

EDGEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

As the year of Centennial celebration of the Edgewood Presbyterian Church approaches, those interested in preserving its history throughout this first hundred years have found limited information available in the Church records. A request for additional historical data has been made of the Edgewood Historical Society (1944-1988). This society preserved a more comprehensive history of the Church from its inception to the present. A desire to supplement already documented historical information and to bring it up to date is the reason for this essay.

The sources of information are from the ongoing records of the Historical Society, contained in its Annals which include the original copy of the attached prize-winning essay by Mary Purdy; "Edgewood – Once Upon a Time" by Mrs. Thomas S. Grubbs, published in 1934; Ernest S. Craighead, first Historian of the Edgewood Historical Society, and his sister, Mary Craighead Brinton; and from material contained in various church bulletins and papers preserved by the Society. All of the above was recorded before 1965. Later reminiscences and comments are supplied by the writer of this essay.

A comprehensive Fiftieth Anniversary celebration history of the Church published in a Church Bulletin in 1944 preceded the essay by Mary Purdy. There was also a publication of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary celebration, with some variations, in 1966.

Recollections by Mrs. Grubbs, a member of the early church, are quoted as follows: "Our community had depended on Swissvale, Pittsburgh, Beulah, and Wilkinsburg Churches. Prayer meetings were held in various homes and Mrs. Gordon, Sr., gathering about her a little group, held a Sunday School in her home."

A dialogue between Ernest S. Craighead and Mary Brinton records that women began holding garden parties for the purpose of raising funds for a church. The first party raised \$170.00. At that time the home of Alexander Gordon, Sr. was 149 Gordon Street. Between 1957 and 1959 during renovation the front of the house was changed to face Chestnut #327, presently the oldest house in our borough still standing.

"On March 26, 1891, a group met in the home of Mr. W. N. Taylor to consider the organization of a church and Sunday School and plans were made to purchase a lot to erect a suitable building. At a meeting of the subscribers to the building fund held July 11, 1891, a committee consisting of Messrs. W. N. Taylor, Wm. N. Burt, E. J. Harlow, and A. W. Cadman, was appointed to present a petition to the Presbytery signed by 65 persons for a church in Edgewood."

According to a letter addressed to Mr. Craighead from Allen S. Davison, January 14, 1944, 46 persons were organizers of the church: Swissvale 10; Wilkinsburg Presbyterian 17; Bellefield 7; First Presbyterian-Pittsburgh 4; First Congregational Allegheny 5; Second Presbyterian-Pittsburgh 1; North Presbyterian-Allegheny 2. The home of W. N. Taylor was 346 Maple Avenue.

"In December 1891, the petition was granted, and Johnston Baldwin, Matthew Bigger, Robert C. Moore, and Wm. N. Burt were elected Ruling Elders. The first Board of Trustees consisted of Messrs. A. W. Cadman, C. M. Thorp, Wm. G. Gordon, Edw. J. Lloyd, W. N. Taylor, and J. H. Harlow. The Sunday School was organized in January 1892 with ten teachers and fifty pupils and Mr. John F. Miller, Superintendent."

"Pending the erection of the church a little frame building on the Keller property where Mr. Curtis now has his office, originally built as a Land Office, was used for church services. An organ was installed with Mr. E. J. Lloyd as organist. In May 1890 (error in date – other documents state March 1892) the Reverend Earnest McCartney was called and the Building Fund was increased by heroic efforts on the part of the women of the congregation, who gave fairs and suppers to which everyone went, and it is needless to say that in the upbuilding of our church ties were formed and friendships cemented which endure to this day. In 1893 a beautiful little church was built and Mr. C. C. Mellor donated a handsome organ."

Records of the Historical Society show that the frame building used for church services had been an office for Squire Collins, owned by Homestead Land Company before incorporation of the Borough. Here the Reverend Dr. Samuel J. Fisher, Pastor of the Swissvale Church, conducted the first service. The first sermon was preached by the Reverend John Gordon, son of Alex and Mrs. Gordon, Sr. Mr. Edward J. Lloyd, donor of the organ, was organist and choir director. Mr. Craighead remembered the organization of the Boys' Brigade in 1907 in the little church. The Keller property mentioned by Mrs. Grubbs is now an apartment complex. In the early years of the new Edgewood Church, Chauncey and Mrs. Mellor took charge of the musical service as a labor of love, he presiding with his well-known skill at

the organ, and she taking charge of the singing in the choir. Mr. Mellor died in 1909. Margaret, daughter of C. M. Thorp, was the first child baptized in the Edgewood Church.

"By 1916 we had so outgrown our little church that plans were on foot to utilize the old building as far as possible and to extend a new building to the sidewalk on Swissvale Avenue. The old Church, setting well back, had a large expanse of lawn in front. On July 22, 1917, the cornerstone of the new church was laid and on November 17, 1918, the beautiful commodious structure was dedicated. Mr. George S. Davison presented the beautiful organ in memory of his wife, Clara Isabel Davison, and later the melodious chimes were installed, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. George A. Blackmore."

"I might say in passing that the Edgewood Presbyterian Church, or Community Church, as it is called, occupies an absolutely unique position in the community. Many small towns of our size are endeavoring to support six or eight small churches of various denominations."

Following is the list of items contained in the Cornerstone:

1. Two copies of the Edgewood Presbyterian, dated March and June 1895.
2. "The Continent," "The Banner," "The Presbyterian," "The Outlook," of July 19, 1917.
3. "The Pittsburgh Post," "The Pittsburgh Dispatch," "The Gazette Times," of July 21, 1917.
4. "Church Bulletin" July 22, 1917.
5. The Program of the Services of the Laying of the Cornerstone July 22, 1917.
6. The Leaflet, "The Four Evangelists."
7. The continuation of the History of the Church from June 29, 1892 to the present.
8. A copy of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Church together with the Directory of the Officers and Members.
9. A list of the Officers, Teachers, and Scholars of the Sunday School.
10. A list of the Officers and Members of the Women's Association.
11. A list of the Officers and Members of the Men's Association.
12. A list of the Officers and Members of the Endeavor Societies – Senior and Junior.
13. A list of the Officers and Members of the Cot Club.
14. The Constitution, Officers, and Members of the Woman's CLUB of Edgewood.
15. The Officers and Members of the Civic Club.
16. The Edgewood Public Schools.
17. The Edgewood Borough Officers.
18. A list of the Charter Members of the Church.

In 1918 George S. Davison, father of Allen S. Davison, donated the large organ pipes. Among his many gifts to the Church was the Tiffany carved woodwork with its motif the Thistle and the Rose, on the pulpit and chancel. The chimes donated by Mr. and Mrs. Blackmore were dedicated in 1929. Plans for the present edifice were drawn in 1916 by the architect, Thomas Hannah, and ground was broken April 9, 1917. Total cost of the new church and its furnishings was \$150,000.00.

In 1967 a new Moeller organ console was dedicated. At this time the Zimbelstern Bells were added to the organ, a gift to the Church by a grateful patient of Dr. William E. Gibson.

The Men's Association remained active in the Church through the 1950's, sponsoring annual Father and Son Dinners. Mother-Daughter dinners were sponsored by the Women's Association through the 1960's. Boy Scout Troop 1 – now #23 – was sponsored by the Edgewood Church as early as the Fall of 1914, having received its charter upon application by several members of the Church. Scouts still meet in the Church. The Historical Society Annals contains a letter written by John F. Miller, a charter member of the Church, October 22, 1925, indicating that Scout activities were carried on in the Church before that date. In 1925 Mr. Miller became the second president of the East Borough Council, succeeding Edwin M. Herr, also an Edgewood resident. During the 1940's and 1950's three adult Bible classes met each Sunday: The Home Training Class whose teacher was Dr. Walter Moser; the Fellowship Class taught by John "Jack" Duff; and the Men's Class taught by George Roth Craig.

During this time of expanding membership it became necessary to utilize space as yet not in use throughout the church structure. The Pastor's office was moved and refurnished; an Assistant Minister's office created along with a Women's Lounge and small kitchen attached, conversion of the old Pastor's Lounge to a storage area for church and pulpit supplies. Extensive alterations and additional rooms and toilet facilities were also made on the lower levels, including enlargement and redecoration of the church kitchen and dining room. The Home Training and Fellowship

classes acquired special meeting rooms. A Teen room was created. Additional rooms for Christian Education of the children of the church were created on the second floor of the building. Dedication of the Christian Education Unit was on March 31, 1957. Between 1953 and 1956 the Church property was expanded southward by the purchase of the adjoining lot at 116 East Swissvale Avenue.

During this renovation the Fellowship Class donated to the Church a small library of religious books which had been a possession of "Jack" Duff. The site of the old pastor's office became the new Church Library under the guidance and direction of Mrs. Stewart Townsend. The complete library of Allen S. Davison was donated by Mrs. Davison who had transported the entire collection from their home in Florida, to which they had retired. Mrs. Townsend, former Librarian, maintained the Library for many years. Furniture for the Library was donated by Mrs. Davison. Two of the chairs were placed in front of the chancel. They were eventually covered with needlepoint. Miss Virginia Watson designed the covering which carries the motif of the woodwork in the Chancel and the needle work was done by several women in the Church. The Kneeling bench and its satin covering were gifts from Mr. and Mrs. George Roth Craig and Mr. and Mrs. William H. Hamilton in loving memory of Anne Gibson, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. William E. Gibson after her death in 1972. Mr. Hamilton crafted the bench, also four circular stands to be used for holding plants or flowers. Two large brass urns were also donated to the church.

The role of women in the governing body of the Church and in its ministry gradually became more prominent with the ordination of women elders taking place nationally in the early 1930's. The first women minister was ordained in 1956. During the ministry of the Reverend Gerald Hollingsworth, women were elected to be Deacons. The first woman elder in the Edgewood Church was Mrs. Samuel Craig, in the mid-1960's; Mrs. Townsend the first woman on the Board of Trustees. For a brief period during his ministry, a woman served as Assistant Pastor. During the ministry of Mr. Douglas Stevens, in 1990, there was a woman Interim Associate Pastor (Rev. June Taylor).

On September 11, 1983, Edgewood Church was joined by the First Presbyterian Church of Wilkinsburg. The jointure changed the name of the church to First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood.

In 1988 Pittsburgh Presbyterial Society changed its Constitution and name. The Women's Association of the First Church of Edgewood, and affiliate, adopted the change and at this time became known as "Presbyterian Women."

The Reverend Walter L. Moser, D.D., an Army Reservist, interrupted his ministry to answer the call to the military during the Second World War. He was Chaplain for the Pennsylvania National Guard at Chanute Field in Illinois. One hundred sixty Edgewood Church members also served in that War. Dr. Moser was Stated Clerk of Pittsburgh Presbytery for many years while ministering to Edgewood Church. From the mid-1960's until his death in 1978 he was Pastor Emeritus of the Edgewood Church. The Moser family resided in the Manse, 128 Hawthorne Street. The first mans was the original home of George Harlow, brother of James H. Harlow, a charter member of the Church, located at the corner of Locust and Hawthorne Streets. The house was sold in 1925. Three years later 128 Hawthorne Street became the Manse. The Reverend Gerald Hollingsworth, who succeeded Dr. Moser in 1959, lived in the same residence until about 1964 when the Church members approved the discontinuance of the use of a Mans for its pastors and their families.

The proposed budget of \$26,111.50 for the year ending March 31, 1944 was approved at the Congregational Meeting held April 21, 1943. The 1988 Annual Report for the fifth year of the First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood included a proposed budget for 1989 of \$273,350.00.

In 1990 a brass Standard was purchased from the Louis F. Demmler Memorial Fund. This attractive addition to the Chancel will hold the Advent wreath and candles.

Mabel A. Holliday
December 6, 1990