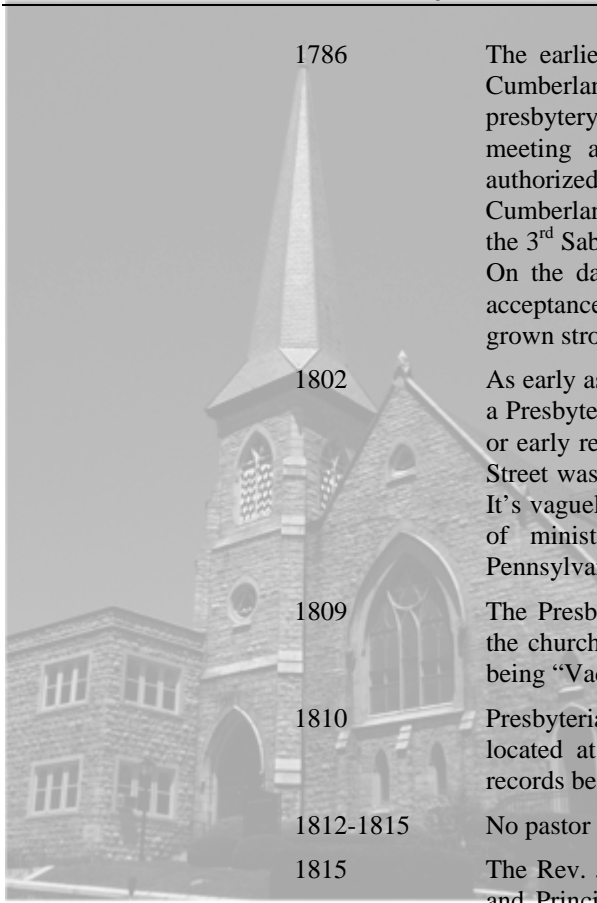


Church History Notes: The First Presbyterian Church



1786

The earliest known reference to the Presbyterian worshipping community in Cumberland appears in the *Minutes of Donegal Presbytery*, the antecedent presbytery to Carlisle Presbytery and Baltimore Presbytery. At a multi-day meeting at Lower West Conococheague on April 13, 1786, the Presbytery authorized the Rev. David Bard as the supply preacher for a service at Fort Cumberland. In a long listing of approved supplies, this line appears: “Mr. Bard the 3rd Sab of Septbr at Franks Town, the 2nd Sab of Augt, at Fort Cumberland.” On the day before, April 12, the minutes also read, “Mr. Bard declares his acceptance of the Call from Bedford.” [i.e., the church at Bedford PA which had grown strong enough to call a pastor.]

1802

As early as this date, the Maryland Legislature provided for the incorporation of a Presbyterian Church in Cumberland. Either no action was taken by the group, or early records were lost along with many others when the Church on Liberty Street was used as a hospital by the Federal Government during the Civil War. It’s vaguely known that earlier church meetings were held under the leadership of ministers and colporteurs (booksellers) from Carlisle Presbytery in Pennsylvania and from Winchester Presbytery in Virginia.

1809

The Presbytery of Carlisle’s annual report to the General Assembly describes the churches at “Great Cove, Williamsport, Cumberland, and Sideling Hill” as being “Vacant, unable to support a pastor.”

1810

Presbyterians worshipped in a log church owned by the Lutheran congregation, located at the corner of Baltimore and Centre Streets. At this time, formal records begin to appear. The stated supply preacher was the Rev. Samuel Porter.

1812-1815

No pastor due to the War of 1812. Mr. Porter had left to serve in the war.

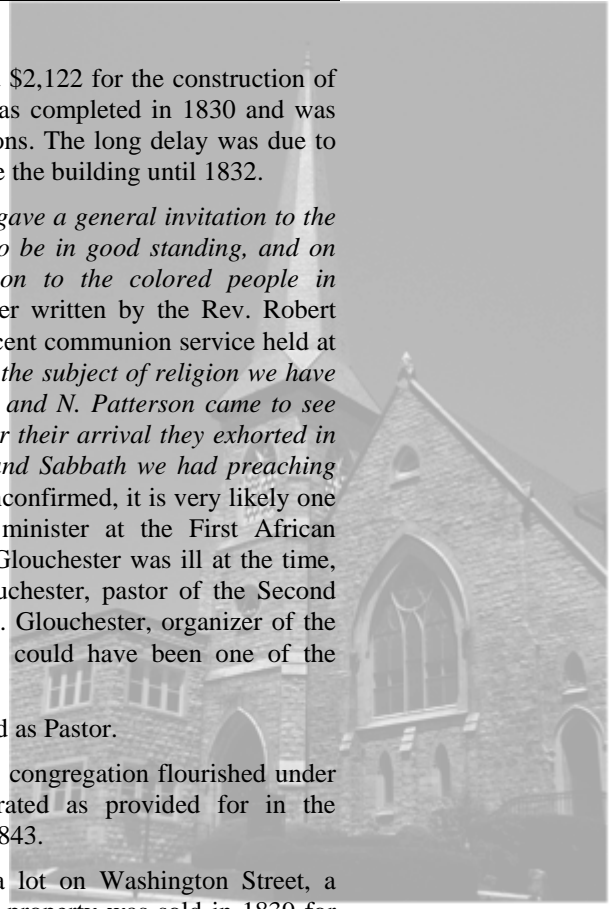
1815

The Rev. John Hayes, former president of the Carlisle College came as pastor and Principal of the Allegany Academy. He had hoped the mountain climate would benefit his poor health, but he died after only a year. The Church and the Academy were closely associated for many decades.

1816

In May 1816, the Rev. Robert Kennedy succeeded Hayes in both offices. He continued as pastor until 1825. We are fortunate to know quite a bit about Mr. Kennedy’s family and ministerial career, thanks to a biographical sketch appearing in the *Presbytery of Carlisle’s Centennial History*.

- 1817 The Presbyterians and Episcopalians contributed \$2,122 for the construction of a jointly owned edifice in the Fort lot which was completed in 1830 and was used as a place of worship for both denominations. The long delay was due to legal problems. Presbyterians did not begin to use the building until 1832.
- 1820 *“Complying with the wishes of the Brethren we gave a general invitation to the members of other societies who were known to be in good standing, and on Mr. Gloucester’s account, a special invitation to the colored people in communion with the Methodists.”* (From a letter written by the Rev. Robert Kennedy dated October 5, 1820, describing a recent communion service held at First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland.) *“On the subject of religion we have lately been roused. Your friends J. Gloucester and N. Patterson came to see Miss Whitehead. On Friday evening shortly after their arrival they exhorted in society. Saturday night one of them preached and Sabbath we had preaching three times.”* The identity of J. Gloucester is unconfirmed, it is very likely one of the two sons of Rev. John Gloucester, minister at the First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA. Rev. Gloucester was ill at the time, but either of his two sons, Rev. Jeremiah Gloucester, pastor of the Second African Church in Philadelphia, PA or James A. Gloucester, organizer of the Siloam Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, NY, could have been one of the visiting pastors described in the letter.
- 1832 Carlisle Presbytery sent the Rev. Moses Raymond as Pastor.
- 1834 The Rev. S. H. McDonald is sent as pastor. The congregation flourished under him, and in 1837, the congregation incorporated as provided for in the legislation of 1802. McDonald was pastor until 1843.
- 1836 Mr. Richard Beall bequeathed to the church a lot on Washington Street, a portion of which is the present church site. The property was sold in 1839 for \$400. In 1870, they would buy a portion of it back for \$5,000 as part of a larger lot to build the present building.
- 1837 Congregation incorporates as “The Trustees of the Presbyterian Congregation of Allegany County,” Articles of Incorporation recorded December 15, 1837.
- 1839 Approximate time of construction of the stone retaining wall along Cumberland Street, behind present church lot.
- 1840 Presbyterians moved to a new brick church located on Liberty Street, downtown. The building is gone now, but a historical marker affixed to the existing building indicates the spot. (You can see the steeple in the centerfold



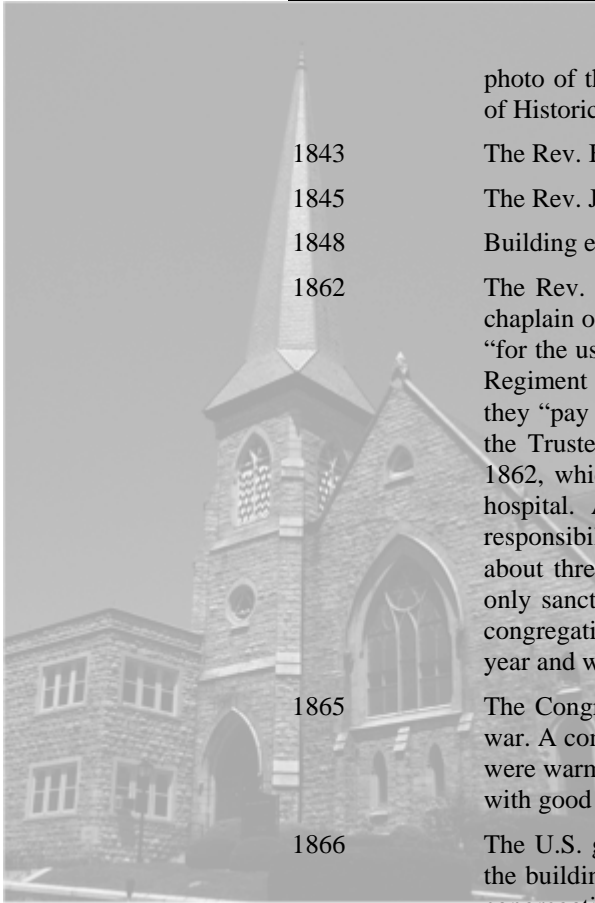
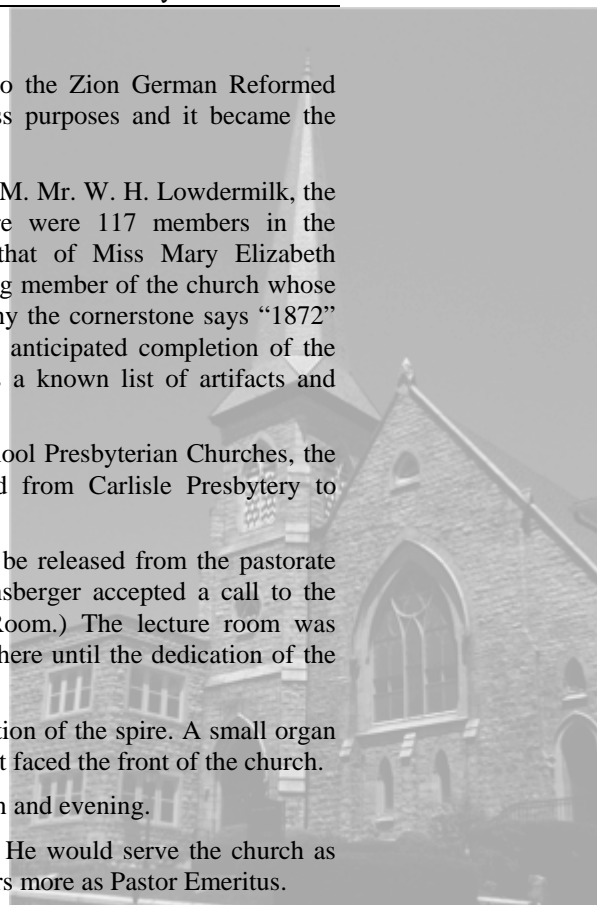
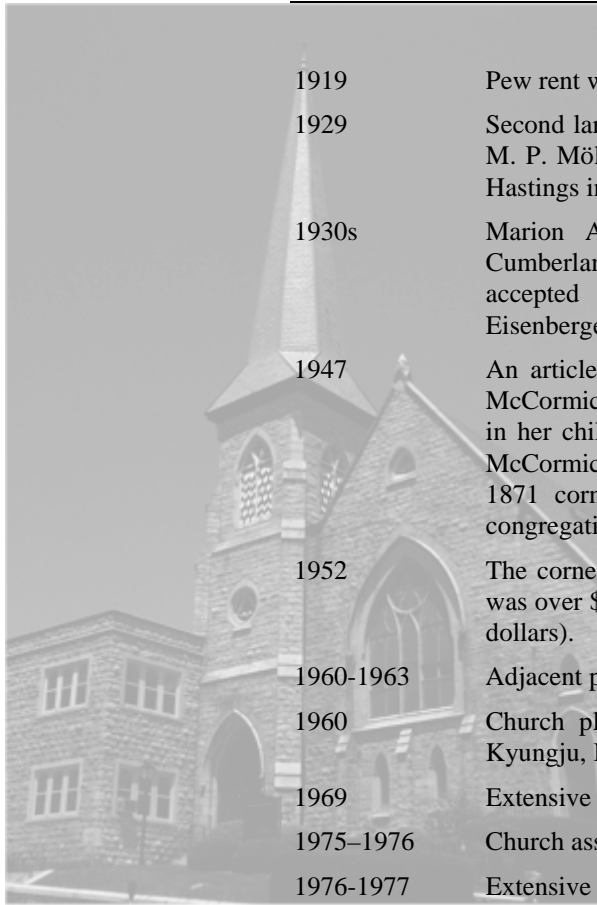


photo of the brochure "Looking Through a Window of Time: A Walking Tour of Historic Cumberland, Maryland." It is the second steeple from the right.)

- 1843 The Rev. B. Wall was pastor.
- 1845 The Rev. John H. Symmes was installed as pastor.
- 1848 Building enlarged and schoolroom added.
- 1862 The Rev. Symmes left the church to serve as chaplain in the Union Army. A chaplain of the 126th Regiment requested permission from the Board of Trustees "for the use of the church for the purpose of holding church services" while the Regiment was stationed here. The Trustees granted the request provided that they "pay the expenses attending the same." This proved unwise. Shortly after, the Trustees received an order later described as "terse," dated 11 December 1862, which directed them to deliver the church to be used as a Union Army hospital. After an attempt to confer with the Commanding Officer about responsibility for damages to the building, the Trustees did not meet again for about three years. The next minutes appear 23 September 1865. This was the only sanctuary in Cumberland taken entirely away from its congregation. The congregation rented space from the Bedford Street Baptist Church for \$50 per year and worshipped there.
- 1865 The Congregation had been scattered and badly impacted by the events of the war. A committee from Carlisle Presbytery was sent to try to reorganize it. They were warmly welcomed by the remnant of the congregation and their efforts met with good success.
- 1866 The U.S. government vacated the building by January. The Trustees inspected the building and asked for \$2,999.10 in damages. They settled for \$2,000. The congregation continued to hold services in the basement of the Baptist Church while they raised the additional money needed for renovation, but talk of a new building was already in the air.
- 1866 The Rev. James I. Fitzgerald was installed as pastor in March.
- 1867 Services in the Liberty Street church were resumed after complete renovation.
- 1870 The congregation purchased the present church site on Washington Street for \$5,000.

- 1871 In May, the Liberty Street building was sold to the Zion German Reformed Congregation. In time, they sold it for business purposes and it became the Liberty Theatre until destroyed by fire.
- July 4, 1871 The cornerstone was laid by Ohr Lodge AF & AM. Mr. W. H. Lowdermilk, the historian, was a member of the group. There were 117 members in the congregation. The last name on the list is that of Miss Mary Elizabeth McCormick who, in 1950, was the only surviving member of the church whose name was in the cornerstone. No one is sure why the cornerstone says "1872" when it was in fact laid in 1871. Perhaps they anticipated completion of the building in that year. The cornerstone contains a known list of artifacts and papers to mark the occasion.
- 1871 As part of the Reunion of the Old and New School Presbyterian Churches, the churches in Allegany County were transferred from Carlisle Presbytery to Baltimore Presbytery.
- 1873 On April 1, 1873, the Rev. Fitzgerald asked to be released from the pastorate here. On July 14, 1873, the Rev. E. B. Raffensberger accepted a call to the pulpit. (See his photograph in the Heritage Room.) The lecture room was completed, downstairs, and services were held there until the dedication of the new sanctuary.
- 1875 The stone edifice was completed with the exception of the spire. A small organ was in the balcony, positioned so that the organist faced the front of the church.
- June 6, 1875 Dedication services were held morning, afternoon and evening.
- 1877 The Rev James Erskine Moffatt became pastor. He would serve the church as pastor for a remarkable fifty years; then, two years more as Pastor Emeritus.
- March 1891 First large pipe organ installed, by organ builders Hook and Hastings. To accommodate the taller pipes, the central circular window had to be covered, "much to the dissatisfaction of a number of members of the Church." A portion of the circular window is preserved in the Heritage Room.
- 1892 Spire and bell added to tower by Jacob Humbird.^{1†}
- 1894 The house at 222 Washington Street was constructed by the Church as a manse. Twelve women of the church made a quilt as a house-warming gift. This quilt has been handed down to the present day from pastor to pastor with instructions to pass it to the next pastor.





- 1919 Pew rent was abolished.
- 1929 Second large pipe organ installed. Three manual organ with walnut console by M. P. Möller, Inc of Hagerstown for \$9,600 and trade-in of the old Hook and Hastings instrument. (This amount is equivalent to \$99,200 in 2001 Dollars)
- 1930s Marion Anderson, famous African-American singer, gave a concert in Cumberland. After being refused overnight accommodations at the hotels, she accepted the invitation of First Presbyterian's pastor, the Rev and Mrs. Eisenberger, to stay with them.
- 1947 An article in *the Cumberland News*, 31 March 1947, shows Mary Elizabeth McCormick admiring an old communion set which had been used by the church in her childhood. She recalled taking her first communion from the set. Miss McCormick's name is on the list of 117 members of the church contained in the 1871 cornerstone. The flagon of that communion set is still used by the congregation in 2003.
- 1952 The cornerstone for the church education building was laid. Construction cost was over \$125,000. The Bowie Memorial Chapel was added. (\$833,490 in 2001 dollars).
- 1960-1963 Adjacent property purchased for parking.
- 1960 Church pledges \$40,000 to build the Cumberland Presbyterian Hospital in Kyungju, Korea (\$238,784 in 2001 dollars).
- 1969 Extensive remodeling and redecorating were done to the church.
- 1975-1976 Church assists with three-floor addition to Cumberland Presbyterian Hospital
- 1976-1977 Extensive remodeling to main level of Christian Education Building.
- 1984 Heritage Room remodeled.
- 1995 Addition of elevator, and remodeling of narthex and side entrance with addition of fully accessible restrooms.
- 1996 Beginning of the NAILS mission project to assist needy homeowners.
- 1997 Lighting of the Steeples with many other Cumberland churches.
- 2000 After extensive study, a successful campaign to renovate and restore the failing 1929 Moller Pipe Organ results in pledges and gifts of \$230,000. Work began January 2001 and was completed later that year. The rededication concert by the eminent organist John Walker was October 14, 2001.

The edifice was built of white Narrows sandstone with trimmings of grey mountain stone from this vicinity. The style of the church is semi-gothic.

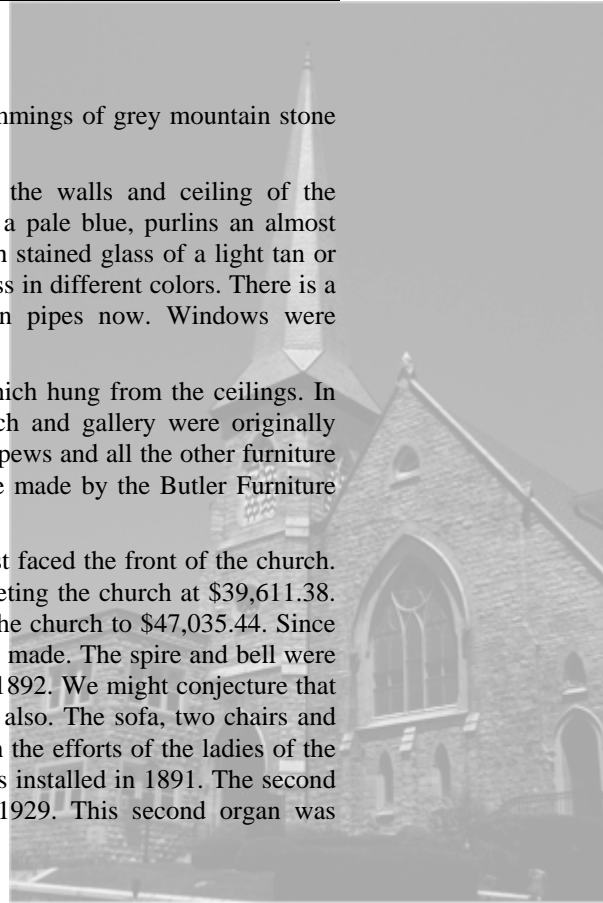
As originally decorated by a Washington, D.C. firm, the walls and ceiling of the sanctuary were kalomined, the walls a delicate lavender, ceiling a pale blue, purlins an almost imperceptible straw color. The original windows were glazed with stained glass of a light tan or chocolate color with delicate tracery, bordered by dark stained glass in different colors. There is a round window at the front of the church, concealed by organ pipes now. Windows were manufactured by a Baltimore firm.

The church was originally lighted by two large "sun burners" which hung from the ceilings. In addition, there were 13 two-light gas brackets. The entire church and gallery were originally carpeted with a dark red carpet with a small figure. The wainscot, pews and all the other furniture are of black walnut. Pew ends and all of the other furniture were made by the Butler Furniture Factory of Cumberland.

The gallery in 1875 contained an organ, so placed that the organist faced the front of the church. A Cumberland newspaper of June 7, 1875 lists the cost of completing the church at \$39,611.38. Preliminary work on the foundation, etc., raised the total cost of the church to \$47,035.44. Since that time, the spire, bell, pipe organ and other additions have been made. The spire and bell were both the gift of Jacob Humbird, a member of the congregation in 1892. We might conjecture that the Brazilian mahogany for the front doors was provided by him also. The sofa, two chairs and two tables for the pulpit were furnished for \$210. Largely through the efforts of the ladies of the congregation the first pipe organ, built by Hook and Hastings, was installed in 1891. The second pipe organ was installed by the M. P. Möller corporation in 1929. This second organ was extensively restored in 2001.

Prior to 1894 there was no manse.

Most of the windows are memorials for former members, some of whom were church officers. Josiah Gordon was a trustee. A memorial plaque for William Wallace McKaig is at the rear of the church (to one side). Mr. McKaig was also a trustee. Both were members of the building committee for the church on Washington Street.



† "Jacob Humbird first settled in Cumberland in 1838. His brother, John Humbird, was a four-term mayor in Cumberland in the [19th] century. The John Humbird High School is named after him. Jacob Humbird had a world-wide reputation as one of the foremost engineers of his day, with projects throughout the U.S. and other countries, particularly Brazil. His local operations included work on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. His

construction of the Emperor Dom Pedro Secundo Railroad in Brazil from the capital, Rio de Janeiro, to points in the interior of Brazil, is considered his greatest engineering achievement. It was the first railroad of any length (44 miles) constructed in Brazil and was completed in seven years beginning in 1859. The completion of a tunnel through the Sera de Mar Mountain was considered in that day to be the greatest work of its kind in the world. The Emperor and Empress of Brazil visited him in Cumberland to express their appreciation for his work in the later years of the [19th] century.” (*Excerpt from the obituary of Mrs. Fannabelle Offutt Doub, great-granddaughter of Jacob Humbird, Cumberland Times-News, November 12, 1994.*)

The window in the church sanctuary dedicated to Mr. Humbird shows the three magi of Matthew’s gospel presenting the gifts of their study, learning, and insight into the natural world, to the Savior. The work of this artist bears apt and eloquent testimony to the Christian faith of an engineer, scientist and builder. May each of us be inspired to bring our own gifts and lives to the Lord!

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS:

