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A HISTORY

OF THE

**NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH,**

NEW YORK.

Rev. J. J. BROUNER, Pastor.



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“Thou shalt remember all the way in which the Lord thy God has led thee,” is a command by no means grievous. Our grateful hearts hasten to obey it, delighting to recount the Lord’s mercies from the beginning until now.

The circumstances which gather around the origin of the North Baptist Church are as follows : In the last week in June, 1826, Brethren Seth Smalley, a licentiate, Peter Relyea, of the South Baptist Church, and James H. Townsend of the North Beriah (now the MacDougal St.) Baptist Church, distributed the following circular from house to house in Greenwich Village, as our part of the city was then called :

NEW YORK, June 29, 1826.

“On the first Sabbath morning in July, public service will commence in the school room now occupied by Messrs Flint & Kidder (formerly by Mr. Parker) in Amos St. between Hudson and Herring Streets, and will be continued at the usual hours of public worship every Sabbath morning and evening. As soon as practicable a Sabbath School will be established at the same place.”

(Signed) PETER RELYEA.

One of these circulars is still in existence, and cherished as a precious memento of the day of small things. In response to the above call, a small congregation assembled on Lord’s Day morning, July 2, 1826, and listened to the Word of Life from the lips of Bro. Smalley. It was there and then decided not only to continue to meet regularly for worship, but also to organize a Sunday School on the following Lord’s Day morning. Accordingly a Sunday School was organized, Sunday Morning July 9, 1826, by the choice of Peter Relyea of the South Church, as Superintendent, James H. Townsend of the North Beriah Church,

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as Secretary, and Elizabeth Ackerman of Mulberry St. Church, as Superintendent of the Female Department. With what gratitude and joy must these earnest workers have seen the boys and girls come flocking into the village school house, until eighty scholars were enrolled, and ten teachers were pledged to the blessed work? Rev. Mr. Smalley continued to labor among them for about two months. He was succeeded by the Rev. J. W. Gibbs, who preached for them until the organization of the Church.

So thoroughly convinced were the little pioneer band that God was calling upon them to go forward, and occupy the field that already gave promise of harvest, that they met on the 1st day of January, 1827, and after prayerful deliberation, organized themselves into a regular Baptist Church. Revs. C. G. Somers, Elon Galusha, Johnson Chase, Samuel Eastman, and John W. Gibbs participated in the services of organization and recognition, which were held in the Meeting House of the Dutch Reformed Church on Herring St. now known as Bleecker St. The Church was organized with twelve members—four brethren and eight sisters, four of whom, viz: Elizabeth Gibbs, Elizabeth Vincent, Euphemie Wilson, and James H. Townsend, are still living. The last named brother and sister are yet worshipping and working with us.

At the time of our organization, the now densely populated Ninth Ward, was a suburban settlement known as Greenwich Village, whilst between it and the city proper were open fields and blooming gardens. The population of the city, according to the census of 1825 was a little over one hundred and sixty-six thousand. The new body adopted the name of the North Baptist Church, expressive of the fact that it was the northernmost Church of our faith on Manhattan Island. To-day there are twenty Baptist Churches on the same island that are located north of it. There are but six other Baptist Churches in the city whose organization dates further back than that of the North Church. Mighty men of God, able and eloquent were filling the Baptist pulpits of this city—Rev. Drs. Parkinson, Cone, Maclay, Somers, and Perkins were in the full tide of usefulness and power.

On January 9, 1827, Rev. J. W. Gibbs was unanimously called to the pastorate—receiving the Sabbath collection as salary. Evidently the young pastor had little occasion to pray for deliv-

erance from the deceitfulness of riches. The congregation soon increased—the little school room became to strait for them, so that in the month of May 1827, the growing Church removed to the Greenwich Village Watch House corner of Hudson and Christopher Streets. The first Sabbath in the new quarters was a day of joy in Zion. Elder Gibbs resigned April 3, 1828, having served the Church for sixteen months. Six persons were received during his pastorate, two of whom were received by baptism.

During the months of April, May and June, in 1828, Elder Jacob H. Brouner the former pastor of the Baptist Church in Sing Sing, N. Y., supplied the pulpit with such acceptance, that on July 3, 1828, he was invited to the pastorate. Having accepted the call, he entered at once on his duties. The divine approval was soon manifested in the enlarged attendance and in the increased seriousness of the hearers. The infant church was now about to pass through the tears and joys, the labors and blessings of its first revival. The Spirit of the Lord came down in power. Conviction of sin was deep and pungent. Conversions were clear, satisfactory and frequent. The first eighteen months of Elder Brouner's pastorate witnessed the large increase of the Church. Ninety-three new members were added, fifty-three of whom were received by baptism. The Watch House was crowded—to arise and build was a necessity. Although no active steps were taken in this direction until during Elder Brouner's pastorate, yet it is an interesting fact that as early as February 1827—one month after organization, when but one brother had united with the Church, it was "resolved that subscription papers be drawn up for the purpose of collecting money to buy ground to build a meeting house on." They evidently meant to live—Brethren Faintheart and Littlefaith had evidently not yet united with the Church.

The present site, corner of Christopher and Bedford Streets, was chosen, and purchased for \$3,500. The struggles that preceded the erection of the house of worship were many. The pastor collected the greater part of the needed money, and labored with his own hands on the new building. The members gave liberally, and some who were unable to contribute money, gave days of hard, but loving labor. At length the foundations were laid, and the walls were raised, but before the roof could be put on, the funds gave out, and it seemed as if the work must cease. The unroofed walls were braced, and for months the

passers by were reminded of the Scripture saying—"This man began to build, but was not able to finish." At length more money was raised, and the building was enclosed. The eager flock entered their house of worship before the walls were plastered. Temporary seats made of rough pine slabs were provided. The house was dedicated to the worship of God Nov. 14, 1830, Rev. Dr. Cone preaching in the morning, and Rev. Dr. Maclay in the afternoon. On the following Lord's Day there was preaching by Elders Dunbar and Somers.

The increase of the Church rendered necessary the choice of additional deacons—accordingly on Feb. 2, 1831, Brethren E. H. Lacey, Edward Clover, and James H. Townsend were ordained as deacons. Deacon Townsend is still serving the Church, and proving the wisdom of their early choice.

In June 1832 a day of fasting and prayer was observed in view of the approach of the Asiatic Cholera, by which the city was afterward devastated. The deaths from this cause during that plague-stricken summer were numbered by thousands, yet only two of the members of the North Church fell victims to the disease.

Bro. Samuel Duxbury a licentiate was ordained to the ministry July 25, 1832, and Bro. David Sampson was ordained Oct. 6, 1834. In Aug. 1835, Bro. John Hatt, father of Revs. William, George, and Josiah Hatt, was licensed to preach. In March 1834, Brethren Samuel W. Kirby, Samuel Vincent, and John B. Acker were ordained as Deacons. Deacon Kirby is still serving the Church, though greatly afflicted in the loss of his hearing.

The revival which had continued with but little interruption from the beginning of Elder Brouner's labors was followed by a season of declension. In the fall of 1837, the pastor's hands began to hang feebly down, and his hopes of further usefulness on the field to fail. The meetings were poorly attended, and the spirit of coldness and indifference prevailed. The pastor tendered his resignation Oct. 11, 1837, but the members, nearly all of whom were his spiritual children, declined to accept his resignation. They at once attributed their inactivity, and want of prosperity, to their own unfaithfulness in prayer, and this failure to co-operate with the pastor. They began to examine their hearts and to humble themselves before God. They began the year 1838 with a Week of Prayer. The meetings were continued until April. Fifty happy converts strengthened the Church, and

gladdened the heart of the discouraged pastor. The resignation was withdrawn, the pastor's salary increased, and a season of general prosperity followed.

On the 2d day of January 1839, Bro. John Remsen was ordained to the diaconate. In 1841 and 1842 the Church was again visited with a gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In March 1843, Bro. William Hatt was licensed to preach. In the month of August, Deacon Samuel Vincent was suddenly deprived of his reason, and continued in this afflicted state until he was removed by death. The vacancy in the diaconate was filled in April, 1847, by the election of Bro. Henry P. See, who still discharges the duties of his office.

Elder Brouner continued in the pastorate until Sept. 1848, when he was suddenly called to his reward, dying, as he had often expressed the wish he might die, with the harness on. The closing scene of his long continued ministry was remarkable. On the second Lord's day in Sept. 1848, he entered the pulpit with uncommon vivacity, and passing through the opening exercises with apparent ease announced his text James 4, 3: "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts." He was happily proceeding with his introductory remarks, when suddenly his eyes became dim, his voice faltering, and his general appearance strange and confused. The deacons immediately entered the pulpit to assist him; but in vain—the Master had called him. Stricken with apoplexy, he fell like a sentinel at his post, like a watchman on the wall of Zion. The last words that fell from his lips on earth were uttered in the pulpit. He lingered without apparent suffering until Tuesday morning, Sept. 12th, when he sweetly fell asleep in Jesus. His funeral sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. C. G. Somers, his lifelong friend and associate. Devout men carried him to his burial, and a second funeral sermon was preached by Rev. Charles J. Hopkins, in the Baptist Church at Sing Sing, N. Y., where he had so pleasantly passed the first fourteen years of his ministry. During his pastorate of twenty years and five months, 578 were added to the Church, of whom 334 were received by baptism. His name is held in lasting remembrance by those who sat under his faithful ministry. The writer of this sketch was but nine years of age at the time of his father's death, and though he has a distinct remembrance of him as a kind, loving father, he is of course unable to

speak of the distinguishing characteristics of Elder Brouner as a preacher and pastor. The following brief extracts from a biographical sketch written by his successor, Rev. A. C. Wheat, are therefore presented. "Rev. Jacob H. Brouner was born in the City of New York, Jan. 1, 1791. In his eleventh year his mind was seriously impressed with religious truth. His conviction of sin was deep and pungent, and at the time of his conversion his heart was filled with unspeakable joy. In his fifteenth year he went before the First Baptist Church in this city to relate his experience. Being small of stature, he was requested to stand on one of the settees that he might be better seen and heard. He was baptized by Rev. Dr. Parkinson. From the very first his heart burned with a desire to tell others the story of a Saviour's love. He soon began a course of study to fit him for the gospel ministry, and pursued his studies under the direction of Rev. Dr. Stanford. He was licensed to preach by the First Church of this city. He had but two pastorates, one of fourteen years in Sing Sing—the other of over twenty years with the North Church. As a preacher he was distinguished for solemnity, faithfulness, great sympathy and spirituality. He was a man of one book, and that book the Bible. As a pastor few men were more faithful. In sickness he was a sympathizing friend; in trial he was patient; in counselling the delinquent, he was forbearing and affectionate; in the discharge of duty he was courageous, fearless and prompt." From my own recollection aided by the fond descriptions of those who knew him best and loved him most:

" I would express him simple, grave, sincere  
 In doctrine uncorrupt, in language plain  
 And plain in manner, decent, solemn, chaste  
 And natural in gesture; much impressed  
 Himself, as conscious of his awful charge  
 And anxious, mainly that the flock he feeds,  
 May feel it too. Affectionate in look  
 And tender in address, as well became  
 A messenger of grace to guilty man."

We certainly shall be forgiven for having lingered so lovingly and so long over the history of early struggles, over the record of a father's earnest, loving and sanctified ministry. Filial love would not let us do otherwise, for who shall keep green a father's

memory or decorate a father's grave, if not his son and successor in the same blessed work?

The workman dies but the work goes on. The bereaved Church betakes herself to prayer, and asks another shepherd from the Lord. The prayer is heard, and in November 1848, Rev. A. C. Wheat entered upon the duties of the pastorate office. Revival blessings crowned the united labors of pastor and people. A debt of two thousand dollars which had long burdened the Church was paid. On Lord's Day, Oct. 5, 1851, Bro. James Richards was set apart as deacon, and though enfeebled by age is still serving the Church. Elder Wheat's pastorate was pleasant and peaceful—103 were added to the Church, of whom 54 were by baptism. During his ministry a change was made in the Sabbath service, namely that of having two sermons a day, instead of three, as had been the practice from the beginning. Elder Wheat resigned in 1852.

Rev. Aaron Jackson was the next pastor. He began his labors in February, 1853. During his pastorate which continued but one year and five months, a baptistery was built. From the day of organization until this time, the Church had repaired to the Hudson River to administrate baptism, first at the foot of Bank St, then to the White Fort at the foot of Gansevoort, and later to the foot of 30th St. The candidates were conveyed thither in Kipp & Brown's stages. Then, as now, most of the baptisms occurred in the winter, when the ice had to be cut, and the converts rode home in their wet robes, with icicles on their garments, warm fires of love in their hearts, and songs of praise on their lips. It was a matter of necessity and of regret as well that this primitive and impressive custom of repairing to the riverside had to be abandoned. Five were received by baptism, and ten by letter, during Elder Jackson's brief ministry. His faithful, earnest presentation of Gospel truth is still lovingly remembered by the older members. He resigned in June 1854. He has since ceased from his labors on earth, and has gone to receive the faithful servants reward.

In Nov. 1855, Rev. John Q. Adams was called to the pastorate. Rev. Dr. Armitage preaching the installation sermon Jan. 10, 1856. The young pastor was greeted at the very threshold of his ministry with the tokens of the divine favor. The congregation increased rapidly and the gathering cloud of God's mercy broke



in showers of blessing. During the years of 1856 and 1857—preceding the great revival of '57 and '58 the North Church enjoyed a season of gracious refreshing. Every month witnessed the baptism of willing converts. The Church lived and rejoiced and brought forth fruit in the summer glow of the divine presence. In 1858, the memorable year of Revival, Pastor Adams baptized 106 converts, the largest number ever baptized in any one year of the Church's history. His pastorate is signalized and honored by the number of young men, who converted under his preaching have entered the ministry. Among whom are Albert G. Lawson, pastor of the Greenwood Baptist Church, Brooklyn, Crammond Kennedy, widely known as the Boy Preacher, Frank Fletcher pastor of First Baptist Church, Patterson, N. J., and the present pastor of the North Church. There were 248 additions to the Church—181 of them by baptism. The pastorate that began in the sunshine of revival ended in the unhappy storm of difference and division. Bro. Adams resigned May 30, 1859, and twelve brothers and seventy sisters during the next three months asked and received letters of dismissal, and joined with Bro. Adams in forming the Antioch Church. When the Antioch Church disbanded a few years since, quite a number of these same brethren and sisters came home to live and labor in the old Church from whence they went out.

And now the Church weakened by the withdrawal of so many members, turns in prayer to Him who had so often heard her cries, and helped her in the hour of need. In July 1859, Rev. Frank Remington was called to the pastorate of the enfeebled Church. He, too, gathered fruit unto eternal life, and many of the members rejoiced to call him their spiritual father. He labored faithfully and well, and that too amid discouragements of no ordinary character. He came with the cherished hope and avowed purpose of removing the Church to a better location, but failing to bring the Church into line on the question of building a new house of worship, he resigned from the pastorate in Sept. 1860. During his brief stay of little over a year, 38 united with the Church, 23 of whom were baptized by him.

The next pastor was Rev. Howard Osgood, who began his labors in 1860, just as the dark clouds of war were gathering over the nation. He was a Southerner by birth and education, and yet no pastor in the city stood more firmly for the Union cause.

Intensely loyal, his pulpit utterances in the dark days of our country's peril were of no uncertain sound. He took an unusual interest in the Sunday School, and spent time and money freely in promoting its welfare. The faithful preaching of Christ was followed by abundant blessing. He was aided in his work by the earnest labors of Bro. William Sheridan, who acted as Church Missionary. In March 1861, the present pastor was licensed to preach, and on May 22, 1862, Bro. Joseph P. Brouner, eldest son of Father Brouner was chosen to serve the Church as Deacon. Bro. Joseph P. Brouner has led the service of song in the sanctuary for nearly 40 years, singing the same gospel so long proclaimed by his father, and now preached by his youngest brother. Bro. Osgood continued to serve as pastor until Oct. 1865, when failing health compelled him to resign from a field where he was endeared to so many hearts, and where God had so greatly owned and blessed his labors. One hundred and forty-one persons were added to the Church during his ministry, eighty-six of whom he was privileged to bury with Christ in baptism. Rev. J. J. Brouner was ordained to the ministry Nov. 17, 1864, in order to settle as pastor of the Mariners Harbor Baptist Church, Staten Island, Rev. Dr. Weston preaching the ordination sermon.

The next leader of the Lord's host appears in Rev. A. Cleghorn, who assumed pastoral care in December, 1865. His was the difficult task of adjusting the relations between the Church and Sunday School, of bringing into harmony interests that ought never to have been separated. He found a strong Sunday School organization claiming to be independent and separate from the Church. To overthrow this independence, and to make the Sunday School work a part of the Church work, subject to the control of the Church and to the supervision of its pastor, was the work to which he gave himself with all the force and fearlessness of his strong character. The relations were adjusted; the School became not an appendage but an integral part of the Church work. The present harmony between the Church and the School is owing in a large measure to Bro. Cleghorn's fearless facing of a long existing evil. The subsoil plough of a much needed discipline prepared the ground for future harvests. Though Bro. Cleghorn came to the throne in troublesome times, though his brief pastorate was by no means peaceful, subsequent events have proved that it was a profitable one to the Church. Bro. Cleg-

horn was a good preacher with rare power to instruct. He remained with the Church until Oct. 1868. Eighty-three persons united with the Church under his ministry, of whom 43 were received by baptism.

In December 1868, the Church called Rev. J. J. Brouner, the present incumbent, to its pastorate. He began his labors on the first Lord's Day in February, 1869, coming to stand in the pulpit where nearly 19 years before his father had lain down the cross to wear the crown, consenting with hesitancy to fill the rather hazardous and dubious vocation of a prophet in his own country and among the friends of his early youth, coming not as a stranger, but as the son of a former beloved pastor, and as one whose manner of living from his youth up was known to them all. Ten and a half pleasant and peaceful years have quickly passed since then. The outpourings of the Holy Spirit have been frequent, and souls won to Christ have been the gratifying seals of the union. The Church has grown in liberality, influence, and numbers, until to-day our membership is larger than ever before in our history, 563 members being enrolled with us. A mortgage of \$5,000, under whose heavy yoke the Church had groaned for over 40 years, has been paid. An organ has been put in, and our house of worship has been repaired and decorated at an expense of over \$2,500. Nearly \$65,000 have been raised for Church expenses, and over \$11,000 contributed for various benevolent purposes. About \$8,000 have been raised toward building a much needed new house of worship. The present pastor has given the hand of fellowship to 538 brethren and sisters, 283 of whom he has been permitted to lead down into the baptismal waters. From the day of organization until now, 1751 members have been added to the Church, of whom 1007 have been received by baptism.

The Church in all its history has been noted for its adherence to sound doctrine, and for its firm but kind advocacy of distinguishing Baptist principles, speaking the truth in love. The articles of faith adopted on the day of organization have neither received nor yet needed any alteration. She has held to the doctrine of three equal persons in the Godhead; personal, unconditional and eternal election; original sin; particular redemption; free justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's operation; efficacious grace

in regeneration; the infallible perseverance of the saints, the immersion of believers only, the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, and the eternal punishment of the finally impenitent.

The Sunday School celebrated the 50th Anniversary of its organization on the 2nd Lord's Day in July, 1876. Services appropriate to the occasion were held, and at a reunion of former teachers and scholars, Deacon James H. Townsend, one of the founders of the School was presented with a silver tea service in token of loving appreciation of 50 years faithful and untiring service in the cause of Christ.

The Church also celebrated the Semi-Centennial of its organization on the 1st Lord's Day in January, 1877. The pastor preached the historical sermon from the 16th and 17th verses of the 90th Psalm. The first pastor of the Church, Rev. J. W. Gibbs, was present and administered the Communion to a large company of former and present members. He has recently entered into rest. A delightful reunion Conference was held in the evening, Elder Gibbs presiding, and Rev. Dr. Dowling assisting in the opening services. Loving letters of congratulation were received and read from Pastors Wheat, Adams, Remington, Osgood and Cleghorn. Pleasant reminiscences of the past were given by Rev. J. W. Gibbs, Rev. Dr. Dowling, Deacons Townsend, See, Kirby, and Brouner, and by brethren John T. Richards, B. C. Wandell, Ransom Parker, Sears Baldwin, and William Church.

And now our task is almost done. It might have fallen into abler, but surely not into more loving hands. The history of fifty and three such eventful years can only be partially written, the full record is on high. God with us, is the only solution of the problem of our long continued existence as a Church. Through changes and trials, through winters of declension, and summers of revival, through dark days of trouble, and bright sunny days of peace, through the fightings of faith against unbelief, and of hope against fear, through narrow straits of financial embarrassment and gloomy paths of spiritual difficulty, through the strangely mingled discipline of adversity and prosperity "the Lord our God has been with us—He has established the work of our hands upon us—Not unto us O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory for thy mercy and for thy truths sake."