

History of the Church Bell

By Elder Barbara McLaurine

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The Union Springs Presbyterian Church 1857 Meneely tower bell is ringing again on Sundays. The Meneely Bell Foundry was established in 1826 by Andrew Meneely. Meneely was one of the greatest bell makers in American History.

Contractor Bruce Anderson has completed the restoration of the bell, church tower, and other areas of the church. Prior to his work, GoPro Wildlife Removal eradicated the bats in the tower and other areas. GoPro also secured the wobbly weathervane atop the tower and other areas of the roof.

The bell can now be heard at 9:30am every Sunday prior to services conducted by Dr. William Sauser. The church has had twenty-seven ministers during its one hundred and sixty-nine years. Dr. Sauser is the longest serving minister of the Church. The Church does not have a Facebook page but a website, (www.unionspringspresbyterian.church). On the webpage click Worship and drop down to Sermons for Dr. Sauser's sermons. The web site was created so members and anyone who cannot physically attend church would have a resource to hear the Gospel News.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church in 1853 was the second denomination to organize in Union Springs, the Baptist Church preceded it by four years.

There were nineteen charter members at the July 23, 1853, organization meeting. Virginia Foster was one of the charter members, her husband Dr. Sterling J. Foster did not join until July 1873. Their granddaughter Virginia Foster Durr was active in the civil rights movement. According to Ms. Durr her husband, Attorney Clifford Durr was the first telephone call Rosa Parks made when she was arrested in Montgomery. Ms. Parks had worked for the Durr family.

Very few Bullock Countians can trace their family back to one of the charter members. Lynn Jinks III can trace his lineage back to charter members William H. Waugh and his wife Mathilda T. Waugh.

According to Church History by Cecil McNair, the first Presbyterian Church building was adjoining Major Culver's property and the corner lot opposite the home of Dr. Hayes. "The wooden building was forty by fifty, resting on brick pillars, four to six feet high, with an altitude of sixteen feet from floor to joists, ceiled overhead, with ten windows." In March of 1857, a severe storm blew the building down. The members immediately began working on a new wooden building and in the summer of 1858, they were in the new church building. The Meneely Bell from New Troy, New York was use in the second church. The pulpit furniture used in the

church today was a gift of the “earnest workers” in 1873. The Earnest Workers was a benevolent society composed of young ladies and girls of the Presbyterian Sunday School.

Twenty-four years later in 1882, the second building was in such bad condition and in need of so many repairs that a movement to erect a new one began. A building committee was formed. Lawrence B. Valk, a Philadelphia architect, was commissioned to draw the plans. The original estimated cost was six thousand dollars. The cost of the church, including the seats, which are folding chairs, came to ten thousand, five hundred dollars.

Work began on May 1, 1883, and on May 15, 1883, the cornerstone was laid. February 3, 1884, the Church was dedicated at an impressive service according to all records.

The original reed organ was replaced in 1888 with a pipe organ. The present pipe organ was installed in 1902 and first operated by a water motor. An electric motor was installed later. In 1949 the organ was completely overhauled and remodeled. The present church organist is Jane Padgett. The church meets at 9:30 am on Sundays because Ms. Padgett is the organist for the Methodist Church at their services.

In 1903 under the leadership of the “good women of the Church” particularly Virginia Foster, the Sunday School Annex and pastor’s study was added to the original structure.

The Memorial Window in the east side of the Church was given by members of the Foster family “In Memorial of Dr. Sterling Johnson Foster 1822-1899 and Virginia Heard Foster 1833-1912.” The original red, white and blue window at that location was given to the Wayman Chapel AME Church. The window can be seen behind the choir of their church.

In 2009 under the leadership of Elder Becky Stuart, the interior of the church went through a major restoration and the roof was repaired. The interior was repainted to the original colors. Additional restoration projects are being considered to make sure the building stays in excellent shape.

A tradition since 1946 has been a Candlelight Service on Christmas Eve. The Church is beautifully decorated. The Christmas Story is read along with traditional Christmas songs. The lighting of individual candles and singing Silent Night closes the program. The citizens of Union Springs are invited to attend.

The Presbyterian Church is a small church in membership but contributes to several programs and events in Bullock County. The members are active in the community.

The Elders are Anderson Hembree, Wendy Hubbard, and Leigh Moorner.

The church is located at 205 Hardaway Avenue and welcomes anyone who wishes to attend.