

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Florence Christian Church

By

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FLORENCE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
FLORENCE, KENTUCKY

The last roving bands of Indians had departed for the "west" so that early settlers in Kentucky could worship God without having lookouts posted at portholes in the church. Oxen were the beasts of burden and one race of God's children were slaves of white masters. In the year 1831 a log church was built in a clearing of the forest that covered the land at Florence, Kentucky. This church was built to hold worship for the Disciples of Christ. It had hand-hewn plank benches with no backs and a puncheon floor. People came by horseback or wagon bringing wallfilled dinner baskets. Sermons lasted three or four hours and prayers were so lengthy they were sermons in themselves. After dinner, services continued into late afternoon.

These early pioneers had so much for which to thank God, they were in no hurry to leave the church. No one was allowed to nod, and men walked up and down the aisle during services with poles to poke anyone who went to sleep. The church was the center of religious, social and political activities and stood at the site of the present church. The land was owned by William Wilhoit and sold to John Stephens on January 4, 1831. It is said this first church was burned by two disgruntled female members.

A date on a brick of the the present church indicates it was built in 1835. On April 14, 1842, John Stephens and his wife Frances deeded the land on which the church stood to the Trustees of the Florence Christian Church. The deed states "including the house recently erected by the Christian Church." This church has had continuous activity since its founding.

Early church records show that members were excluded from membership for habitual drunkenness, unchristian conduct, for leaving county clandestinely and in debt, making no explanation, and violence. If wishing reinstatement, they had to make request to be taken back into the church, their case was heard openly before the congregation and voted upon. If approved they were again given the hand of fellowship.

During the Civil War, "Morgan's Men" had a skirmish in front of the church and the church was used as a hospital for the wounded. In 1883 the back part of the floor was lowered to the level of the front, and the pulpit was moved to the back end of the church and benches rearranged to correspond with the change.

Until this time no musical instrument was permitted in the church. Certain members wanted an organ which was bought for \$75.00 (\$50.00 of which was given by Warren Graves of Georgetown, Kentucky, a son of Milton Graves). This caused a division of opinion and for a time the future of the church was imperiled but this subsided and the organ was placed in the church.

Many Negroes were members and were required to enter the back door.

Mrs. Martha Bradford died September 23, 1929, and left her home to the church. This was used for a parsonage until 1948 when it was sold and the money used to build a new parsonage on the church property.

The church was completely renovated and redecorated in 1937 by the Ladies of the church. It was rededicated on November 21, 1937. The interior walls and woodwork are white with exception of the wall around the pulpit which is covered with wine red velvet draperies centered by a large hand-painted picture of a river scene.

During the last thirty years a Ladies' Auxiliary, and a Missionary Society were formed and recently a Men's Fellowship, Christian Youth Fellowship and Christian Endeavor have been organized. A new Hammond electric organ has been purchased and there is an adult and junior choir. A basement and vestibule were added to the original building during 1951.

Like the early church, the present church is the center of community service. In addition to its own services, many civic and women's organizations of the county, as well as youth groups use the church for gatherings. It is ideally situated on the corner at the intersection of four-lane National Highways 42 and 25 and is directly at the gateway to the North and South. Few Sundays pass that do not see visitors who are attracted to stop at the "little white church by the side of the road."

Like rare jewels from a golden casket, old customs are regularly observed. Special services are held at Christmas and Easter. Nightly services are held during the week preceding Easter, with a Candlelight communion Service one evening. Homecoming Day is the first Sunday in October.

Ministers and evangelists who have served the church are:

Thomas Campbell, 1848; G. Campbell, 1867; Philamon, 1874; G. B. Briney, 1869-1871; F. M. McKibben, 1871-1883; W. S. Keene, 1875; Ridgeway, 1877; Rowe, 1888; Horton Foster, 1892-1893; T. H. Duncan, 1898; George W. Watkins, 1900-1903; Edgar DeWitt Jones, 1903; William Clark, 1904, Edgar Riley, 1908; S. S. Lappin, 1912; Edgar Riley, 1913-1914; J. P. Barnwasser, 1915; George W. Mills, 1916-1920; R. H. Carter, 1919; H. C. Runyan, 1921-1934; Brother Taylor, 1935-1936; I. A. Paternoster, 1937-1946; R. H. Carter, 1947; C. R. Dawson, 1948-1951; Herbert L. Reid, 1952, R. C. White, 1953; Ross Allen, 1954; Charles Holder, present pastor. Forrest King and George V. Moore have served several times as guest speakers.

The Christian Church, at Florence, Kentucky, like all other churches has had its share of shadows and sunshine but has survived,

secure in the statement, "I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God."

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