

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Elder William Conrad:
His Life and Labors

by

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*Yours to Serve in the
Gospel of Christ
Wm. Conrad,*

ELDER WILLIAM CONRAD

December 6, 1797 — March 13, 1882

ELDER WILLIAM CONRAD

His Life and Labors.

William Conrad was born December 6, 1797, in Harrison County, Kentucky, on the waters of Twin Creek, a tributary of the south fork of the Licking River, the eldest child of Isaac and Margaret (Lemmon) Conrad.

As a boy, he was able to obtain the little schooling available at that time and served nearly three years with a tanner in Harrison County learning the tanning trade.

On September 11, 1817, when he was not yet 20 years old, he married his cousin, Elizabeth Boyers - a daughter of Jacob and Dorothy (Lemmon) Boyers (and a grand-daughter of Casper Boyers, a Revolutionary War soldier). They moved to a tract of $8\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land in what was then Pendleton County. This tract of land is within a short distance of what is now the Baton Rouge Road. It is possible that the first plumbing in Grant County was installed in their home. A large spring flowed freely about 50 feet up the slope above the cabin. The water was conveyed to a vat inside the cabin by halved hollowed-out logs. The surplus water was carried away from the vat by other hollowed logs. By this means they had a constant supply of fresh water.

William and his wife owed \$300 for this land and cabin, and had been given plainly to understand by their parents on both sides that their chances of making a living were very slim. They were surrounded by unbroken forest and a few strangers, with their parents and friends some 23 miles distant, which was anything but close at that time. Although often discouraged, they were young and willing to work. Thus, their start was made.

William Conrad made known his hope in Jesus, and on the fourth Saturday in September 1820, joined the Regular Baptist Church at Dry Ridge, which stood about where the lumber company is now. He was received into the church and baptized the following morning by Elder Jared Riley, then an acceptable minister in doctrine and practice among regular Baptists. Elizabeth Conrad professed hope in Jesus in the winter of 1820 and was baptized in the spring of 1821.

About this time Elder Riley left, and with various pastors in the meantime, was replaced by Christian Tomlin, who was soon recognized to be of the new school order of Baptists. Although William Conrad had many differences with Elder Tomlin in the matter of doctrine, and for that matter with a great many members of the church, he was nevertheless ordained for the ministry on June 8, 1822.

Disagreement and persecution developed due to the differences in doctrine, so ten members, including William Conrad, received letters of dismissal in 1826, of which seven of the same were organized into a Church of Christ, Particular Baptist, at Williamstown. The organization took place in what was then known

as the Old Brick Seminary. The church called for his ordination on the Fourth Saturday in February 1827, and he preached to this church until his death. It is only appropriate to add that this church was moved from Williamstown in 1896 and is correctly known as Dry Ridge Primitive Baptist Church of Christ, without any change in doctrine or practice.

In September 1832, William Conrad, accompanied by Brother Robert Childers, who wished to visit his kinsmen, began his first ministerial tour to what he termed the "Far West" - actually, to Adams County and Quincy, Illinois. Here he preached to old Baptist churches and assisted in baptisms and an ordination. His trip required about six weeks and he returned convinced that he was unworthy as minister, and so urged the church to call another. But they would not have it.

During the time William Conrad preached at Williamstown and had made two western tours, the churches in Harrison County were undergoing a great change. Additions to these churches, Cynthiana, Mill Creek and Raven Creek slowly ceased. This area included the location of William Conrad's birthplace and the lack of strong churches caused him great sorrow. He obtained leave to preach at school houses and family houses, feeling that the need for an active church existed in this area. This was further borne out by his brother, Thompson Conrad, joining the church at Williamstown rather than casting his lot with one of the churches nearer his home. Later, Paul and Catherine Renaker and Isaac Eckler came from Harrison County to join the church at Williamstown. These three brothers and sister then asked for letters of dismissal and assistance to organize a church nearer their home.

The organization meeting was held in 1842 and was attended by the previously named members and a Sister, Patsy Porter, and representatives of the other churches, with William Conrad the only ordained minister present. The meeting was held in a school house on Thompson Conrad's land at Twin Creek and was designated Twin Creek Church of Christ Predestinarian.

Not only during this time was William Conrad pastor at Williamstown and Twin Creek, but also every other month at Rays Fork and Forklick. For the most part, all of these churches prospered during the 1840's and 1850's, although various types of internal difficulties occurred at times. Of these four churches, Forklick is now extinct.

In 1827, the Williamstown church elected to join with the Licking Association, which was at its zenith when its troubles began in 1833. The Association was begun officially in 1812 and apparently had no difficulties until this time. The Association attempted to settle a dispute within the member church at Mt. Gilead. Six churches withdrew in 1833, feeling that such matters were not in the province of the Association. A circular on doctrine, prepared by Elder Thomas P. Dudley, called Origin, Nature and Effects of the Christian Warfare, was substituted for one originally prepared by William Conrad, but the circular prepared by Dudley was rejected by the Association at its next meeting. The doctrine contained in the circular by Dudley was apparently accepted by three churches, including the church at Bryan's Station, which was dominated by the Dudley family, and it was accepted by the Licking Association in 1849 with the result that seven more churches withdrew, including the churches pastored by William Conrad.

These churches were members of the Twin Creek Association for the next five years. However, after 1855, William Conrad did not attend any more Associations and upon his strong recommendation, these churches have not participated in any Association meeting since that time.

Although most records of William Conrad, including his autobiography, record his activities as a preacher, his old record books give us an inkling of his financial success. His financial records are detailed and exact, and show a considerable amount of business acumen. He was a thrifty man and did not want to see anything wasted. Guests, when eating, were welcome to take all they wanted, but were requested not to leave anything on their plates. William Conrad had prospered over the years so that he was able to distribute to each of his five sons, during the 1840's and 1850's, almost \$8,000 apiece in land and improvements. This was based on land values of \$15 to \$30 per acre.

Although a slave owner, and kinsmen participated in the War Between the States on the side of the Confederacy, William Conrad personally attempted to maintain strict neutrality. He was successful until July 30, 1864, when Federal troops arrested him at his home. He was first taken toward Dry Ridge, as a Confederate force was supposedly attacking to the south of Williamstown. This proved to be false and William Conrad and several other citizen prisoners, including his son Jacob Seldon, were taken to the court house and imprisoned in the Jury Room on the second floor. He felt that he had been imprisoned without cause and was irked to be so imprisoned in a building to which he had made a substantial contribution for its construction (he had operated a grist mill on that same spot some 56 years earlier). While imprisoned in Williamstown the prisoners were forced to pay for their food and had to pay for their transportation to Morgan Station and their train fares on the Kentucky Central Railroad to Lexington and on to Louisville. After a few days in Louisville, they were offered their freedom upon payment of large sums of money, provided they would go north of the border states and remain away from family and friends for the duration of the war. This offer was promptly refused. During their stay, most of the prisoners became fast friends. Permission was granted to hold religious services, usually led by William Conrad. On August 14 he was given his unconditional release. This was brought about by a Dr. Carter Snell of Owen County, who appeared before the commanding general with the plea that William Conrad was an old man and not a politician, and that the Union cause in this section of Kentucky was hampered by his indiscriminate arrest.

Comments in his autobiography concerning the decade following the war would perhaps fit the aftermath of any war. During this period he made three more ministerial tours, one to Virginia and two to the West, the first of which was in the summer of 1865 to Illinois. The third tour to Missouri was made in 1870. On both of these tours he met many old friends at the various churches in which he preached, most of them having moved on from this section of Kentucky. His last tour began in Ohio in 1871 and continued on to West Virginia.

The years 1874 to 1876 were devoted to writing his memoirs, which were published in 1876. In view of his age and difficulty in getting around, William Conrad ceased as pastor at Forklick, Raysfork and Twin Creek in 1874. However, he was pastor of the Dry Ridge church until 1881.

William Conrad died March 13, 1882, at the age of 84. Throughout his life his religious convictions predominated. He was one of the outstanding ministers of his day, which included 54 years as pastor of Dry Ridge Church; Raysfork Church for 40 years; Forklick for 30 years; and Twin Creek for 29 years.

William Conrad has been referred to as a preacher by will of the Lord, a tanner by trade, and a farmer by profession.

Above outline of Life of William Conrad supported by:

Autobiography of Elder William Conrad, published in 1876
History of Kentucky, 7th Edition, published 1887 by Perrine, Battle & Kniffin
Old or First Record Book of William Conrad
Descendants of Elder William Conrad

Read at the celebration of Sesqui-centennial of the Birth of Elder William Conrad at the Primitive Baptist Church of Christ, Dry Ridge, Kentucky, Sunday, December 7, 1947.

John B. Conrad