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RESTORATION MOVEMENT & WELLSBURG

Wellsburg, WV, is an historic city in its own right. A settlement existed on its site as early as 1778. The town was incorporated in 1791 as Charlestown, (then) Virginia. In 1816 its name was changed to Wellsburg for Charles Wells, the son-in-law of Charles Prather, the original purchaser of the land on which the town stood. In the early 1800's the town was one of the most important trading and shipping points on the Ohio river, then the main access to the southern part of the Ohio territory, which was then being settled, as well as to points to the northeast around to the southwest. We leave the history of the town itself in order to center on its place in the Restoration Movement.

FIRST CHURCH ESTABLISHED BY ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

Beginning in 1816 a small group had been meeting in Wellsburg from time to time under the influence of Alexander Campbell, but no church had yet been organized there.¹ In 1823, Campbell and thirty-one other members of the Brush Run church in nearby Pennsylvania withdrew their membership from that church to "constitute a church of Christ at Wellsburg."¹ Already in 1816 Campbell

had embarked on a journey to the east to raise funds for a meeting house in Wellsburg.¹ It was built at Main and 12th streets.¹ This was the second church established based on Thomas Campbell's call for a restoration of the ancient order of things, Brush Run having been the first. By 1824 the church consisted of forty members.¹

Over the years many efforts to spread the gospel were made by the church in Wellsburg. The results were such as at which we marvel today. By 1827 its total membership stood at fifty-six.¹ In 1839 four visiting preachers preached in Wellsburg and three other surrounding churches. Their efforts resulted in fifty baptisms. They reported that there were then about 500 Christians meeting in the five meeting houses in the general area.¹

Reports of meetings resulting in many baptisms at the church there continued throughout the run of the second paper Campbell edited, the *Millennial Harbinger*¹ (started in 1830).

As with countless churches the meeting house of the church in Wellsburg had many preachers enter

its doors. Besides Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott was there with a host of other early preachers who worked in the area. C.L. Loos, one of the most influential preachers of the late 1800's, preached at Wellsburg for a year in 1849.¹ In 1871 Benjamin Franklin preached a series of lessons at Wellsburg. It was here that Daniel Sommer became interested in bro. Franklin, who became one of his mentors.¹ Sommer would later take on the editing of Franklin's paper following his death. When speaking of preachers who trod its floors the meeting house at Wellsburg pails in comparison to another location in this old city.

WELLSBURG'S WHARF

The Wellsburg wharf has been in use since the 1790s. Standing at the waters edge by the present-day wharf one can still see some of the original stones of the old wharf, which once extended twenty feet out into the river. As the main connection to many parts of the nation before the coming of the railroad the wharf was a transit point for thousands, including many early preachers. In reporting his preaching trips to various parts of the country in the 1840's and '50's, Campbell mentioned in passing taking steamboats from or to Wellsburg.¹ Included is a trip he took in February, 1850, which began with his visiting the (Eight and) Walnut street church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and attending a called meeting of the Christian Missionary Board.¹ (Campbell had been sick the previous year and unable to attend the first meeting of the *American Christian Missionary Society*.) Walter Scott's memoirs likewise contain frequent mention of

steamers to or from Wellsburg.¹ In the spring of 1847, 18 year-old J.W. McGarvey caught a steamboat to Wellsburg to attend Bethany college, which was seven miles from town.¹ A host of other preachers likewise used the wharf as published directions to the college in those early days were via steamer to Wellsburg.¹ Standing a scant two hundred yards from the wharf today is the building of the old Miller Tavern. Built before 1798, succeeding generations of Bethany students would have seen it as they debarked at Wellsburg.

THE WELLSBURG CHURCH & OTHER CHURCHES OF ITS DAY

Many events of major importance took place during the time Campbell worked with the church there. We focus on just a few here. It was in 1823 that he began editing and publishing his first paper, the *Christian Baptist*¹, which continued until 1829. Campbell would later date from this year the planting of churches "not only from Nova Scotia to Texas, and from the Atlantic to Oregon and California, in all the American States" but to Great Britain, Ireland, and New Zealand as well.¹ Further, in the first issue, he recorded his convictions about the first Christians. These words have come in for much discussion since their appearance.

Their churches were not fractured into missionary societies, bible societies, education societies; nor did they dream of organizing such in the world.... They knew nothing of the hobbies of modern times. *In their church capacity alone they moved.*¹

The above quote is of note for at least two reasons. First, the churches at Wellsburg and Brush Run were, early on, each members of associations of churches. The other churches in these associations were mainly Calvinist in their beliefs. Nevertheless, the Campbell's independent thinking and resultant continued emphasis on returning to the ancient order contained in the New Testament eventually started a growing cry among Baptists that they exclude the increasing number of disciples from Baptist churches. In 1830 churches following the restoration principle formally separated themselves from the Baptists. Second, upon their separation they resolved to meet in annual meetings.¹ This led to the church at Wellsburg being directly involved in starting what would grow into arguably the major conflict of the nineteenth century among God's people.

THE WELLSBURG COOPERATION MEETINGS

The April, 1835, issue of the *Millennial Harbinger* contained the following announcement, "General Meeting of Messengers, from thirteen congregations, held in Wellsburg, Va. on...the 12th of April, 1834."¹ One of the main focuses of the gathering was to discuss "a systematic co-operation of the churches for the conversion of the world." By the time the meeting had ended the machinery for such an effort was on the fast track to becoming a reality.

Soon afterwards, "'Cooperation Meetings,' fully organized with presidents and corresponding secretaries, sprang up like magic all

over the brotherhood."¹ Campbell's writings reached beyond our shores. After having contact with him, churches in England held their first "cooperative meeting" in Edinburgh, Scotland, in August of 1843.¹ The cooperative meetings were like miniature missionary societies. Indeed, the eventual formation of the *American Christian Missionary Society* was a logical outcome of this type of collective action of churches.

The influence of these meetings did not stop when the division of churches over the support of the ACMS had run its course, churches of Christ and Christian Churches generally representing brethren on opposite sides of that issue. As the twentieth century progressed the Wellsburg cooperation meetings would be recalled again and again as the subject of collective action of churches once more became an issue among God's people.¹

WELLSBURG IN CHANGING TIMES

In 1848, the church in Wellsburg moved into a new meeting house a couple blocks down Main Street from the original building. This building, with some improvements and additions, still stands today. Travel went from horses, to steamboats, to trains during Campbell's life time. A trolley was built from Wellsburg to Bethany in the early part of the 20th century.¹ In the last ten years of the *Harbinger's* existence (1860-1870), announcements of the deaths of various members of the church in Wellsburg make up the bulk of references to this historic city. A new generation was coming on.

FIFTH SUNDAY PHOTOS

Every fifth Sunday of the month, we try to highlight some of great things happening around our congregation that were captured through photography. If you happen to get a good picture of one of those great things, please feel free to post it on our Facebook page, tag us on Instagram (@wellsburgchurch), tweet us at @wellsburgchurch, or e-mail us at minister@wellsburgchurchofchrist.com with a little description of what is happening in the picture.



Shannon, Nathan and Marlow all have the baby room ready for Ashby's arrival! Continued prayers for blessings as we anticipate her delivery!



Lydia, Solomon, and Addison were great helpers picking out fruit and helping with the fruit baskets sent out. Always willing to help out and serve others, these kids are great examples for us all!



We've been blessed with several snow days and has been a great opportunity to get some sled riding in! Solomon has some great tricks to show as he is totally loving the fun in the snow!



So thankful to have Roland and Melody Fisher back with us and so excited for their baby expected to be here in March! Many prayers for continued blessings for a safe and healthy pregnancy and delivery!