

History of the South Liberty Presbyterian
Church

T. G. Macfie

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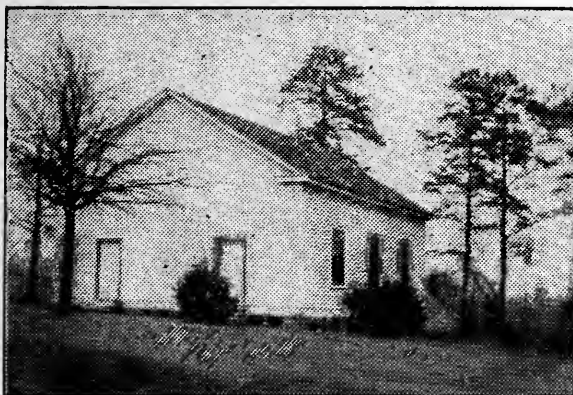
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T. G. Macfie 13-5-30.*

1828

1928

HISTORY
of
South Liberty
Presbyterian Church
Sharon, Georgia.

Founded in May, 1828



Centenary Celebration Sunday, May 6th
1928

—By—

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Farmer, Member of the Church,
Formerly Chief Magistrate of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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History of South Liberty Presbyterian Church at Sharon, Georgia, Founded in 1828.

In the year 1820 a petition was presented to the Augusta Presbytery by some of the members of old Liberty Presbyterian Church who lived near Raytown in Taliaferro County asking for a separate church owing to distance, bad roads and high water during the winter. Old Liberty Church was across the Little River in Wilkes County. In the following years a Sunday School was held with occasional services. A log church was built and the first regular services were held in it a hundred years ago on the first Sunday in May, 1828. The building stood about four miles east of Sharon on the old highway which ran from Augusta through Wrightsboro and Raytown to the Mississippi Valley and which had since 1698 been the main route of traders and later of settlers going to the South-west. In the early years services were held on the Second and Fourth Sundays in the month, and they have been continued since except during the War of the States when the minister and many of the members were absent on military duty.

The log church was replaced by the present frame building in 1855, and that was moved to Sharon in 1877.

The foundation members of this church were three

[1]

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men, Moses Alexander, C. C. Mills and John McLaughlin, and nine women, Mary Alexander, Sarah J. Mills, Eleanor McLaughlin, Rachel Scoals, Mrs. Henry Clemmons, Elizabeth Morgan, Matilda Moore, Eliza Grier and Elizabeth Grier, grandmother of Alexander H. Stephens. Mrs. Elizabeth Moore, Mrs. Nancy Taylor, Mrs. James Clemmons and Nancy Morgan joined in the same year. Dr. LeRoy Holt, Mrs. Mary Holt, Jane Grier, Joshua Morgan, Mrs. Margaret Grier, Geo. Morgan and Mrs. Mary Triplett joined next year. Thomas Grier joined in 1834. Dr. David E. Darden in 1838 and Dr. Paul Davidson in 1847. Mrs. Elizabeth Moore is represented here today by her grandson, John H. Stone, our oldest Elder; her great granddaughter, Mrs. Thomas F. Kendrick, and her great, great granddaughter, Christine Summers Kendrick. Mesdame Henry and James Clemmons by their grand nephew, the Rev. W. B. Clemmons, formerly minister of this church and now of Fairfield, Ala., who preached here this morning. Dr. Paul T. Davidson by his granddaughters, Mrs. W. J. Lunsford, Mrs. F. M. Hall and Mrs. B. C. Lyons and his great granddaughter, Mary Lunsford; Dr. David S. Darden, by his great granddaughter, Mrs. Gladys Darden Moore, and Mr. Joshua Morgan by his granddaughter, Miss Genie Nicholls, of Philomath.

Mrs. Elizabeth Moore, (born Davis) a Mother in Israel, had a plantation between the church and the Little River, where she lived for many years. Most of her descendants and connections appear to have been members of the church at one time or another. Her daughter, Mrs. Nancy Stone, was a member until she removed to Thomas county in 1854 and rejoined on her return. Mrs. Emma Stone Meadows was a member in 1860; Emma Stone in 1870; Mrs. Anna C. Stone and James Meadows in 1875 and Welcome A. Stone and Mrs. Elizabeth Stone in 1884.

Mrs. Fannie Wright and Mr. and Mrs. John S.

Flynt became members in 1875 and Thomas E. Kendrick in 1882. Mr. Kendrick was an Elder and Clerk of the Session from 1883 until his death in April, 1905.

The first Elders of the church were Moses Alexander, C. C. Mills and Joshua Morgan. Mr. Morgan, who remained an Elder until his death in 1862, gave in 1828 part of his plantation for the church site and the graveyard, which is still maintained. He was born in Wilkes county, but on attaining to years of discretion, he moved to the better land in this corner of Taliaferro. His large, two-story white plantation house stood amongst old forest oaks on a rise over-looking the church, and when the Augusta Presbytery met at the church he entertained all the members to dinner there.

I am told by Aunt Betsy, an old negro woman living on my farm, who was one of Mr. Morgan's slaves, that the ladies of the house always drove down to church in a carriage with two white horses, a coachman, old Uncle David, on a high dickey seat in front; a footman standing up behind, whose business was to let down the carriage steps and hold the horses while the ladies alighted, and, what would possibly be unnecessary in our days, a colored girl sitting up beside the coachman whose work was to carry the trains of the ladies' dresses until they got into their pew. The Morgan carriage was not, however, the only one in the neighborhood. A Mr. MacCarty, who lived on this farm about a century ago, always went to church in a six-horse coach, but that was probably a matter of necessity as it is unlikely that the roads were any better then than they are at present most of the time. Aunt Betsy, although unable to tell me how many laborers Mr. Morgan had on his plantation, gave me the names of eight servants who worked at the house, and she tells me that in those days the members of the church, in addition to holding services on their plantations, brought their negro field hands and house servants to church with them on Sun-

days, and that before the morning service the minister took them through the Shorter Catechism. From personal experience, I think it is possible that some of them had a little difficulty with "What is effectual calling."

Mr. Morgan's oldest daughter, Sophia, married John W. Reed who was the second minister of this church and served it for many years. When their son, James M. Reed, died in Richmond in 1862 from wounds received at the Battle of Seven Pines in the previous month, his body was brought back here and buried in the Morgan lot in the old graveyard. One very hot Sunday in July, 1865 old Mr. Reed rode 20 miles from Philomath to hold the services in this church but was too exhausted to preach when he reached it and was taken to the Morgan home where he died on the following Thursday. He, also was buried in the Morgan lot beside his son. I first heard of Joshua Morgan shortly after settling here when driving across to Barnett one day with Uncle Frank Wright, an old slavery time negro, who pointed out his plantation and spoke of him with affection and respect as "the old Patroon." It is irrelevant, but possibly not without interest, that we talked also of Africa from which I had just come. He was emphatic that he did not wish to go there; he preferred Georgia, and he gave as his reason that his grandmother had told him that in Africa people were eaten, and that she had been glad to escape to America.

Mr. C. C. Mills had the plantation on Little River known as the Branham place near the plantation of W. W. Simpson, who was also a member of the church in later years, and of General Semmes (Uncle of Admiral Semmes of the Alabama Cruiser) who was killed at the Battle of the Wilderness. Mr. Mills was the father of the "beautiful Miss Nancy Mills" who married Captain Abram Simons, a wealthy planter in the neighborhood. He died in 1821 leaving her all his property after payment of legacies amounting to \$27,000. I men-

tion the amount as it is pleasant to reflect that, as will no doubt happen again, a farmer in this neighborhood once had as much cash money as that to give away after leaving his widow well provided for. She afterwards married the Rev. Jesse Mercer, a Baptist minister, who founded Mercer University with the money she left him. It was Mr. Mills, who, being struck with the ability at an early age of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, recommended him to the Rev. Alexander Webster, then minister of old Liberty Church, who had a famous school at Washington and induced him to take in young Stephens who, as we all know, afterwards became Representative of Georgia in Congress, Vice-President of the Confederate States, and Governor of Georgia, and whose statue has recently been erected in the Capitol at Washington. Mr. Mills probably became acquainted with him at this church, as A. H. Stephens's connection with it was very intimate. His mother, Margaret Grier, died when he was young, and when the church was being built in 1828, he was a boy of sixteen years, living with his maternal grandparents, the Griers, on their plantation near by. They belonged to the church. He helped in putting up the first building and he was a frequent attendant at the services in it. His older brother Aaron Grier Stephens, became a member in 1829. His grandfather Stephens had been a foundation member of Old Liberty, of which his father also was a member. His mother's people, the Griers, were a notable family, and strikingly illustrate that ability is hereditary, and is transmitted to sons from the mother's side of the family. One of his mother's brothers was a Judge of the Supreme Court of the United States in Washington, and one of the judges who decided the Dred-Scott case. Another, Robert Grier, the original compiler of Grier's Almanac which still has a large circulation, was an astronomer as well as a planter and his astronomical work at home on his plantation

near the church had a high reputation, and the third, Aaron Grier, whose plantation was on the road between Sharon and Raytown, was a general in the Indian wars and in the Mexican war of 1846 and a man of deservedly great influence in the state. The Griers, like the Stephenses were of Scotch origin.

Since our church is a daughter of Old Liberty Presbyterian church, bears its name, and inherits its traditions it is necessary to revert for a few minutes to the history of that church and to pay our tribute, to the memory of its founders. It was established in 1783 near the field of the Battle of Kettle Creek, fought in 1779, where the American forces commanded by Elijah Clarke, were victorious. It was the first Presbyterian church in central Georgia, and the first Presbytery in Georgia, the Hopewell, now the Augusta Presbytery, was organized there in 1797. The district had been settled only a few years before as the Indians were not moved out of that part until 1777. Speaking of that time and neighborhood Governor Lumpkins, who was brought up in Wilkes county, said in Congress in 1830 that, "Amongst my earliest recollections are the walls of a fort which gave protection to the women and children from the tomahawk and scalping knife of the Indian." In his History of old Liberty the Rev. F. T. Simpson, for many years minister of our church, describes the members of old Liberty as frontiersmen who had brought in with them their spinning wheels and reels, who had no vehicles and few horses and who used lightwood roots for candles as their ancestors had done in Scotland. Mr. Simpson was a grandson of Archibald Simpson, the first Elder of old Liberty, who settled on land at the junction of Kettle Creek and Little River, where he lived until his death on September 26th, 1819. We are glad to have with us today his great grandson, Dr. A. W. Simpson, of Washington. According to family tradition, Archibald Simpson came into Georgia

leading his horse on which his wife rode with their child, and carrying his axe and rifle. His grandson graduated at Princeton University and Columbia Theological Seminary. These founders of old Liberty were of the Voo-trekkers, that first tide of settlers of our race who had pushed west from the coast of Virginia and the Carolinas, settling on good land when they came to it, and who, when stopped by the Appalachian mountains, had come south along the foothills and crossed the Savannah River into Georgia at the fords above the Broad River. They were a virile race; amongst them in the neighborhood of old Liberty were grandparents of Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States as well as of the Vice-President, and the father of David Finley, of Montgomery, Ala., and they had left on the other bank of the Savannah such people as the parents of John C. Calhoun and his friend Governor MacDuffie.

Being also Presbyterians, it was inevitable that they espoused the cause of the Revolution since Liberty and Republicanism are in the spirit of Presbyterianism. An eminent British authority writing on Republicanism has said that, "When John Knox (the founder of the Presbyterian church) based his claim to speak on the government of the Realm on the fact that he was "born within the same," he advanced a claim very new to his generation, but it was one which was fated to achieve a great future.. The right of the subject simply as a member of the community to a voice in the affairs of the community in which he was born and on which his happiness depended implied all the "rights of man," as they were stated two centuries later in the 'American Declaration of Independence.'"—(Encyclopedia Britannica, "Republicanism").

It is therefore not surprising that the district of Old Liberty church was known as the "Hornets' Nest" during the War of Independence, that most of the members of the church had fought at Kettle Creek, and that

when they founded their church in the same year that Independence was achieved they called it "Liberty." We inherit the name, and, let us hope, we inherit also their principles and their unconquerable spirit.

Our Church, founded 45 years later, belonged to a new order of things as the intervening years had brought great changes in Georgia. The invention of the Whitney gin in 1794 had made cotton growing on large plantations highly profitable in those days. The whole of the State had been thrown open to settlement by treaties with the Cherokee and Creek Indians in 1802, 1817 and 1827, and the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 had also thrown open that State and the whole territory west of the Mississippi. The population of Georgia had increased from 80,000 to over 500,000 and in 1828 the population of this county alone was about 2,000 whites and 2,500 negroes.

In 1810 the first Agricultural Society in Georgia was formed at Augusta, and the first banks in Georgia, the Planters' Bank and the Bank of Augusta, were opened there. Next year the Bolton Cotton Mill was built in Wilkes county and in 1819 the first steamboat that ever crossed the Atlantic was built at Savannah and sailed with a cargo of cotton. In 1828 there were already river steamboats running between Augusta and Savannah. There was consequently a large influx into Georgia of cotton planters, many of whom naturally settled along the old road from Augusta to the west. Some of the old pioneers like the Simpsons had also become cotton planters, and there was simultaneously a movement of old settlers to the new lands opened up in the West. It is recorded that one of the reasons for the removal of old Liberty from its original site ultimately to Philomath where it still survives, was that many of its members had removed to the fertile lands in Alabama and Mississippi. Another reason was, it is said, that some people thought

that those who believed in, taught and understood the Shorter Catechism were a proud people and that, as a preacher in Wilkes county remarked in a sermon, "If you cut off a Presbyterian's head, you cut off his religion." It is no doubt possible that the great Presbyterian doctrines of Predestination and Election have been stumbling blocks to some, but, however that may be, South Liberty has continued for over a century and is likely to continue for more. But until after the war of the States it was a church of slave owning cotton planters and none the worse for that. That accounts also for the number of doctors in this neighborhood in the early days, due largely to the care the planters took of the health of their slaves.. Doctors Davidson, LeRoy Holt, Ward, Powers and McGuisken were members between 1828 and 1857.

The membership of the church was never large, varying from 25 in 1830 to 14 in 1891 and averaging about 20, but it is to be remembered that in the early years the members not only held services on their plantations, but brought their negroes to church with them.

In later years, after the death of Charles Roth in 1905 Mrs. Sara Davidson, relic of Dr. Paul Davidson, was until her death on the 16th of December, 1914. the mainstay of the church and kept it alive through her constant efforts. She had for many years before taught the younger children in the Sunday school and her house was the "Preacher's Home" where the minister always stayed on his monthly visits. Among the other faithful supporters of the church in these years were Miss Fanny Clemmons, sister of the Rev. W. B. Clemmons, who was Superintendent of the Sunday school and Justice M. J. Taylor.

The membership is now 36. The church has always paid its way, and is free from debt.

The ministers of the church have been:

The Rev. Dr. Carlisle T. Beman.

The Rev. J. W. Reed.
The Rev. J. C. Baldwin.
The Rev. J. W. Logan.
The Rev. Homer Hendee.
The Rev. William Davis.
The Rev. Henry Newton.
The Rev. N. H. Smith.
The Rev. Robert A. Houston.
The Rev. A. L. Whitfield.
The Rev. F. T. Simpson.
The Rev. Dr. M. W. Doggett.
The Rev. G. M. Howerton.
The Rev. T. P. Burgess.
The Rev. B. R. Anderson.
The Rev. J. B. Hillhouse.
The Rev. W. B. Clemmons.
The Rev. M. C. Dendy, and our present minister
The Rev. Angus Guy MacInnis.

Malcolm Alexander MacDonald held the services as a student for some time in 1926 and 1927, and others like Mr. MacMeans and Mr. Matheson, minister of the Washington church have filled vacancies temporarily. The services were held once by President Wilson's father, who was then minister of the First Presbyterian church in Augusta.

The first minister, Dr. Beman, was the son of a celebrated Divine for many years minister of Mount Zion church near Sparta, who conducted a noted school there and published a largely used Hymn book. The next, Rev. J. W. Reed, has already been mentioned. He was minister as early as 1838 and officiated as late as 1865. In later years the Rev. F. T. Simpson, the grandson of Archibald Simpson, the first Elder of Old Liberty, was minister for many years until his death on the 1st of April, 1906. He had preached here first in November, 1858 when he was still a student at Columbia Theological Seminary but already an Elder of the Washing-

ton church. In the Southern Presbyterian of the 18th of June, 1903, it was said that:

"The Senior Pastor (of the Augusta Presbytery) both in point of age and of service is the Rev. F. T. Simpson who has ministered to various churches in the Presbytery since 1861. His ministry has been marked by earnestness, tact, fidelity and devotion to his people. Mr. Simpson received his literary training at Princeton College and his theological instruction at Columbia Seminary. The lovable and venerated Rev. F. T. Simpson by his soundness of doctrine, lucidity of expression, and genuine power of preaching the Gospel edifies the churches of Lincolnton and South Liberty."

Time does not permit me to say all that should be said of the other ministers of the church but their memory remains in the hearts of the congregation, and it is with peculiar pleasure that we welcome among us today Rev. T. P. Burgess, B. R. Anderson, J. B. Hillhouse and W. B. Clemmons.

The former Elders of the church have been:

Moses Alexander and C. C. Mills, 1828.

Dr. LeRoy Holt, 1829.

Joshua Morgan, 1830.

Dr. David E. Darden, 1838.

Phineas Matthews, 1846.

Dr. Paul Davidson, 1848.

Jcel T. McGinty, 1859.

James Triplett, 1870.

H. D. Smith, 1876.

Joseph L. Thompson, 1878.

Thomas E. Kendrick, 1883.

Charles Roth, 1886.

A list is appended of the present officers and members.

Such is shortly the history of a small country church in Georgia. Its foundations reach back into the dawn of civilization in this state and its first members are still

represented here by descendants. Great men have sat within its walls. It passed through a devastating war which took toll of its members and destroyed the basis of its economic and social order, but it survived. It sprang from a church of men who only a generation before had done their share in redeeming the land from barbarism and establishing the government of this great country on the sure foundation of liberty and equality under laws made by the people. Although for many years they had no roads except a few Indian trails, no bridges, no railroads, no home markets, no cotton, few horses and implements and little money they nevertheless created in the hostile wilderness an ordered civilization, made and maintained farms and homes, brought up families and established churches, schools and colleges. Unless the race has degenerated, which I do not believe, we with our advantages can surely at least maintain here in Taliaferro county and transmit undimmed to our descendants, the church and the civilization they founded and the principles for which they fought and sacrificed.

“It is not to be thought of that the flood

Of Liberty which to the open sea,
Of the world's praise from dark antiquity,
Hath flowed with pomp of many waters unwith-
stood.

Roused though it be full often to a mood,
Which spurns the checks of salutary bands,
That this most famous stream in swamps and sands,
Should perish and to evil and to good
Be lost forever. On our walls are hung
Armoury of the invincible men of old.

We must be free or die that speak the tongue
That Cromwell spake, the faith and morals hold
That John Knox held. In everything we are sprung
Of earth's first blood have titles manifold.”

APPENDIX

1928

Minister of South Liberty Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Angus Guy McInnis, B. A.

ELDERS:—

John H. Stone,
W. J. Lunsford.
J. R. Moore (Sessions Clerk).

DEACONS:—

T. F. Kendrick,
J. M. Kendrick,
W. F. Moore.

MEMBERS:

Mrs. Nat Byrom.
Mrs. Ethel Flynt.
Mrs. George Fielding.
Mrs. Helen Hall.
Mrs. Ella Hill.
Roger T. Hill.
Mrs. Enoch R. Jackson.
John M. Kendrick.
Mrs. John M. Kendrick.
Thomas F. Kendrick.
Mrs. Thomas F. Kendrick.
Christine Summers Kendrick.
B. C. Lyons.
Mrs. B. C. Lyons.
William J. Lunsford.
Mrs. William J. Lunsford.
Mary Lunsford.
John Robert Moore.
Mrs. John Robert Moore.
Emmye Victoria Moore.
W. F. Moore.
Mrs. W. F. Moore.
Ola Estelle Moore.

Mrs. Maud Wright Moore.
Mrs. Amelia Roth Martin.
William Frederick Moore.
Mrs. Mattie Mac Alpine.
T. G. Macfie.
Mrs. T. G. Macfie.
T. G. T. Macfie.
Charles Roth.
Mrs. Charles Roth.
David Roth.
John H. Stone.
Dallas Towers.
Mrs. J. V. Wynne.

Note 1. Margaret Grier, Alexander H. Stephens' mother, was descended from Robert Grier and his cousin, Jeannie Burns, who were born in Scotland and migrated to the north of Ireland about two hundred years ago. They emigrated to Pennsylvania and moved to Georgia about 1769. Robert Grier was too old to serve in the Revolutionary army in the War of Independence but his three sons, Robert, Aaron and Thomas, did so. His son, Robert, married Margaret Livingstone and his son Aaron married Jean Gibson. His grandson Robert, who lived until 1843, married his cousin, Elizabeth, the daughter of Aaron Grier, and his wife, Jean Gibson. This Mrs. Elizabeth Grier, who died on the 6th of February, 1847, was a foundation member of this church and the grandmother of Alexander Hamilton Stephens.

2. Mrs. Elizabeth Moore, born Davis, who was also a foundation member of the church, was an aunt of Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States. His father's plantation, inherited from his grandfather, who died and was buried there, was only a few miles from the Moore plantation, and his father lived there until shortly before the birth of Jefferson Davis on the 3rd of June, 1808. Mrs. Elizabeth Moore is still remembered as a woman of great capacity and force of character.

Errata.

page 2. Elizabeth Grier was an Aunt of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, not his grandmother. His maternal grandparents were Aaron Grier and Jean Gibson Grier.

page 5. In Sandberg's Life of Lincoln (Vol II p. 202) a letter from Lincoln to A. H. Stephens is given in which Lincoln refers to "Your Uncle Justice Grier of the Supreme Court." It appears, however, that Mr Justice Grier was the second cousin, not the Uncle, of Stephens.

page 6. Aaron Grier was also a Brigadier General in the War of 1812.

page 144 Note 2. Mrs Loring of Keytown, who is a Grand-daughter of Mrs Elizabeth Moore, tells me that she was a first cousin, not an Aunt, of Jefferson Davis.

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