



CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Gallatin Church of Christ

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Brief Review of Research

It seems unknown when our church began. In issue 2, I reported various claims about the start of our church—dates ranging from before 1850 to the year 1866. In issue 3, I reported the presence of the Christian Church leader Barton Stone in Gallatin in 1796, 1811, and 1812. In issues 4 and 5, I reported my finding that people in Gallatin were reading Stone’s Christian Church periodical in 1826, 1827, 1828, 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834, 1835, and 1836; and that Christian Church evangelists labored in Gallatin in 1842. It is reasonable to imagine that seeds for the Gallatin Christian Church were planted during these years. Whether this indeed happened, and how it happened, are questions I hope to answer.

In issues 6 and 7, I reported that, before the beginning of Gallatin Christian Church, the only churches in Gallatin of which I am aware were Cumberland Presbyterian (1820s), mainstream Presbyterian (1828), Methodist (1829), and Catholic (1837)¹—although the non-denominational Union Church building seems to have been available to any believers before *and* after the forming of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Could there have been Christian-Church sympathizers using the Union Church building during this period?

Histories of Tennessee Christian Churches from the 1800s

In 1897, J. W. Grant wrote *A Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee*, a history of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in the state. Grant’s history included a reproduction of an even earlier work on the same topic by Isaac N. Jones. For his part, Jones had reported that Tennessee Christian Churches and Churches of Christ began “some where in the ‘teens’ of the present century [the 1800s],”² and that these efforts preceded Alexander Campbell’s work in Tennessee. For this reason, these earliest Restoration Movement churches should not—in many cases—be considered “Campbellite.”³ In Tennessee, Barton Stone and others came before Campbell. In addition, Jones had noted the general preference for the term “Christian Church” over “Church of Christ” in Tennessee at that time.⁴

These histories from the 1800s confirm my own research on two counts: (1) that Barton Stone’s presence and influence in Sumner County preceded any work in the area on the part of

¹ There were Baptist churches in the area, but, to the best of my knowledge, none of them was in town, but rather in neighboring areas (e.g., El Bethel on East Station Camp Creek). First Baptist Church of Gallatin did not begin until 1859, I believe.

² Jones, *The Reformation in Tennessee*, quoted on p. 28 of Grant’s *A Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee*. Available and accessed at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

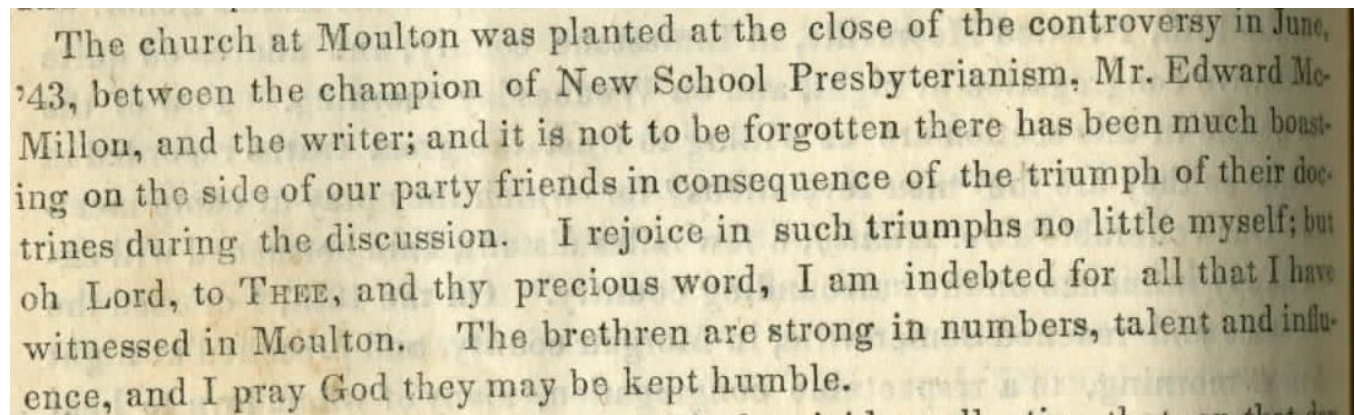
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Alexander Campbell; and (2) that when time came for a Restoration Movement church to begin in the city of Gallatin, preference was given to the name “Christian Church”—as was apparently the broader trend in Tennessee in those years.

Division among Gallatin Presbyterians

In *Old Sumner*, Walter Durham tells of a division in First Presbyterian Church of Gallatin in the 1840s and ‘50s. The church divided into the “Old School” and the “New School,” with each side being served by its own distinct ministers during the years of division. Charles Moffatt⁵ explained to me that the division began at the Presbyterian General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1837 and centered on the nationwide relationship of the Presbyterian Church to the Congregational Church. The two denominations had agreed to cooperate in outreach and to allow the transference of ministers between the two denominations. The division seems to have worked its way into individual congregations, impacting Gallatin Presbyterians in the 1840s. Both Gallatin’s Old School and New School used the same building at different times until the New School died out some time after the Civil War.

I bring up this division among Gallatin Presbyterians for two reasons: (1) the timing of the division is in that time frame in which the Christian Church movement may have had some sympathizers and adherents in Gallatin⁶; and (2) I found literary evidence of a Christian Church/ Church of Christ forming amidst a controversy involving New School Presbyterians in Moulton, Alabama, in 1843. Below is a picture from Tolbert Fanning’s journal, *The Christian Review*, November 1844, p. 244 (printed in Nashville, TN):



The church at Moulton was planted at the close of the controversy in June, 1843, between the champion of New School Presbyterianism, Mr. Edward Millon, and the writer; and it is not to be forgotten there has been much boasting on the side of our party friends in consequence of the triumph of their doctrines during the discussion. I rejoice in such triumphs no little myself; but oh Lord, to THEE, and thy precious word, I am indebted for all that I have witnessed in Moulton. The brethren are strong in numbers, talent and influence, and I pray God they may be kept humble.

Tolbert Fanning was “the writer” who had the controversy with the “champion” of New School Presbyterianism in Moulton. And so, in 1843 in Alabama, a Christian Church formed on the tail end of a controversy with New School Presbyterians.

Back to Gallatin: I wonder if the Old School / New School division in Gallatin contributed to a climate in which those disgusted with Presbyterian division and knowledgeable of Stone’s alternative would have begun looking for ways to act on that alternative? Again, the data are inconclusive on these points, but we are learning better the atmosphere of churches in Gallatin in that time period at the end of which a Gallatin Christian Church would exist and, in 1870, would purchase its own house of worship.

⁵ In a telephone conversation I had with him.

⁶ As evidenced by *Christian Messenger* readers, and by evangelistic work done in Gallatin in 1842.