

THE HISTORY OF EUREKA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

"In 1832, Eureka was 'the forest primeval' called Walnut Grove ... a body of timber some two miles wide, lying for some eight miles along Walnut Creek. Clustering at the skirts of timber on both sides were rude farmhouses with the broad prairies back of them. In the unbroken forests were innumerable squirrels, birds, flocks of wild turkeys, herds of deer, numerous raccoons, some lynxes and wild cats, and now and then an itinerant panther."
(B. J. Radford)

THE CHURCH AT WALNUT GROVE (EUREKA) ~ 1832



The Walnut Grove Church was founded in 1832, the same year the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was established. The Walnut Grove Church was organized in April, 1832, in the cabin home of John Oatman, a short distance northeast of the present Maple Lawn Homes. There were twenty charter members. Oatman and Richard B. McCorkle were chosen as elders. The congregation met again on the second Saturday of August, and Daniel Travis and Joshua Woosley were elected deacons. At that time, there were 65 names on the church roll. The congregation had services occasionally either in barns or in the shade of the great trees that grew in the forest. It was not feasible to meet every Sunday because the membership included families from a large area extending from Holland's Grove (now Washington) to

Panther Creek (about 8 miles east of Eureka).

In 1836, the congregation was reorganized. William Davenport, Ben Major, and Elijah Dickinson were elected elders. Davenport did most of the preaching. Oatman moved from the area in 1836. Some of the original members of the congregation became leaders in new congregations near Panther Creek and Holland's Grove. In 1837, the membership of Walnut Grove Church of Christ had increased to 165.

After the first meeting house was built in 1846, the congregation held worship every week. In good weather, the people gathered on Sunday mornings in the churchyard and visited until "Uncle 'Lijah" called them to worship by striking up a hymn. No musical instruments were used. There was always a communion service conducted by

MINISTERS & PREACHERS: 1832-1846

John Oatman (1832-1835) came to Walnut Grove from Ohio in 1830. The Walnut Grove Christian Church was organized in his home a half mile northeast of the original railway station, and he was the first elder and minister. The family moved away from Walnut Grove a few years later.

Richard B. McCorkle (1832-1835) was also an Elder of the Walnut Grove Christian Church and shared the pulpit with John Oatman.

William Davenport (1835-1858) was a lawyer who originally came with his family to Walnut Grove (renamed Eureka in 1855) from Christian County, Kentucky in 1835. Here he settled on a farm, but his life's work became preaching the gospel. In early life,

he united with the Baptist Church; but according to Benjamin J. Radford, Jr., "Davenport, having heard the preaching of Alexander Campbell, was captivated by the simplicity and scripturalness of his teaching and became a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He enthusiastically entered into the ministry and was one of the ablest and most active pioneer preachers of the Christian Church." His name is mentioned dozens of times in the Millennial Harbinger between 1857 and 1860 as aiding and founding churches and strengthening congregations throughout the northern half of Illinois. He was also one of the charter members of the Board of Trustees of Eureka College at its organization in 1855.

THE FIRST MEETING HOUSE ~ 1846



The first meeting house was built in 1846 on land that is now the site of the Soldiers' Monument in Olio Cemetery. The building had two doors facing to the west. Just inside the doors and between them was a boxed-in walnut pulpit. The building was 30 by 50 feet with a 12-foot ceiling. The floor sloped downward toward the pulpit. All of the wood in the structure and furniture was from trees felled in the nearby forest. Brick used in the foundation and chimney was made on the banks of Walnut Creek. The mortar was made with sand from the creek and lime from nearby hills. The meeting house was used for worship and community meetings, such as band concerts, for 18 years. It was also in the late 1840s that both Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, founders of the

Christian Church, came and preached in the community.

One of the outstanding pioneers and preachers of Walnut Grove was William Davenport. He was a lawyer, farmer, and the main preacher of this new church for 23 years; and he holds the second-longest tenure in this position. He was an imposing personality, well proportioned, and weighed over 250 pounds. He came here from Kentucky in 1835. He was a born orator, full of wit and humor. From the first, no public meeting, whether religious or secular, could be entirely satisfactory unless "Uncle Billy" had something to say.

A burial ground was established by the church in 1848 on land just south of the meeting house. It was owned by Ben Major. "Uncle Ben," a pioneer farmer, doctor, part-time preacher, community benefactor, and college promoter, died in 1852 of cholera at the age of 56. This epidemic took numerous lives in the community. This land was later transferred to Olio township, which has operated the cemetery since 1906. The original meeting house was sold and moved to become part of a commercial building.

MINISTERS & PREACHERS: 1846-1864

William Davenport (1835-1858), known by many as Uncle Billy, arrived in Walnut Grove in 1835 and was one of the pioneer preachers of the area. He was also a lawyer but engaged here in farming. He was closely associated with the Walnut Grove Academy, which later became Eureka College. He owned land, which later became the sites of Davenport Grade School and Eureka High School, and possibly the 1864 Christian Church. He died in 1869 at age 72.

John T. Jones (1853-1855) came to Walnut Grove from Pennsylvania in 1847 at age 52. That same year he established a school for girls, which closed a few months later due to a measles epidemic. In 1849, he was the first President of the Trustees of Walnut Grove Academy. He was later a founder and trustee of Eureka College and is said to have been on the committee which picked the name Eureka. His home was on the land south of Davenport School that is now the playground.

Otis Asa Burgess (1855-1858) was from Thompson, Connecticut. He was instrumental in obtaining the charter for Eureka College and was a professor at the college for one year.

Charles Louis Loos (1858) was born in France and came to the United States at age 11. At age 14, he was confirmed in the Lutheran Church; but a year later he became a member of the Christian Church. He was President of Eureka College for one year.

Albert G. Ewing (1859-1860) was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. He graduated as a Greek scholar from Cumberland College at age 16. He married Alexander Campbell's eldest daughter. While living in Eureka, he was President of the Board of Trustees of Eureka College.

James Robeson (1860) sold his slaves in Kentucky in 1835 and moved to central Illinois. After living a short time at Walnut Grove, he moved to a farm about four miles southeast of town. There he founded the town of Bowling Green where he owned a store and operated a hotel. He served in the state legislature in 1841. He delivered a sermon in 1888, the year he died, at the age of 91.

James M. Allen (1861, 1877-1878, 1881) was born in Kentucky, attended Transylvania University and Bacon College, and then studied and practiced medicine. In 1856, he entered the ministry. He was ordained at Eureka and was a professor and President of Eureka College.

Richard H. Johnson (1862) was born in Washington, Illinois, and was a student and professor at Eureka College.

Barton W. Johnson (1859-1867) was born in Tazewell County and was a professor and President of Eureka College.

THE OLD BRICK CHURCH ~ 1864



John Darst, a prominent member of the church, platted the original town. On December 29, 1855, 32 years after the first settler came to the area, the name was officially changed from Walnut Grove to Eureka. Soon after the renaming, the railroad was constructed to Eureka, and the center of community activity shifted from the college to the present downtown area. This shift influenced the leaders to recommend moving the church to a new location.

The members of the church voted to move to a site just south of the original town (the original town being the courthouse square) and about one mile north of its current site. Most of the land now owned was purchased in 1863 for \$350. The move took place during the Civil War in which many men of the church volunteered their services.

Some men came back; others were brought back in their blankets and laid to rest in the church yard; still others found their last resting place in the bloody fields where their lives ended. A new two-story brick building was constructed on this site in 1864. It had only one room, 44 by 77 feet.

During the 1870s and 1880s, some notable revival meetings were held in Eureka, which increased membership greatly. Additional land adjacent to this brick church was bought for \$200 in 1888 in preparation for anticipated growth.

MINISTERS & PREACHERS: 1864-1902

Barton W. Johnson (1859-1867) was born in Tazewell County and was a professor and President of Eureka College.

William C. Poynter (1864-1866) was, he said, deeply influenced by the preaching of William Davenport. He memorized most of the New Testament and could readily quote from it. When he lost his arm in an accident, he turned from farming to preaching.

Harvey W. Everest (1864-1866, 1871-1872, and 1879-1881) attended Hiram College and Bethany College and graduated from Oberlin College. He was President of Eureka College and was a prolific writer of Christian literature.

John Lindsey (1865-1866) was born in Tazewell County, the son of a pioneer evangelist. He graduated from Bethany College and was an assistant to Alexander Campbell. He taught at Walnut Grove Academy.

Amos Sutton Hayden (1868-1871) was from Youngstown, Ohio, and was baptized by Walter Scott at age 15. He was the author of the first compilation of Disciple Church music as well as a pastor and scholar.

Benjamin J. Radford, Jr. (1871-1874, 1877-1885) was born in Walnut Grove. He worked on the family farm and in 1859 taught school at Mt. Zion. He attended Eureka College, but like many students at that time left school to fight in the Civil War. After three years, he was discharged from the service. In 1865, he entered the ministry. He graduated from Eureka College in 1866, farmed in 1867, and purchased the Woodford Journal in 1869. He later became President of Eureka College and then Drake University.

Jesse H. Berry (1875) taught at Eureka College.

Asa Minor Weston (1876) was raised on a farm in Cleveland, Ohio. He went to Oberlin College and graduated from Antioch College in 1857. He entered the army in 1862. He came to Eureka College in 1870 as a professor for three years and was President for three more years.

James M. Allen (1861, 1877-1878, 1881) was born in Kentucky, attended Transylvania University and Bacon College, and then studied and practiced medicine. In 1856, he entered the ministry and was ordained at Eureka. He was a professor and President of Eureka College.

B.J. Pinkerton (1882) taught at Eureka College.

J.B. McCorkle (1882-1884) organized a Roanoke church in 1872 with 20 members.

John Garland Waggoner (1886-1894, 1895-1898) graduated from Eureka College in 1872 and later became the first full-time minister. During his first term, there were 1,035 new members.

W. H. Cannon (1894-1895) grew up on a farm. He was educated at Eureka College and Drake University. He was also a minister at Illiopolis, Lincoln, and Lexington, Illinois.

Nathaniel S. Haynes (1898-1902) was born in Washington, Kentucky, and came to Walnut Grove in 1852 where his father became a farmer. He went to school in Eureka and entered Eureka College, but when the Civil War began, he joined the army. He participated in many skirmishes until 1863 when he contracted typhoid fever. After his recovery, he enlisted again in the spring of 1864 and served until the end of the war. He then returned home, graduated in 1867, and became an ordained minister.

THE 1902 CHURCH BUILDING



The inadequacy of the old brick church was recognized in May 1892 when a committee was appointed to consider the possibility of a new church house. In 1899, the congregation accepted plans for a new red brick structure. It was dedicated on October 26, 1902 (cornerstone laid in 1901). It had seating capacity of more than 500 with semi-circular rows facing the pulpit and a balcony. The floor sloped in the style of a theater. The pulpit was a raised platform with the communion table on the floor in front of the pulpit. Behind the pulpit was the baptistry and above it were the choir loft and the pipe organ. There was a pastor's study on the northwest corner and a choir room on the southwest corner. On the lower level, there was a large room used for dinners, for prayer meetings, and for Sunday school. Curtains were used to

divide it into areas for classes. West of this room were the kitchen, a meeting room for small groups, and the furnace room. The cost of the building was about \$18,000. At the time of dedication, there was a debt of \$4,500, which was subscribed to by those persons attending the service.

Individual communion cups were first used after the congregation began to worship in the new building. The change took place after discussion and a congregational vote, 183 for individual cups and 73 opposed. There was also an action by the Board requiring that the Lord's Supper always be observed just before the sermon.

The congregation faced an emergency when fire destroyed the building on March 7, 1932. Plans had been made for the celebration of the congregation's 100th anniversary. This celebration was modified to include an emphasis on planning and fund raising for a new structure. Even though there was a depression, members made commitments of money and many people in the community, including skilled workers, volunteered their

MINISTERS & PREACHERS: 1902-1932

Alva W. Taylor (1902-1909) was the librarian at Eureka College. He also was President of the Chautauqua Corporation that was established in 1907. The Chautauqua was an 11 day program attended by people from far and wide, and Taylor was instrumental in coordinating this event. Some of the noted speakers were "Billy" Sunday, Adlai Stevenson, William Jennings Bryan, and Carrie Nation. The Chautauqua included band concerts, baseball games, lecturers, magicians, musical performances, and movies; but the key events took place in the Mission Tabernacle. It was constructed in 1884 on the south campus of Eureka College and had a seating capacity of 1,200. It was used extensively for many church and college events until it burned to the ground on the morning of July 12, 1923. The last Chautauquas were held in a tent from 1923-1930.

David H. Shields (1909-1913) was minister when the first pipe organ was added to the church in 1910. During his ministry, the street in front of the church became the first paved street in Eureka. Now called Main Street, it was formerly called College Street. There was no more street paving until 1924.

Verle W. Blair (1914-1919) was minister during WWI, a time in which many members of the church and community were killed. In 1917, he commissioned Emory and Myrta Ross and Dr. Ernest & Evelyn Pearson as missionaries to the Congo.

James M. Philpott (1919-1922) came to Eureka from Union Avenue Church in St. Louis, Missouri. While he was here, the Mt. Zion church was dissolved and forty members united with the Eureka church. (In 1934, the funds remaining in the Mt. Zion church were used to help pay for the painted glass window in the north wall of the current sanctuary.)

George E. Moore (1922-1923) was an interim minister while serving as a Professor of Religion at Eureka College.

Thomas Cleaver (1923-1925) was minister during a time when there were 26 lodges or social clubs in Eureka, some of which met in the church.

Fred W. Helfer (1926-1931) was minister when the high school was torn down in order that a new one could be constructed in 1927. The church was used to house some school classes during that time.

Ben Cleaver (1931-1935) came to Eureka from Dixon, Illinois. When the 1902 church burned down on March 7, 1932, he called the church Board together and suggested that they make plans to hold services in the college chapel until a new church could be built. They met there for three years.



THE EUREKA CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) ~ 1932

After the church burned down in 1932, the congregation met at Eureka College until the new church was finished in 1935. The building committee chose an English Gothic architectural style. The plan had a chancel with a divided choir setting, an elevated pulpit, and a lectern. This plan was quite different from most Christian churches in Illinois at that time. The placement of the baptistry in the chapel was also a departure from the Disciples of Christ tradition of having the baptisms in the sanctuary.

Walnut wood was chosen for the interior. It was cut from trees given by members of the congregation and sent to the American Seating Co. of Grand Rapids, Michigan, for curing and finishing. The wood above the communion table was carved by Alois Lang of Oberammergau, Germany. The use of a few black bricks in the interior walls was an innovation suggested by the architect. These bricks had turned black in the kilns; such bricks had always been discarded as useless. Bohemian painted glass, set in lead, was used for most of the windows and door panels.

The contract for the sanctuary was let in 1934. It was dedicated, free of debt, on May 26, 1935. The cost was \$42,283. In the meantime, the congregation had voted to proceed with construction of an addition, which included a parish hall, kitchen, offices, and Sunday school rooms. This unit was planned for both church use and meetings of community service groups. It was dedicated May 3, 1936. The total cost of both units was \$80,960. The debt retirement on the parish hall was celebrated in 1942.

At the main entrance to the church, on the left of the vestibule leading into the narthex, is a corner stone with the date 1864, the year when the first brick church was constructed on this site. On the right is the corner stone from the second church, which was built on this site in 1901. The dates on it are 1832 to 1901. The bricks around it are from the building that burned on March 7, 1932.

There are two cabinets in the narthex with mementos. In one is a lamp used on the pulpit of the 1846 meeting house. In the other are keys to the 1864 old brick church and several hymn books used by the congregation.

By 1961, Sunday school enrollment had grown so much that there was no room for children in some classes. It was recommended that an educational building be built. A campaign raised \$75,000 to fund the educational building and the enlargement of the Aeolian Skinner pipe organ. This project was completed and dedicated on May 2, 1965, at a cost of \$160,000. The debt was retired on October 29, 1978.

The church has had over 45 ministers and preachers. Of all these dedicated persons, Marvin Cheney, who was the minister for 26 years, holds the longest tenure in this position. His life was devoted to God, his church family, and to all people who needed him.

MINISTERS & PREACHERS: 1932-2009

Ben Cleaver (1931-1935) presided over the laying of the cornerstone of the new church on October 10, 1934. On May 26, 1935, he led the dedication of the new sanctuary and chapel and preached a sermon entitled "In the House of Our God."

Raymond McClain (1935-1936) left the ministry of Eureka Christian Church to become the President of Eureka College from 1936 to 1939.

Donald M. Salmon (1936-1949) came from Buffalo, New York, with degrees from Bethany College and Yale Divinity School. He was in Eureka during WWII and helped many families deal with their losses. He championed ecumenical relationships among Eureka churches and brought the first refugee family to Eureka. His wife, Betsy, was the organist during his time here. He left Eureka and went to Seattle, Washington. From 1959-1967, he was an Executive Secretary of the Commission on Evangelism in Indianapolis.

Hilton Windley (1949-1965) earned degrees from Transylvania University and Lexington Theological Seminary. He came to Eureka from churches in Covington and Earlinger, Kentucky. While in Eureka, he orchestrated the construction of the parsonage and the educational building of the church. He retired to a family farm in Lexington, Kentucky.

Glenn Riddell (1966-1969) graduated from American University and Yale Divinity School. He came to Eureka after serving in churches in Arizona, California, and Iowa. After his ministry at the Eureka Church, he was Chaplain at Eureka College. He later accepted several interim ministries. He continued to participate actively in the Eureka Church, living and later retiring in Eureka.

Marvin Cheney (1970-1996) earned degrees from Drake University and Union Theological Seminary. He earned a doctorate from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. He did clinical training at BroMenn Regional Medical Center in Normal and was founder of Heartline and Hearthouse in Eureka. He was president of the College of Ministers for the Disciples of Christ and was a Witness for Peace in Nicaragua. On a sabbatical to Japan in 1991, he taught the New Testament at Tokyo International College.

Robert & Diane Steffer (1997-1998) were interim ministers at the Eureka Church. They came to Eureka from Canada, where Robert had served as Regional Minister of Canada and Diane had had a congregation in Toronto.

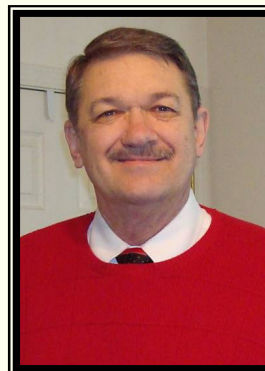
Bruce Naylor (1998-2001) came from the Springfield, Illinois, church. He had served as executive director of the church federation of Indianapolis, Indiana. Before serving as a minister in the Christian Church, he was a Methodist minister. He worked closely with the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Church Assemblies.

Ross & Maris Walters (2001-2002) were interim ministers at the Eureka Church. They came from Indiana, where Ross had been an interim minister in Marion and Maris had worked with the hospice program in New Castle.

Richard P. Richards (2003-2008) came to Eureka from Franklin, Tennessee, where he was Vice President for Human Services and Program Development at Advocat-Diversicare, Inc., a nationally known long-term care company. Prior to that, he was Senior Minister of Suburban Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, for 16 years. Dick has degrees from Hiram College and Duke University.



Carolyn Roper-Fowlkes (2007-present) came to Eureka from Carmel, Indiana, to serve as our Associate Minister.



Fred Dorisse (2008– present) came to Eureka from Jacksonville, Illinois, to serve as our intentional interim Senior Minister.