

Second Presbyterian

Celebrating 150 Years

Serving Christ in Downtown Chattanooga

1871 - 2021



150th Anniversary of Second Presbyterian Church

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL...*

[The committee for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Second Presbyterian Church decided that a column relating the many facets of the “birth” and growth of Second Church should appear in the church’s newsletter, February through September. Since I am familiar with much of the information in the Roby McGuire Archives Room, I was asked to carry out this task. Some of the information has been familiar, but much has not. I hope that in these articles I can convey what I have found—strength, hope, direction, determination, love for one another, and Godliness, all echoing true purpose for “a future.” NCW]

Reading about Chattanooga of 1871, the year of our founding, I was struck by the sameness of the ‘times’, Chattanooga...1870-‘71 and Chattanooga...2020-‘21! It brought to mind the often quoted works of Charles Dickens:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom,
it was the age of foolishness...it was the season of light,
it was the season of darkness...it was the spring of hope,
it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us....**

(I suspect that the members of these eras would shout a loud *Amen!*)

Today Chattanooga, Tennessee, population—181,000, finds itself in uncontrolled, undesired, unfamiliar, and unanticipated places where lives and livings are compromised if not extinguished entirely. This can be attributed to a world-wide pandemic of Covid-19 and disruption of the political process by malcontents. Bitterness and distrust are wide spread.

Chattanooga, Tennessee of 1870, population—6,093, found itself in uncontrolled, undesired, unfamiliar, and unanticipated places because of four years of bloody hostilities wrought by the Civil War (in the area—4000 dead, 12,000 wounded). Bitterness and distrust followed. The term frequently used for this period, reconstruction, fueled these apprehensions.

How did we, the Second Presbyterian Church, survive and thrive during the journey of 1871 to 2021? Can members look forward to celebrating in 2071 another amazing milestone of a purpose-filled journey? Our history provides us with a pattern for action.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL...CONT.

The larger Presbyterian Church of the 1860's was, as the country, wrestling with conflict resulting in a division—the Presbyterian Church, United States of America, and the Presbyterian Church, United States. The first group became designated as 'Northern' and the latter, 'Southern.' This, perhaps, lends light to the decision of the founding fathers and mothers, immigrants from Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, New York, etc., to designate Second Presbyterian Church as a Northern church. Although accommodating and supportive of Second's efforts to form a church (the first official service was held at First Church), it must have seemed a rejection of the established and successful First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga, Southern.

The founders of Second Church appealed to the Kingston Presbytery for recognition, their justification for existence was: *a view to promoting the glory of God and the good of souls*. A number of these fourteen listed as founders (an additional twenty-four noted as supporters) were termed Carpetbaggers. We must quickly qualify this term. Many did serve in the Union forces that fought and occupied Chattanooga. Unlike the rabble who came to take advantage of the people devastated by war, the founders envisioned the possibilities of the area. As professing Christians, highly educated, exceptionally talented, and persons of vision, they wanted to build a worthwhile and prosperous community.

In ten years the population of Chattanooga had doubled. The first mayor was elected, and Tennessee had been readmitted to the Union, first of the seceded states. Industry grew. In the beginning Second struggled, but the church began to grow as the Sunday school programs flourished.

In 1876, due to the death of their minister, members of the Congregational Church became a part of Second's family. Miss Hattie Ackermann was one of these members. In 1881 Second dedicated its first sanctuary at 8th and Chestnut Streets.

Members of Second Presbyterian Church **2021**, think on these things: Yellow Fever, World War I, Spanish Flu, the Depression, World War II, Atomic & Hydrogen detonations, Korean conflict, JFK's assassination, Vietnam, 9/11—all of these challenges have been faced. Through the Faith of past and living Saints of Second Presbyterian Church—"serving downtown Chattanooga since 1871"—and guided by the Spirit they 'reached-out' and overcame. Can we do less?

*Alexander Pope "An Essay on Man"

**Charles Dickens "A Tale of Two Cities"