

# North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society

## Winter, 2020

### Spring Tour 2020: April 17-18

### A Journey Back in Time – Early Granville and Vance Counties



Nutbush Presbyterian Church, Townsville

Our Spring Tour this year will take us to an area home to some of the earliest Presbyterian settlers in North Carolina. South of the Virginia line in what are now Granville and Vance counties, the land was beautiful, gently rolling, and full of game. The first Scotch-Irish coming down from Pennsylvania and Virginia in the 1750s did not settle in the western lands subject to Indian raids but came further east. Many moved south of the Roanoke River when the French and Indian War broke out in 1754. These were the Presbyterians who met to hear Hugh McAden preach on his journey through North Carolina in 1755-1756. It was then that they began to meet as congregations or “societies,” not yet organized under a presbytery. Among the societies forming in this region at that time were **Nutbush** in what is now Townsville, **Grassy Creek** in present-day Stovall, Eno, Hawfields, Upper Hico (later Griers), Middle Hico (later Red House), and Lower Hico (dissolved in 1811).

At first there were no settled ministers, though the synod sometimes sent “supplies” or missionaries to itinerate. In 1762 Rev. William Tennant, Jr., is thought to have been the first Presbyterian to celebrate Holy Communion in Granville County, at a home near what became Grassy Creek Church. In 1765 James Creswell, a native of northern Ireland, was ordained by Hanover Presbytery. He organized

**Nutbush** and **Grassy Creek** in that year and served Nutbush, Grassy Creek, and Lower Hico. He left around 1774 for South Carolina, where he died two years later.

The Reverend **Henry Pattillo** came to Nutbush and Grassy Creek in 1780. He had begun as a schoolteacher in Virginia and had studied in his spare time with Rev. Samuel Davies, later president of Princeton. Ordained in 1758, he moved to North Carolina in 1765 to serve the Eno, Hawfields, and Little River churches. There, during the War of Regulation, he urged a peaceful solution with Governor Tryon. But in 1774 he moved to Bute County and the next year was a delegate to the revolutionary Provincial Congress. He also served on the local provincial council. He was called to Grassy Creek and Nutbush in 1780 at the age of 54. His congregations there gave him a 300-acre farm on condition that he stay there the rest of his life, which he did, dying in 1801 at almost 75.

Both in Orange and in Granville counties, Pattillo kept a very successful school in his home. On his farm in later life he turned more to writing, publishing *A Plain Planter's Family Assistant* (1787), a book of his sermons (1788), and *A Geographical Catechism* (1796), the first textbook published in North Carolina. A copy of his published sermons is in the Henderson County Library.

The minister at Nutbush, Rev. David Vellenga, will talk to us about Henry Pattillo when he was at Nutbush and Grassy Creek. We will also visit the very interesting cemetery at Nutbush.

In the 1880s the Grassy Creek congregation decided to move their church literally to the nearby town of Stovall. They tore down their second church building and used its framing, pulpit floor, and weatherboarding to build the one in Stovall. With these materials included, the members of Grassy Creek claimed to have one of the oldest churches standing in North Carolina



Grassy Creek Church building

Meanwhile, two early congregations on the upper Tar River west of Oxford were Providence and Sharon. A church was built at Providence in 1793 and used by all denominations. In 1823 it was organized into a Presbyterian church. Sharon Church was on a plantation a few miles away. In 1833 they merged to form the **Geneva Presbyterian Church**. That September there was a very large camp meeting held at the new church, attended by eight ministers besides their regular pastor, Rev. Alexander Wilson. People would come to such meetings from considerable distances, prepared to sleep in their wagons or tents and to cook out while enjoying the fellowship, the singing, and some rousing preaching.

Oxford, the county seat of Granville County, was incorporated in 1816, and in 1818 the **Oxford Presbyterian Church** was established there by members from Grassy Creek. Services were held at the Oxford Academy until 1830 when a building was completed. The present building was built in 1892. Last year Oxford spent all year celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary! We look forward to hearing about their history and also how they celebrated!

In 1860 the Oxford congregation included 12 African Americans communing members. But by 1888 only one remained, Mrs. Harriette Howell. That summer a visiting African American student from Auburn [Presbyterian] Theological Seminary in New York was surprised that a town with so many Negro citizens (56%) had no black Presbyterian church, so with the help of Mrs. Howell, he organized one. It was named **Timothy Darling Presbyterian Church** for one of his professors at Auburn. In 1889 a school was started in the church, which became Mary Potter Academy, a boarding school for Negroes. A new church was built in 1906. The congregation was a member of the Presbyterian Church in the USA until reunion in 1983.

Meanwhile, another branch of Presbyterianism, the United Presbyterian Church in North America, opened the **Henderson Normal Institute** in 1891 to educate black teachers. They also established Jubilee Hospital and U.P. churches in Townsville and Henderson (now Cotton Memorial). The Institute was very successful, evolving into an excellent though segregated high school. In 1970 it was closed because of integration.



Graduation at the Henderson Institute

Other denominations flourished in the area too. Most of the early large plantations were owned by English families who had moved down from Virginia. After 1700 the Church of England was the established church in North Carolina, and the General Assembly created a parish in each county. The parish council was elected by the landowners to care for the poor of the county and to build a house of worship. Accordingly St. Peter's, known as the Nutbush Church, was built in 1757. A new and more elegant church building, still known as Nutbush, was built nearby in 1773, and the community that grew up around it was incorporated as Williamsboro in 1787.



Interior of Old St. John's Episcopal Church

After the American Revolution there was no Episcopal minister and the building was used mostly for public meetings and secular entertainments. New leadership revived the parish, and in 1825 Bishop Ravenscroft re-consecrated the structure and named it **St. John's Episcopal Church**. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the building fell into severe disrepair. It was beautifully restored in the 1950s and is now used for special services. The colonial interior has almost entirely survived, with its box pews and elevated pulpit.

The simpler **Holy Trinity Episcopal Church** in Townsville was built around 1910. It also no longer has a congregation but is used for special services. The Episcopal church is still active in the area, however, especially the church in Henderson.

Methodism, which began as an offshoot of the Church of England, spread rapidly in America after the Revolution – much more rapidly than Calvinism. There was always a shortage of Presbyterian ministers, due to the strict requirement of a classical education and theological study before ordination. It was rumored that Methodist leaders would sometimes wait outside a presbytery meeting to woo disappointed candidates who had failed to qualify for Presbyterian ordination! Especially in the early days, Presbyterian churches might go for years without pastoral leadership.

Methodist circuit riders from Virginia and Maryland often stayed at the home of a Colonel Taylor near present-day Townsville and preached at a brush arbor or “tabernacle” nearby. Francis Asbury, later one of the first Methodist bishops in America, preached there in 1780. In 1784 the

**Tabernacle Methodist Church** of Townsville was organized and is still active. The nineteenth-century Taylor plantation, **Machpelah**, is now open to the public, but the original house from the 1750s was destroyed by fire.

Just to the east of Williamsboro and Townsville is Kerr Lake and the former site of **Presbyterian Point Camp and Retreat Center**. Between 1960 and 2002 thousands of Presbyterian young people and adults played, worshiped, sang, sailed, cooked out, learned, and grew at summer camps or church retreats there. The camp was supported first by Granville and Orange presbyteries, and then by Salem and New Hope. In 2002, however, it was decided to give the entire campgrounds to the Henderson YMCA, which gave it up after only one year. Mr. Robert Stoddard, who was the last full-time administrator of the camp (1994 to 2002), will talk with us after dinner. ♦

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### Meeting of the Board of Directors January 11, 2020

On the second Saturday in January, the board met at The Cypress, a retirement community in Raleigh, arranged for us by Dan and Flo Durway. President John Goodman opened the meeting with prayer.

The appointed officers – treasurer, historian, newsletter editor, and publicity chairman – were unanimously approved without change for another year. The minutes of our society's meeting in October were also approved. Communications received include a flyer describing the "Fourth Creek Congregational History" by C. Donald Stevenson and an invitation from Maggie Lauterer, our award-winner last spring, for our society to visit Ashe County. The treasurer reported on our financial health, which is good. Money has been moved from the Dudley account to pay for indexing the volume. We will continue our membership in the NC Federation of Historical Societies.

Steve McRae, our program chair, then presented a number of good suggestions for the Spring Tour, to be held on April 17-18, 2020. In recent years we have planned our spring tours to alternate between the western part of the state and the eastern, with our fall one-day meetings in Raleigh or nearby. Since we were in Charlotte last spring, it was decided that our tour this year will be in one of the earliest areas of Presbyterian settlement, in what are now Granville and Vance counties. Nutbush and Grassy Creek churches began to organize when Hugh McAden preached in the area in 1755-1756. We will visit other historic churches as well, including Old St. John's Episcopal, built in 1773. Later history of the area will be incorporated too, such as African-American Presbyterians after the Civil War and development of Presbyterian Point just to the north.

Ideas for future tours include the Sanford area, Statesville (Fourth Creek Church), Ashe County, Crossnore (Avery County), Scotland County, and Ashpole Church and northern South Carolina. We are always glad to have input and invitations from members or churches.

**Our Fall Meeting will be held on October 10, 2020.** It will be held at **White Memorial Church** in Raleigh, which is just finishing a major addition. The 2021 Spring Tour will be held on April 9-10.

Sarah Alexander brought updated membership lists, which we reviewed. Sam Martin has been presenting certificates to churches that have reached significant milestones. The anniversaries that will be coming up in 2020 are on p. 4 of this newsletter.

There was a vote of sincere thanks to Flo Durway for arranging our meeting and lunch. The meeting was then adjourned with prayer. ♦



## Historic Churches Celebrating Anniversaries in 2020

This year our society will be recognizing seven churches that have reached significant anniversaries of their founding. Sam Martin will be presenting the certificates of recognition and congratulation from the North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society to each of the following:

### Presbytery of Charlotte

Philadelphia Presbyterian Church, Mint Hill, Mecklenburg County	250 years
First Presbyterian Church, Rockingham, Richmond County, NC	150 years

### Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

Iona Presbyterian Church, Fairmont, Robeson County, NC	150 years
Community Presbyterian Church, Pinehurst, Moore County, NC	100 years
Dothan Presbyterian Church, Maxton, Robeson County, NC	100 years
Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Coats, Harnett County, NC	100 years
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Whiteville, Columbus County	100 years

Congratulations to all of these congregations! This anniversary year is a great time for each of you to begin or update the history of your church. It is truly worth recording the heritage on which you build. The records and the memories are too easily lost.

**Philadelphia Presbyterian** was one of the seven earliest Presbyterian churches in Mecklenburg County. Interestingly, it has three cemeteries that mark its history from the earliest days. Begun by Scotch-Irish settlers as the Clear Creek Presbyterian Church in 1770, the Meeting House Burial Ground is the earliest, with a marked field stone of 1774. After the log church burned in 1780, the congregation moved and began a new cemetery. When the church moved again in 1826, a third cemetery was begun. A history of the church, *The Presbyterian Gathering on Clear Creek: the History of Philadelphia Presbyterian Church*, was written by Rev. Russell M. Kerr in 2001.

The **Community Presbyterian Church** has an unusual history. In 1895 James Walker Tufts bought land in the Sandhills to create a health resort, which became Pinehurst, Inc. One of his employees, Miss Fannie Bayley Gray, was concerned that there was no Sunday School or church for the year-round employees and their children. With the help of Leonard Tufts, John Walker's son, the Sunday School began in 1908 and grew into a congregation. The Pinehurst Community Church was organized by Fayetteville Presbytery in 1920 with 28 members representing nine denominations! The church was built in 1929, and the name changed in 1976 to Community Presbyterian.

If you have an upcoming anniversary or have recently celebrated one, please email the Newsletter editor to let us know how you are planning to celebrate it or what you have already done. And please send us a copy of any published history and describe for us any historical project completed as part of your celebration. We'd like to share this information and recognize your good work. ♦

## History Awards given by NCPHS

Since 1968, the NC Presbyterian Historical Society has given awards in recognition of well researched books or projects on some part of Presbyterian history in North Carolina. Usually these have been published books, often histories of a particular church or a presbytery. But awards have also been given for the preparation of an excellent historical room or display; for plays illustrating the history of a church; for a detailed study of the cemetery of an historic church; and even honorable mention once for a quilt! These projects were all brought to our attention. Doubtless there have been many that we did not know about.

Last year the board voted to continue giving certificates of recognition and appreciation, but if a submitted history or project meets the criteria for excellence, a monetary award of \$100 will be given.

**If you know of a recently published church history or a completed church history project that you feel is worthy of consideration for an award**, please send the book or a description and photographs of the project to Awards Chairman Mrs. Connie Hudson, 501 E. Whitaker Mill, Apt. 406A, Raleigh, 27608; [ibchudson@webtv.net](mailto:ibchudson@webtv.net). Awards are given for works published or completed in the previous year or in a recent year. ♦

## Report on our Fall Meeting October 9, 2019 Davie Street Presbyterian Church

What a wonderful meeting we had at Davie Street last October! It was their 151<sup>st</sup> year, and a good time to celebrate. In 2019 the church had completed a beautiful addition, including office space and a large fellowship hall and kitchen. But for over a year during construction it was necessary for the congregation to move out. They had been meeting at St. Augustine's University and had to postpone their Sesquicentennial Celebration for a year, with a big Homecoming planned for November 2019. It was a joyful time to visit them, join them for lunch, and tour the new structure.

After registration, coffee, and fellowship, the Rev. Dr. Byron A. Wade welcomed us in their lovely sanctuary. Members of their choir sang for us and also with us as we joined in stirring hymns. Mrs. Ethel Evans, a long-time member, spoke to us about the spirit of the church and how much it means to its members and to the community.

Dr. Robert J. Cain then spoke to us about African American Presbyterians both before and after the Civil War. Some of the information was in our last Newsletter, Summer 2019, and a summary is below.

At the end of the morning meeting, President John Goodman presented Dr. Wade with a Certificate of Recognition from the society for Davie Street's 150 years of ministry and service in Raleigh.

After lunch, President John Goodman opened our annual all-member business meeting with prayer. The minutes of the last meeting were approved, and our treasurer John Myhre reported on the Society's finances. Flo Durway commented on how the Spring Tour in Charlotte focused on the way history can transition into viable and vital work today. Sam Martin reported on his visits to churches celebrating anniversaries. He was also invited to speak about Presbyterian history at the Aldersgate Home in Charlotte.

The terms of three officers had expired, but since all three had expressed a willingness to continue in office, all three were re-elected. They are President John Goodman, Secretary Flo Durway, and Membership Chair Sarah Alexander.

With thanks to all who participated and with a closing prayer, the meeting was adjourned for a tour of the new addition. ♦



### African American Presbyterians

Presbyterians of color have been in North Carolina for a very long time, from at least the 1730s. Settlers from Scotland and Northern Ireland certainly brought their Presbyterian faith with them, and some of them acquired slaves, even though slavery did not exist in their native lands. The General Assembly, Synod, and Presbytery pronounced often and vigorously that masters should provide religious instruction for their slaves, as well as taking them to church services. As a result, numerous slaves were received into Presbyterian churches as full communing members, with greater numbers in rural areas. In 1860 First Presbyterian Church in Raleigh had 7 African American members out of 118; Nutbush had 27 "colored communicants" out of a total membership of 43.

When the Civil War ended and slaves were freed, most of them left their white churches. Some joined the already organized African Methodist Episcopal Church, but others wished to remain Presbyterian. The new "southern" church, the PCUS, repeatedly urged evangelization of African Americans; however, almost nothing was accomplished in the following decades. Much more successful was the "northern" church, the PCUSA, which sent missionaries and educators to North Carolina and throughout the South. Presbyterian Sunday schools often evolved into churches and schools. Separate academies included Mary Potter Academy in Oxford, Albion Academy in Franklinton, Dayton Academy in Carthage, and Henderson Institute for teacher training. In North Carolina higher education included Scotia College for girls (later Barber Scotia), Biddle University (later Johnson C. Smith), and Warren Wilson. Scores of churches were established all over the state in both urban and rural settings. Numbers of them, such as Davie Street in Raleigh and Timothy Darling in Oxford, continue to be active today. The PCUSA also created synods and presbyteries—the Synods of Atlantic and Catawba, and the presbyteries of Cape Fear, Catawba, and Yadkin. The membership was overwhelmingly African American, and

numbered in the thousands rather than tens of thousands. In 1921, after over half a century of missionary work in North Carolina and the expenditure of considerable sums, membership in the state stood at only 6,333, which included Davie Street's 87 members.

In 1983 the northern and southern Presbyterian denominations merged, healing a 122-year wound in the body of Christ. There would henceforth be no synods or presbyteries in North Carolina or the South defined on the basis of race. Today increasing numbers of individual churches are beginning to explore their historic connections, working together as partners in Christ. ♦

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**We will begin our tour at Geneva Presbyterian Church, 4620 Culbreth Road, Oxford, NC 27565. It is a country church, so you'll want to use your GPS if you have it! However, the map and directions are below.**



**From Raleigh or the Raleigh Outer Beltline I-540**, take Creedmoor Road (Hwy 50 North) to Creedmoor. In Creedmoor, turn left on W. Lake Rd (Hwy 56), and in a half mile turn right onto Stem Rd., which becomes Brogden Rd. In 5.4 miles you will be on Main St. in Stem, NC. Turn right onto NC Hwy 1004 (Old NC 75), and in one mile turn left onto Culbreth Road. In 3.7 miles the church is on your right. From Glenwood Ave. and Creedmoor Rd., the distance is about 31 miles, or about 42 minutes.

**From the west on I-85**, take exit 191 for Butner /Creedmoor (Hwy 56) and turn left on Hwy 56. Just past I-85 turn right onto W. Lyon Station Rd. In 2.4 miles turn left onto Brogden Rd. In 1.7 miles you will be on Main St. in Stem, NC. Turn right onto NC Hwy 1004 (Old NC 75), and in one mile turn left onto Culbreth Road. In 3.7 miles the church is on your right. From Exit 191, the distance is about 9 miles or 12 minutes.

**From Oxford**, go west on Hillsboro Rd., then right on the Oxford Loop Rd. (Hwy 1195). Turn left on US 158 and in 0.7 mi. turn left onto Enon Road. Continue for 7.2 miles, then turn right onto Culbreth Rd. The church will be on your right in 0.2 mi. Distance from Oxford is 10.5 miles, about 14 minutes.

## North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society 2020 Spring Tour

### Friday, April 17

Noon – 12:45	Geneva Presbyterian Church, 4620 Culbreth Road, Oxford. Registration and social time
12:45 – 1:30	History and tour of church
2:00 – 2:45	Timothy Darling Presbyterian Church, 123 McClanahan St., Oxford.
3:00 – 3:45	Oxford Presbyterian Church, 121 Gilliam St., Oxford.
4:00 – 4:30	Grassy Creek Church (now God's House of Restoration), 203 US Hwy 15 North, Stovall.
5:00 – 5:30	Check-in at Sleep Inn, 18 Market St., Henderson, 27537.
6:00	Dinner at George's Restaurant, 210 N. Garnett St., Henderson.
7:30	Memories of Presbyterian Point, Robert Stoddard.
8:15	Board meeting, Sleep Inn.

### Saturday, April 18

8:00	Leave from motel.
8:30 – 9:15	Tabernacle United Methodist, 1725 Rock Spring Church Road, Townsville.
9:30 – 10:00	Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Townsville.
10:00 – 11:00	Nutbush Presbyterian Church and Cemetery, Nutbush Church Road, Townsville.
11:15 – 12:00	Machpelah Plantation, 12079 NC 39, about 0.5 mi. south of Townsville.
12:15 – 1:00	Old St. John's Episcopal Church, 112 Stagecoach Road, Henderson.
1:15 – 3:00	Lunch & Tour, Henderson Institute Museum, 629 W. Rockspring St., Henderson.

Our recommended accommodation is the Sleep Inn, 18 Market St., Henderson, NC 27537. You can call the Sleep Inn directly for reservations at (252) 654-4398. Motel has free wi-fi and a complimentary breakfast.

Registration fee is \$20, including coffee and refreshments Friday and lunch on Saturday. Please send the form below and a check (payable to NCPHS) *by April 10* to NCPHS, P.O. Box 20804, Raleigh, NC 27619-0804. If you have questions, please contact our Program Chairman Steve McRae, (336) 693-1929, [smcrae@stevemcraelaw.com](mailto:smcrae@stevemcraelaw.com).

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### **Registration, Spring Tour, April 17-18, 2020**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registrations: \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$ 20.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation needed? \_\_\_\_\_

Dues if included (Individual \$15; Family \$20; Individual Life Membership, \$125): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Please send this form **by April 10** with a check (payable to NCPHS) to NCPHS, P.O. Box 20804, Raleigh, NC 27619-0804.



**If you can do so, please put the following announcement in your church bulletin or newsletter:**

**The North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society's Spring Tour** will be in one of the first areas of Presbyterian settlement in North Carolina, just below the Virginia line in Granville and Vance counties on Friday and Saturday, April 17-18. The Nutbush and Grassy Creek churches began in 1755-1756, Old St. John's Episcopal was built in 1773, and we'll visit other early and interesting churches in the area. Registration is \$20. The schedule, registration form, and address are on our website at [www.ncphsociety.org](http://www.ncphsociety.org), or contact the newsletter editor for a copy.

If you haven't paid your 2020 dues yet, please send them with the registration form.

\*\*\*\* Individual \$15; Family \$20; Individual Life Membership, \$125. \*\*\*\*

North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society  
P.O. Box 20804  
Raleigh, NC 27619-0804

**Spring Tour, April 17-18, 2020**  
See registration form on p. 7.