



CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Gallatin Church of Christ

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Gallatin and *The Christian Messenger* (continued)

1834 (continued)

In the December 1834 issue, evangelist B. F. Hall recounts a trip to our area:

“On my return from a recent visit to Alabama, I spent several days in the neighborhood of Gallatin Ten. when a few brethren and sisters last May came together as a congregation of Christ. Bro. Adams was with me two or three days. During our visit eight persons were immersed and one other made the good confession. Among the number was a Cumberland Presbyterian gentleman, and a Methodist lady. The prospect for many more additions is flattering.

“The brethren of that congregation now number, I think, more than fifty zealous and interesting members. They meet regularly every first day to break the loaf, attend to the contribution, &c.

“December 10th.

“B. F. Hall.”¹

This excerpt is primary-source, documentary evidence of the beginnings of a “congregation of Christ” in “the neighborhood of Gallatin” in spring 1834. This is not, however, the beginning of Gallatin Christian Church. Other evidence² clarifies that the church referred to here is the church that met alternately at Hopewell in Castalian Springs and at Sylvan Academy. This “Sylvan Church” was later to become Old Union Church of Christ. It began in spring 1834.

The above reference to the beginning of Sylvan Church interests me for this reason: the names of the people who began that church³ are *not* the names of the Gallatin recipients of Stone’s *Christian Messenger* from 1826 to 1834. If the names had been the same, then we could draw a straight line from the *Messenger* to the Sylvan Church. Since they are not the same, it may well be that, in 1834, the people who started Sylvan and the Gallatin readers of the *Messenger* were distinct with no connection.

¹ B. F. Hall, letter to *The Christian Messenger*, in Barton W. Stone, *The Christian Messenger* 8:12 (December 1834): 378.

² I will handle that evidence in a later issue, but, for now, I mention a few sources here: A. G. Branham, “News from the Churches,” in Tolbert Fanning, ed., *The Christian Review* (December 1845): 281-283; E. A. Elam, “The Union Congregation in Sumner County, Tenn.” in *The Gospel Advocate* (June 28, 1894): 400-401; a manuscript history of Old Union Church of Christ by Charles C. Chenault, cited in Walter Durham, *Old Sumner*, pp. 337-338; and sister Draper’s history and her access to first-hand accounts.

³ Whose names are not mentioned in the above excerpt from *The Christian Messenger*, but are mentioned in the sources in footnote 2 and include the following: John Gillespie, Willis A. Bush, Peter Hubbard, John Bush, W. C. Huffman, G. B. Harris, A. G. Branham, and Dr. Daniel Mentlo.

If the two sets of people were distinct with no connection, at the very least, the December 1834 issue would have made the Gallatin readers aware of the Sylvan Church.

1835

Five months later, Stone notes the following receipts: “*Gallatin*, W. Bell, J. Gourley; S. Wilson; A. Wilson; Jona Wilson; each for 9.”⁴

To the seven already familiar names—Crockett, Wallace, Moore, “S.” Gourley, Bell, Winham, and Rogers—we can now add “J.” Gourley⁵ and the three Wilsons. By 1835, then, the awareness of Stone’s periodical in Gallatin has grown to at least ten or eleven (see footnote) individuals.

1836

Nine months later, Stone notes these receipts: “*Gallatin*, Jona Wilson, Sam’l Wilson, Ad. Wilson, Wm. Bell, John Gourley, for 10.”⁶

The recipients of volume 10 are the same as the recipients of volume 9. We get a little more help with the first names, and the Gourley reader would seem to be distinct from the “S.” Gourley of 1831.⁷ Gallatin awareness of Stone’s paper thus hovers at ten or eleven people at least, and likely several more.

1842

Six years later—though only two *issues* later⁸—an account of the travels of evangelist John T. Johnson includes mention of Gallatin:

“Bro. Rice and myself have just returned from a tour of 9 weeks, having labored chiefly in that section of Green river, occupied by bro. G. W. Elley as an Evangelist during the past 12 months. We commenced operations at Russelsville [sic] in conjunction with brother Elley; and from thence proceeded to Elkton, Hopkinsville, Bellville, Red river, Keesburgh, Adamsville, Franklin, Grassdale, Bethel, Bethany, (Fountain Head, Gallatin and Hopewell in Tenn.) Dripping Springs and Salem. We labored faithfully at each of those places and succeeded beyond calculation.”⁹

This account names places, but does not tell about churches as such. “Hopewell” can be taken in reference to the people of the Sylvan Church. What I do not know is whether “Gallatin” refers simply to the town, or members of the movement in town, or even a church in town. I hope that further research will enable us to solve this puzzle. I still do not know the exact year in which our church began. Albert G. Branham will report to Tolbert Fanning in 1845 that the Sylvan Church and Hartsville Church are the only two in Sumner County¹⁰, but I will not be satisfied with that report until I can explain why I have found no connection between the names of *Christian Messenger* readers and the charter members of the Sylvan Church.

⁴ Stone, “Receipts Since Last Number,” in CM 9:5 (May 1835): 120. By 1835, Stone had moved from Kentucky to Illinois and was publishing his paper from Jacksonville, IL.

⁵ If the “J” is not a mistaken rendering of a handwritten “S.” We have already seen an “S.” Gourley, and a mistake would mean that we are dealing here with the same person named before, not another Gourley.

⁶ Stone, “Receipts Since Last Number,” in CM 10:2 (February 1836): 32.

⁷ Although, admittedly, the typographical error could have gone the other way: a “J” mistaken in 1831 for an “S” and clarified in the 1835 and ‘36 issues.

⁸ Because of a lengthy break in publishing the *Messenger*—due to, I believe, the failure of many recipients to pay Stone for the issues they had received. This was a recurring problem throughout the life of the paper.

⁹ J. T. Johnson, letter to *The Christian Messenger* from Georgetown, KY, dated August 15, 1842, in Stone, CM 12:11 (September 1842): 351-52.

¹⁰ In 1845, Trousdale County did not yet exist, and so Hartsville was part of Sumner County.