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CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Gallatin Church of Christ

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Gallatin and Sumner County in the 1840s in Tolbert Fanning's *Christian Review*

Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) was something of a second-generation leader in the Restoration Movement in Middle Tennessee.¹ He knew Alexander Campbell and even travelled with him. Fanning is best known for starting the periodical *The Gospel Advocate* in 1855, but before *The Advocate*, Fanning started and edited *The Christian Review* from 1844 until 1847. On the pages of Fanning's *Review*, I found notes pertinent to Gallatin and Sumner County.

In a December 1844 list of donors to Fanning's Franklin College, Fanning listed four people from Gallatin who had contributed to the school: Dr. D. W. Mentlo (\$25), Peter Brison (\$10), Elcanah Bush (\$5), and John W. Hall (\$10).² In January 1845, a "Jno. T. Baber" of Sumner County was listed among students enrolled at the college.

Dr. D. W. Mentlo, Gallatin,	25
Peter Brison,	10
Elcanah Bush,	5
John W. Hall,	paid 10
Jno. T. Baber, Sumner Co., Tenn.	

In June 1845, a Restoration Movement evangelist, J. J. Trott, wrote Fanning about his labors "in word and doctrine," in Sumner County (among other counties).³

In October 1845, Fanning published an August 30 obituary letter from a "W. A. B." in Gallatin, notifying the *Christian Review* readership of the passing of a "Sister Mary Wilson," daughter of a "Bro. Stephen Wilson, in Sumner county [sic]."⁴

In December 1845, Fanning began publishing a series of reports from Albert G. Branham on Churches of Christ in the area. Branham began with the Sylvan Church in Sumner County, east

Sylvan Church, Sumner county, Tennessee, was organized March 30th, 1834, with 9 members. Present number, 115; 44 males, 57 females, 15 servants, 36 heads of families; 4 immersions past year. From the first, some have

of Gallatin. Due to interest in the report, I transcribe much of it here:

"Sylvan Church, Sumner county, Tennessee, was organized March 30th, 1834, with 9 members. Present number, 115; 44 males, 57 females, 15 servants, 36 heads of families; 4 immersions past year. From the first, some have met regularly on the 1st day of the week, to break bread and worship the Lord. At present about 50 disciples, on an average, are present each Lord's day. They are much scattered, and the meetings are alternately at Hopewell, Castalian Springs, and Sylvan Academy, the brethren having no house of their own. . . . We yet

¹ A convenient and brief biography of Fanning is available at <http://www.therestorationmovement.com/fanning.tolbert.htm>.

² Fanning, *Christian Review* 1:12 (December 1844 [Nashville, TN]): p. 288.

³ Published in the August 1845 issue: Fanning, *Review* 2:8 (August 1845): p. 189.

⁴ Fanning, *Review* 2:10 (October 1845): pp. 239-240.

hope that the brethren, by building a house at some central point, will provide for a general assembly each Lord's day.

"The Elders are John Gillispie, W. A. Bush, and P. Hubbard; Deacons, John Bush, W. C. Huffman, and G. B. Harris; A. G. Branham, Evangelist. Bro. Jas. Calahan, during the present year [1845] has preached for the brethren monthly, for which they give him \$100. He is the first who has been engaged by this church in this way, and as the brethren are not generally in favor of having monthly preaching, it is to be hoped they will not fall into this dangerous habit, especially as they have proved by experience that they conduct their meetings to edification of the body, without a preacher. Passing Evangelists are generally well paid by a contribution made on the occasion. . . .

"A Bible class was set on foot about 4 years since, and after various methods being tried, the present plan is, to meet at 10 o'clock Lord's day, and spend one hour in examining some chapter as a lesson. The elder who presides, or some one named by him, proposes such questions to those who assemble at this hour. . . .

"After the Bible lesson, the present order is to spend an hour in singing, prayer, and breaking of bread, after which a discourse or exhortation is offered by some one of the elders or brethren. A small sum is generally contributed for the expenses of the house. . . ."

Branham's report goes on to describe the Hartsville Church—Hartsville being part of Sumner County at that time. Branham, who is from Sumner County, goes on to say: "These two [Sylvan and Hartsville] are the only churches in Sumner county [as of December 1845]. A large portion of the people in this county have not even heard the gospel preached, as we understand it. The word has not sounded out in the neighborhood by the churches as it was in ancient times."⁵

In March 1846, Fanning published an obituary notice from a "D. W. M." regarding a "bro. Isaac P. Parker," who died "near Gallatin" early that month. Parker had been baptized in 1842 during the evangelistic efforts of John T. Johnson, George W. Elly, and R. C. Rice in the area.⁶ Later in 1846, some Franklin College students spent a little time in Gallatin as part of a geological excursion of some kind.⁷ Lastly of note from my findings, in September 1846, Fanning shared a query asked of him by "a Presbyterian friend in Sumner County Tennessee."⁸

Summary

Briefly for now, these findings reveal the following about Sumner County and Gallatin in connection with this Restoration-Movement periodical in the 1840s: Gallatin donors to a small local college associated with the Movement; a Sumner County student at that college; the labors of a Restoration Movement evangelist in Sumner County; the deaths of two members of Sumner Churches of Christ shared with the *Review* readership; the details of the first two Churches of Christ in Sumner County as of December 1845; the brief presence of Franklin College students in Gallatin; and mention of Fanning's Presbyterian friend⁹ in Sumner County.

⁵ A. G. Branham, "News from the Churches," in Fanning, *Christian Review* 2:12 (December 1845): pp. 281-283.

⁶ "Obituaries," in Fanning, *Review* 3:3 (March 1846): p. 72.

⁷ Fanning, *Review* 3:8 (August 1846): pp. 186-187.

⁸ "Queries," in Fanning, *Review* 3:9 (September 1846): p. 214.

⁹ "Friend" may mean a literal friend of his, or it may refer politely to someone he does not know.