



CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Gallatin Church of Christ

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The Beginning of Gallatin Church of Christ?

It is unclear to us when, exactly, Gallatin Church of Christ began. Here I enumerate various claims and clues as to the date of our origin.

(1) An 1887 history of Tennessee tells of numerous Sumner County citizens who were members of the Christian Church in Sumner County during the 1850s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and possibly earlier.¹

(2) In a newspaper article from about 1913/1914, Mrs. J. B. Malone wrote, “In 1866, a small but zealous band of brethren met and organized at the home of the late George A. Foster, East Main Street.”²

(3) In about 1950, a history of Sumner County compiled by county teachers claimed that “regular meetings [of Gallatin Church of Christ] were held in the old Court House prior to the Civil War”³

(4) Local historian Walter Durham wrote in 1986, “The Christian Church or Disciples of Christ had a congregation in Gallatin prior to 1850.”⁴

(5) In 1993, from information submitted by Julius Hovan, Tom Bradshaw wrote in an appendix that Gallatin Church of Christ was first organized “before 1850.”⁵



¹ *History of Tennessee, from the Earliest Time to the Present; Together with an Historical and a Biographical Sketch of the Counties of Sumner, Smith, Macon, and Trousdale, Besides a Valuable Fund of Notes, Original Observations, Reminiscences, Etc., Etc.* (Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1887), pp. 854ff.

² Emphasis mine. The picture to the right is a scan of a copy of the newspaper article. We have not yet learned the date of the article and the newspaper from which it came. The picture to the left is Mrs. J. B. Malone holding Glenn Freeman. Mrs. Malone was listed in our 1917 directory.

³ *A Brief Study of the History of Sumner County*, by Sumner County Teachers (Available at the Sumner County Archives, call no. 976.847 Sum, date uncertain, but after 1947), p. 30. Emphasis mine.

⁴ Walter T. Durham and James W. Thomas, *A Pictorial History of Sumner County, Tennessee, 1786-1986* (Gallatin, TN: Sumner County Historical Society, 1986), p. 117. Emphasis mine.

⁵ Thomas G. Bradshaw, *R. H. Boll: Controversy and Accomplishment among Churches of Christ* (Louisville: Word and Work, 1993/1998), p. 102.

(6) In her congregational history, Nannie Dunn Jones Draper noted that eight trustees acted for the Gallatin Christian Church in the purchase of its first building in 1870.⁶

Assessing these sources is challenging.

The 1887 history does not identify specific churches, but rather denominational groupings. Thus, designating various Sumner County citizens as “members of the Christian Church” does not guarantee that they were members of Gallatin Christian Church in particular.

Mrs. Malone’s newspaper article would be considered a primary source from someone who lived during, or very close to, the events described. She represents the rare jewel of a living, oral tradition of a church’s history. As a researcher, I wonder, though: what about the claims of the Sumner County teachers, Walter Durham, and Julius Hovan (via Tom Bradshaw)—*all* of whom date the origin of our church to *before* the Civil War—even before 1850?

The strength of the Sumner County teachers’ claims is that, as they say in the Foreword of the book, they had access to H. L. Olmstead, whose knowledge of Gallatin Church of Christ would have been invaluable. They do not, however, formally cite Olmstead as a source of their claims as to the time period of origin of our church. They do not cite any source of that claim.

Walter Durham’s pictorial history does not cite a source for claiming that Gallatin had a Christian Church prior to 1850. I think he’s right, but I have no further leads from his history.

Tom Bradshaw’s source was, as I said, Julius Hovan. Having worked for our church for nearly three decades, Julius would have had access to reputable information, but he no longer recalls the source of the dating he gave to Bradshaw at that time.

As for sister Draper’s congregational history, my inference works like this: If Gallatin Christian Church was able in 1870 to put forward eight men as trustees and to invest in its own house of worship, then the church must at least have existed several years prior to 1870. It seems highly unlikely to me that, in too short of a time, a church could begin, organize, gain enough members to be represented by eight trustees, and gain enough funds to invest in a building.

Informed by these sources, it is safe to say that Gallatin Church of Christ—first known by the name Gallatin Christian Church—began in the mid-1800s, in the 1850s or 60s at the latest.

Further research may uncover more clues. In the next issue, I will share some research revealing that people in Gallatin were reading a Restoration Movement periodical in the 1820s and 30s. The names of readers of that periodical may offer further clues as to the people and dates we associate with the beginnings of a Restoration Movement church, a Christian Church, here in Gallatin.

⁶ Though Draper did not number her pages, she recounted these details on the 9th and 16th pages.