

Early Church History Wasco County, Oregon

..In 1854 Rev. James Gerrish, a Methodist minister, preached at The Dalles. In 1856 Rev. H.K. Hines was appointed to the charge, and through his exertions a church was organized.

The Congregational society was organized in September, 1859, under the ministrations of Rev. W.A. Tenny. This church edifice was erected in 1863. Rev. Thomas Condon was pastor. A Catholic church was built in 1869 by Father Vermeersh. In August, 1869, the Baptist society was formed, Rev. Ezra Fisher being pastor in charge. This building was dedicated to religious services in 1874.

In September, 1873, services were begun by the Protestant Episcopal denomination, by Rev. Dr. Nevius, who held occasional services until the completion of the church building. The corner stone was laid May 28, 1875, and the edifice was opened for services Christmas Day, 1875. August 1, 1879, Rev. W.L. MacEwan assumed charge, becoming thus the first permanent minister. All debts having been liquidated the church was formally consecrated Sunday, November 23, 1879. It is our purpose to present a brief, yet concise history of the organization and progress of each church in the Dalles.

The Methodist Episcopal Church is, probably the largest and most influential religious organization in Wasco county. We shall not recapitulate the very earliest history of Methodist church work at The Dalles, or rather where the city now stands, as it has been treated in extenso in the current history chapter of Wasco county. We shall here consider its progress from the abandonment of the Methodist mission in 1847, or rather, from the first church work here after the town of Dalles City was founded. There was no stated religious work done by any church at The Dalles for nearly ten years after the abandonment of the mission. In 1856 the Methodist Episcopal Conference in Oregon sent to this place Rev. H.K. Hines, a young man of 27 years. He organized into a class the few Methodists then residing in the vicinity. Rev. Hines purchased a beautiful quarter block of land on the opposite side of the street on which the church now stands, and one block nearer the river, paying for it \$175, and donated it to the church. This was afterwards exchanged for the lot on which the church now stands, and some cash. A little chapel, costing about \$200, was built two years later by Rev. A. Kelly, who was then in charge of the church here.

In 1861 and 1862 Rev. J.F. De Vore was pastor, and under his administration a good church for the time was erected on the lot where the present edifice stands. This remained unchanged until 1879-80 when H.K. Hines was again pastor, when the church was thoroughly remodeled and a fine parsonage erected at a cost of about \$3,500. In the great fire of September, 1891, when a large portion of The Dalles was destroyed, both church and parsonage were consumed. With great recuperative vigor the members and friends of the church built, on the same ground, a larger, handsomer, building. In 1893 it was completed. The membership of the first church over which Rev. Hines presides comprised; Dr. Shaug and wife; George Herbert and wife; William Connell and wife; George Banburger; Mrs. Eliza McFarland; Mrs. Hall; Mrs. White; Mrs. Martin; Mrs. Cantrell.

The position which this organization has held among the churches of this coast is evidenced by the list of pastors who have been called to serve it since its organization, now nearly fifty years. They are as follows: H.K. Hines, J.W. Miller, A. Kelly, John Flinn, J.F. De Vore, B. C. Lippincott, I.D. Driver, J.T. Wolf, G. Hines, N.Doane, S. Van Dersol, J.C. Kirkman, E.J. Hawn, L.J. Whitcomb, J.D. Flenner, W.C. Gray, W.G. Simpson, John Whistler and J. H. Wood.

In a report of a meeting of the Methodist of The Dalles, published April 12, 1882, the Times said, in part:
*** Short speeches were made by Grandma McFarland, J.R. Dickerson, A.M. Walker and William Mitchell. Grandma recollected well the first sermon ever preached in The Dalles. It was at her house in 1855 by

Rev. G.M. Berry, to a small congregation at which time a Methodist class was organized. *** J.B. Dickerson named the pastors -- eighteen in all -- who had served the church here since its organization, and said few could realize the struggle he and his classmates had in those early days to pay the preacher and build the church. He remembered that the first parsonage property cost \$750, and that the main part of the present building was commenced and completed by J.F. DeVore, of the Oregon Conference.

Writing to the Times April 19, 1882, a gentleman signing himself "History," says:

"As history should be accurate, if written at all, will you permit one of the olden times to give you an item or two about the M.E. church at The Dalles. In 1853 Rev. James Gerrish supplied the Vancouver and The Dalles circuit from the annual conference, in the spring of that year until October, when G. Hines took charge of it. Both of these men visited The Dalles before December, 1853, in the work of their ministry, but I am not aware that any class was organized. G.M. Berry followed them and probably organized the first class. H.K. Hines was the first pastor who ever resided at The Dalles, he removing there in the fall of 1856, and organizing the first Sunday-school, with Grandma McFarland, her daughter and Mrs. Hines as teachers. Mr. Hines bought the first property for the M.E. church, paying \$175 out of his own pocket for it and donating it to the church.

*** Mrs. Hines taught a private school to enable them to live. *** The first quarterly conference was organized by Mr. Hines. The church was removed and remodeled into its present form, and the parsonage -- the best in the state -- built under the second administration of Mr. Hines as pastor, in 1880 -- twenty three years after his first pastorate."

The Methodist Episcopal church at The Dalles at the present time has a strong membership, and an influential constituency, taking in many of the most substantial and influential citizens of the place.

The foundation of St. Peter's Catholic Church was the mission established May 16, 1848, by Rev. L. Rosseau. The first church edifice was built at the rear of what is now the Catholic cemetery, February 26, 1855, this church and all that belonged to it was totally destroyed by fire. The church records, also perished. But according to an estimate made by Rev. Mesplie about 500 persons had been baptised, 30 confirmed and nearly 20 couples married in the old mission chapel. In 1851 Rev. Mesplie was appointed parish priest; he continues in this capacity until 1863. The charge of St. Peter's church was then given successfully to Rev. Fathers Vermeesh, Dielman, Thibau, Mackin, Demers, Gaudon, and in the year 1881 to Rev. A. Brongeeest. During this last administration a new brick sisters' convent and an addition to the priest's residence were built. Mrs. Lord says:

"About ten years after the founding of the Catholic mission (which was 1848), and after Father Mesplie came, Bishop Blanchett came up and they decided to build a church in town. They were quite in favor of a site between Fourth and Fifth, Laughlin and Federal streets. I don't remember why they decided on their present location."

The following historical record of the Congregational church was contributed to The Dalles Chronical by S.L. Brooks, September, 23, 1899:

"The Dalles -- formerly called Wasco-pum -- forty years ago (1859) was an infantile town of scarce 400 inhabitants, when Rev. W.A. Tenny, the pioneer preacher of Congregationalism, stepped ashore from off the little steamer Hassalo, at the Gate City of the Inland Empire -- to be. After a few days' survey of the place and its surroundings, he found that the religion of the day, for the majority, was everybody for himself. Being a frontier town the revolver and bowie knife were the seat of justice outside of the courts. The roughs were in the ascendency so far as court justice was concerned, Need I say that His Satanic Majesty reigned in what is our beautiful city, with its church spires pointing heavenward?

"A brave man was Mr. Tenny to face such a condition of affairs. He saw, after his arrival, the awaiting opportunity for active work in this Godless field. The better class hailed this herald of the cross with favor. The Master had called him to "Go and preach the gospel." With this command he came to bring good

tidings to the people. Tact, patience, perseverance and forbearance were requisites he possessed. Zealous work was commenced at once in the mission on which he was called. Days, weeks, months passed. Evidences of his labor were unseen. He thought --

"We do not know it, but there lies
Somewhere, veiled under evening skies,
A garden all must sometime see --
Somewhere lies our Gethsemene."

Mr. Tenny had secured from the county clerk the privilege of using the court room for church purposes until such time as circumstances would allow a better place. Underneath the audience room was the jail, which was filled most of the time with criminals of various classes. I am told that during religious worship, vaporings of profanity and villainous songs mingled with the sacred exhortations from the minister's desk, and during the season of prayer the mocking "amens" would be heard from the inmates below.

With all these discouraging features Mr. Tenny pressed on in the work. As time passed on he concluded that steps must be taken toward the formation of a church society. After consulting with Messrs. E.S. Joslyn and E.S. Penfield in regard to the matter, it was decided to move in that direction at once. This encouraging conference resulted in Mr. Tenny making a call for a meeting of all those interested at the next Sabbath's morning service. At the stated time the acting pastor prefaced his invitation with a prayer, and asked that all those connected with the church assemble at his home on the evening of the 17th of September (present month) and formulate and complete the organization of the First Congregational Church of The Dalles. The following members appeared and signed the compact: Erastur S. Joslyn, E.S. Penfield, William B. Stillwell, Rev. W.A. Tenny, and Mrs. Tenny. This perfected the organization. Mr. Zelek, Mrs. Camilla Donnell and Mrs. Mary Joslyn not being in town at this meeting, were received into fellowship at a meeting a very short time afterward as charter members of this, The First Congregational Church of The Dalles.

*** The church shed a fresh influence upon the people after its organization, and an interest showed itself in the small community, from which some eight or ten were added to the record prior to the close of the pastorate of Mr. Tenny. From the first, church financial support was an unknown quantity. Popularity did not prove a barrier against the needed want for proper support. In other words to keep the wolf from the door. Providentially a call from Forest Grove church came to him, and after due and prayerful consideration, he accepted the call and bade the little church farewell, late in the summer of 1861.

The little flock was left without a leader until the early spring of 1862, when Rev. Thomas Condon, of Albany, having heard of the vacancy, came and took up the work left by its founder. Mr. Condon, after a short sojourn in the embryo city, found it absolutely necessary that a house of worship other than the old court room over the jail should be provided. On the 12th day of July, 1862, Rev. Condon called a meeting of the church people to meet him at his residence to discuss the subject of erecting a church edifice at an early day. Mr. H.P. Isaacs, a prominent citizen of the town, was very enthusiastic, as were, also, Messrs. Andrew Clark, and J.M. McKee, in the matter. Although the population was then hardly 700 souls, they concluded that \$1000 could be raised

from the people for the purpose. They felt that the people would be generous and do the right thing. They were not disappointed. After some discussion and deliberation, Messrs. H.P. Isaacs, Andrew Clark and J. M. McKee were appointed a building committee with the authority to purchase grounds and begin work as soon as practicable. They found it difficult to secure material to prosecute the work with rapidity. However, a building 30 by 50 feet was begun and enclosed so that in the early part of January, 1863, with a rough floor thrown down, improvised benches, and an old box stove to warm the building, the church people were gathered under one roof. The summer and winter of 1863 and 1864 saw the building finished inside and out: the seating was done by Messrs. Hogue and Abrams. The seats were made of cedar, covered with shellac varnish; the pulpit was an elaborate piece of workmanship and was presented to the

church by Colonel J.S. Rickel, a prominent personage of transportation fame. The colonel was not strictly a religious man yet was a warm friend of the church and pastor, Mr. Condon. In 1867 an addition was put on the front of the building; on the northeast was a tower in which a large 800-pound bell was placed. This addition was built by volunteer work. I well remember Mr. Zelek Donnell saying that his stock were fattening on the bunch grass and he could put in time for the Lord while his flock increased. ***

In the spring of 1867 Messrs. Robert Pentland, Zelek Donnell and Erastus S. Joslyn filed articles of incorporation incorporating the First Congregational Church of The Dalles. The capital was fixed at \$2,000. After incorporated the following trustees were elected: Messrs. E.S.S Joslyn, W.P. Abrams, H.J. Walden, Z.F. Moody and Zelek Donnell. Prior to the incorporation Messrs. E.S. Joslyn, E.S. Penfield, Z. Donnell, W.R. Stillwell and Rev. Thomas Condon were elected and served as trustees up to the time of incorporation. Each year following the first general election, the vacancies have been filled by the following persons:

E.B. Comfort, Zelek Donnell, H.J. Waldron, Robert Pentland, Orlando Humanson, John P. Booth, James B. Condon, Mrs. Camilla Donnell, Joshua W. French, Samuel Brooks, William R. Abrams, Eben B. McFarland, Fred A. McDonald and R.A. Roscoe, The church clerks have been as follows: E.S. Penfield, Rev. Thomas Condon (acting), Rev. W.R. Butcher (ex-officia), S.L. Brooks, Mrs. E.E. Pentland, W.R. Abrams, Mrs. N.J. Simons, O. Sylvester, Mrs. E.J. Robinson, W.J. Strong, R.A. Roscoe, A.R. Thompson, B.S. Huntington and A.R. Thompson.***

Mr. Condon was a very popular man and minister; his labor was a witness of it. At the close of his ministry in the summer of 1873 the church roll numbered 97 members, or communicants. On his retirement Rev. W.R. Butcher, of Albany, accepted a call to fill the vacant pulpit and began his ministry in the early autumn of the same year. During his ministry the church forged ahead as usual in additions to the roll. The fore part of June 1876, he tendered his resignation.

This church was without a pastor from the period of Mr. Butcher's departure until the summer of 1877, when Rev. J. W. Harris, of Evansville, Wisconsin, was called to fill the vacancy. In the early fall of 1878 Rev. D. B. Gray came and commenced in the church. He remained until July 1887. November 7, 1887, Rev. R.V. Hoyt accepted a call from this church and remained one year. In 1888 Rev. W.C. Curtis accepted the pastorate. On September 2, 1888, fire destroyed the old church building. Then the society, being left roofless, fell back on first principals and worshiped in the court room -- not the old one, but the new. In this room the church conducted services until January 27, 1889, at which time the new and beautiful church edifice, erected upon the property purchased of Judge O.S. Savage, was dedicated. The total cost of this building, grounds, furnishings, etc., was about \$13,000.



September 3, 1872, the First Baptist Church of the Dalles was organized. Articles of incorporation were filed with the county clerk January 8, 1873. Until 1881 the church was served by various pastors. In December of that year Rev. O.D. Taylor came from Orange, New Jersey, where he had been associated with Edward Judson, D.D., and assumed the pastorate of the church. In 1883 their property on the corner of Third and Washington streets was sold, and a new church and parsonage were erected at the corner of Washington and Fifth streets. In 1889 it was considered one of the best church properties on the coast. In May, 1887, Rev. J.C. Baker was called to the pastorate, which he held for one year, when he resigned and Rev. O.D. Taylor once again entered into active charge of the church. Like all others on the coast

the First Baptist Church of The Dalles has encountered prosperity and adversity, but it is now on a firm foundation and its future most encouraging.

April 20, 1889, articles of incorporation were filed with the clerk of Wasco county by the Second Baptist Church of The Dalles. The incorporators were John Harper, M.J. and L.L. Hill. The capital stock was placed at \$2,000.

Calvary Baptist Church was dedicated at The Dalles January 27, 1901. The cost of the edifice was \$2,508.07, and when dedicated it was nearly free of debt. The building is a credit to the city and the funds for this handsome edifice were secured from a congregation of only about forty people.

A concise and excellent history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church was published in the Times-Mountaineer of January 1, 1898, and we are highly favored in being able to reproduce it:

"Very little is known of the early history of this church in The Dalles. Some of the oldest residents remember visits from the Right Rev. Thomas F. Scott, D.D., Rev. H.M. Fackler, D.D., Dr. McCarthy, Dr. Stoye, Dr. Nevius and others. A child of the Hon. D.K. Kelly was baptized by Dr. Fackler, D.D., in 1866, and in 1871 Rev. R.D. Nevius held two services in the Congregational church, through the courtesy of Rev. T. Condon, the pastor. From 1871 to 1873 four services were held by Rev. R.D. Nevius, one by Bishop Morris, and one or two others by Rev. L.H. Wells. At this time there were found ten communicants of the church, and Dr. Nevius baptized four adult persons in the Congregational church. With this as a nucleus a congregation was established and an effort made to build a church. In 1874 Rt. Rev. Bishop Morris gave \$500 towards it on condition that a like sum should be raised in The Dalles. This work was undertaken by Mrs. G.H. Knaggs, and successfully accomplished by her, the sum of \$655 having been raised. In addition to this \$105 was realized from a strawberry festival. A chancel window was then given by General Joseph Eaton, in memorial of his son, and an east window was, also, given by the Hon. L.L. McArthur. May 28, 1875, Bishop Morris laid the corner stone of the present church, and deposited in it a copy of the Holy Bible, a book of Common Prayer, a copy of the Oregon Churchman of May 25th, and a copy of The Dalles Mountaineer, and copies of the Portland dailies, the Oregonian, Bulletin and Evening Journal.

January 11th the church received its furniture, leaving an indebtedness of about \$800. On the day the church was consecrated a draft on New York was received for \$100 from St. Luke's Chapel, Middletown, Connecticut, and a like amount was received from the Rev. John Bonney, from the east, a friend of Mr. William Beall. Bishop Morris also gave \$100, and the balance of the indebtedness was provided for by the congregation. In 1877 a paten and chalice of solid silver was received from St. Mark's church, Augusta, Maine. From January 11, 1876, to July 7, 1879, sixty-three services were held by the Rev. Dr. Nevius, when he was succeeded by the Rev. Mr. McEwen, who took charge of the church, having been sent by Bishop Morris. In September, 1880, through a subscription circulated by Miss Anna Thornbury and Mrs. Stansbury, an addition of the vestry room was made to the church, and about November, 1885, the present rectory was built.

The bell was purchased in 1883, and was on the Queen of the Pacific when she struck on the Columbia bar, and the framework of which was thrown overboard. The present mountings were made by Mr. John Clayton. About April, 1886, Miss Mary Wall, a communicant of the church, died and left a bequest of \$500. The Rev. W. L. McEwen officiated as rector from 1879 to 1886, when he was succeeded by the Rev. John C. Fair, about April 1, 1887. From 1879 to 1886 there were four confirmation classes under Rev. Mr. McEwen, numbering seventeen persons in all, and from 1886 to 1887, under the Rev. John C. Fair, there were two confirmation classes, numbering eight persons. In the spring of 1889 Rev. Eli D. Sutcliffe took charge of the work and remained five years. Rev. Joshua N. T. Goss was rector for the year ending Easter 1897.

The Dalles Presbyterian Church was organized July 8, 1888, in the hall of the Young Men's Christian Association. This was at the termination of several weeks' diligent work by Rev. George A. Hutchison, of San Francisco. Membership of this initial organization comprised sixteen persons. Mr. J. M. Patterson and Mr. G. W. Filloon were elected ruling elders; Mr. G. W. Swank and Mr. W. J. Strong, deacons. Immediately afterward a Sunday school was organized with the pastor, Rev. George A. Hutchison, as superintendent; Mr. J. M. Patterson, assistant. Of both the church and Sunday school W. J. Strong was elected treasurer. Miss Sadie Whitman was named as secretary of the Sunday school. January 5, 1889, the Times-Mountaineer said:

"The Presbyterian society was one of the first to occupy the great northwestern country and has already become strong in all our larger towns and in all our cities. On account of an agreement for many years with the Congregational body she did not occupy this field. About two years ago the synod of Columbia, which covers Oregon and Washington Territory, felt free to enter upon work here and so determined; as a result the present minister was sent."

The Lutheran Church was dedicated Sunday, April 17, 1898. The building complete cost about \$5,000. Prior to this the Lutherans had no church edifice and held services only when they could procure the use of a room. The pastor, L. Grey, should be credited with the work of raising the money to bring about the erection of the building. Rev. James F. Beates, of Seattle, delivered the dedicatory sermon. Rev. M. L. Zwizig, of Portland, conducted the dedicatory services, assisted by Revs. A. C. Anda, of Tacoma; W. Edlund, of Astoria, and L. Grey, of The Dalles.

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