

The History of First Presbyterian Church

Raleigh, North Carolina

First Presbyterian Church (FPC) of Raleigh was organized in the North Carolina State House by Reverend William McPheeters on Sunday, January 21, 1816. This seemingly odd circumstance resulted from an interesting background. The North Carolina General Assembly passed an act to establish an academy in the City of Raleigh in 1802. The Raleigh Academy was built on Burke Square (where the Governor's Mansion is now located) in 1803. Although the Raleigh Academy was non-denominational, its principal was always a Presbyterian minister. In 1810, the Reverend William McPheeters was hired to be principal of the Raleigh Academy and pastor of the city. In that capacity, Reverend McPheeters also held services in the State House on a regular basis, and served as a chaplain at governmental functions.

Construction of the first brick church in Raleigh began on July 4, 1816, and was completed in February 1818. The cost of the building was \$17,000, raised from the sale of sanctuary pews. The first sanctuary was by far the largest and most expensive in all of Orange Presbytery, and was the largest and finest meeting place in the City of Raleigh.

During the antebellum period, almost all public, governmental or political meetings which required a large assembly room were held at First Presbyterian, and the bell in the church's tower was used as a fire alarm to call volunteers to fight fires, a frequent occurrence in 19th century Raleigh.

Membership at FPC increased greatly during the mid-to-late 19th century. In the many years since its beginning, membership has increased to well over 1200 and many members over those years have started here and gone out to help start other churches in the area. Churches included among them include Milner Memorial, St. Barnabas, Westminster, West Raleigh, and Ernest Myatt Presbyterian and White Memorial. In addition, churches were established in Fuquay-Varina, Willow Springs, and Mt. Pleasant.

In 1857 William Peace, a founding trustee of First Presbyterian Church, the treasurer of Raleigh Academy and a trustee of the University of North Carolina, gave eight acres and \$10,000 to establish a college for women. William Peace and his older brother Joseph were wealthy landowners from Granville County who operated a mercantile business located on Fayetteville Street. Mr. Peace, a bachelor, lived the final years of his life in the home of his niece, who was married to Governor William Holden.

FPC has enjoyed tremendous growth for over 202 years as a result of Christ-centered leadership provided by many people. In addition to those mentioned above, they include Dr. Drury Lacy (1837-1854,) Dr. William McClanahan (1908-1934,) Dr. James Sprunt (1951-1957,) Dr. Albert G. Edwards (1958-1986,) Dr. Edwin W. Stock (1988-2002) and since 2004, Dr. Edward A. McLeod.

Dr. Edwards had the longest tenure of any minister of this church. Born in Canada, he was sent to Scotland to be raised by his grandparents after his mother died in childbirth. Dr. Stock formalized church leadership for staff and church officers encouraging both to become active in Presbytery. He served as moderator of New Hope Presbytery in 1990-1991. Dr. McLeod, son of a Presbyterian minister, was born in North Carolina and grew up in Virginia.

The current minister, Dr. McLeod has a passion for preaching and has led the church to make significant progress in many areas during his ministry. Under his leadership the church embarked on a project to reconfigure the existing sanctuary, remove the 1920's Education building and replace it with a new building. This work was completed in August of 2012.

"We proceed out of history into history again." For over 202 years, First Presbyterian Church of Raleigh, North Carolina has had a glorious history. With God's continued blessings and directions, the future is very bright, ...thanks be to God.