



A BRIEF HISTORY

BY JIM KILSON

Every church has a story; a story of commitment to God's mission and of a steadfast endurance on that journey. This is a brief telling of the story of **Lane Christian Church**.

OUR HERITAGE

Restoration (*res-tuh-rey-shuh*) (n) "Bringing back to, or putting back into, a former position or condition."

The "Restoration Movement," from which our church draws its heritage, is a uniquely American faith movement. In the late 18th century, multiple preachers from various denominational bodies (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian) became disenchanted with the legalism and rampant sectarianism that prevailed in the groups to which they belonged. These men came to see these denominations as man-made institutions that were not authorized by Scripture and thus called for the restoration of the church of the New Testament.

This Restoration began in the 1790's with **James O'Kelly** and **Rice Haggard**, Irish immigrant ministers who severed their ties with the Methodist Episcopal Church, preferring to wear the simple name "Christian." Baptist ministers **Abner Jones** and **Elias Smith** followed suit, separating from their respective Baptist Associations in 1801, likewise taking on the name "Christian" and establishing the Christian



Old Cane Ridge Meeting House

Connexion. Elsewhere other "Restoration" minded ministers were making similar moves, the most well known being **Barton Stone**, and the father and son team of **Thomas** and **Alexander Campbell**. Stone, a Presbyterian minister broke with his denomination and gathered together a group of followers at Cane Ridge, KY, who took the name "Christian." They insisted on local church autonomy and pledged fidelity to the cause of Christian unity. The Campbells, who were also Presbyterian ministers, broke ties with their denomination, later fellowshiping with several different Baptist associations before ultimately breaking ties with denominational groups altogether.

Campbell's group came to be known as the "Disciples of Christ." Barton Stone's group identified themselves as the "Christian Church." With their commitment to the "Restoration" of the Church of the Bible, these separate movements united in 1831, with nothing more than a simple handshake.

It was New Year's Day, 1832, in Lexington, Kentucky: on that occasion a preacher named **"Raccoon" John Smith** delivered a message on Christian Unity in which he encouraged those present with the following admonition:



The "Handshake" Agreement

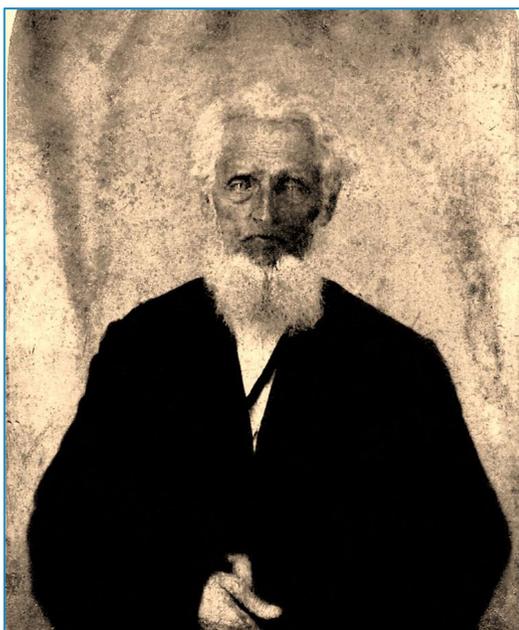
The group opposed to these innovations separated from the movement and identified themselves as the "Church of Christ." This separation was formalized with the 1906 census. The remaining churches continued to identify themselves as the "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)."

"Let us, then my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us come to the Bible, and to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the light we need."

As a united movement, the Restoration Movement took the nation by storm, quickly becoming the fastest growing religious body in the nation. The propagation of the Gospel through this group happened at an exponential rate. Though vast in its influence, the movement wasn't without its trials or its divisions. In fact, the unity that the founders built the movement on would barely last a generation.

The first major upheaval came in the late 19th century, when a split occurred over the use of musical instruments in worship and the formation of missionary societies.

Unfortunately, this initial division wouldn't be the last for the Restoration Movement. Early in the 20th century, a number of the more prominent Disciples congregations began to embrace the tenants of rationalism and negative Biblical criticism. This was a theological movement that had begun in Germany in the previous century, and eventually made its way to America. This shift to the theological left contained a rejection of key tenants of the faith, including the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth and the historicity of the resurrection. The divide between liberal and conservative congregations continued to grow unabated. This division ultimately led to the establishment of a formal denomination in 1968. This group is known as the "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)."



"Raccoon" John Smith

The more conservative minded churches that declined to join the newly established denomination became known as the "Christian Church/Churches of Christ," a brotherhood of churches committed to maintaining the New Testament model of congregational autonomy. This brotherhood is often described as being "*the balance between two extremes*," rejecting both the legalism of the Churches of Christ and the liberalism of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is with this group that Lane Christian Church identifies.

Approximately 5,500 congregations in the United States today identify as part of the fellowship of independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Despite diversity in many areas, the churches have much in common: (1) a common understanding of Scripture, (2) a common heritage, and (3) a common goal: to restore the Biblical pattern so that Christians united can connect the world to the God Who made them.

Those 5,500 congregations have a total membership of more than 1.5 million adherents. They support more than 40 colleges and seminaries, with more than 10,000 students. They also support hundreds of para-church ministries, including church camps, church planting associations, children's homes, campus ministries, publishing houses, and benevolence agencies. They also participate in regional and national conventions, and avail themselves of other opportunities for cooperation in ministry.

OUR HISTORY

The Restoration Movement roots of Lane Christian Church are nearly as old and deep as the movement itself. In the early 19th century, DeWitt County, while still on the American frontier, was beginning to be settled. With its settlement came the Gospel, which in the words of **W.E. Garrison**, “followed the frontier.” DeWitt County's first Restoration Movement church was the “Old Union” Church, founded in 1833, by **Hughes Bowles**, who was himself a product of the great “Cain Ridge Revival.” It is from the Old Union Church (*Hallsville Christian Church*) that all other DeWitt County Christian Churches draw their lineage.



W. P. “Wattie” Bowles

In 1850, the Restoration message made its way to Lane. In March of that year, **W.P. “Wattie” Bowles**, the son of Hughes Bowles, and **Dr. J.A. Zimmerman** established the congregation that is today Lane Christian Church. W.P. was a minister of great prominence in the region and was a close personal friend of **Abraham Lincoln**, who was once quoted as saying to Bowles, “Wattie, if I could preach like you, I would rather do that than be President.”

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Abraham Lincoln

”

In the early years, the church had no building of its own, meeting in the homes of its members or in the local schoolhouse. In 1884, the congregation purchased the building of the Harmony Christian Church (*né Creek Nation*) for the incredible sum of **\$1,000.00**, when the vast majority of its membership relocated to the Western states. The building, located 1 mile west of Birkbeck, was dismantled, moved overland by wagon team and then reassembled at its present location. The building was dedicated on September 21, 1884, with renown Professor and Evangelist **William F. Black** delivering the dedicatory address.

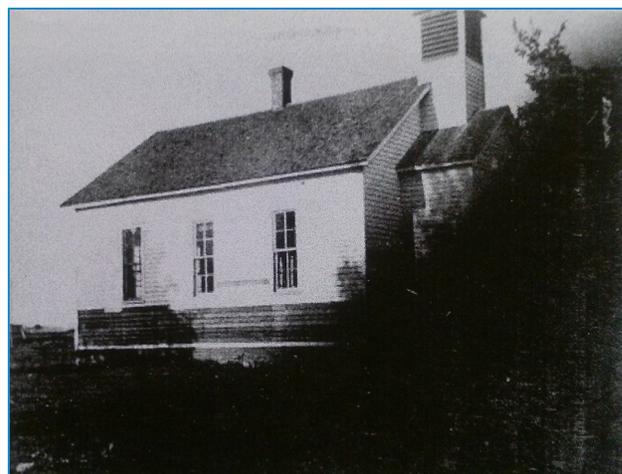
This building served as the congregation's primary meeting place for the next 124 years, undergoing several renovations and additions. During that time, there were periods of growth, as well as times of decline, when only Sunday school was held. In 1964, the church hired its first "full-time" minister and, in 1969, constructed the parsonage. When the DeWitt County Schools consolidated, the church purchased the Lane School property, which was located directly across the road from the church. This expansion provided the church with a gymnasium, kitchen, and additional classrooms.

Approaching the turn of the 21st Century, and having served the community of Lane and the surrounding areas for over 150 years, the church found itself standing at a "crossroads" regarding its future. With dwindling populations, many churches in rural Illinois communities were closing their doors; LCC church didn't want to become just another statistic. Though church attendance was holding steady at 75-120 for many years, the future of the church was far from certain. Moving forward, the church had only two options: either "get busy growing" or "get busy dying," so the Church chose the former - to get busy growing!

By 2005, in order to stabilize attendance and provide room for future growth and ministry opportunities, the decision was made to build a new building directly across the street from its present location. The building would include a sanctuary with seating for 300 as well as additional office and classroom space. This building would also incorporate the old Lane School building. In 2009, the church moved into this new facility. The original church building has since been converted into a Youth Center for Jr. High and High School students, as well as providing a home for the Backpack Program.

In 2018, the **Illinois State Historical Society** recognized Lane Christian Church as one of its Sesquicentennial Churches. This award is presented to churches that have faithfully served their communities for a minimum of 150 years.

Today Lane Christian Church is nearing 170 years of faithful ministry to Lane and the surrounding communities. We are a growing and vibrant multi-generational congregation. God has richly blessed us in the past, and we can only imagine what He has in store for us in the future!



Original Church Building

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