

# *The History of Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church*



Photo Credit: Cris Hamilton

Last Revised: 2016

"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." In many respects, this verse from the Old Testament Prophet Micah sums up the history of Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church. For almost two and a half centuries the Presbyterians of Canonsburg have been serving Jesus by seeking to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

The following pages take a backwards glance to gratefully remember all those who have planted seeds in the beautiful garden that has blossomed into Canonsburg Church. From the pioneer days of Matthew Henderson to the modern times of building renovations, one thing has not changed about the Presbyterian Church of Canonsburg — God is faithful to us! "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come."

The text that follows below is a revision and expansion of the 1975 history of the Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church that was written for the church's 200th Anniversary.

## History — Introduction

In the beginning was the wilderness and a small but doughty group of pioneers who had come to be known as the Chartiers Settlement. The year was 1775. Washington County, Pennsylvania would not come into existence for six more years. The settlers "on the waters of Chartiers" were subjects of His Majesty, King George the Third, Ruler of the British Empire. With few exceptions, they considered themselves to be inhabitants of Augusta County, Virginia.

That April, at Lexington, Massachusetts, "the shot heard round the world" was fired. A month later, a committee met at Pittsburgh and resolved unanimously to approve the New Englanders' action in opposing "the invaders of American rights and privileges."

The heated dispute between Virginia and Pennsylvania over the jurisdiction of this region was at its height. Indian atrocities and massacres would occur with increasing frequency over the next fifteen years. Into this boiling caldron of war and political disturbance came two prodigious men of God, John McMillan and Matthew Henderson.

Much has been recorded about these two pastors, but little about the devout, God-fearing men and women that formed their first congregations. No list is known of the first members of the Chartiers Associate Presbyterian congregation as it existed in 1775, but we do know the names of the four elders who signed the call issued to Matthew Henderson in 1779. They were James Scott, Nicholas Little, John White, and David Reed. Two of the four are remembered in history because of their mention in George Washington's diary.

David Reed had emigrated from Lancaster County. He and James Scott, among others, purchased claims to land on "the waters of Miller's Run," presently the Venice-Southview area. However, it later developed that General Washington had been granted this same land by the Colony of Virginia.

In 1784, on his only visit to this area, Washington lodged with John Canon and from here went to visit his land. On September 19, he noted in his diary, "Being Sunday, and the People living on my Land apparently very religious, it was thought best to postpone going among them till tomorrow."

The next day General Washington dined at David Reed's log house and met with the settlers, who were reported to be "mostly Seceders," another name for the members of the Associate Presbyterian Church. Washington wrote, "Dined at David Reed's after which Mr. James Scott and Squire Reed began to enquire whether I would part with the Land and upon what terms."

The diary of Washington continues, "I told them I had no inclination to sell, however, after hearing a great deal of their hardships, their religious principles and unwillingness to separate or remove ... concluded by making offers, which after long consultation the settlers refused. All chose to stand suit and abide the issue of the law."

The court ruled that Washington's title to the land was the valid one; so, shortly thereafter, most of the settlers purchased new claims nearby in what is now Cecil and Chartiers Townships where they were still within walking distance of their meeting house at Oak Spring.

These Seceders of whom Washington writes were some of the founders of Chartiers Church. They were men and women of courage and strong conviction. They had forsaken their homes east of the mountains — left their families, friends, churches, schools, and the safety and conveniences of the settlements to seek a life of greater opportunity on the frontier.

The moral tenor of the church community was controlled to a great extent by the judicatory actions of session. The minutes of early session meetings give accounts of judicial proceedings at which the session was both judge and jury. If an accused felt unjustly treated by the session, he or she could appeal its decision to Presbytery, but this rarely occurred.

The sins for which the members were called before the session were diverse. They included lying, quarreling, intoxication, blasphemy, "hard speaking," thievery, fornication, and many others. Some, to us, seem trivial and certainly not sinful —such as "occasional hearing" or "irregular marriage" which included not giving previous publication and being married by someone other than a minister of your own denomination.

One of the more unusual occurrences was the trial of the woman who put stones in her butter that she sent to Pittsburgh to be sold. The stones increased the weight of the butter, but they also resulted in her being "sessioned" and her sin publicized before the congregation.

Much has been written about the use and manufacture of whiskey by the early settlers. It was considered a household necessity at this time. It was also a prime commodity for trade purposes, and stills were common on local farms. But intoxication was looked upon as a sin and was not tolerated in the Presbyterian denominations.

A report of a church member being intoxicated resulted in the accused being immediately confronted by the session of his church. On one such occasion a Canonsburg resident had the misfortune "to fall off his horse intoxicated, in front of the door of Mr. McMillan's meeting house and he could not rise for some time." The Presbyterian penchant for order in all things was, without a doubt, maintained by a diligent and God-fearing session.

Many of the pioneer settlers were young; then, as now, the young were venturesome. A young man would come West to the frontier, secure land, clear a portion of it, erect a cabin, and then return East to marry. He would return with his bride and the few necessities they possessed the following Spring.

Their lifestyle was completely changed — but not their faith or perseverance. A home, a meeting house in which to worship God, and a school to educate their children were considered immediate essentials, and the settlers willingly sacrificed to establish them in that order.

Henderson and McMillan were illustrious examples of God's servants, but no more than the courageous Scotch-Irish Presbyterian pioneers who called them to be their pastors. The one constant that sustained them, through unbelievable adversities, was their steadfast faith In God.

## **History — Chartiers Associate Presbyterian Congregation (Seceders)**

The first mention found of the Chartiers Congregation was in the Spring of 1774, when a petition was sent from Chartiers to the Presbytery of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, asking for the election of elders. The Reverend Matthew Henderson, a graduate of Glasgow University, visited the Chartiers settlement as a result of this petition. He preached here during the summer of 1775, and that same year the Associate Presbytery recognized the congregation of Chartiers. Mr. Henderson visited here again in 1779, and in November of that year received a call from the Associate Congregations of Chartiers, Buffalo and Mingo Creek. He came west alone and was installed as pastor in 1781, having left his family in Franklin County because of the rekindling of Indian attacks in this area.

The Chartiers Congregation was worshiping at Oak Spring. They purchased four acres of land from John Canon, but he was not able to provide clear title to his land until the 1790s and the deed was not delivered until 1797. A log meeting house was erected at Oak Spring at an early, unknown date. The oldest legible gravestone standing today in the old churchyard is that of Alexander Russell who died in 1784.

Mr. Henderson served as pastor of Chartiers and Buffalo until his accidental death in 1795. For several years he was the only minister of the Associate Church west of the mountains. In addition to caring for his own widely scattered flock, he was one of the incorporators of the Pittsburgh Academy in 1787 and the Washington Academy in the same year.

After these schools ceased to operate, Matthew Henderson and John McMillan were instrumental in establishing the Canonsburg Academy in 1791. The congregation of Chartiers joined in the support of the academy. A receipt dated March 1800 from the academy's treasurer recognizes that the eight dollars had been given by the Congregation of Chartiers for work done to the academy.

Matthew Henderson was accidentally killed by the falling of a bee tree. A weathered tablet marks his grave and that of his wife near the location at Oak Spring where he had expounded God's word to his Chartiers congregation.

**In Memory of the  
Revered Matthew Henderson  
who departed this life Octr. 2d, 1795  
Aged 60 years  
and in the 37th; of his Ministry**



In heavenly toils O Henderson grown gray Thy earthly frame was hastening to decay, Thy growing languors threatened to detain Thee from thy loved employment, but in vain, For in thy course no Sabbath fail'd t'attest. The love of souls which Burn'd within thy breast, Till by one transient stroke which gave release, Thy Saviour bade thee enter into peace: Great and happy change from Batter'd dust Unto the glorious mansions of the just: Let us prepare to measure the bright road. The best of all our friends is there, our God.

In 1796, following Mr. Henderson's death, the Rev. John Smith, another Glasgow University graduate, accepted a joint call from Chartiers and Peters Creek. Like Matthew Henderson, Smith had been pastor of the Associate Church at Oxford, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

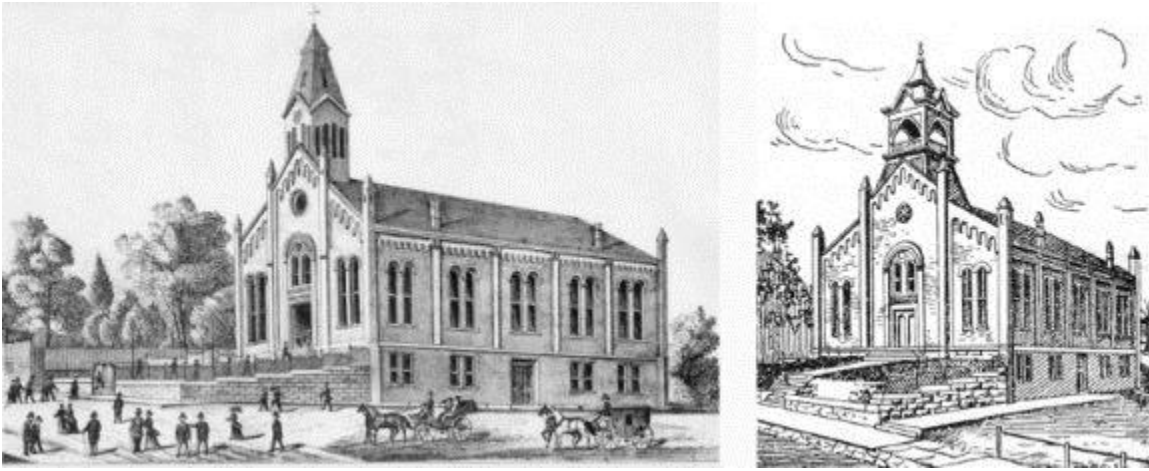
Rev. Smith was released from Chartiers in 1802, and the pulpit remained vacant for three years, until the Rev. James Ramsey was installed as pastor. James Ramsey was not a stranger to the Chartiers people; he had been educated at Canonsburg Academy. He served this congregation, his only pastorate, until 1849. The log meeting house was replaced by one of limestone, and this was, in 1835, replaced by a brick building. In 1839 there were 430 communicants on the roll; little wonder they outgrew two meeting houses in short order.

In 1821, during Mr. Ramsey's ministry, the Associate Theological Seminary was moved to Canonsburg. The seminary, since its founding in 1794, had been located Service, Beaver County, Pennsylvania. Dr. Ramsey was appointed professor in the Canonsburg Seminary and served as the only faculty member until 1835, when an additional professor was secured. Dr. Ramsey resigned from the theological seminary in 1842 and was released as pastor of Chartiers in 1849 due to ill health.

John Barr Clark was called as pastor in 1853, and again the congregation chose a man who had attended school in Canonsburg. He was a graduate of Canonsburg Seminary. Dr. Clark was released at his own request in 1860 to accept a charge in Allegheny. During his pastorate, the Associate Theological Seminary was moved from Canonsburg to Xenia, Ohio. Three years later (1858) the Associate Presbyterian and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches united to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America.

Daniel Houston French, a native of Washington County, was installed as pastor in 1861. He had graduated from Jefferson College in 1857 and attended Xenia Seminary. His service covered the sorrowful years of the Civil War. Mr. French resigned in 1866.

The pulpit was vacant for almost five years, but during that time, the present house of worship was erected. In 1868 the property on Pike Street was purchased for six hundred dollars, and construction began immediately. The present brick edifice was completed two years later at a cost of \$18,000. The old brick church building at Oak Spring was razed and the Oak Spring Cemetery Association was organized. The Association purchased the Oak Spring property from the Chartiers Congregation in 1870.



*The original steeple of the Chartiers Church, described in the Canonsburg Herald as "an eye-sore from its uncouth appearance," is shown in an illustration from the 1876 Washington County Atlas, left. To the right is a drawing from an 1899 Daily Notes.*

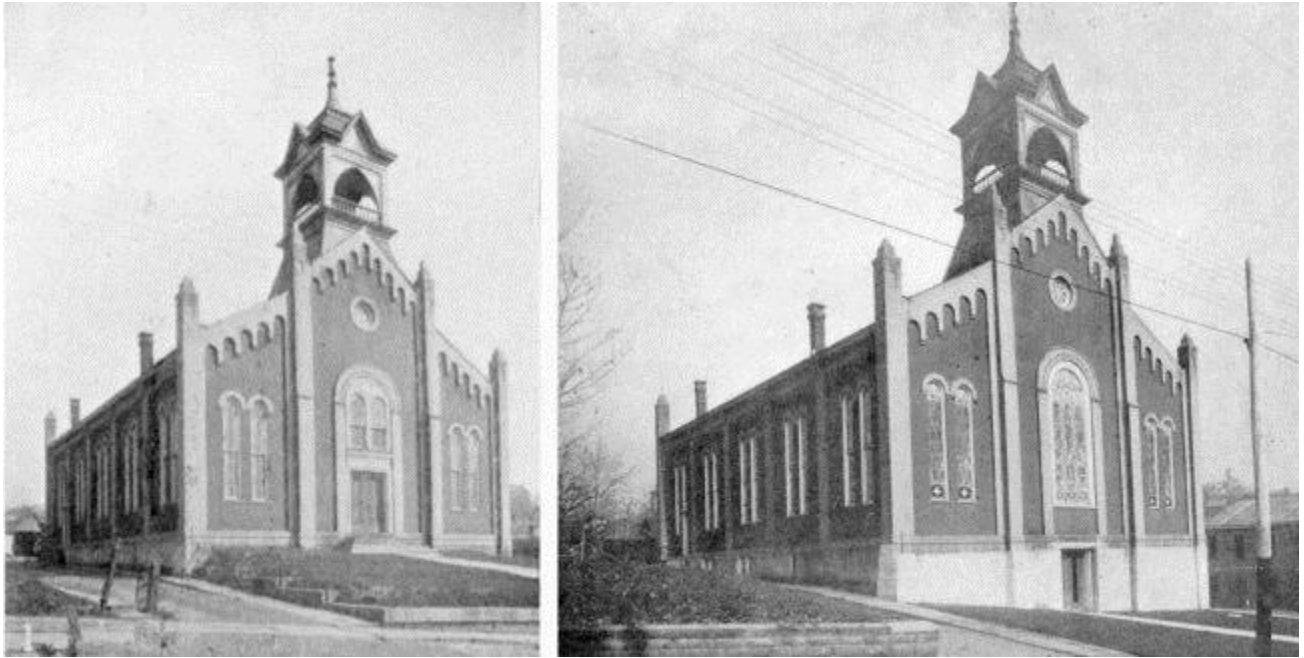
Daniel McBane McLean, the sixth pastor, was installed in 1871 and served until his death in 1880. Again the congregation had chosen a man who was educated in Canonsburg; he had attended Jefferson College. During Reverend McLean's pastorate, Chartiers celebrated her centennial, and the town overflowed with visitors for the occasion.

Mr. McLean, a kind and considerate man, was much loved by his congregation. Rachel Louise Carson, the world-renowned biologist and writer, known for her books about the sea and pesticides, was a granddaughter of Daniel McLean.

William Brownlee Smiley, a native of Washington County, accepted the call proffered by the Chartiers congregation in 1882, and served faithfully for the next twenty-seven years. At this time, many of the old-line Seceders were mortified by talk of installing an organ in the sanctuary. Hadn't there been enough radical changes? The sanctity of the communion service had been tampered with; gone was the common cup, the fencing of the table, and the use of the communion token. The psalms had been revised, lining out was no longer practiced, and now, some wished to desecrate God's house by introducing anthems and hymns. Was there nothing too sacred to be violated? With time, the wounds healed, and the controversial organ was in use in the worship service by 1897.

During Mr. Smiley's pastorate, the Houston United Presbyterian congregation was organized (1888) with the blessings of Chartiers, but not without the loss of some faithful members who lived nearer to Houston.

Changes in the worship practice of Chartiers were accompanied by alterations in the facade of the church building as well. When originally constructed, the sanctuary was entered by ascending a set of wide stone steps on the outside of the building. The front doors were located where the large stained glass window is now. The borough lowered the grade on Pike Street several feet, which made it possible to remove the long flight of stone steps and make a front entrance to the church on the ground floor.

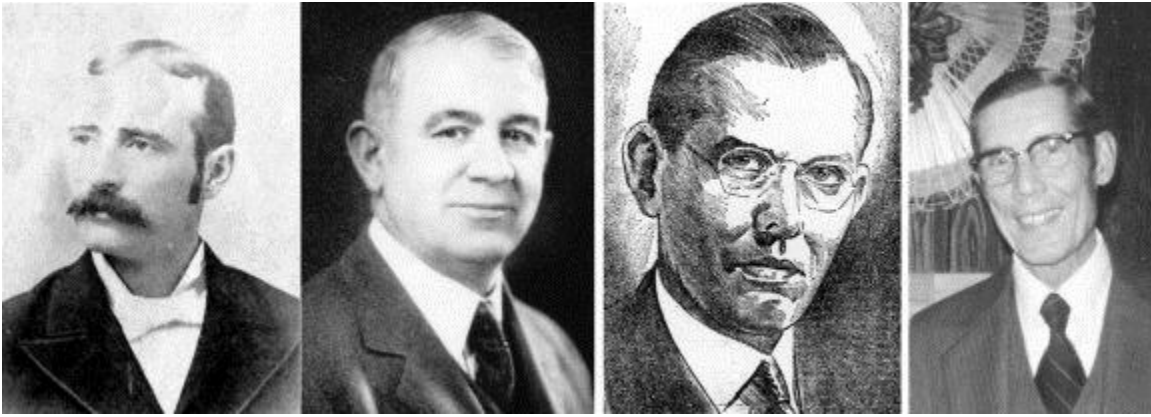


*These two views of Chartiers United Presbyterian Church show the changes to the façade from the lowering of Pike Street. The earlier view, left, was retouched to remove the wires.*

Following William Smiley's resignation, William P. Aiken, the eighth minister in the history of Chartiers, was called in 1910. Dr. Aiken was a friendly man who is especially remembered for his devotion to the shut-ins and his frequent calls to the homes of his parishioners. A number of improvements took place during Dr. Aiken's 21-year pastorate. A resolution passed at the annual congregational meeting in 1913 favored ladies removing their hats during church services. In 1920, a 16-foot addition was made to the north end of the church building, and an Estey pipe organ was installed.

Rev. Donald Spencer brought the enthusiasm of youth to Chartiers in 1931. He had an intense interest in young people and did much to stimulate their activities in the church. Very frequently there were as many as a hundred in attendance at the meetings of the Young People's Christian Union. The baptismal font was designed and built by members of the congregation during Rev. Spencer's pastorate. The wood used was from the old Associate Theological Seminary building on West Pike. It was dedicated to the pioneer members of the congregation, and the original baptismal bowl was placed inside the font.

Dr. J. Reade McCrory succeeded Donald Spencer in 1938 and served the congregation until 1947. While pastor here, he was elected Moderator of the Pittsburgh Synod, at that time the largest synod in the United Presbyterian Church. He also served as Vice Moderator of the United Presbyterian Church.



*Above, left to right, Chartiers U.P. ministers William B. Smiley, William P. Aiken, J. Reade McCrory, and Francis Scott.*

Dr. McCrory was succeeded by the Rev. John T. Brownlee, who came to Chartiers in 1948. The 180th anniversary of the congregation was celebrated with the dedication of the new Education building during Dr. Brownlee's pastorate.

In 1961 the Rev. Francis Scott, a former missionary, was installed as pastor. He instituted informative newsletters and family dinners with their interesting programs. By 1964 the sessions of Chartiers and First Presbyterian had met to discuss closer cooperation between the two congregations. Joint summer services were among the results. During August, church services with guest ministers alternated between the two sanctuaries.



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## History — Greenside United Presbyterian

The Speer Spring Congregation of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was organized in 1830. Many of the original members had formerly attended the Chartiers Associate Presbyterian Church at Oak Spring. The Speer Spring congregation's first building was a small brick structure erected in near the bank of Chartiers Creek where the Speer Spring Cemetery is located.

The Rev. Alexander McCahan was installed in 1831 as the first pastor of this and the Cross Roads (Chartiers Township) Associate Reformed congregations. Mr. McCahan was born and educated in Northern Ireland and before coming here had been pastor at Chambersburg and Concord, Pa. He severed his connection with Cross Roads in 1837 but remained the pastor of the Speer Spring congregation for six more years, at which time he accepted a call to Indiana County, Pa. After retirement, Mr. McCahan returned to Canonsburg and made his home with his brother's family.

One history of this congregation states that in the first six years of session minutes, there was scarcely one meeting "at which there were not cases of discipline, suspension, expulsion, confession of faults, of unruly tongues, of breaking most of the commandments by some weak member. These were heard and admonished with public report being made from the pulpit of each case censured."

*Speer Spring Church from the South.  
The photographer was standing where the I-79 interchange is now located.*



The Rev. Thomas Callahan was installed in 1844 as the second pastor of the congregation. He was born in Peters Township and was a brother of General William Callahan of Canonsburg. He resigned four years later and became an army chaplain.

After a vacancy of two years, the Rev. William Wallace was called (1850). He had been born at Noblestown, Pennsylvania and was a graduate of Washington College and the Associate Reformed Seminary at Allegheny. He had served as pastor for only four months when he contracted typhoid fever and died.

The next pastor was the Rev. David Paul, who was called in 1853. A native of Belmont County, Ohio, this was his first charge, and he remained only two years. Mr. Paul was a scholarly man noted for his powerful sermons. His later attainments included moderator of the General Assembly. For many years he was a director of the Allegheny Seminary, and he served as president of Muskingum College from 1865 to 1870.

William Hume Andrew became the fifth pastor in 1857. Born in Xenia, Ohio, he graduated from Franklin College and Canonsburg Seminary and had been ordained by the Associate Presbytery in 1848.

Six years later he transferred to the Associate Reformed Church and was the pastor here in 1858, when the Associate and Associate Reformed churches joined to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America.

Outspoken, fiery abolitionist John Wallace Bain was the next pastor. A graduate of Westminster College and Xenia Seminary, he came to Canonsburg in 1861. During his six-year stay there was never a moment's doubt concerning his utter disdain for pro-slavery adherents. In 1865, the congregation was incorporated as the United Presbyterian Church at Canonsburg, Pennsylvania.

James Gillespie Carson succeeded the Reverend Mr. Bain in 1867. He was a son of the Rev. David Carson, who, in 1834, had become a professor in the Canonsburg Seminary. Both James G. and his brother, David W. Carson, attended Jefferson College and the Associate Theological Seminary here.

When the Carsons had moved to Canonsburg from Tennessee, Mrs. Carson's family, the Gillespies, came with them. The Gillespie family brought two emancipated slaves with them to Canonsburg. From these two former slaves came the black Gillespie and Caldwell families — highly respected citizens and members of this congregation for many years.

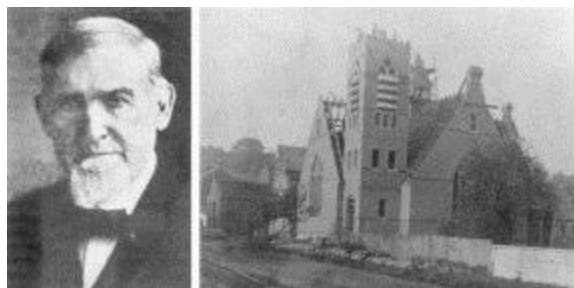
James Gillespie Carson stayed only two years as pastor of the Canonsburg congregation. He left here to accept a charge in Xenia, Ohio and an appointment as a professor in the Xenia Theological Seminary. During his pastorate, a Sabbath School was instituted and interesting benevolent commitments were made: to the rebuilding of San Francisco and to the Anti-Secret Society.

The Reverend William Weir became the eighth pastor of this congregation in 1870 and served here for three years. He was the author of a serial novel published in the Canonsburg Herald newspaper entitled "A Fair Sample: A Romance of Old Jefferson."

John Stuart Speer, born in Ohio, had been a captain in the Union Army. After the war, he attended Allegheny Seminary and came to Canonsburg as pastor. It was during his pastorate that the church building on Greenside Avenue was erected on a lot that for many years had been a tanyard where leather was tanned.

Rev. Speer was active in both the planning and the construction of the new house of worship. Miss Jeanette Dickson in her 100th Anniversary history of this church states: "In memory I can plainly see the glossy black horse owned by Reverend Speer and driven by his son Henry, as the scoop shovel scattered the ground for the foundation of this edifice." In 1885 the last communion service was held at the old Bridge Church.

*Above, Rev. John Speer, constructor, and the Greenside Church, under construction.*



*Mothers' Club of  
Canonsburg U.P. Church  
(Greenside), Summer  
1911.  
(Click on the picture for  
an enlargement and the  
names)*



After sixteen years, Mr. Speer retired as pastor (1890) but remained in Canonsburg and engaged in the banking business. His residence was the large, handsome, Victorian house on Vine Street, which he built early in his pastorate.

The next pastor was David Rentoul McDonald. Scottish by birth, he was a graduate of Westminster College and Allegheny Seminary. Mr. McDonald served as pastor of this congregation from 1891 to 1900, at which time he resigned to assume a faculty position at Grove City College. During David McDonald's pastorate, the church building debt was retired and the congregation was the recipient of Andrew Carnegie's munificence in the form of a grant to install a Vocalion organ in the sanctuary.



*Above, from left, the Revs. Alexander McCahon, David R. McDonald, James H. Grier, and Charles D. Fulton.*

Rev. Charles Dent Fulton was installed as pastor in 1901 and served for the next twelve years. During Mr. Fulton's pastorate, the Vocalion was replaced by a pipe organ, the congregation purchased a parsonage on West College Street, and a mission Sabbath School was started in East Canonsburg. The mission Sabbath School was organized in 1905 in the old Cecil Township School House in East Canonsburg.

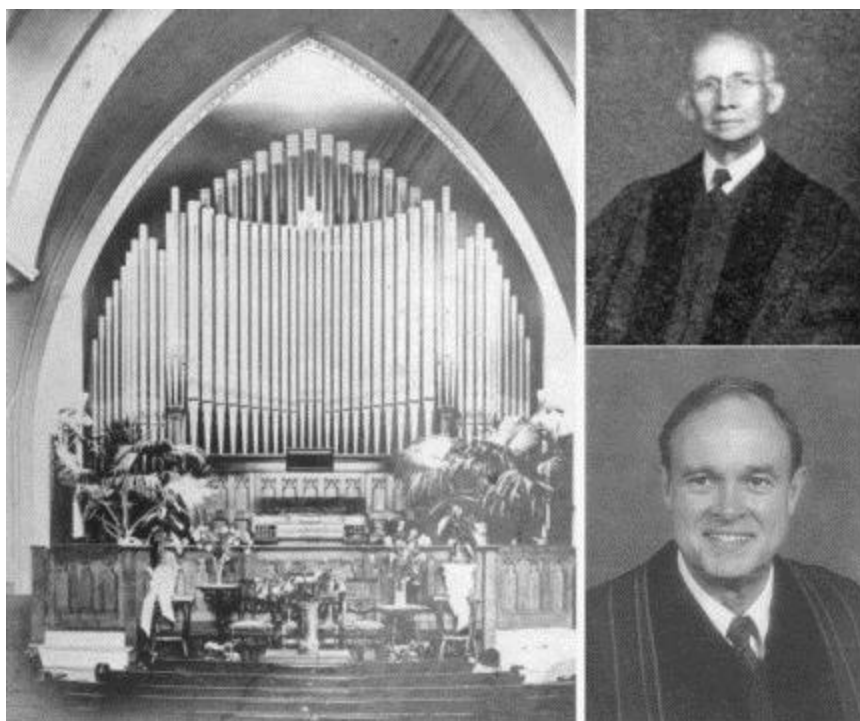
James H. Grier succeeded Mr. Fulton in 1914 and occupied the pulpit during World War I, except for a six months' leave of absence to serve with the army YMCA overseas. He resigned to accept a faculty position in the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. During James H. Grier's pastorate the congregation built a Chapel on Euclid Avenue to house the Mission Sabbath School and dedicated it in 1918. Miss Kate Gladden was the first regular employed worker. An addition to the church was also dedicated in 1918. Its primary purpose was Christian education, and the 22 new classrooms were badly needed by a Sunday School that had an enrollment approaching 700.

*The East Canonsburg Chapel on Euclid Avenue, dedicated January 13, 1918, provided better facilities than the old Cecil Township schoolhouse where the Greenside Church had instituted Sunday School in 1905. The photographs were taken during Vacation Bible School in the 1930s, when Dora B. McNary had charge of the youngsters. Rev Hume is toward the right side of the lower right photograph. The chapel also served adults, and A. M. Mason is remembered reading the Bible in Syrian on Sunday afternoons.*

*(Click individual pictures for enlarged views)*



In December 1922, the congregation voted to call Rev. H. Ross Hume as pastor. He had served overseas as a chaplain, and the tall, kind, soft-spoken man in his World War I uniform marched proudly in the Armistice Day parades in Canonsburg. Both the centennial celebration of the church and the 25th anniversary of the East Canonsburg Chapel were celebrated in 1930 during Dr. Hume's pastorate. Rev. Hume died in 1956 after 33 years of faithful service in the congregation and the community that he deeply loved. The East Canonsburg Chapel, under the care of Mrs. J. M. Heagen for so many years, continued its good work with a Sabbath School, morning worship service, and evening young people's meetings.



*Far left, a view of the Greenside Church sanctuary at Easter. Near left, top, the Rev. H. Ross Hume, bottom, Thomas F. Conboy.*



The Reverend Paul R. Graham was called as pastor and installed in 1957. At this time, the church roll showed 700 communicants and the morning service was being broadcast over the local radio station WCNG. After a pastorate of nine years, Mr. Graham resigned and the following year the congregation voted to call the Rev. Thomas Franklin Conboy, Jr.

In June 1966, the session voted to discontinue the use of the East End Chapel and provide bus transportation for the members of the chapel to a consolidated service at Greenside Avenue.

## History — College Church

The Presbyterian Congregation of Canonsburg was formed in 1830, mainly by members of John McMillan's church. Rev. McMillan, the apostle of Presbyterianism in the West, first preached in this area at the home of John McDowell in 1775. His church, the Chartiers (Hill) Presbyterian Church, was a mile south of Canonsburg, and the way to church was all uphill.

For several years preceding 1830, Rev. Matthew Brown, president of Jefferson College, assisted the aged McMillan. During the summer months, Dr. McMillan delivered the morning sermon and Dr. Brown the afternoon sermon. It is more than a coincidence that, when John McMillan strongly indicated his desire to be released from his pastoral duties at the Hill Church, two new congregations were formed—Canonsburg and Center.

Loyalty to this venerable divine had prevented an earlier dissemination of the ranks of the Hill Church. However, now that their beloved pastor of more than fifty years was relinquishing his charge, the townspeople of Canonsburg and those who lived at a greater distance in Peters Township felt less reluctant to leave their mother church. In 1830, Presbytery granted the petition of the Presbyterians in Canonsburg to become the Presbyterian Congregation of Canonsburg.

The congregation of 79 members probably worshipped in Prayer Hall at first, but after the erection of the largest college building, Providence Hall, in 1833, worship services were held in the first floor chapel. The congregation was commonly referred to as the College Church. Townspeople, Jefferson College students, and the faculty families attended. The regular members occupied the pews on the east side of the chapel, and the college students, those on the west side. Jefferson College President Matthew Brown was the first stated supply of the Canonsburg congregation.



*Providence Hall*

Matthew Brown had been called from Mifflin, Pennsylvania in 1805 by the Presbyterian Congregation at Washington, Pennsylvania. He was installed as the first pastor of that congregation, and the following year he was elected the first president of Washington College. He is described as a leader of great earnestness, piety and intellect and, next to McMillan, perhaps the greatest single influence on education in this region.

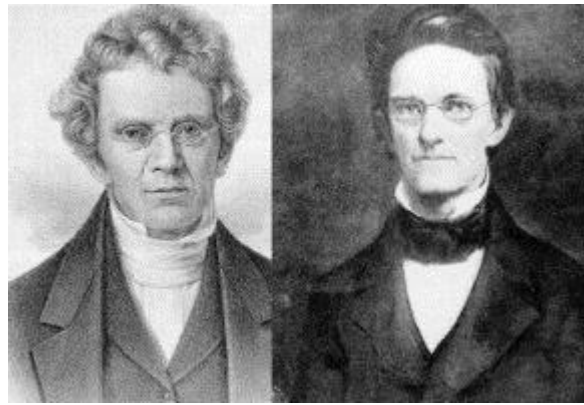
Dr. Brown resigned as president of Washington College in 1817 and five years later relinquished his charge as pastor of the Washington congregation. In 1822 he was elected president of Jefferson College, in which position he remained for twenty-three years. He is considered to have been the ablest and most

successful of the Jefferson presidents. Dr. Brown served as stated supply of the Canonsburg congregation for fifteen years, after which time, due to illness, he resigned as president of the college and asked to be released from his church duties.

Dr. Robert Jefferson Breckinridge, Matthew Brown's successor as president of the college, was called as pastor of the congregation in 1845. The cultured, urbane Dr. Breckinridge had served for thirteen years as pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Baltimore. He was a Kentuckian, had studied at Princeton, Yale and Union, and had practiced law in Lexington before graduating from seminary. He was considered one of the ablest and most eloquent speakers of his time.

The new pastor and president did not remain in Canonsburg for long. In 1847 he resigned and returned to Kentucky. He said the winters of this region were too rigorous for his health. It was for Dr. Breckinridge that the college erected the president's house that was located on North Central Avenue where the Armory now stands.

Alexander Blaine Brown, a son of Matthew Brown, was elected president of the college in 1847 and shortly thereafter was called as pastor of the Canonsburg Presbyterian congregation. He was a deliberate and straightforward man, but above all gentle and self-critical, a man of reserve and easy refinement. Ill health forced Rev. Brown to resign his pastorate in 1857.



*Matthew Brown (left) and Alexander Blaine Brown.*

Four years earlier, Aaron Williams, Professor of Latin at Jefferson College, had been elected co-pastor of the church with Alexander Brown. Joseph Alden, who replaced Alexander Brown as president of the college in 1857, was a Congregational minister and could not be the church's pastor. He was invited to take part, with Aaron Williams, a Presbyterian minister on the faculty, in the ministerial work of the congregation, and he continued this relationship until 1862, when he resigned as college president.

The Rev. David Riddle was Joseph Alden's successor as president of Jefferson College. He was installed as pastor of the College Church in 1863. Dr. Riddle, a graduate of Jefferson, married Matthew Brown's daughter, Elizabeth, and was well acquainted in the village of Canonsburg. Although Jefferson College ceased to exist in 1865, Dr. Riddle continued as Professor of Philosophy under the new president of the united college, Washington and Jefferson, and as pastor of the Presbyterian congregation for three more years.

Jonathan Edwards was the first president of Washington and Jefferson College. In 1868 he was appointed stated supply to the Canonsburg congregation, in which capacity he served until the following year. Dr. Edwards was the last of the college presidents to serve this congregation.

William F. Brown accepted a call as pastor of the church in 1870. He was an alumnus of Jefferson College and a son of A. B. Brown, who had been the pastor twenty years previously. The Rev. William Brown was a native of Canonsburg and a strong proponent of the infant Jefferson Academy. He was a kind, generous, distinguished gentleman. His musical propensity, along with that of his brothers, made the Brown Brothers renowned. There was no worthwhile charitable undertaking in this entire region that the

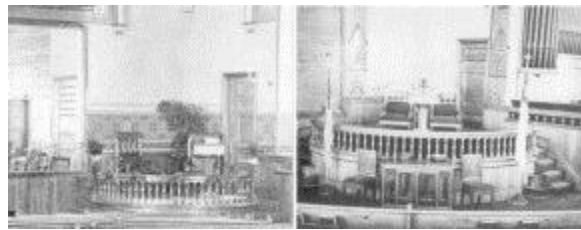
Brown Brothers did not support, if requested, with their musical talents.

John M. Smith, installed as pastor in 1876, succeeded William Brown. A native of Washington County, a graduate of Jefferson College and of Western Theological Seminary, Rev. Smith was extremely successful in his pastorate here. During his stay, the membership more than doubled and missionary benevolence was greatly increased. In 1887 the congregation, now numbering 310 members, voted to change their name to the First Presbyterian Church of Canonsburg.

## History — First Presbyterian

All was not harmonious in the former College Church. The year following the change of name the local newspaper reported: "At a congregational meeting of the First Presbyterian Church of Canonsburg held in the Chapel November 12, 1888, a majority of those present decided to leave the present place of worship immediately. Those dissenting therefrom continued to worship in the Chapel, and their petition was presented to Presbytery...asking for a division of the First Church or the Organization of another church in Canonsburg." Thus, what was one, became two: the First Presbyterian Church and the Central Presbyterian Church.

*These photographs show the First Presbyterian pulpit, and probably were taken a half-century apart. In the earlier one, on the left, the sanctuary was illuminated by gas lamps. Organ pipes can be seen in the more modern photograph, on the right.*



Having removed from the Chapel in Providence Hall, the First Presbyterian congregation held services in the Coliseum skating rink for the next two years (the site is now the front lawn of the Canon-McMillan Administration Building on Jefferson Avenue). The large brick church building on North Central Avenue was finished in 1890. The Rev. Charles Pridgeon was the first pastor to serve after the construction of the new church building. During his pastorate a parsonage was built on West Pike Street and a mission Sabbath School started in Strabane.

*First Presbyterian Church, about 1910. Going down North Central Avenue, toward the left of the photograph, you would pass the two brick buildings that had been Olome Seminary for Women some fifty years before, then the First National Bank and Pike Street. The lower Olome building was razed to enlarge the bank. The site of the upper building is now a parking lot. Across Pike Street can be seen the Citizens Trust (now Colaizzo) Building and the Notes Building. The church site is now occupied by the Canon House apartment building.*



Mr. Pridgeon was released from his charge in 1902, and the same year the Rev. Robert Howard Taylor was installed as pastor. One year later the final payment was made on the building debt and at a service attended by a large number of members and friends, the mortgage was burned. After a pastorate of three years, Rev. Taylor requested the congregation to unite with him in asking presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship.

The records of this period reveal numerous session actions involving drunkenness and immorality. These actions resulted in admonitions, suspensions and even excommunication of the accused members, but by this time the Presbyterian elders had lost most of their temporal power. In 1903 the session received a petition from the Women's Christian Temperance Union calling attention to posters and notices in a local newspaper advertising the coming of a play to the local Opera House. The escape and capture of the Biddle brothers, convicted murderers, would be represented upon the stage. A request was made that the session take action to stop the play, as the ladies of the WCTU believed it would have a demoralizing effect on the people of Canonsburg. Action was taken, but the show went on.

Rev. Ardven E. Linn, a native of Mercer County and a graduate of Westminster College and Allegheny Seminary, was installed as the next pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in 1906. Dr. Linn died after serving only four years. The following year the Rev. George Gibson Kerr was called and would become the pastor with the longest term of service at First Church. In 1914 the church roll numbered 536 communicants, the duplex envelope system was instituted, and a paid leader for the Sunday School orchestra was appointed. Conferences involving the sessions of the First Church and Central led to a September 1916 vote on reunion by the two congregations. At First Presbyterian, the vote was nearly unanimous for merger. Central's communicants, however, voted two to one against, and reunion was not pursued.

In the summer of 1930, amid the gloom of the beginning of the Depression, the lawn in the rear of the church was transformed. A tennis court was built, accompanied by horseshoe pits and a miniature golf course with sunken flowerpots for holes. Equipment for volleyball was purchased as well.

The congregation was shocked by the sudden death of Rev. Kerr in June 1936 after 25 years of faithful service. In December of that year, Ellwood M. Schofield was elected pastor. In 1943 the session and Dr. Schofield were planning on how to best contact the many new families that had moved to Canonsburg to work in the war plants, when he resigned. Shortly after, the session decided to discontinue Sunday evening services. They also voted to sell the old manse on West Pike Street and purchase a more modern house on Hawthorne Street.



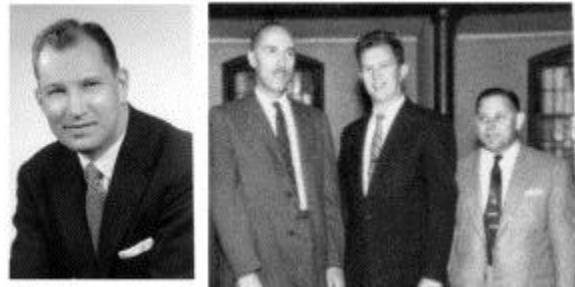
*First Presbyterian Church pastors Robert Howard Taylor(left) and George Gibson Kerr.*

Nine months after Dr. Schofield's resignation, the Rev. William Wallace Morgan was elected pastor at a salary of \$3,000 per annum and manse furnished. He had been born at Ingram and graduated from Grove City College and Western Theological Seminary. Two years after he assumed the pastorate, there were 619 members on the church roll, and the Strabane mission, under the direction of Mrs. G. C. Kerr, was



well attended. On May 25, 1947, a service was held in honor of the 113 men and women from the First Presbyterian Church who had served in the armed forces.

*Rev. William Wallace Morgan (left), pastor of the First Presbyterian Church from 1944 to 1952. The photograph on the right is from the 1956 Canonsburg High School yearbook and shows three of the Religious Education teachers: Reverends John T. Brownlee (Chartiers U.P.), Carl H. Lenz (Central Presbyterian), and Daniel B. Eveland (First Presbyterian).*



Rev. Morgan resigned in February 1952 to accept a call to Millville, New Jersey, and one year later the Rev. Daniel Buckley Eveland was installed as pastor. Mr. Eveland was a graduate of Maryville College and Princeton Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Virginia, were especially active in working with the young people of the church and the community.

The 125th anniversary of the Presbyterian Congregation in Canonsburg was celebrated in 1955, and commemorative plates were issued for the occasion. The session minutes of the following year note that Mrs. Edna Jacobs, superintendent of the Strabane Mission, made a request for additional teachers and workers. Two years later, the session ruled to close the mission and requested Presbytery to furnish bus transportation between Strabane and the church. The budget for 1960 included \$360 for a radio ministry.

## History — Central Presbyterian

The members of the former college church who had dissented from leaving the College Chapel, reorganized the congregation in 1888. A committee of presbytery, having ascertained that seventy persons had obtained their certificates and that a number of others signified their willingness to unite at an early date, granted permission for the organization to be known as the Central Presbyterian Church. The new church organization then leased the chapel from the trustees of Jefferson Academy.

The Rev. L. M. Lewis was installed in 1889 as Central's first pastor. The following year, the congregation numbered 124, and plans were made to purchase the house on the northwest corner of Central Avenue and College Street for a parsonage. This property, built as a home for the president of Jefferson College, was purchased from the Canonsburg Academy for \$4,000. In March 1896, Mr. Lewis asked to be released, and the same year the Reverend James M. Work was installed as pastor.

There were 178 members on the roll by 1900. The following year the session established a mission Sabbath School on East Pike Street. Industries were enlarging their facilities, and the town was growing rapidly. Many of the new workers were recent immigrants from Central and Southern Europe. Central Church "agreed to engage a young man from Seminary as missionary to the foreign speaking people of our community—to be paid thirty dollars per month for three days' service in Canonsburg per week."



*These photographs were taken on the Jefferson campus; above left, on the front lawn, about 1904, and right, behind Providence Hall. The church's placard can be seen in the left photograph.*

The twentieth century was still relatively new. In 1907 the sum of \$37.62 was listed as being spent for new hitching posts. Another expense commonly encountered in the old financial records was for pumping the organ. The social life of the congregation was kept active by numerous bazaars, festivals and socials. The "common-sense, oyster and ice cream and fancy work" committees at the Aid Society bazaars raised goodly sums of money that the ladies put to use in furthering the work of the church.

The Rev. J. W. McLeod, of Belwood, Canada, was called as pastor in 1912. That year there were 76 members received by profession of faith and 14 by certificate. The congregation was reported to be in a flourishing condition. Mr. McLeod resigned in 1916, and in January 1917 the Rev. H. J. Allsup of Clarksburg, West Virginia was called.

In April 1920, the Thomas Grier property at the corner of Belmont Avenue and Pike Street was purchased for \$10,000 and the old parsonage was sold to T. C. Barr for \$9,000. Rev. David Dempster came to the pastorate of Central Church that year, and within a short time, plans were drawn to build a new house of worship on the Belmont Avenue property. The dedicatory service was held June 11, 1922.

David Dempster was an outstanding preacher. The sanctuary was filled to capacity on numerous occasions when he delivered special dissertations on Sunday evenings. His resignation was accepted with regret in January 1926. In March of that year, the congregation called the Rev. Leroy Myers. The year 1929 brought the beginning of the depression, and the next several years were ones of constant financial struggle for Central Church. Mr. Myers asked to be dismissed and, in 1931, the Rev. Paul J. Lux came to this pastorate from Clovis, New Mexico.

Dr. Lux was well advanced in years, having been born in Germany in 1863. His bachelor's and master's degrees were earned there (he had a dueling scar for authenticity), but he received his theological degree in this country in 1892. He also successfully completed a three-year Ph.D. program.

Through the constant effort of individuals and groups, sufficient money was raised to retire the church debt in 1932, less than ten years after the dedication of the building. Paul Lux voluntarily reduced his salary to an amount he felt would not overburden the congregation's limited finances. The year 1934 ended with a membership of 150, all organizations reported being clear of debt, and the pastor's salary paid in full. The financial storm had been weathered. The Rev. Dr. Lux tendered his resignation and retired from the ministry in December 1936.

The Rev. Frank W. Stephens was installed as Central's eighth pastor in 1937. Mr. Stephens received 27 new members in the first year of his pastorate, bringing the membership to 184. He was here during the difficult war years. His annual report in 1943 began, "The stress and strife of a war-mad world are to be seen and heard on every side." Two years later, he resigned to accept a call to Greeley, Colorado.

The pulpit was to remain vacant for nearly two years, but 1947 brought brighter prospects, as the Rev. John A. H. McLean, a native of Scotland, was called as pastor. Mr. McLean gave impetus to the drive for an organ, and the following November the organ was dedicated. He and a figure named Jocko entertained at church functions with a ventriloquism act. His office was off the prayer meeting room next to the sanctuary, but he preferred a comfortable chair in the basement next to the furnace where he could enjoy the cigars Mrs. McLean wouldn't let him smoke at home. Mr. McLean resigned in 1954 to accept a charge in New Jersey. During the seven years of his pastorate, he guided the congregation to several major accomplishments.



*Top left, Rev. James M. Work, top right, Dr. Paul J. Lux. Middle, Rev. and Mrs. Charles Crist. Bottom, Rev. David Dempster standing in front of the church on Belmont Avenue. (Click to enlarge each picture.)*

That same year (1954), the Rev. Carl M. Lenz, Jr. was installed as pastor. Carl and Ann Lenz came to Canonsburg as newlyweds and set up their first home in one of the church apartments at 176 West Pike Street. They were instrumental in reactivating the youth groups, and the Women's Association was organized under the direction and urging of Mrs. Lenz. Church membership increased to 204 and finances were in excellent condition. Church benevolence giving was increased by more than fifty percent.

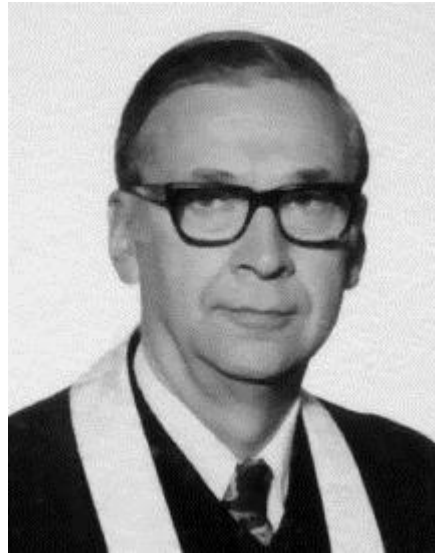
Mr. Lenz resigned in the fall of 1956, and a call was issued in May 1957 to the Rev. Arthur C. Haverly. During Mr. Haverly's pastorate, the union of the United Presbyterian and the Presbyterian denominations was consummated. New boundaries were set for the presbyteries, and the four Canonsburg churches became members of the Washington Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church. The pastoral relationship between Mr. Haverly and the congregation of the Central Presbyterian Church was dissolved in October 1959. The congregation, at the suggestion of presbytery, voted to form a yoked-field with the Muse Presbyterian Church in 1960. The Rev. Charles Crist was called to this field and installed that same year. In 1963, during his pastorate, Central celebrated her seventy-fifth anniversary. He was, from the beginning, in favor of a merger of the Canonsburg Presbyterian congregations.

## **History - Canonsburg United Presbyterian**

In 1961 the Presbyterian churches in Canonsburg formed a committee to study the feasibility of four Presbyterian churches continuing to exist in a town of ten thousand people. They held meetings over the next five years, culminating in a simultaneous vote on Sunday morning April 2, 1967. The question was whether the four congregations should merge into one. The majority of the members voted in favor of the merger.

Under the plan of merger, each of the four ministers would resign and the search for a new pastor would begin. The former pastors would continue to serve as stated supplies and a moderator appointed by presbytery would head the session. Washington Presbytery named Dr. William G. Rusch, of Washington, as moderator to act until such time as a pastor was installed. Daniel Eveland and Charles Crist had both received calls to new churches before the formal union, so it was left to Thomas Conboy and Francis Scott to act as stated supplies.

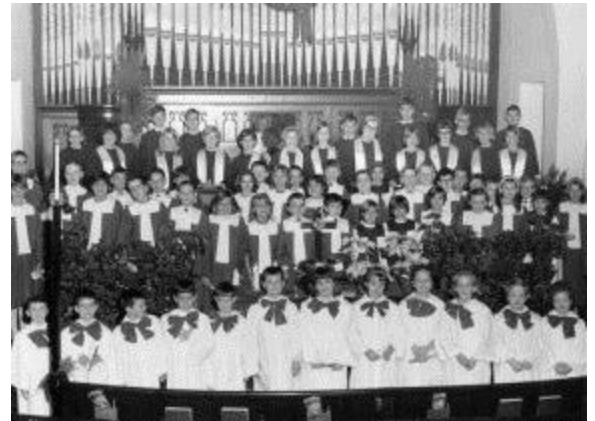




*Left, buttons with the lettering "4 ONE" were worn by supporters of the church merger in the weeks before the vote in April 1967. Right, Rev. Charles G. Skuce, first pastor of the merged church. He wrote in October 1967, "My philosophy of the church's purpose is: Bring people to Christ. Tell people about Christ Build people up in Christ. Send people out to serve Christ."*

The session minutes of the merged church record: "On the evening of May 7, 1967, at a thrilling Uniting Service conducted by the Presbytery of Washington, four United Presbyterian congregations in the town of Canonsburg officially became one." The new Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church had a combined membership of 1,896, and that month the session of the new church organization decided, for the present, that the place of Sunday worship would be alternated between the two largest buildings, the former Greenside and Chartiers sanctuaries.

At a congregational meeting, the Rev. Charles G. Skuce, Jr. was called to be the first elected pastor of the merged church. A fixed house of worship and Christian Education facility were needed, and the congregation voted in January 1968 to settle on the former Chartiers U.P. facilities, described in the session minutes as "the West Pike Street property." It was also agreed to purchase the former Canonsburg Library property and two adjoining lots (separated from the church by the post office) to be used for Sunday School, office space, and for parking.



*This choir of children from the united church is shown in Greenside Church, Christmas 1967.*

Events moved rapidly, and there was a general feeling of good will and harmony. In June 1968, acting assistant pastor Thomas Conboy resigned to accept a call to another church, and in September 1969, Francis Scott left to accept a new charge. That same month the congregation issued a call to the Reverend C. Richard Berggren to serve as associate pastor. Under his leadership, youth activities grew to include such programs as Saturday Morning Trailblazers, weekend retreats for Junior and Senior Highs, and a Junior High camp at Chautauqua.

The two Sunday morning worship services instituted at the time of the merger were continued, and the Sunday School and youth activities were well attended so well that an addition to the Christian Education building was needed. A building Study Committee was formed and held its first meeting in February 1969. It was determined that a new church building also was necessary. Rev. Hedley A. Burrell of Thomas was employed by the session as a part-time church visitor from August 1970 through August 1972. He was a veteran of the Canadian Army with service in World War I, and he had been a career Salvation Army officer until his retirement in 1964.

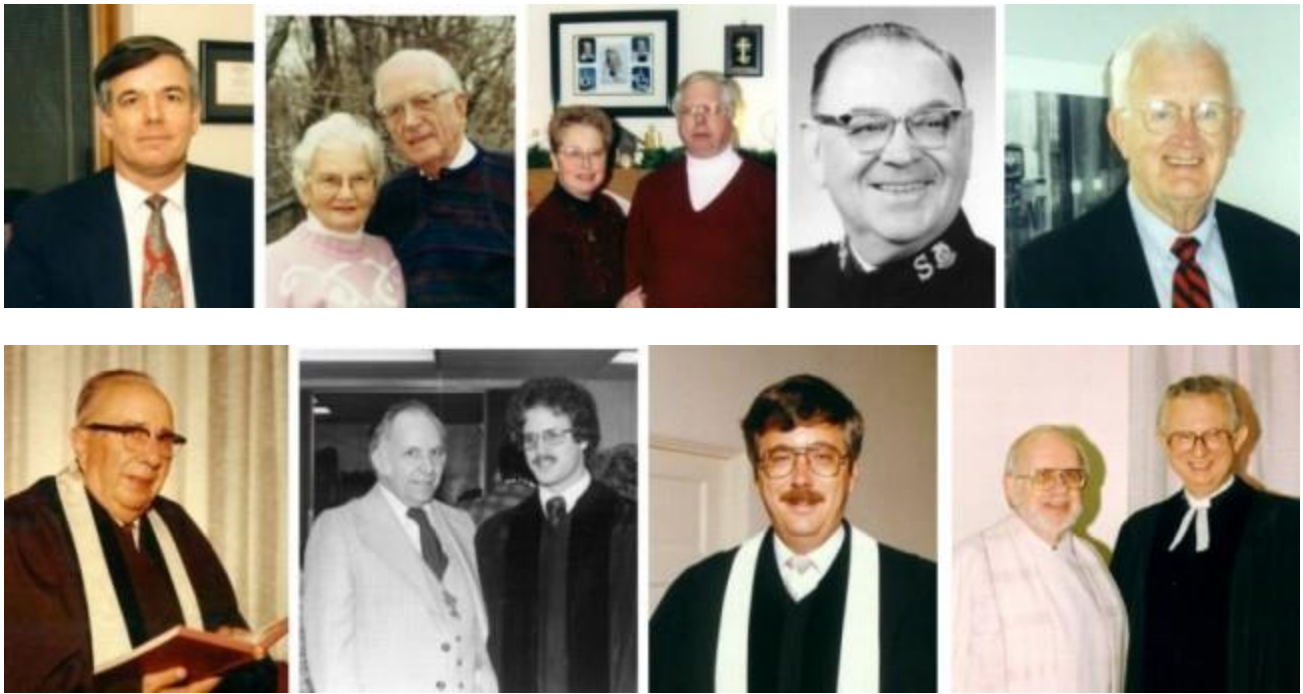
The following year, 71-year old Rev. W. Austin Gilleland was employed as Minister of Visitation and Evangelism, and his wife, Naomi, as Director of Missionary Education. The choir director during the early years of the combined church was L. Herbert Ostrander. Mrs. Donald Emery was organist.

A 1969 drive for funds for the building projects did not realize enough money for both a new church and expanded Christian Education facilities. The church building project was named "Phase 2," and ground-breaking for the new Christian Education facility (Phase I) was July 4, 1971. Arrangements were made to borrow \$150,000 to finance the venture, and the Building Study Committee became the Building Committee with Park Rankin chairman.

The building was dedicated on November 26, 1972. Next came the enlarging and improving of the parking lot on the former Bell properties. This lot was not only a convenience to the congregation, but also a service to the entire community. In July 1974, the congregation accepted Rev. Berggren's resignation as associate pastor. The session minutes of January 1975 record the securing of Bruce Mawhinney and James Paxton as staff assistants to the pastor with the added provision that Mr. Mawhinney would become, as of June, a full-time assistant in the position of student pastor.

Both Reverends Skuce and Gilliland resigned in 1977, and Rev. Mawhinney the following year. The Rev. Willard Wellman served Canonsburg U.P. as stated supply from 1978 to 1979, when G. Sherman Ott was called as pastor. During Mr. Ott's pastorate, the Rev. William McKinney held the position of assistant pastor from 1980 to 1983, and Rev. Donald Steele from June 1984 to 1988. Mr. Steele resigned to become pastor of Center Presbyterian Church, McMurray. In 1991, the Rev. Robert Sheehan came to Canonsburg as an interim assistant and remained until 1994.

In May 1992, the session called the Rev. David Mayo to the pastorate. Both Gary Gibson and his sister, Linda Mankey served in the church as Commissioned Lay Pastors. In 1996, Susan Zoog joined the staff to work with senior adults and as director of visitation. She retired in 2005 and Pam Walker joined the staff as Director of Pastoral Care.



*Top row: Rev. Bruce Mawhinney, Rev. and Mrs. Willard Wellman, Rev. and Mrs. C. Richard Berggren, Hedley A. Burrell, and Rev. Harold H. McConnell. Bottom Row: Reverends W. Austin Gilleland, G. Sherman Ott, William McKinney, Donald Steele, Robert Sheehan, and Francis Blair.*

During the months from April to July 1998, renovation of the Sanctuary building was carried out on a grand scale. The nearly 13 decades of use had taken their toll. The balcony was unusable, and the beams and joists supporting the sanctuary were found to be unsafe. The choir loft could not accommodate the 50-voice choir that Music Director Dennis Mumper had built.

It was discovered that the only support for the Fellowship Hall floor were chestnut beams resting on the ground. This was remedied with massive amounts of gravel and concrete. During the extensive renovation, worship was carried on at the St. Genevieve Roman Catholic worship site on East College Street.



*Above, two photographs of the church balcony. The left hand picture was taken during an Advent worship service in 1975. The one on the right was taken in warm weather after renovations were made in 1998.*



Reconstruction allowed the balcony to be used safely; new lights and ceiling fans are in place in the sanctuary, and extension of the building to the north allowed expansion of the pulpit and choir facilities. There is a new heating system and the building now is air-conditioned. A sound system was installed, along with a ceiling-mounted projector and screen.

Behind the choir loft is a multipurpose storage room used at present for the Food Bank. On the ground floor, an enlarged kitchen was built with a gift from Victor and Hannah Zaccaglin. A carillon in the venerable steeple, a bequest of Margaret Newton, also became part of the project. The effort was named "Faith in Action" and required the giving of more than half a million dollars.

As an ancillary effort, the small room at the front of the church west of the choir loft was remodeled. New stained glass windows were installed; one was donated by Park Rankin, in memory of his wife, Marguerite, and the other by Margaret McMillan in memory of her husband, Grover. The church's Prayer Ministry, led by Linda Mankey, reminds us, "Prayer is much more than talking to God; it is also listening to God."

Following the resignation of Sherman Ott in 1990, the church was energized by the Rev. Harold H. McConnell, interim pastor. Rev. Francis Blair, stated supply, replaced McConnell. Through these years, Colleen Yarbrough was the assistant in charge of youth ministries and Carol Stewart served faithfully in the church office.



*Top: left, a summer worship service with the choir in mufti. In front are Dennis Mumper, Rev. David Mayo, and Linda Mankey (obscured); center, Ministerial Assistant Gary Gibson at his farewell service in 1995; right, Ministerial Assistant Linda Mankey standing in front of one of the new windows in the prayer chapel.*

*Bottom: left, an Advent service in 1999 with Director Dennis Mumper leading the choir and Kenton Klink at the piano; center, Susan M. Zoog, Director of Visitation; Kenton Klink, instrumentalist at the new grand piano purchased in conjunction with the 1998 renovation.*



In 2001 Peggy Shannon was hired as the Director of Christian Education. She completed Interim Ministry Training at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2008.

Rev. Linda Ruby became the interim pastor following the resignation of Rev. Mayo in 2004.



*Vacation Bible School at Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church in 1999. Featured performers in a skit included David Mayo, Dick Hultman, and Laurie Rigby.*

In January of 2005, Rev. Thomas D. Hamilton Jr. started his work at Canonsburg U.P. He is a 1991 graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

In 2007, a much needed, over-sized garage was built, and renovations to the Christian Education building were completed in 2010. These include air conditioning, new fire safety doors and an alarm-security system.

2009 proved to be an exciting year for the church with the opening of "Up with Kids" Childcare Center in November. Up with Kids was created to provide "lots of love and learning for little ones" and places an emphasis on Christian beliefs and values in our daily programs.

From 2010 to 2011, Rev. Geoffrey Rach served in ministry as Designated Associate Pastor. He is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Upon the resignation of Rev. Hamilton in 2012, Rev. Doug Beltzner served as interim pastor. He served at the church until 2013. Rev. Tom Ribar then served as interim pastor until 2014 until Rev. Don Coleman was called to begin his ministry at Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church. Rev. Coleman is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary.

In 2014, an elevator was constructed in the Sanctuary building. This was a much needed improvement and has been a blessing to our church family and visitors.



*The brick edifice of the Canonsburg United Presbyterian Church dates from 1870, and we are fortunate that it survived the 1960s and '70s, when it was fashionable to demolish old buildings and replace them with modern structures. The spire has been repaired many times, but it still stands as a distinctive landmark and welcoming beacon on Pike Street.*

## History — Appendix & Bibliography

### Reformed Presbyterian Church at Canonsburg

In addition to these four Presbyterian Churches of Canonsburg, there was a Reformed Presbyterian congregation for a while in the early part of the nineteenth century. Adherents of this branch of Presbyterianism were called Covenanters, . . .

### Chartiers Associate Congregation pledges, 1799

We the subscribers promise to pay unto any authorized collector belonging to the Associate Congregation of Chartiers....

### Pastors of the Presbyterian Churches of Canonsburg, 1775-2000

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