

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

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# Walton Christian Church: A History

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Compiled by  
**Jack Rouse**  
On the Occasion of our 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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The time is 1873, the "great war" has ended and the young men are back home again. There is a quietness over the neighborhood. Horses clip-clop in the dusty roads, children play at the edge of the road and in the smooth worn circles, marbles fly with unerring aim as boys squat to shoot their glass spheres. Girls too, with merry rhymes, skip rope to a cadence decades old. In the distance a hound is heard, seemingly many miles away. Cow and sheep bells tinkle as their carriers contentedly graze in the fields. Birds flutter and sing in the many trees. Oil lamps are trimmed and should the night be chilly, the ashes are removed from the iron stoves and fireplaces. Coal or wood is brought from the outside to more convenient places within the homes.

Friendships appear quite close as neighbors chat over side fences and talk is about the desire of having a "different" church. Surely, there is the Baptist Church down on Church Street that many attend, and some of the Methodist are meeting in halls or homes. The Presbyterian Church near Richwood is having regular services.

The talk is not so much of being unhappy about the existing church assemblies, but rather a vague non-fulfillment of their own common desire of meeting with other people that believe as they do.

The history of the Walton Christian Church dates back to 1873. About that year a small group of Disciples who had located in and around Walton called J. W. Beasley to conduct a revival meeting. The meeting was held in the Baptist Church, then located on Church Street. Another meeting followed in 1876, resulting in the organization of the First Christian Church. Rev. Beasley was called to be its first pastor. For a period of about three years, services were held in the Masonic and I.C.C.F. Hall, and in the school house which stood at that time at the fork of Stephenson Mill Road and Beaver Grade. Sometime during the latter part of this period, the congregation held a church festival and made \$125.00 which was to be used to buy a lot for a building of their own. The first site selected lay between High and Church Streets. Feeling that this site was not the most desirable location, Mr. Adam Senours contributed an additional \$80.00 to purchase a site on High Street. Mr. Stephen Waite, Mr. Warren Lermond, and Mr. James Sanders led in a movement to erect a permanent structure for this group. Mr. Waite, along with other members of the church, razed and moved the old Antioch Christian Church building that stood on Banklick Creek near Banklick Station to this site. The timbers of the old building along with some material donated by the L & N Railroad and others were used in constructing the church that was erected and dedicated in 1879.

Among the charter members were: Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Waite, Mr. and Mrs. George Ransler, Mrs. Fred Schafer, Mr. H. C. Dahling, the Senours, Mrs. Hiram Fry and daughters Emma and Mary, Mrs. Lucy Durr, Mrs. J. C. Cross, Mrs. Fannie Stevens and others. Some of the early leaders in addition to the charter members were: Mr. Will Ransler, Mrs. Luella Watson, Mr. Robert Cleek and family, Mrs. Barbara Gibbs, Mrs. Nan Vest, Mr. and Mrs. Ira Percival, Mr. and Mrs. George Lipp, Robert Foster and Flem Jones, Mr. James Saunders and Mr. Warren Lermond. The church from its beginnings enjoyed a normal growth.

During the first years, such men as R. B. Neal, R. T. Matthews, W. W. Ridgeway, Rev. Stanley, Rev. Perkins, James Lawson, J. W. Rogers along with Rev. Beasley, held successful revivals. H. W. Elliott, George Peale, Rev. Vawter, L. A. Kohler, Walter M. White, Russell Briney, Richard Wallace, R. E. Moss and others as noted, served the congregation as pastors in days gone by.

With the turning of the century, more rapid progress was made. In May, 1905, a movement was initiated to "have preaching two Sundays in the month instead of one." No record is available of the month or year this object was realized. But in 1911, the individual communion service was introduced, a gift from Mrs. Art Stamler.

In 1916, Rev. E. C. Lacy was called to be the first full time pastor of the church. Under his leadership, the present church site was selected and a church, which later burned, was erected. This first church was dedicated on May 5, 1918 by Rev. C. W. Cauble of Indianapolis and cost approximately \$20,000.00. A large portion of this amount was raised on the day of dedication. Following this event, Milo Atkinson, then of Memphis, led the church in a two week revival. In 1937, the basement was completed and all indebtedness wiped out. Ministers who served the church during this period were: E. C. Lacy, J. D. Waters (19-20), A. C. Brooks (20-21), G. W. Nutter (22-25), E. C. Boose (26-27), Rev. Erenfight (28), Sam Allen (29-30), C. A. Weesner (31-32), Jack Ervin (33-39), Thomas Alderson (40-42), George Caroland (42-44) and Fred Nichols (44-48).

On Thanksgiving Day 1947, the church burned leaving only the red brick walls and stone foundation. Plans were immediately laid for the construction of the present building under the leadership of Rev. Fred Nichols, and the present building was constructed at an approximate cost of \$75,000.00. The church in which we now worship was dedicated August 14, 1949.

Ministers filling the pulpit since 1949 are: C. A. Gravely (49-50), Charles Vaughn (51-55), George Fisk (55-58), William Moore (58-65), Jack Russell (65-71) and our present pastor, Ira Richard Harris, who has been our pastor for slightly over a year.

The first "gathering of information" for a church history was compiled by Jack Ervin in 1938 and contains a few names of the earliest members of the church. The oldest map of Walton which lists the property owners and their land holdings was published in 1883, a scant 10 years after the beginning of our church. I have examined this map to find out what I could about the early people mentioned as having lived in and around Walton. What small bit of information I found on the map I will make known to you.

Mr. Stephen Waite lived in the last house on the right as you leave south of town near what is now the white concrete bridge.

Warren Lermond lived on High Street at the corner of the first street on the left, as one goes east on High Street.

Adam Senours lived in a log house between Beaver Road and Chambers Road behind what is now Dr. Gaines E. Huey's house. Mr. Senours farm was later owned by Walter Sleet who lived there 40 years. He and his wife are buried nearby and their stones are inscribed: Adam Senours - born November 2, 1802 - died January 10, 1883. Martha P. - born August 16, 1807 - died April 16, 1902.

George Hansler lived on Main Street near where the Benton Bonar Department Store is now. He also owned a house on High Street across the street from Warren Lermond.

H. C. Dahling is listed as being a boot and shoe maker and he too lived on High Street near Warren Lermond.

Hiram Fry had lots on Main Street near where the Bell Bar Restaurant is now.

Robert Clegg lived in or near where John Gault has his home and antique shop.

Ira Percival was a farmer and owned 173 acres near Percival and Green Road in Kenton County.

James Sanders was a farmer and he lived off Jones Road in Kenton County.

I couldn't find the remaining names on the map as it only shows land owners and then as now, all people did not own their own property.

Unfortunately, in the fire that consumed the church in 1947, the church records were burned and any information that the books contained was lost forever. We have, through memory and "bits and pieces" of letters, photographs, etc., gathered a few incidental stories which are interesting and should be related to a church history.

In the 1880's, the present church site was owned by John Arnold, a prominent land owner, who lived in a large house on this site. There were no other houses south of this site until McBee's house, where Mrs. Harris Moore lives. Al Arnold lived where the parsonage is now and the vacant lot on the curve north of the church was occupied by a large house owned by Dr. R. A. Edwards. According to Miss Libbie Ingram, Mrs. Graham Roberts and Mrs. Murphy occupied a house where the present church now stands.

When I talked to Miss Lib, she stated that she was the organist of the High Street Church and that Mr. Lermond and Mr. Saunders started the Ladies Aid Society of which she was the oldest member. She also stated that the first parsonage was in the Gross house and that the Aid Society purchased the first parsonage. Rev. E. C. Lacy lived in the parsonage and "paid a little rent" in order to finance it. She said that the Aid Society "kept up" the present parsonage until Brother Vaughn was here, then it was taken over by the Church.

The architecture of the church that burned was quite stately. It was constructed of red brick with arched top stained glass windows. The steps and entrance to the sanctuary were through large round columns. The interior woodwork was stained very dark and had folding wooden doors on each side to close off that portion to be used as Sunday School rooms. It had a balcony which was entered at the side near the rear of the church.

There is a small flat inscribed stone in the north outside basement wall which has been the subject of much speculation. The stone is carved "Eugene Watson, 1917". Upon investigation, it was learned that he was the colored contractor who laid the magnificent natural rock foundation for the church in 1917. It is a fitting tribute to his skill that his labors have lasted through one church building, a severe fire and have furnished the

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foundation for our present church. According to one who helped stain, varnish and paint the old church, this rock mason was known throughout the state and was highly sought after at the time as he was an outstanding rock mason.

When the church burned, the ashes had not long cooled before plans and discussions were being made for a new building. While church services were being held in the James Theatre and the Walton School Gym, various committees were being organized. With the ideas nearing completion, George P. Nicholson and sons Kyle and Raymond, were selected to build the church and at the dedication August 14, 1949, with much rejoicing and thanksgiving, pledges were given to the church that indicated our love of God and his church.

Through the love of God and the sacrifice of two families, two people have been sent into full time church service from our church. Mrs. Virginia Moore Liggett, an overseas missionary, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Moore, and Raymond Watson, a minister, son of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Watson.

It has always been the custom of any history to mention the oldest member, still living, of the church. By being faithful to the faith for over 93 years, Mrs. Pearl Fink has that honor today. She joined this church when only a child and it is fitting to say that her great grand-daughters attend this church today being the fifth generation to do so.

The white front columns on the old church were salvaged and sold to the owner of the Bruce Cox farm south of Walton. This owner did not use them and the church bought back the columns and re-sold them to the owner of the recently re-modeled house on the Walton-Nicholson Road near Banklick Station Road where they are in place today.

When Charles Vaughn was pastor of our church in the early 1950's, there was held under the leadership of our church a large, protracted, old-fashioned tent revival for all denominations. This was held upon the Walton School grounds with Gladys and J. B. Smith as song leaders. Nationally known speakers led in the spiritual preaching and many souls were led to a closeness with God during these revival times.

In 1956, additional property was purchased just north of the present church until now the church owns sufficient area for any foreseeable plans for future expansion.

The last property was purchased with an anonymous donation that truly makes one marvel at the generosity of the donor. Surely God moves in mysterious ways his will to make known. Praise God for this unknown person.

The first organ in the new church was a gift of the Pervical family, and in the early 1970's an organ and piano were given to our church anonymously. We are truly blessed to have such generous people.

Many gifts and bequests through wills and trusts have been received by our church. It is only hoped that we will use them as the Lord would have us to do. Pray to God in Thanksgiving and Praise.

As any history is a growing, learning process, the history of this church is no different. I learned only yesterday of a photograph of the High Street Church showing many people gathered at the front of the church. It was also stated as explanation that the church building, upon being not used for church functions, was sold and several houses were built with the lumber upon this property formerly used by the church.

It is regrettable that one can not possess a time machine where we could tune in and be at any time desired---but such is not possible. I am sure that for each name and incident mentioned in this small history, at least a thousand are omitted. I apologize for the lack of historical fact and if I have omitted items which are notable and important I most humbly beg for forgiveness to those both living and dead.

I can assure those that are interested that I owe what small success I am to the influence of the devout Christian people I have known in this church. Truly, I am in debt to this church---to its Sunday School teachers, its music, its pastors and to its lay people. To those who reach down and touch me when I make mistakes and with tender compassion seek to lead by example, rather than harsh words. Each of us move through life touching and being touched by those most close to us. It is my hope that someone, someday may be touched by me and helped over some spiritual weakness, as I have been touched by the close associations of the people in this church.