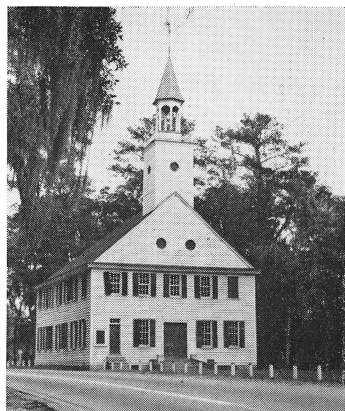


NEWS LETTER

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MIDWAY CHURCH,
LIBERTY COUNTY, GEORGIA

THE MIDWAY SETTLEMENT

In the year 1792 a Colonial Meeting House, burned by the British in 1778, was replaced by a new church edifice. It is the historic Midway Church, located in Liberty County midway between Savannah and Darien in the State of Georgia. This Church has become known as the "Shrine of Congregationalism in the South" since the Midway Colony was the first of two New England groups planted in the South who came as representatives of the Congregational denomination.

On this 175th Anniversary of the erection of the present Midway Church it is appropriate to review some of its striking history. The background of the church may be traced to Puritan ancestors who, in a Congregational Church meeting in Plymouth, England, in 1630, decided to come to America.

They took the long and hazardous voyage in the chartered ship "Mary and John" and, one hundred and forty in number, arrived in Massachusetts, March 30, 1630. The settlement they established was named Dorchester, now the southern part of the City of Boston.

In the late 1690's settlers moved from this Massachusetts town to a spot on the Ashley River, eighteen miles from Charleston, organized a church and founded Dorchester, South Carolina. Toward the middle of the next century, some of the Congregationalists from Dorchester, South Carolina, migrated to Georgia and received the grant of a large tract of land south of Savannah. So began the Midway settlement.

Two years later, in 1752, 280 Congregationalists moved into the Midway district making it the southern stronghold of Congregationalism. In 1754 they built the first church on the present site.

This was the beginning of a very interesting story. Long before the American Revolution broke the Midway people were fiercely patriotic. The Royalist governor bitterly complained to the English Lord of Colonies that the Midway and other Congregational Churches were the backbone of the Revolution in Georgia. But these sturdy Congregationalists paid dearly for their patriotism. During the Revolutionary War Midway's Colonel John McIntosh sent the defiant message from Fort Morris, "Come and take it." And Colonel Fuser of the British forces answered with overwhelming numbers. Midway Church was burned to the ground and its minister, Rev. Moses Allen, was captured and imprisoned, only later to drown in an effort to escape from a British prison ship.

It was after the erection of the present church in 1792 that the Midway Church reached the height of its strength and influence. Look at the record of famous people

from St. John's Parish (later Liberty County) most of whom were members of the famous old Midway Church. Four were Governors of Georgia; Button Gwinnett, Richard Howley, Nathan Brownson and Lyman Hall. Two of these were also Signers of the Declaration of Independence — Button Gwinnett and Lyman Hall. To this Church and people also belongs the honor of giving names to six counties of the State. Five were named after her illustrious men, viz.: SCREVEN, named after Gen. James Screven, a citizen of Sunbury, who fell mortally wounded in an engagement near Midway Church in 1778. HALL, named after Dr. Lyman Hall, Resident of Liberty County, member of Midway Church. GWINNETT, named after Button Gwinnett, whose business and associations were at Sunbury, an early, strategic and flourishing town in St. John's Parish (later Liberty County). BAKER, named after Col. John Baker of Revolutionary memory and one of the early pioneer settlers of Liberty County when it was known as St. John's Parish. STEWART, named after Gen. Daniel Stewart, a native of Liberty County, member of Midway Church and another soldier of military fame. The sixth county, LIBERTY, was named after the inspiring efforts of these brave and patriotic people of the Midway settlement, who contributed so much to the cause of Freedom in so emphatically asserting their independence at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. Five U. S. Congressmen, some of whom became U. S. Senators: John Elliott, Alfred Cuthbert, Alfred Iverson, Augustus O. Bacon, Lewis LeConte, father of Professors Joseph and John LeConte, founders of the University of California — were from the Midway settlement. Another famous name connected with Midway is that of Commodore John McIntosh of Ft. Morris fame, at Sunbury, whose immortal words, "Come and take it" are frequently quoted in connection with the stirring days of the Revolutionary War. Other famous names connected with St. John's Parish, Midway, Sunbury and Liberty County are: Rev. Abiel Holmes, father of Oliver Wendell Holmes, the poet; John E. Ward, the first minister to China; Dr. Frank Goulding and son, the Rev. F. R. Goulding, author of the *YOUNG MAROONERS*, and inventor of the sewing machine; Col. Charles C. Jones, Jr., distinguished Georgia historian; Bishop James Osgood Andrew, one of the first two bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church; Mariah J. McIntosh, novelist; Robert Sallette, terror of the Tories during the Revolutionary War; Dr. William McWhir, teacher and minister of national renown.



THAT GREAT BRASS KEY TO
MIDWAY CHURCH, CAST IN 1754

The pathway from Midway to the White House is illuminated by the first Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, Ellen Axon, and Dr. I. S. K. Axon, her grandfather and pastor of the Midway Church. Her father, Samuel E. Axon, was born at Midway and ordained for the ministry there. President Theodore Roosevelt was a great-grandson of Gen. Daniel Stewart of Midway.

A monument to Gen. Screven and Gen. Stewart was erected in 1914 by the U. S. Government at a cost of \$10,000. It stands in the Midway Cemetery.

The cemetery is of absorbing interest. The wall built between 1807-1814 contains

not less than 1,200 graves in less than two acres of land. Many of those whose names have already been mentioned are buried here.

"Her great men are numbered by the scores. Her influence is felt in thousands of places. Her history is unparalleled." So wrote Midway's great historian, Dr. James Stacy.

At present there is no sign to identify the Church with the Congregational fellowship, but we may justly claim that it was the Puritan spirit that was largely responsible for the exciting history of the Midway settlement.

Surely in this year that marks the 175th Anniversary of the building of the present Midway Church, tourists with a Congregational background should stop on the way south to admire the old Puritan meetinghouse which is located on the coastal highway, U. S. 17, just below Savannah. You will see a large historical marker by the roadside bearing the letters ACH (American Colonial History). It reads:

"Midway Church. Built in 1792. Replaced Colonial Meeting House Burned by the British in 1778. Sherman's Cavalry Camped Here 1864. Midway Settlement Produced Many of Georgia's Most Famous Men." A. S. W.

Remarks made at the meeting of the History Commission of the Nebraska Conference by Rudolf G. Schade, Chairman of the Historical Commission of the United Church of Christ on October 18, 1966:

The Historical Commission is the youngest commission instituted at General Synod meeting in Chicago in 1965. The questions which have arisen in many areas of the United Church are, What is the task of the Commission? and, What do you want us to do?

Let me state as briefly as I can what we conceive to be our objectives. The United Church of Christ is the most modern expression of the spirit of ecumenism. The injunction of our Lord, "That they all may be one," has been taken more seriously by us than by other religious fellowships. But the diversity of our background is not something we are trying to hide. We are proud to have been Evangelical, Reformed, Congregational or Christian in our heritage. Each one of our churches has made a great contribution to the American life. Be it New England, Pennsylvania, the South, the Middle

West, or the Far West, there is witness to the great contributions which the church has made and we are proud of it and thankful to God for it. The sojourn of our various churches reveals that we have emerged from the confining traditions which our early history had placed upon us.

We are not ashamed or apologetic for the past. We are thankful and proud for it. We are aware that in the faith and labors of the fathers were the fundamental ingredients for what we claim to be today: a United Church of Christ, a people dedicated to the essence of the Gospel both in worshipping God and serving man.

But we also have some objections. As a child should not despise his home, father or mother, so we do not want to ridicule, despise or even forget our spiritual home; not to worship the past, but to look with love and affection upon the pioneering labors of those who journeyed before us.

Therefore we want to encourage local church, sectional or conference research. Let us discover the great heritage which we have. There have been men who built churches, and churches which have built social and educational institutions. What

we want is simply to know what the fathers have done and what they have thought, preached and taught.

What we want to know is how the Gospel was spread across our land, how churches arose at the crossroads, in the hamlets as well as in the emerging metropolitan centers of our land. We know that our past is unique. The spirit of our Lord found an expression in the inclusive spirit of our pioneers. Cultural and language particularities were used to gather people into a Christian fellowship, the most unique one has perhaps been the formation of German Congregational churches. A true ecumenical spirit expressed itself in these ventures.

The westward expansion in our national history is an epic of unparalleled charm. Let us discover what contribution the church has made to this great movement. Let us collect records, write the history of the local church, of association, conference or whatever name might have been used for the regional work which was carried on. Let us discover, collect and write the story of our fathers' struggle and faith.

Because of the difficult financial situation facing the Congregational Christian Historical Society it was voted at a meeting of the Executive Committee on February 20th that contemplated plans for a joint meeting of the two Historical Societies in Cleveland on April 12th be cancelled. Instead it was voted to hold the Annual Meeting of the Congregational Christian Historical Society in Barrington, Rhode Island on Tuesday, May 2nd. The Barrington Church is celebrating its 250th Anniversary in 1967 and it there-

fore seems appropriate to meet under its auspices. Formal notice of the Annual Meeting is given on another page.

At the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Congregational Christian Historical Society it was voted that the Annual Frederick L. Fagley Memorial Awards for the best Anniversary Program and material be presented as follows: for churches with over 500 members, to the First-Plymouth Congregational Church, Lincoln, Nebraska; for churches under 500 members, to the Smyrna United Church of Christ, Smyrna, Oregon; Honorable Mention to the First Congregational Church of Murphys, California. These awards will be presented at the Annual Meeting on May 2nd.

Does anyone have a copy of the pamphlet, *Pilgrimage Toward Unity, Along These Paths These Churches Came*, published in 1957 by The Executive Committee of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches and the General Council of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches? This 100-page booklet is a helpful resource. If you have one to give, please send it to The Congregational Library, Room 207, 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

ADVANCE REPORTS NEEDED

Copies of THE ADVANCE REPORTS for the years listed below are requested by The Congregational Library: 1923, 1927, 1929, 1931, 1934, 1936, 1940, 1942, 1944. Please send to Room 207, 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

14 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts

You are cordially invited to the Annual Luncheon and Business Meeting of the Congregational Christian Historical Society to be held on Tuesday, May 2, 1967, at 10:00 A.M. in the Barrington Congregational Church, Barrington, Rhode Island.

- 9:30 A.M. Executive Committee and Board of Governors Meeting.
- 10:00 A.M. Registration.
- 10:30 A.M. Annual Business Meeting with Welcome by the Rev. William T. Scott, Jr., Pastor of the Host Church.
- 11:30 A.M. Seminar for historians of local churches conducted by Dr. James F. English and Rev. Harold Burdon.
- 12:45 P.M. Luncheon in the Barrington Church followed by Address by Dr. William T. Scott of Elon, North Carolina on "The History and Contribution of the Christian Church as a Part of the United Church of Christ."

The Annual Business Meeting at 10:30, will include reports of officers and committees, election of officers, adoption of budget and such other matters as may be brought before the Society.

Harold F. Worthley, Chairman
Committee on Arrangements

Mervin M. Deems, President
Arthur S. Wheelock, Executive Secretary

If you wish overnight accommodations, reservations should be made direct either at the Holiday Inn, Seekonk, Massachusetts, or the Sheraton Hotel, Providence, Rhode Island.

Please send in reservations for lunch on the form below.

REV. ARTHUR S. WHEELOCK, 14 Beacon St., Room 206, Boston, Mass. 02108

Kindly reserve place(s) for the undersigned for the luncheon, May 2nd, at the Congregational Church, in Barrington, Rhode Island. The ladies of the Church are serving the luncheon without charge.

Date

Signed

No reservations received after
April 25th.

Address

HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Room 206, 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. 02108

Rudolf G. Schade
Chairman

James F. English
Vice Chairman

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Arthur S. Wheelock
Editor

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