

JOURNAL  
OF THE  
Presbyterian Historical Society

---

---

VOL. VI.

MARCH, 1911.

No. 1.

---

---

THE EARLIEST ACCOUNT OF PROTESTANT MIS-  
SIONS, A. D. 1557.

BY THE REV. PROF. J. I. GOOD, D.D.

PART II.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise when I heard the children crying together (although I had now lived half a year with the barbarians and was almost acquainted with their manners) yet not to dissemble, I was then somewhat afraid, especially, seeing I knew not what should be the end of the matter. At length, these cries were ended, the men being somewhat silent, the children and women also together holding their peace. Presently the men began to sing so sweetly and with so great harmony, that I was wonderfully desirous to see them. But when I would have gone out of the cottage, I was both kept back by the women, and also admonished by the interpreter that he (who had already lived seven years among the barbarians), durst never come to these solemn meetings: and lastly, that if I went into them I should not do wisely. Whereby he caused me to stay a while for fear of danger.

Yet, because he alleged no probable reason thereof, the women and interpreter somewhat resisting, I went forth: relying upon the friendship of certain ancient men, inhabitants of that village. Going therefore into that place where I heard that musical harmony, I made a hole through the roof of the cottage that I might better perceive what was done within. For they (the cottages) are somewhat long and round, after

<sup>1</sup>Concluding a paper begun in the last (December) number of the JOURNAL OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

**SOME NOTEWORTHY FEATURES IN THE ANNALS  
OF THE MAHONING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:  
1785-1910.**

**BY THE REV. PROFESSOR ROBERT LAIRD STEWART, D. D.**

The records of this time-honored church carry us back to the earliest of the pioneer days on the frontier line of north-eastern Pennsylvania.

On the 26th of November, 1774, General William Montgomery, a sturdy Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, came from Chester County to this region, and purchased from the land office the wilderness tract on which the town of Danville now stands. On a newly cleared space of this tract he built a small log house, and to this new home brought out his wife and children. Not long afterwards he and all his neighbors were compelled to flee from hostile bands of Indians, who ravaged the country and murdered the inhabitants of every exposed settlement from Fort Augusta, at Sunbury, to the upper end of the Wyoming Valley. In the spring of 1780 General Montgomery returned, and with the aid of his three sons continued the work of clearing and improving his wilderness possession. About this time he built a grist mill on Mahoning Creek, which was the first of its kind in this region. It supplied the settlers with flour and meal for many miles around, and, ere long, became the nucleus of a little settlement which took the name Mahoning. The church, which was organized seven years before the founding of the town of Danville, received its name, as seemed fitting, from the settlement in which it was planted. It was the first Christian church of any denomination in this portion of the Susquehanna Valley, and its bounds, as then constituted, extended from the south of Fishing Creek to the vicinity of the town of Northumberland.

The original members and adherents of the Mahoning Church came from the older settlements to the south and east, and were, for the most part, of the hardy, God-fearing

Scotch-Irish race. The spiritual destitution of this frontier region one hundred and twenty-five years ago may be inferred from the fact that there was not at that time a settled pastor or stated supply within the limits now occupied by the Presbytery of Northumberland. Ten years later there were but three within these limits. It was the custom of the time to send out, under the authority of the Synod or Assembly, a few ministers or licentiates each year to "missionate" on the frontier for three or six months, but the territory they were expected to cover was so large that frequently they could not make more than one visit to each place on their itineracy. In those days the word of the Lord was precious in the valley of the Susquehanna, and the coming of one of these missionary evangelists was an event of great importance. For thirteen years the Mahoning Church was dependent upon such transient supplies, and there is no record of a communion season during all of that period. Without pastoral care and in the face of such unusual discouragements its members nevertheless maintained their organization and bravely waited for the coming of a better day. It came with the advent of one of these itinerant evangelists, the Rev. John Boyd Patterson, who accepted a call from the united churches of Derry and Mahoning. He was ordained and installed over these churches in the autumn of 1799. The first communion service was held in a log church, erected about 1787, when twenty-two members were added to the thirty-seven already recognized as communicants, making a total membership of fifty-nine. During this pastorate, which covered about one third of the first century of the history of the church, the longest by far in its entire history, the growth of the congregation was steady and continuous from year to year. At its close there were more than two hundred communicant members. In one year of this ministry, Mr. Patterson reported the baptism of one hundred and fifty infants, and from 1825 to 1830—a period of five years—he baptized three hundred and twenty-three infants. This was the constructive period in the history of the community, as well as of the church and the nation. It was given to this faithful pastor

to see and to have a part in the beginnings of the town of Danville; of the Sabbath-school work in his own community and throughout the nation; of the Bible Society and the mission boards of the Church; of the Colonization Society, the temperance reform and a host of kindred agencies for the betterment of the community, the nation and the world at large. As an evidence of this awakening, note the fact that the Presbytery of Northumberland, at one of its sessions in the year of grace 1878, unanimously "resolved that the use of ardent spirits be excluded from our meetings in the future." Like most of the pastors of his time, Mr. Patterson gave instruction at his home to young men who were preparing to preach the gospel, and out of this home school grew the academy. Three of his pupils, each of whom bore the honored name of the founder of the community, *viz.*, William B., Samuel and John Montgomery, were members of this congregation. The first-named labored as a foreign missionary among the Osage Indians with much success for more than thirty years. The journey to his field in the Indian Territory occupied about four months. His wife, formerly Miss Jane Robinson, died a few months after her arrival at the mission station.

Five or six years before the close of Mr. Patterson's term of service the old log church was removed to another location, where it served for a time a distillery, and a substantial brick church was built upon its site.

Robert Dunlap, the successor of Mr. Patterson, was a young man of sweet spirit and rare ability. The most notable feature of his pastorate of less than six years was a gracious revival which resulted in the ingathering of about one hundred converts in a single year. During the term of service of his gifted and greatly beloved successor, David M. Halliday—a period of five years and five months—one hundred and eighty-two members were added to the roll of the church. Of this number one hundred and eighteen were received on confession of faith. A marked advance was made during this period in the voluntary offerings of the congregation. At the close of Dr. Halliday's ministry—October 4, 1843—the communicants numbered two hundred and seventy.

The pastorate of the Rev. Dr. John W. Yeomans—Dr. Halliday's successor—extended over a period of more than eighteen years, and was terminated by his death on the 22d of June, 1863. Dr. Yeomans was regarded as one of the wisest and ablest men of the Presbyterian church and was made the moderator of the General Assembly of 1860. He was described by one of his contemporaries as "a man of noble presence, of splendid attainments and culture, and of extended influence." During his term of service the town grew rapidly from a quiet country village to a busy manufacturing center, through the development, mainly, of the iron interests. To keep pace with these developments it was deemed necessary to build a new and more commodious house of worship. The site which the church now occupies was chosen for this purpose, and on the 14th day of November, 1854, it was dedicated to the service of Almighty God. On this memorable occasion—a little more than fifty-six years ago—the venerable Dr. Plumer preached the sermon before an audience which filled the house to its utmost capacity. About a year after this removal a large and influential minority of members and adherents, who preferred the old site, made request to be organized into a new church. This organization, which has grown and prospered alongside of the mother church, is now known, I need hardly say, as the Grove Church. After this withdrawal the Mahoning Church reported two hundred and twenty-five communicants. Its maximum membership previous to the organization of the second church was three hundred and twenty-five.

Three young men of the congregation entered the ministry during the pastorate of Dr. Yeomans; two were his own sons, Edward and Alfred; the third was Isaac Cornelison, D.D., for many years the esteemed pastor of the church of Washington, Ill.

William E. Ijams, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Huntingdon, was chosen as the successor of Dr. Yeomans. During his brief ministry—a little short of two and a half years—ninety-two persons were received into the communion of the church. Sixty-seven of this number were added on confes-

sion of faith. These were the fruit of a gracious revival which stirred the congregation to unwonted activity and profoundly impressed the entire community.

The next pastor was the Rev. Alexander B. Jack, whose rare gifts and eloquent speech attracted large audiences in this house as well as in other places. There are those here to-night who can recall his tall form, inimitable manner and sharply defined, classically moulded face, as well as the brilliant imagery in which he clothed his conceptions and set forth the transcendent value of the vital truths he was commissioned to declare. In his gifted son, Robert Bonner Jack, a child of the Mahoning manse, who now ministers so acceptably to the Hazleton Presbyterian Church, Alexander B. Jack has a worthy successor.

In his place he is fulfilling the duties of the sacred office which in due course has descended from father to son through four successive generations.

Thomas R. Beeber, the successor of Mr. Jack, took charge of the congregation in July, 1875. In the first year of his ministry the church was blessed with a spiritual awakening which was followed by an ingathering of fifty-three persons on confession of faith. In the period covered by this pastorate, a little short of five years, eighty-two members were received on examination and twenty-five by certificate.

Dr. Beeber, as we now know him, has been eminently successful in other fields of labor as well as in this church and community, and has received of the Synod of Pennsylvania the highest honor which it is permissible for it to bestow.

The next occupant of the pulpit and manse was the writer of this sketch, whose terms of service extended from October 1, 1880, to July 1, 1890—a period of nine years and nine months. Five years of this period fell within the limits of the first century of the history of the church, and the remainder is to be reckoned with the records of the new century, whose twenty-fifth anniversary we celebrate to-day.

The commemorative services, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Mahoning Church, were largely attended during each of the five memorable days appointed

for this festival season. Addresses were made by President James McCosh, Dr. Jonathan Edwards, John Wanamaker, Dr. Beeber, Alexander B. Jack, Drs. Stuart Mitchel, Brydie Waller, Dr. Alexander Henry and other members of the Presbytery. The history of the church, which was prepared for this occasion, was the outcome of more than a year of gleaning among old records and of interviews with the older members of the congregation and community.

The Woman's Home Missionary Society and the Society of Christian Endeavor were organized during this pastorate. The first came into being with eleven members, December 1, 1880. Its early growth was stimulated by the sending out of one of its active members, Miss Kate Best, as a missionary teacher to a Mormon village in Utah Territory. The Christian Endeavor, organized at a later date, was one of the first in this section of the State. The Presbyterial Home Missionary Society was organized in the lecture room of the church; and on this occasion an address was made by Dr. Sheldon Jackson. The large organ, which has led the service of praise for twenty-eight years, was the gift of Thomas Beaver in the autumn of 1882. The building of an addition for its reception necessitated, or rather was made the occasion of, other changes which included the enlargement of the Sabbath-school room and the addition of some much-needed rooms for the primary and Bible classes. From this date the average attendance of the midweek service was greatly increased. The same was true of the Sabbath school, which, under the able and efficient leadership of the Hon. H. M. Hinckley, reached out into the neglected sections of the town and became a most efficient missionary agency of the church.

It was the joy and privilege of the pastor to welcome to the fellowship of the church many of the young people of this school. Two of them, Margaret Best and William Schultz, are missionaries in the foreign field and others of their associates are faithful laborers in the several churches of the widely separated cities and towns in which their lot has been cast. Margaret Best, who was baptized and received into the communion of the church at the age of fif-

teen, has been in Korea from almost the beginning of that mission and has witnessed scenes of transforming grace as wonderful as those recorded in the Act of the Apostles. William Schultz, perhaps the youngest of all who were admitted to the full communion of the church, is now facing exceptional possibilities for good as a medical missionary of great promise in the West Shantung mission in the empire of China. Dr. Schultz is supported by the Westville Church of New Jersey, of which Dr. Steans is the pastor. During this pastorate two hundred and fifty-four persons were received into the communion of the church. The enrollment at its close was three hundred and forty-three. The most costly and extensive improvements in connection with the church building and its surroundings, since the days of Dr. Yeomans, were undertaken in the summer of 1889. They included the approach in stone work to the church, the terrace around it; the vestibule and its wainscoting; a new raised floor; new pews and pulpit; stained-glass windows; wall decorations; a new system of heating and lighting and four additional rooms for the Bible classes and Intermediate Department. At the rededication of the building, April 13, 1890, provision was made for the liquidation of the entire cost of the work, amounting in the aggregate to nearly \$13,000. Dr. Sample of New York and Sheldon Jackson were present on this occasion and took part in the service. The total aggregate of offerings and contributions during this decade was \$50,941.

There is a closer connection between the free library group of buildings and the Mahoning Church than most of you, perhaps, are aware of. Its founder, Thomas Beaver, was a member of our church; its beginnings were the direct result of a personal interview with him by the pastor, who was burdened with the thought that there was not a public hall of any kind to which our young men could go except the saloons and the pool rooms; its first proposed location was on our own church lot; its present location was secured by the pastor, through the kindly assistance of Dr. Oglesby, who unselfishly gave up the valuable option which he held upon

it for the public good. The first president of the Board of Directors was Mr. Hinckley, and the first outline sketches of the plan of the buildings, and later of the Y. M. C. A. building, were made in the pastor's study. Through the abounding generosity of Mr. Beaver the consummation far exceeded the original ideal, but the Mahoning Church had a most important part in its beginnings.

The present pastor, James Wollaston Kirk, who was tried and seasoned amid pagan influences and arctic winters before his advent, is the third in the line of succession during that period. Generally speaking, the records of the church show the evidence of faithful labors and encouraging success. The number of communicants reported last spring was three hundred and eighty-one (it was three hundred and ninety-six the year previous) is a larger aggregate than was reported at any time on the records of the first century of its existence.

The pastors of the Mahoning Church, without a single exception, have been evangelical and evangelistic in type. It has been blessed with frequent periods of reviving and ingatherings and it has given to the church at large twelve ministers of the gospel. Six missionaries have gone out from it to the home and foreign fields—Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery, Miss Nancy Russell, Miss Kate Best, Margaret Best and William Schultz. It has also given scores of devoted men and women to form and develop other centers of influence all over the land. God only knows, and the records of eternity only can disclose, the far-reaching results which have followed the founding of this church in the wilderness by men of faith and prayer one hundred and twenty-five years ago.

There never has been a time perhaps in its long history when its spiritual leaders have not faced opposition of some sort and discouragements of many sorts; and yet its history as a whole is replete with the evidences of labors crowned with the divine blessing, and far-reaching, beneficent influences which can only be measured or gauged by the mathematics of the angels.