

Keeping the Faith: A History of the Russellville Presbyterian Church.

Excerpts from an original publication with the same name by Harold Showalter, 2017

Full citations are available in the original publication under Works Cited.

The Russellville Presbyterian Church [RPC] first known as the Eagle Creek congregation when it was founded in 1817 has a rich and deeply spiritual history. This history began with the passionate work of itinerant missionaries who were ministers associated with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, PC (USA). Over the years the congregation matured into a dedicated organization, keeping alive the faith that those missionaries shared with the Russellville area frontiersmen of the early 1800s.

At a Washington [Kentucky] Presbytery meeting at Buckskin on April 2-3, 1817, “a petition from a [sic] people living on Eagle Creek, praying to be known in our minutes by the name of Eagle Creek congregation, and to receive supplies [ministers] was brought in and read and granted” (Galbraith 77).

On August 29, 1829, Eli and Mary Collins of Brown County donated “free and clear of all claims and incumbrances [sic] whatever” to the trustees of the Eagle Creek congregation Lot No. 77 in the town of Russellville (Taxmap Lot 0077). In 1830 the Eagle Creek congregation relocated to Russellville and “we first hear of Rev. Lockhart [Jesse H. Lockhart 1799-1879 Decatur Cemetery] who labored so long and so faithfully with and for the people of the community” (Harman).

At the 1837 General Assembly of the PC (USA), doctrinal differences between delegates were described as Old School or New School and the division led to the Schism of 1837 (Hunt 513).

This action led ministers in southern Ohio to form a new Presbytery named the Ripley Presbytery [New School] (Gilliland: Sermon, Anderson letter). Rev. Lockhart was a member of that Presbytery and in 1847 he joined his cousin, John Rankin of Ripley, in forming the Free Presbyterian Synod to express his support for abolition (Wilson 305).

Locally, the Schism led to the withdrawal of several RPC members who then built an Old-School Presbyterian Church in 1842 where the Church of Christ stands today. The New School Presbyterians at RPC continued to worship in the 1830 building situated on Lot No. 77 in Russellville.

“Rev. James Dunlap was the first and only minister in the [Old School] church. After a short stay, he removed [sic] to a different field of labor, and soon after the organization [church] dissolved” (History 613).

By the time Rev. Lockhart retired forty years later in 1870, he had helped many slave fugitives escape to freedom, relocated the Eagle Creek congregation to Russellville, overseen the building of a meeting house there, renamed the church, led his congregation through a schism, shepherded a flock of over 100 communicants, and, at the end of his career, overseen building a new house of worship for future generations.

Author Ann Hagedorn is a scholar regarding slavery and the abolition movement among Ohio Presbyterian ministers. She notes that from the time that Lockhart first arrived in Ohio, his home and church [in Eagle Creek and Russellville] were always open to those seeking escape from slavery (Hagedorn 82).

After receiving religious training, Kevin Jodrey, a Presbyterian elder, was commissioned as a lay pastor [CLP] in 1993 by the Cincinnati Presbytery of PC (USA). Over the years, he has served several congregations in the Russellville area, in particular at RPC from 2009 to 2014 and 2018 to the present.

In 1999 Rev. William [Bill] Kirby [Dodie] served as a Pulpit Supply at RPC. When the Cincinnati Presbytery PC (USA) required additional seminary credits in order to receive his pastoral credentials, Kirby elected to form a separate, non-denominational congregation. A significant number of RPC members followed him to his new church, Faith in God Fellowship, south of Russellville (Hurt).

For several years, the RPC elders had become increasingly concerned with changes that were taking place within the PC (USA). Therefore, on May 22, 2011, the congregation voted unanimously to withdraw from the PC (USA) (Session 2011: 155, Hurt).

On February 26, 2012, the congregation approved a “Covenant of Gracious Separation” which the Cincinnati Presbytery of PC (USA) confirmed on March 27, 2012 (Session 2012: 185, Hurt). With the release from PC (USA) completed, RPC received full status with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

In 2014 together with Wheat Ridge Presbyterian Church, RPC called the Rev. Dr. Larry Hoop [Debbie] as Stated Supply Pastor. During his tenure [2014-2017], in addition to his customary duties, Rev. Hoop led the congregation in developing visionary statements to facilitate the calling of a full-time pastor.

Historically, the Holy Spirit has been at work at Russellville Presbyterian Church. Truly it has been “His Story” from itinerant missionaries to Kevin Jodrey, from Rev. Jesse Lockhart to Rev. Larry Hoop.

“There have been many people spiritually touched and blessed throughout the years. Even in the bad times, the church has kept faith and prevailed. Because of the dedication and determination, it will continue to thrive and grow in the present and the future” (Brown 136).