



CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Gallatin Church of Christ

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In the previous issue, I took six sources to indicate that our church, Gallatin Christian Church, began in the mid-1800s—in the 1850s or 60s at the latest, and possibly earlier.

Additional research reveals that people in Gallatin were reading a Restoration Movement periodical in the 1820s and 30s. Before sharing the names of those readers and their import to researching our history, I need to describe the Restoration Movement in general, and Barton Stone in particular. Based on my research to date, it is my belief that Barton Stone's movement planted the seeds for what would eventually grow to become Gallatin Christian Church.

The Restoration Movement

In the early-1800s, some Christians and churches initiated movements to unite what was fast becoming an increasingly divided American Christianity. In Kentucky at that time, a Presbyterian preacher led his churches out from under the governance of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky. He and his associates sought to restore New Testament Christianity in order to unite Christians and enable the evangelizing of non-Christians. This preacher was Barton Stone, whose movement—together with that of Alexander Campbell of Pennsylvania—historians call “The Restoration Movement” or “The Stone-Campbell Movement.”

Barton Stone and His Influence

Barton Stone had been ordained and licensed to preach by the Presbyterian Church. He had been assigned to the Concord and Cane Ridge churches in Kentucky. In 1801, he participated in a revival with churches of other denominations—Baptists and Methodists—for which he was chided by his supervisors. The positive experience of the revival and the negative experience of his Presbyterian supervisors helped Stone decide to leave the Presbyterian Church in 1804. He and his associates organized their churches into independent “Christian Churches” or “Churches of Christ”—the names were interchangeable and non-divisive.

Barton Stone had spent some time in Sumner County, first as an ordained Presbyterian preacher on his way to Kentucky in 1796:

“I had now arrived at the frontier settlement of West Tennessee, on Bledsoe's creek, at the cabin of Major White. Here I was kindly entertained, and rested several days, and then proceeded to Shiloh, near where Gallatin now stands. Here I joyfully met with many old friends and brethren, who had lately moved from Carolina, among whom were my fellow students and fellow laborers, William McGee and John Anderson, the latter of whom agreed to travel and preach with me through all the settlements of Cumberland. . . . Among other settlements

visited by us, was that on Mansker's creek. Here we often preached to respectable and large assemblies, from a stand erected by the people in a shady grove."¹

It is evident from these recollections that Stone had connections along the Cumberland River settlements of Sumner County in the mid-1790s.

In 1811, after Stone had begun leading the Christian Church movement in Kentucky, he preached again in Sumner County, this time as a Christian Church preacher and elder:

"Barton W. Stone preached first in the fifth civil district of Sumner County, in 1811, on the farm of H. P. Jones. From there he went immediately to a place near where the little village of Roganna now stands, and preached on Bledsoe's Creek, at the mouth of Dry Fork Creek. The preaching was done under an Elm and Oak. . . . Stone was accompanied here by the Brethren Craighead and Dodridge. From this place they went to where Hopewell now stands, and preached under a Beech Tree, covered with a Summer grape-vine. Mr. Rogan says there were additions at both places; but he does not know how many. Of course Mr. Rogan was not then born; but having an excellent memory, he remembers what he heard his father relate concerning this."²

In 1812, Stone actually lived in Sumner County for a short time:

"October 31, 1811, I was married to my present companion, Celia W. Bowen, daughter of Captain William Bowen and Mary his wife, near Nashville, Tennessee. . . . We immediately removed to my old habitation in Bourbon county, Kentucky, and lived happily there for one year. Then by advice and hard persuasion, we were induced to move to Tennessee, near my wife's widowed mother. The old mother put us on a very good farm, but without a comfortable house for our accommodation. I labored hard at building a house and improving the farm, till I learned that mother Bowen designed not to give me a deed to the farm While I was in Tennessee my field of labors in the word was very much circumscribed, and my manual labors took up much of my time in fixing for living comfortably."³

From this account, we learn that Stone lived in Sumner County in 1812 and, though limited by the demands of farming and house-building, would have had some opportunities to share his Christian Church movement with people nearby until he would move to Lexington, Kentucky.

In addition to travelling, preaching, and organizing, Stone used writing to strengthen and spread the cause of the Christian Churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, and other states and territories. He began his periodical, *The Christian Messenger*, in 1826, and continued it, with some exceptions, until his death in 1844.

It is on the pages of *The Christian Messenger* that we find—to the best of my knowledge—the first connection of the people of Gallatin to this Kentucky-based Christian Church movement. The names of the people of Gallatin that show up in issues of *The Christian Messenger* will, unfortunately, have to wait until the next issue of this newsletter. Hopefully, I have made my case in this issue as to why I think that Barton Stone and his movement are relevant for speaking about the origins of Gallatin Christian Church—and likely of the church that would become Old Union Church of Christ.

¹ Barton W. Stone, *A Short History of the Life of Barton W. Stone, Written by Himself*, in *Voices from Cane Ridge*, ed. Rhodes Thompson (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1954), p. 52. Available at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/bstone/barton.html>.

² E. A. Elam, interview with Charles Rogan, as quoted in J. W. Grant, "A Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee" (1897?), pp. 9-10. Manuscript and transcription available at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.