

## **Rossville Presbyterian Church**

In 1831 Indiana was the edge of the frontier. The first settler took up land in Ross Township in March 1828. The area's first gathering of Presbyterians for worship was held three years later at the home of Samuel Seawright-about 1 ½ miles northwest of Rossville. The minister was the Rev. James Carnahan who had founded the Frankfort Presbyterian Church early in 1831.

In January of 1833, the Rev. Carnahan was succeeded at Frankfort by Leonard Godfrey Bell, who came to this area from the Presbytery of Holston (eastern Tennessee). Both Rev. Carnahan and Rev. Bell were two of about two hundred missionaries sent into Indiana in the period before the Civil war by the American Home Missionary Society, a voluntary agency supported by the Presbyterian, Reformed and Congregational Churches in the East.

What were these pioneer missionaries like? In a biographical note published in 1884, 18 years after his death, L. G. bell is described as "a man of eminent evangelical spirit and always delighted with the triumphs of the Cross of Christ. He was characterized by courteous bearing, gentleness and kindness towards all. As a preacher he was simple, earnest and solemn. None could doubt his sincerity, and the depth of his convictions or fail to see that his soul yearned over lost sinners."

Brother Bell found some of those pioneers who settled in this area responsive to his efforts. He saw that they were intent on building more than their personal homes and farms. On April 25, 1834 the Rev. L. G. Bell met with nineteen settlers "on the Middlefork of the Wildcat" to form the Middlefork Presbyterian Church. We know the names of only five couples among those charter members: Thomas Ewing, who laid out the town of Rossville, and his wife Elizabeth (Ferguson) Ewing, David and Mary A. LaFever, Richard and Elizabeth Wilson, Mr. and Mrs. John Black, and Mr. and Mrs. VanHuysen.

The first building, made of logs, was in Carroll County on Prince William Rd. south of the creek (now Ray Miller's farm) and was used by all the churches in the area. In 1838, the congregation moved to Rossville, holding services in the school house until a frame building was constructed on the site of the present sanctuary (61 W. Main St.) in 1840. During these early years we had no settled minister. Presbytery assigned pulpit supply from among its members so that services were held here on a regular basis (probably once a month). Among those to serve the church during this period were: Rev. Daniel Jones, Rev. Alexander Williamson, and Rev. Edward M. Wright.

On April 12, 1844 Presbytery was formally asked to change our name to the "Rossville Presbyterian Church". Later that year, Rev. Thomas M. Chestnut was called to serve our church and Lexington Presbyterian Church (Cutler & Geetingsville Presbyterian Churches grew out of this church). Rev. Chestnut left in September of 1845, but returned to serve Rossville church from 1846-1850.

Our oldest surviving book of session minutes begins with the meeting of September 8, 1846 and lists John Black, John Smith, and David Morrison as elders with Rev. Chestnut as Moderator. J. Black's name continues to appear throughout the book, which covers the pastorates of Rev. Joseph Platt (1850-1853), Rev. James McClusky (1853-1857), Rev. William Armstrong (1857-1859) and Rev. David R. Love (1861-1864).

D.R. Love was ordained on October 3, 1861 at a meeting of Presbytery held in our church. The minutes show that we counted 49 "members in good standing" but our average attendance for the "stated preaching of the word" was about 200. Note is also made of the renovation of the church building. It was "whitewashed, painted, carpeted,"etc. through "the energy of the ladies."

Rev. Samuel M. Crissman (1864-1868) and Rev. John A. Campbell (1868-1872) served the church after the civil war and were followed by William P. Koutz. The minutes make special note of the death of charter member Richard Wilson on June 30, 1875: he was nearly 82. Rev. Koutz was an energetic preacher, who held revivals not just in the church but also in some of the school houses out in the country.

On September 22, 1882, during the pastorate of Sidney J. Brownson , 20 members of our congregation became the charter members of the Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church. Rev. H. D. Onyett was employed as “ministerial supply” beginning May 1, 1883 “provided Pleasant Hill Church engages part of his services for the same time...” every pastor since has served both churches.

Rev. Thornton D. Fyffe was the next minister. In 1887, during his pastorate our present sanctuary was constructed at a cost of \$7000. It was dedicated on Thursday, November 24, Thanksgiving Day. Soon after, an extended revival was held. Session was constituted after morning services, December 11, 1887 and officially remained in session until closed with prayer “on Sabbath, January 1, 1888.” One member was removed from the roll, 17 were added and 8 were baptized (six of them on Christmas Day) during this remarkable meeting.

The next pastor was Rev. David R. Burr (1888-1893). During his pastorate new brick walks were laid “from each door to the sidewalk” and it was decided “not to allow anything of a theatrical or frivolous nature in the church.” D. R. Burr was followed by Rev. William H. Blair (1893-1894), Rev. E. N. Prentice (1894-1897), Rev. W. H. Roberts (1897-1898), Rev. H. C. Johnson (1898-1900), Rev. F. M., Tyrell (1900-1902), and Rev. Henry M. Rogers (1903-1906).

When Rev. Rogers came we began to hold all day annual meetings. These gatherings, broken in the middle by a carry-in dinner, included entertainment and inspiration, as well as reports and elections. In the minutes of the 1904 meetings, clerk E.E. Hufford approves of the innovation: “...all seeming to have received a blessing from having been present.” In the 1906 minutes he endorses the pastor’s opinion that it has been “a pleasant and profitable day.” Despite this praise, in 1912 the annual meeting was held in the evening, a practice that continued until 1967.

Rev. Claude G. Fowler served from 1906 to 1910 and moderated the session on March 15, 1908 when Zelpha L. Erb and Mabel M. Clauser were among those who “...appeared before session and were examined upon their religious experience. When having made satisfactory profession of their faith in Jesus Christ...they were admitted to the Lord’s Supper.” Mrs. Zelpha Metzger and Mrs. Mabel Carson were still active in our congregation when our 150<sup>th</sup> year was celebrated in 1984.

Rev. N. F. Chapman (1910-1912) and Rev. C. E. Fowler (1912-1916) were the next ministers to serve our church. An issue of the local newspaper, the Rossville Journal, published on December 26, 1913 notes the activities occurring in our church:

Church services every Sunday morning or evening. Prayer meeting held each Wednesday 7:30 p.m.; Sabbath school 9:15 a.m.; YPSCE each Sunday 6:00 p.m.; Woman’s Missionary Society last Wednesday of each month 2:00 p.m.; Industrial Society second Wednesday of each month. Communion seasons, first Sabboath of the months of January, April, July, and October.  
Rev. C. E. Fowler

We know that the “Young People’s Society for Christian Endeavor” and the woman’s Missionary Society go back at least to 1902. The Ladies Industrial Society began April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1903. One of their first projects was raising \$200 for a furnace, installed in 1905. ‘Christian Endeavor’ was the ancestor of our present Junior and Senior Youth Fellowships. Our ‘United Presbyterian women’, in its monthly meetings and special workdays continued the traditions of service from both of the groups that preceded it. It was disbanded in 1989.

The roll of ministers serving our congregation continues with Rev. George W. Rowe (1916-1918), Rev. Arthur Raabe, (1918-1921), and Rev. G. E. Jones (1921-1926). Rev. Florizel A. Pfeleiderer (1927-1929), Rev. R. Washington Burton (1929-1931) and Rev. L. Dewey Burham (1932-1934) served next. The reports presented at the 1933 annual meeting list the name of Miss Ruth Maish as Sunday School pianist. The record shows that she was present 52 Sundays that year. Her contribution to the music of our congregation has spanned more than a third of its life. Her Golden anniversary was celebrated in 1983 and she continued her faithful service as our organist until 1989.

Our second century began with the Rev. John Hanstra (1935-1941) and Rev. Arthur Powell (1942-1949). During 1941 the men of the church dug a basement under the sanctuary. Some of them weren't too sure it could be done without undermining the structure—they didn't want the steeple to fall! Fred Ruch was sure it could be done and with Jacob Cheney, he crawled in to take out enough shovels of dirt to allow a conveyor belt to be installed.

1947 saw the beginning of a rotating session, with the election of Jacob Cheney, Robert Hufford and William Stevenson. They joined George Wotring, Frank Cheney, L. E. Moore, Walter Jackson, Albert Kuhns and James R. Crouse who were declared lifetime members. Mr. Kuhns was the last of these to die on April 9, 1962.

Rev. Stanley B. Hopper served our church from 1950-1959. It is in the minutes of the 1951 annual meeting (reviewing 1950) that we first see the "Annual Report of the Rossville Presbyterian church farm". This 135 acre farm in Carroll County was given to the congregation by Mrs. Elizabeth Gray Lyman and has made possible many of the improvements in the years following. On May 13, 1951 we dedicated our new Hammond electric organ.

In 1959 the property to the west of our church was purchased jointly with Pleasant Hill to serve as manse, and was ready to welcome the new pastor, Rev. E. Dean Finley when he arrived in May of 1960.

On Sunday, November 5, 1961, Mr. Ralph Rodkey, Chairman of the Building Committee presented our new Christian Education Building to Mr. Howard Miller, Chairman of the Trustees, during a service of dedication. It cost about \$35,000. At its meeting April 23, 1963 the session set several policies concerning the use of this building including a motion "to allow social and folk dancing with proper adult supervision..." The Youth Fellowship proceeded to organize dances after away basketball games, which were both a financial and social success.

Rev. Finley left in May of 1965 and was followed by Rev. D. Bruce Fry, who served from October of 1966 to February of 1970. On December 10, 1967 the congregation elected Mrs. Patricia Sharp as the first woman elder.

Rev. Thomas D. Thomas was installed in December, 1971. Events during his pastorate include: the purchase of two lots behind the manse to be used for parking (1972); the beginning of our newsletter "The Ross-Hill Press-Bits" (1975); the session's presentation to the Presbytery of Stephen R. Melton as a candidate for the ministry (October 1979); a pulpit exchange (August 1980-July 1981) during which we were served by the Rev. D. R. Reid from New Zealand; the beginning of the tape ministry for shut-ins (1981); and the construction of a balcony in the rear of the sanctuary (1983).

The church bells rang 150 times when we celebrated our Sesquicentennial, Sunday evening, May 6, 1984. Joining our church during this service were Anna McCaw, Angela Buntin, Heather Buntin, Melissa Davis, Shana Gochenour, Michael Hufford, Shelly Humbarger, and Todd Whitlock. We also baptized Jessica Deboy and Sabrina McCaw. A birthday cake with 150 candles was the highlight for our children.

When Rev. Thomas left in 1986, we were served by an interim pastor, Rev. Alan Pareis until 1988 when Rev. William Dunaway arrived. After two years, Rev. Dunaway was dismissed from the Presbytery. For the next two years, we provided our own pulpit supply including Phil Wright a missionary from the Frankfort area. During 1990, a lot containing a garage directly south of the church and adjacent to the parking lot was purchased for \$14,000. The Rev. Dr. Fred L. Page answered our call in 1992. He and his wife Sally and two daughters, Rebecca and Carrie came to us from Arkansas where he had been serving small churches in rural area.

Another property was added in 1994 when the house on the east side of the church was purchased from the estate of Donnabelle Gochenour for the sum of \$55,000. The feeling was that we were now in the position to expand our current building if that became the desire of the congregation.

During 1996, a committee was appointed to study whether to expand our current building, build a new structure or take no action at that time. Accessibility was a key issue. It soon became clear that remodeling would involve several expensive regulations. While the committee was still considering their options, Richard and Kathryn (K.T.) Roth graciously offered to donate approximately five acres of land at the west edge of Rossville for the construction of a new church should the congregation opt to build. A congregational meeting was called to decide whether to remodel or build and it was a unanimous decision to build a new church building.

A building design committee was appointed during the summer of 1997 and worked with FBi Builders of Remington, IN to design a structure able to serve this congregation and this community for many years to come. Serving on this committee were Pat Sharp who served as chairman, K.T. Roth, Janis Miller, Donald Wallace, Bill Ruch, Sally Page, Ken Alling, and Eugene Glenn. Roberta Ruch served as their recording secretary.

Simultaneously with the building design process, the Session explored the options available to them to fund the building. Congregation voted to sell the house to the east of the church, the garage and lot south of the church, the farmhouse and six building lots along the north edge of the farm as well as our church building and parking lot.

A three year pledge drive was conducted and many money-making projects were held. R.P. (Rossville Presbyterian) became our mascot and a costume representing a church building was made. Rick Ryan donned this costume and made numerous appearances to promote our cause. A new cookbook was assembled and sold, a garage sale was held, a playhouse was built and chances to win it were sold throughout the community, an ice cream social was held, Sunday School classes sold noodles and served dinners, and the biggest event of all was a walk-a-thon. Over 80 people participated in a walk from the site of the original log structure on Prince William Rd. past our present building and on to our new church site. Walkers solicited sponsors and over \$26,000 was raised, earmarked for pews in our new building.

Ground was broken for our new house of worship on May 3, 1998. The next eight months were very exciting as the building took shape. In October, a homecoming service was held in the new building even though it was still a shell of concrete and wood frame. Rope made by Kyle Wallace was strung from the old building to the new building with those members who were able, walking to the new building to symbolize the transition. Member Susie Conrad, owner of Kaleidoscope in Lafayette, designed and built our beautiful stained glass windows. Several members of the congregation stopped by the stained glass studio and were invited to cut pieces that became part of our windows.

Worship service on January 17 began at the old church as the doors were symbolically locked and continued at the new church. Thus begins the history of our new church building.

Dedication of the new building was held on February 28, 1999 with an organ recital in the afternoon followed by an open house reception and dedication service. Several former pastors participated in the service as well as representatives of the Synod of Lincoln Trails and the Wabash Valley Presbytery. Margaret Morris, Executive Director of the Presbytery presented the key to the church to Clerk of Session Roberta Ruch.

One of the main objectives in building a new church was to be able to house a state licensed childcare program. A board of directors was named to launch this program. Rainbow Connection Childcare was formed in early 1999. They are independently incorporated but remain a mission of the Rossville Presbyterian Church. A director was hired and the facility opened its doors in July 1999. Many families in the Rossville community are served by this outreach program. Church members as well as community members comprise the board of directors.

Although the stained glass windows were well underway during the construction of the church, services actually began with plate glass windows in place. Soon after the installation of the three large front stained glass windows, members expressed an interest in replacing the eight east and west panels of the sanctuary with stained glass. Several families stepped forward, donated funds, chose designs and these windows were also built and installed by the Kaleidoscope team.

In November of 1999, Rossville Presbyterian hosted a meeting of the Wabash Valley Presbytery. This was the first time we had a facility large enough to accommodate the meeting. Members of Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church shared in the hosting duties. Member Rick Ryan was installed as Moderator of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley at this meeting. Rebecca Page, daughter of Dr. Fred Page, was accepted as an Inquirer, the first stage in her path towards entering the seminary to begin her ministerial studies. Over two hundred Presbyterians were in attendance.

A new tradition was born in December 1999 when Tom and Marjorie Page, Dr. Fred Page's parents, presented our church with a Peace Candle from their home church in Nashville, Tennessee. The tradition began in 1986 when a group of parishioners from York, Pennsylvania visited a church in the Soviet Union and were given rubles to purchase a candle for their church to be lighted as a symbol of Peace during each service. The light has been passed to many congregations in many countries since that time. Our peace candle has been placed on the communion table and is lit each and every Sunday. Several members of our church family have passed the peace candle on to other churches and the tradition lives on.

In June of 2000, our second financial building campaign was kicked off. The second in our three phase plan resulted in pledges of over \$225,000 over a three year period. Three more building lots on the church farm were sold and the \$60,000 revenue from the sale was applied to the building loan.

Our church served as the community coordinator for the Heifer Project International. Ultimately \$5000 was raised which sends two of several different species of animals to underdeveloped countries. The project provides transportation and training so that the recipients can continue the program.

Two of the many social events that took place in 2000 were a visit from Rev. Bob and Lynne Reid who had participated in our pulpit exchange in 1980-81. A reception was held and members were able to visit with the Reids who live in New Zealand. The second event was the marriage of Dr. Fred and Sally Page's daughter Rebecca to Patrick Lesley on December 30 in our sanctuary.

Early in 2001, the Session commissioned a mission study to be conducted as a way to establish goals and direction as well as address concerns of the congregation. A series of three meetings was held. Discussion groups were formed at each meeting so different perspectives could be shared. One primary concern that emerged from the study was the question of the yoked relationship with Pleasant Hill Church. The two congregations have shared a pastor and subsequently a secretary and a manse since 1883. An ad hoc committee was formed to explore the situation and make a recommendation. Bill Ruch chaired the committee that ultimately, after many meetings and much prayerful consideration, recommended to the Session that the yoke relationship be dissolved. The general consensus was that our congregation had grown to a point that we needed a full time pastor who could be available during Sunday School hour as well as being available more hours throughout the week. The Session voted unanimously to accept the report and recommend to the congregation that the vote be to dissolve. On May 5, 2002 a congregational meeting was held for the purpose of voting on the yoke issue. With a vote of 54-7, it was voted to dissolve the yoke with Pleasant Hill effective January 1, 2003.

Early in 2002, we were privileged to have the Rev. Dr. Jack Rogers, Moderator of the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, speak at our worship service.

Dr. Page, who stated he would not choose between the Rossville and Pleasant Hill churches, terminated his pastoral relationship with both churches effective September 1, 2002. He and his family moved to Ellettsville, Indiana where he will become the Associate Executive Presbyter for Church Development/Redevelopment and Stated Clerk of the Ohio Valley Presbytery.

Rev. Dr. John Stevens became our interim pastor in November 2002.

As of 2003, both the old church and the manse were sold.. The Rossville congregation voted to hire their first female pastor, Rev. Gretchen Schneider, who began her pastorate on November 30. She was the fortieth pastor to serve the congregation during the one hundred sixty nine years of its existence. The active membership of the church was 178. The congregation boasted of active youth groups, chancel choir, men's choir, and a children's choir.

Rev. Schneider left us in 2005. Although we had no permanent pastor, we thrived and our mission life flourished. Thirty six members of our church family participated in one or more missions to Mississippi aiding those affected by Hurricane Katrina. We participated in a Habitat for Humanity build with other Presbyterian churches in the area.

Rev. Robert McAulay Jr. was hired to serve as our interim pastor while our pulpit nominating committee began the process of finding a permanent pastor to continue our 175 year tradition as Presbyterians in our community. We are very proud of the fact that through the efforts of everyone, we were able to burn our mortgage in December of 2007.

In June 2009, Rev. John Everett was hired as our pastor. He and his wife Kay came from Blountville, TN and have purchased a home in Rossville. He chose to retire in 2013. We welcomed a transitional pastor, Rev. Ruby Kleymann who shepherded our congregation for two and a half years.

After two years of prayerful searching and studying dossiers of prospective pastors, Rev. Michael Lyle was hired. He began on August 5 and since this is his first church, he was ordained that afternoon. While serving our congregation, Mike married Francesca D'Amiano (in Florida). Mike served our congregation for four and a half years and left us on January 31, 2021. He and Francesca moved to Germantown, TN where Mike is part of a pastoral team. Since his departure we have been served by a bridge team of four pastors while our PNC goes through the process of finding our next full time pastor.

In December of 2022, our PNC chose Rev. Susan Lock to present to the congregation as our next ordained pastor. She had been an ordained United Church of Christ pastor in Illinois for 29 years. Due to a

reciprocal agreement between the UCC denomination and the Presbyterian denomination, we were able to install her. She had originally been from this area and knew several people in the community. In April of 2024, Susan chose to take early retirement.

Instead of an interim pastor or electing a PNC, our journey took an unexpected turn. Angela Hufford, who grew up in Rossville and had been a teacher and guidance counselor for our school, approached our session about possibly becoming our next pastor. She had been in the state of Washington for about 20 years, as a pastor in a non-denominational church. She visited Rossville frequently and was very familiar with our community and our congregation. Her family is local and she felt it was time to move back. Due to the fact that she was not ordained with a reciprocal church, we became trailblazers in our quest to hire her and fulfill the qualifications of our Presbytery. We were ultimately able to hire her as a covenant pastor, meaning she was hired by our session instead of being elected by our congregation. She began her pastorate with us on October 27, 2024. She will complete some studies and then will be ordained in the PCUSA.

Our library contains many volumes of pictorial history. Since 2007, our annual history books have been published and are available to peruse in the library as well as online in our photo link.