pilson Club History Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1955.

⁵ *Gleanings from West Lexington Presbytery, Ebenezer and Lexington-Ebenezer*, by Robert Stuart Sanders, p. 3. Privately published.

⁶ Dr. Sanders has just published *Annals of the First Presbyterian Church of Lexington, Kentucky*, Dunn Press, 1959, in connection with this celebration.

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