



THE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Samuel Colgate Baptist Historical Collection

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June 7, 1979

Stephen Bogdan
Highway Tabernacle
18th and Spring Garden Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Dear Mr. Bogdan:

Enclosed you will find a photocopy of a brief historical sketch of the Fifth Baptist Church of Philadelphia. I believe that this sketch will answer the questions you have about the history of the building.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to write.

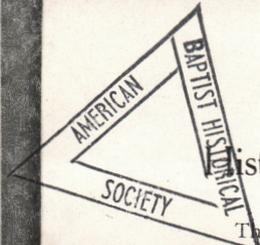
Yours sincerely,

Janet M. Hazlett

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Reference Librarian

JMH:fp

Enc.



History of the Fifth Baptist Church, of Philadelphia

The history of the Fifth Baptist Church began with the organization of the Sansom Street Baptist Church, located on Sansom Street between Eighth and Ninth, on January 15, 1811, by members of the First Baptist Church. Due to the exigencies of the War of 1812 financial difficulties overcame the church from which it never recovered, finally causing its sale by the sheriff in 1824. Dr. William Staughton was the first and only Pastor. It was into this church that Samuel Cornelius (1815) and Noah Davis (1819) were baptized, both of whom were connected with the founding of the American Baptist Publication Society in 1824, indeed, it was Samuel Cornelius' hat out of which the tracts fell that inspired the establishment of a stable depository for such tracts.

Eighty members of this church constituted the Fifth Church on August 9, 1824, to remove any blemish that might offer itself from the Sansom Street Church. The Bible School was organized October 17, 1815. Through the generosity of John Welsh, Esq., who purchased the property from the sheriff, it was secured at the sale price.

In 1825, Rev. John L. Dagg, a clear and able thinker, was called to the pastorate. The church grew, and in 1832 was free of debt with a membership of about 450. The entire membership of the Sansom Street Church, with few exceptions, came into the Fifth Church. The last recorded meeting of this church was held October 15, 1824. Pastor Dagg resigned in 1834.

Rev. A. D. Gillette followed in 1835. It seems from the record that the church entered into a period of turmoil which at times threatened its very existence, but it now reads clear that it was the scattering period—as the early church at Jerusalem—the building up and spreading of the Baptist cause in a growing city. Rev. Gillette led forth a colony and formed the Eleventh Baptist Church in 1838.

Rev. Joseph A. Warne served for one year. In 1840 Rev. J. L. Burrows was called. The church took on new life. In 1842, the membership again rose to over 475. However, Pastor Burrows was called of God for a still greater work. He, with numerous others, in 1844 assisted in the formation of the Broad Street Baptist Church; now disbanded. We find that through the years the Fifth Church has given of its best to form the newer churches of the denomination in the city and suburbs.

A fire in 1844 added to the growing difficulties of the church. Rev. William Shadrach served from 1844 to 1847, leaving to devote his time to help the institution of the University of Lewisburg (now Bucknell), thus connecting Fifth Church with the founding of that institution. In 1849, after two years of persistent effort to secure a Pastor, Rev. Howard Malcom, LL.D., accepted the pastorate. The difficulty in securing and keeping a Pastor was attributed to the poor location and uninviting surroundings. For this reason, in 1850, as a compromise with those who desired to move to another location, the house of worship was altered, and we find in the report of that year, "conditions more encouraging, more added by baptism than any year since 1843." Dr. Malcom resigned in 1851 to accept the Presidency of Bucknell University.

In 1852, the burial ground between Eleventh and Twelfth on George (now Sansom) Street was sold and a new burial ground purchased in South Laurel Hill, in which are buried Doctors Staughton, Chase, and Peddie. Rev. John Dowling became Pastor in 1852. During his pastorate our vital connection with the Swedish Baptist cause was started when Rev. Andreas Wiberg left for Sweden after his marriage to Caroline Lintemuth, head of the infant department of our Bible School. Both became pioneers of the Baptist cause in Sweden, where today their memory is still greatly cherished.

From the resignation of Dr. Dowling in 1856 until 1859, the church was without a Pastor. In 1859, Meriwether Winston assumed charge, and the following year it was

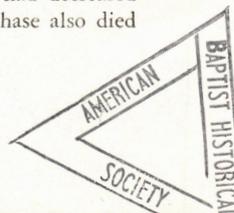
deemed expedient to move. A lot was purchased at Eighteenth and Spring Garden Streets. Work was started in May, 1860, the cornerstone laid September 5, 1860, and the chapel completed and dedicated November 29, 1860. The completion of the church was delayed owing to the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1861, Pastor Winston resigned, it is said to champion the Southern Cause. However, in the same year, God sent a man of great power, Rev. James B. Simmons. With great faith in God, a splendid spirit arose in the midst of the most trying conditions. It was resolved in spite of all this "that the church would not enter the completed edifice until it was finished, furnished, and paid for." In the dedicatory address, October 31, 1864, we read, "to this end we worked, prayed, and contributed of our means again and again, assisted greatly by our friends from without. Steadily, patiently, and persistently (contrary to the wishes of some of our friends and the repeated advice of others, who recommended us to enter this place largely in debt), until at length the work is finished, and tonight we give God all the praise and glory and with joyous hearts dedicate it to his service FOREVER." We are told that it remained completed several weeks unopened until the last dollar was paid, and in October, 1864, it was dedicated free of debt at a cost of over \$77,000. This was the beginning of the golden era of the church. Pastor Simmons resigned in 1867, and we read that some 400 members were present and voted unanimously not to accept the resignation. However, the denomination needed a great man for pioneer work in the South among the negroes, so Dr. Simmons left a work so wonderfully done amidst the tears of all. Simmons University at Abilene, Texas, is one of his monuments.

In 1867, Dr. Warren Randolph carried on the work so well started by his predecessor. In 1868, the fifty-third anniversary of the Bible School was held in the Academy of Music; the church being too small to accommodate members and friends. The number on the roll was 1248, with an average attendance close to 1000. In the same year, the young people's association had an average attendance of 224. In 1870, Dr. Randolph accepted a call to become Sunday School Secretary of the American Baptist Publication Society.

The church membership continued to grow. Rev. B. D. Thomas commenced his labors in 1871, resigning eleven years later to accept a call from the Jarvis Street Church in Toronto because, as he is said to have expressed it, "the people loved him more than their Lord." During his pastorate, the endowed funds of the church were started. At the death of Deacon Isaac Ford, his family donated \$1000 for the Permanent Poor Fund of the church.

In 1882, Dr. John Peddie, endeared and loved by all, was called to the pastorate. In 1883 we read, "the capacity of the church building is unequal to the comfortable accommodation of the large number of persons who attend." In 1884, the church was remodeled, enlarged, and beautified at a cost of over \$43,000. Thirty thousand dollars was contributed, and a mortgage was to be drawn for the balance, but the generosity and love of the people for the pastor and church, and under the leadership and inspiration of the noted financier, Colonel Chas. H. Banes, backed by the spirit of the war days, "finished, furnished, and paid for," the thought of a mortgage disappeared and the church remained clear of debt. In 1884, "we are permitted to worship in our remodeled, enlarged, and beautiful church home." It is noted that at that time our church was considered one of the most beautiful in the country. In 1886, The Trinity Baptist Church, under the leadership of Deacon William E. Burke, was constituted. In 1891, the church was saddened as never before in the death of their Pastor, Dr. Peddie, "a personal friend of each member." A memorial fund of \$7500 was raised for the benefit of his widow.

In 1891, Dr. William T. Chase appeared. While the Sunday School had decreased numbers, the church membership reached a total of 934 in 1895. Dr. Chase also died in the Pastorate in 1898, and was mourned by all.



Dr. B. L. Whitman in 1899 battled against a changing neighborhood and changing urban conditions for eight years. He was active in denominational affairs, representing our denomination in the Centennial Missionary Celebration held in Shanghai in 1907. He resigned in 1908 to accept the call to the First Baptist Church, Seattle, Washington.

Dr. W. Quay Rosselle entered the pastorate in 1908. It was during this period that the thought of "forever" was firmly fixed in the minds of the Fifth Baptist people under the leadership and zeal of Deacon Gared C. Landes, late teacher of the semi-century Class No. 64 (organized 1873) of our Bible School. The initial contribution was made by this class in 1906 in the amount of \$1000. The endowment funds continued to grow until today the permanent funds of the church are well on to \$50,000.

Dr. Rosselle sowed, watered, and prepared the field as it swung to the extreme in a changed neighborhood. He resigned in 1919 to accept a call to the First Baptist Church of Malden, Mass.

Dr. George W. Swope entered the field in 1920. It was during this year that the annuity plan was started by Deacon Chas. P. Hoyt, who contributed \$10,000, and at his death this amount was by agreement transferred to the endowment fund. The total amount of annuities at the present time is \$1500. During this period there was a steady harvest, the church took on increased vigor, adjusted itself to the neighborhood and post-war conditions until the membership again ran up to over 800. The chapel was enlarged and made adaptable to modern Sunday School work, and the church improved, all costing over \$23,000. New life was added to the church to again assure us that the spirit of the dauntless men of God who labored here will live on and Fifth Church shall ever hold sacred their memory till time shall be no more. The Centennial was celebrated in October, 1924, closing with a revival by Dr. Cortland Myers. Dr. Swope resigned in 1925 to accept the Chair of Evangelism in the newly organized Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

Dr. John Love served as Acting Pastor in 1898 and again in 1919. Dr. Wilbur T. Elmore became stated supply after the resignation of Dr. Swope. Both these men did effective pieces of work for the church in this capacity.

On June 30, 1926, a call was extended to Rev. Harold C. Abbot, who now carries on the work so richly endowed. The Fifth Church continues as ever to shed forth its light, drawing men and women into its folds, while numerous other churches in the neighborhood are passing away, removing, or merging, claiming their inability to meet the conditions that now exist. In years gone by, we have given our best to new church enterprises; today, however, we have been greatly blessed by some of the best from those churches which have gone from our neighborhood.

This church has been active in the formation of many Baptist interests in this part of the country, and one man has said: "Few churches have been more fruitful. Some of the most flourishing interests in the city owe their existence either in whole or in part to the impetus received from this organization."

Over 5500 people have united with this church in the past 105 years. It has numbered in its membership leaders of the type of John B. Stetson, William Mann, Dr. David Downie, Rev. I. Newton Ritner, J. P. Crozer Griffith, and others, all who have left their heritage for us. We have a church plant worth close to \$200,000, with but a debt of \$10,000, the liquidation of same spread over a period of years. We need today an endowment fund of \$100,000 and a new Bible School building to insure the continuance of an effective work for God at this corner. Shall we continue its heritage by our time, money, and talents throughout life and unto death, rendering of our best at all times to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and at all times serving our own church well; so that the years ahead will be still more useful in the Cause of Jesus Christ!

GILBERT S. BAILEY, Historian, 1929.

