

A CENTURY OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

By
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The First Presbyterian Church of Arlington County, Virginia is celebrating its one hundredth anniversary (1872-1972) this year. The church, presently located on the northeast corner of No. Vermont St. and No. Carlin Springs Rd., has contributed to the local history of Arlington County.

Historical Setting

Ball's Crossroads had been a focal point in Arlington County since about 1740 when the two roads were developed. One road started at the future site of the city of Alexandria and terminated at the mouth of Pimmit Run. The other road started at Awbury's Ferry (at the site of Rosslyn) and ended at Falls Church. The first road much later became known as the Glebe Road because it passed the glebe of Fairfax Parish and in order to distinguish it from other roads to the Falls. The second road was eventually named Wilson Boulevard in honor of President Wilson. The intersection became known as Ball's Crossroads when Ball's Tavern was established there in the early 1800's. This two-story log inn was an important gathering place for the community.¹

During the Civil War, Ball's Crossroads continued to be an important road junction and therefore was a significant tactical objective. The Union Army had a cavalry outpost located at the area. On August 29, 1861, Gen. McClellan requested Prof. Thaddeous Lowe to ascend above Ball's Crossroads in a gas filled balloon to observe the Confederate Army activities around Upton's and Munson's Hill. When the Confederate troops on Munson's Hill (near the present site of Seven Corner's shopping area) began firing at the balloon, Lowe was winched down in a hurry.²

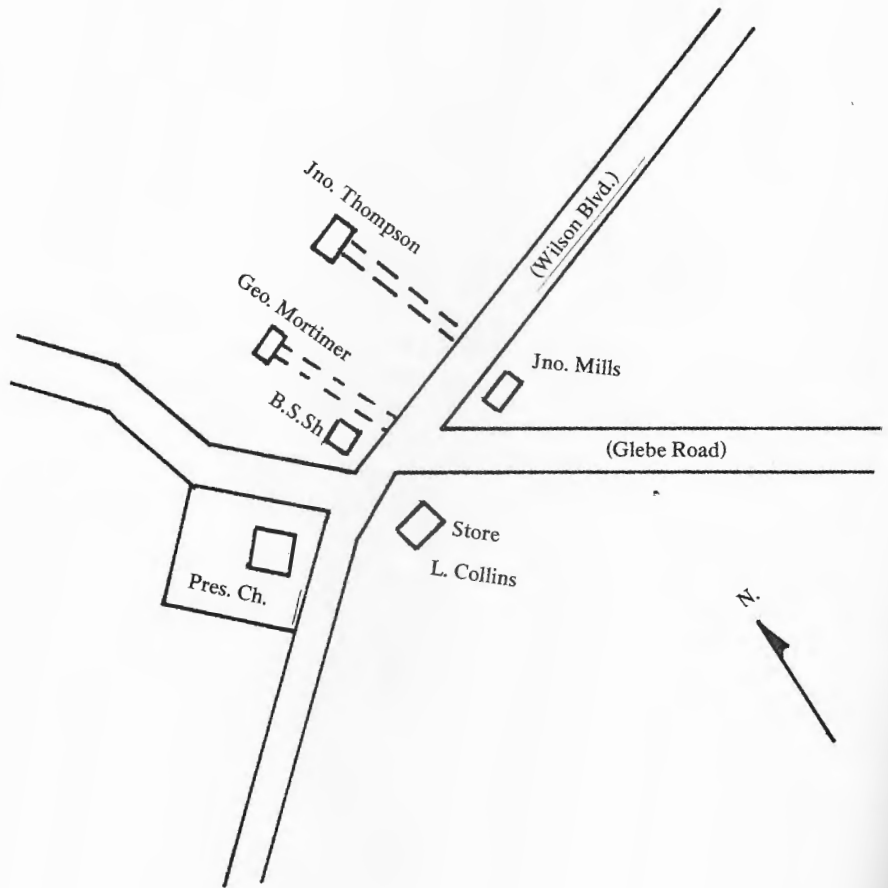
By 1870 Alexandria (its name was changed to Arlington in 1920) County had a population of 3,185 persons and was predominately rural in character. There were 86 farms in the County and 30 of the farms averaged between 100 and 500 acres in size.³ George Vanderwerken had the largest farm in the County which covered 1,316 acres.⁴ Major agricultural products were dairy products, corn, oats, winter wheat, potatoes, fruits, and garden vegetables.

¹Ludwell Lee Montague. *Historic Arlington: 1608-1932*. Arlington, Virginia: 1968, p. 25.

²Percy C. Smith. "Ball's Cross Roads." *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Oct. 1960, p. 57-58.

³U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Agricultural Census: 1860-1870*.

⁴Griffith M. Hopkins. *Atlas of 15 Miles Around Washington Including the Counties of Fairfax and Alexandria, Virginia*. Philadelphia: 1879, p. 33.



BALLS X ROADS IN 1878
 Copied from a portion of a map in Griffith M. Hopkins *Atlas of 15 Miles Around Washington Including the Counties of Fairfax and Alexandria, Virginia.* Philadelphia: 1879.

The transportation network in Alexandria County consisted of two railroads, the Alexandria Canal, and a number of unimproved roads. Ball's Crossroads in 1872 consisted of a general store, a blacksmith shop, and several residences. After retrocession in 1846, the general store was used as a voting precinct and in 1895 a branch post office was established within the building.

Around the 1890's the area known as Ball's Crossroads, became known as Ballston soon after the development of the electric railroad line along what is now Fairfax Drive.

Ladies Mite Society

Twenty-nine persons met at the home of Mrs. Alonzo G. (Malvina) Hayes on February 22, 1872, with the purpose of forming a Presbyterian Church in Alexandria County. As a result of this meeting, a Ladies Mite Society was formed to raise funds for purchasing a site to build a church. The following officers of the Ladies Mite Society were elected: Mrs. Harvey Bailey - President, Miss Annie M. Hayes - Vice President, Mrs. Miles C. Munson - Treasurer, and Mrs. Alonzo G. Hayes - Secretary. As a means of raising funds, the members agreed to pay an initiation fee of 25¢ each and to have monthly dues of 10¢. Some members made articles of clothing for sale and others organized a festival which resulted in clearing a total of \$110.00.⁵ This organization continued for a number of years as a social and religious influence in the community.

Sunday School Services

The hall over George Mortimer's blacksmith shop at Ball's Crossroads was rented and on April 28, 1872, a Sunday School began to meet regularly at 3 o'clock p.m. The Sunday School group started with a membership of twenty-two persons and the following officers were elected: Miles C. Munson - Superintendent, Albert P. Douglas - Assistant Superintendent, Thomas H. Sypherd - Secretary and Librarian, and Miss Annie M. Hayes - Treasurer. The first five teachers in the school were Miss Annie M. Hayes, Miss Mary Hale Hayes, Miles C. Munson, Nicholas Van Voast, and Mrs. Miles C. Munson. The nucleus of the present church library began when a number of library books were donated by the Presbyterian Church Sabbath School of Falls Church and the Waugh Methodist Church of Washington, D.C.⁶

⁵Annie M. Hayes. *Record of the First Presbyterian Church of Arlington County, Virginia. From February 22, 1872 to May 2, 1897.* (Manuscript).

⁶Albert P. Douglas. *Book of Minutes of the Presbyterian Sabbath School, Ballston, Alexandria County, Virginia, 1893,* p. 3-5.

Church Services Begin

The Rev. David Hoge Riddle, the pastor of the Falls Church Presbyterian Church, began to preach every other Sunday at Ball's Crossroads in June 1872, by arrangement with the Presbytery of Washington. The Ball's Crossroads congregation was considered as a Branch or mission of the Falls Church Presbyterian Church until 1895. The following thirteen persons are considered as the original members of the First Presbyterian Church of Arlington County, Virginia: Mrs. Alonzo G. Hayes, Miss Annie M. Hayes, Miss Mary Hale Hayes, Miles C. Munson and wife, Ira F. Munson, Nicholas Van Voast, Miss Maggie Van Voast, Mrs. Thomas H. Sypherd, Albert P. Douglas and wife, Harry Hamilton Douglas, and Mrs. Elizabeth Nilson.⁷

David H. Riddle was ordained and installed as pastor at Lewinsville and Falls Church Presbyterian Churches on April 25, 1871. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., on January 27, 1846, and was the son of Rev. David A. and Elizabeth Brown Riddle. Rev. Riddle was educated at Jefferson College, Canonsburg, Pa., where his father and grandfather, Dr. Matthew Brown, had both served as President. He had studied at both Western and Princeton Theological Seminaries. Rev. Riddle's work at Falls Church increased in importance and in February 1873, a new organization was established and called the Presbyterian Church of Falls Church, Virginia. Rev. Riddle became the first pastor of the new church and severed his relationship with the Lewinsville Church. In 1902 he was honored by receiving the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Jefferson (now Washington and Jefferson) College.⁸

Miles Cleveland Munson owned a farm near the present intersection of So. Glebe Rd. and Columbia Pike. First he was a member of the Lewinsville Presbyterian Church. Later when the Falls Church Presbyterian Church was organized, he became a member there until the Ballston Branch was started. In 1908 Mr. Munson was involved with the organization of the Arlington Presbyterian Church and served as one of the first elders there. Thus it was that this man who was originally an elder at Lewinsville, became one of the first elders of churches at Falls Church, Ballston, and Arlington.⁹

By October 1872 the Ballston group had saved enough money to purchase a site for the location of the new church. The site selected was on the northwest corner of Wilson Blvd. and No. Glebe Rd. (where Peck's Chevrolet is now located), but the owners would not agree to sell a part of the tract of land which totaled "11 acres, 1 rod, and 2 poles of land." So ten members formed a company and purchased the tract for \$1,200.00 with a down payment of \$400.00, giving their notes for the remainder of the amount.

⁷*Minutes of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Ballston, Virginia.*

⁸Franklin Brown Gillespie. *A Brief History of Lewinsville Presbyterian Church, McLean, Virginia (1846-1946)*. 1946, p. 10.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
1874-1951

Approximately two acres on the corner were deeded to the Trustees, Nicholas Van Voast and Ira F. Munson, and the other Trustees of the Presbyterian Church at Falls Church, Va.¹⁰ The remainder of the land was planned to be a cemetery with any profits accrued from the sale of lots designated to go to the church.

Rev. Riddle was preaching regularly at Ball's Crossroads every Sunday afternoon by December 1872. A ground breaking ceremony was held at the new church site on April 18, 1873, and the excavation for the basement commenced. Several fund-raising activities were held during the summer to obtain additional money to pay for the materials and labor required during the construction of the new church building. Mr. Vanderwerken promised to give one-tenth of the cost of the church. The first communion service was held at Ballston on December 22, 1873, in the room over Mortimer's blacksmith shop.

On May 17, 1874, the first services were held in the unfinished church. There was no floor and a pulpit was made of two carpenters skids. Rough seats were built of timber and bundles of shingles with boards laid across. By October the roof was shingled, the floor laid, the windows installed, and the outside of the church painted. By 1876 the church building had been completed. The finishing inside was in yellow pine with black walnut trimmings. The Sunday School purchased an organ for \$150.00 and the Ladies Mite Society bought a carpet and installed a coal furnace in the basement. On October 16, 1876, a meeting was held at the church by the congregation to elect five Trustees. Those chosen were: Henry A. Whallon, Nicholas Van Voast, Ira F. Munson, George O. Wunder, and Alonzo G. Hayes. Mr. Whallon was made President of the Board; Mr. Munson, Clerk; and Mr. Hayes, Treasurer. All secular business of the church was transferred to the Trustees. The church was dedicated on Sunday, Oct. 22, 1876, by the Rev. Dr. Wills of Washington, D.C., assisted by Rev. Riddle. After the dedication of the church, Mr. Charles Mix was elected and installed as the first ruling Elder.¹¹

On October 1, 1878, Georgeanna Wunder was the first baby to be baptized in the church and Etta M. Cameron and W. Douglass Hayes had the first wedding in the new church facilities. The first funeral was held in the church for Mrs. James Bolden on February 17, 1881.

As the Ballston congregation continued to increase in size, there was a need for additional church facilities. The congregation agreed to sell nine acres of adjoining land and use the proceeds to build an addition on the west side of the church building. The title to the land was found to be defective and it took a court action to clear the status of the land.¹² Nine acres were

¹⁰Arlington County Deed Book, Liber A, No. 4, p. 459.

¹¹Hayes. *Record*, p. 10.

¹²Arlington County Deed Book, Liber B, No. 4, Folio 285.

sold for \$2,500.00 on July 18, 1892. The new addition was used for the first time on December 24, 1892, for the Christmas program.

Independent Church

The full Session of the Presbyterian Church of Falls Church met on April 21 and May 12, 1895, to consider the proposal of organizing the Ballston Branch into a separate and independent church. Elders Miles C. Munson and Albert P. Douglas represented the Ballston Branch. The motion was approved and the action of the Session was referred to the Ballston congregation for their approval. On June 2, 1895, the Ballston congregation approved the motion and presented it to the Presbytery of Washington City for approval. On July 5, 1895, the Presbytery approved the organization of the "First Presbyterian Church" of the Ballston area of Alexandria County, Virginia. The new congregation consisted of 65 persons who elected four Elders, five Trustees, three Deacons, and two Deaconesses. The Rev. Frederick E. Andrews was called as stated supply and began his pastorate on July 26, 1896. There were 105 members of the congregation who attended the service.¹³

The *Evening Star* of Washington, D.C., made this comment: "The advent of the electric cars—early service, has led our people into the assumption of city airs and ways in several respects. The First Presbyterian Church now has morning services, with its own minister, Rev. Andrews, instead of afternoons, as formerly, with Rev. Rathbone (*sic*: Rathbun) of Falls Church. Full benches and largely increased interest in church matters generally testify most strongly an appreciation of the change."¹⁴

On October 26, 1896, the Presbytery met at the First Presbyterian Church and Rev. Andrews was examined and approved. He was then ordained and installed as an Evangelist and became the first pastor of the independent church. A seven-room manse, north of the church, was completed on March 12, 1899, and a garage was erected in 1926. On November 22, 1912, electric lights replaced the kerosene lamps in the church building. Dedication of the pipe organ and the renovation of the sanctuary was held in the church on March 22, 1931. Major improvements continued to be made to the church facilities and during 1946, the old kitchen, coal bin, and furnace were replaced by a modern kitchen, rest rooms, a new gas furnace, and a concrete floor in the basement.

New Church Site

The Rev. George H. Yount was installed as pastor on May 16, 1944. Membership and attendance increased until it was necessary to hold two worship services on Sunday. Soon it became apparent that a larger building

¹³*Minutes of Session. First Presbyterian Church of Ballston, Virginia*, p. 1.

¹⁴*The Evening Star*, Saturday, August 8, 1896.

was needed and a number of plans were studied by the congregation. The original plans called for the erection of a new building on the same site, but increasing traffic congestion and the encroachment of commercial properties along the Wilson-Glebe intersection resulted in the decision to find another site for the church. After considering several sites, the congregation authorized the Trustees to purchase the 3½ acre Veitch property located at the northeast corner of No. Vermont Street and No. Carlin Springs Rd. for the location of the new church facilities. The land was purchased and the title was delivered on December 9, 1947.¹⁵ The architect was instructed by the congregation to design the new church facilities so it could be built in different sections as the money was raised. On June 9, 1949, the congregation authorized the Trustees to enter into a contract for building Unit C of the new church. Ground breaking ceremonies were held on June 26, 1949, at the new church site. The new church wing was dedicated on August 6, 1950. From then until December 16, 1951, the Junior, Intermediate, Junior High, and Senior High groups of the church school held their services in the new section of the building. The nursery, kindergarten, primary, and Bible class used the extra space at the old property.

On March 19, 1950, the congregation voted to accept a purchase bid for the old church property. By this time the church membership was 403 and the church school had 334 on its roll. The next section of the new church facilities to be built was the sanctuary, social hall, kitchen, and choir rooms. (Units A, B, and G). The new section was completed on June 15, 1952.

The last worship service at the old church site was held on December 9, 1951, after which the congregation followed the minister and the official boards carrying the cross, pulpit bible, and flags to the steps of the new sanctuary. The following Sunday the first communion service at the new location was celebrated during the eleven o'clock worship service in the Social Hall. Two hundred and fifty persons participated in the communion. The church membership was 428 with 376 on the church school roll. Morning worship continued in the social hall while the sanctuary was being completed. On June 15, 1952, the present sanctuary was used for the first time followed by the laying of the cornerstone and formal dedication. An addition to the existing wing was dedicated on April 9, 1961. The new Christian Education Wing allowed room for a library, assistant pastor's office, church parlor, and classroom facilities. A celebration was held at the church in May 1969, to commemorate Rev. Yount's twenty-fifth anniversary as pastor. He has been the minister at the First Presbyterian Church longer than any other minister during its one hundred year history. A number of recent improvements to the church facilities included the installation of central air-conditioning in the sanctuary, completing the additions to the pipe organ, and renovation of the social hall.¹⁶

¹⁵Arlington County Deed Book 132, p. 436.

¹⁶*First Presbyterian Church: 1872-1972 100th Anniversary. Pictorial-History Directory.* 1972, p. 3-5.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
December 9, 1951

No church historical sketch would be complete without a few anecdotes. "One Saturday while preparing the sanctuary of the old church for Sunday worship, a disagreeable odor was quite discernable. A thorough search of the area finally located the source, a poor church mouse who was dead under the organ pedal."

"One hot Sunday the windows in the sanctuary of the new church were open. The minister was deep in his sermon and had just mentioned "the birds of the air" when the congregation noticed a nervous mocking bird walking about on the molding around the edge of the ceiling in the sanctuary. This incident helped to give an additional punch to the text."

"On another occasion the minister asked the ushers to come forward to pass the collection plates. Upon turning to the altar where the collection plates were usually located, the minister found no collection plates. The ushers improvised quickly and found a couple of hats in the vestibule to use for collection purposes."

The First Presbyterian Church of Arlington County, Va., started as a mission of the parent Falls Church Presbyterian Church in 1872. As the church developed and became independent, it also served as the parent church for two of its neighboring churches: the Arlington Presbyterian Church and the Clarendon Presbyterian Church. The First Presbyterian Church is believed to be predated by only three other existing church organizations in Arlington County. It has made its contributions to the local history through its religious and social influences over a century of Christian service.

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MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED

David H. Riddle	1872*
David L. Rathbun	1890*
Frederick E. Andrews	1896
William J. Young	1898
Edward N. Kirby	1908
Edward Wright	1917
John L. Allison	1923
George G. Culbertson	1924
Linus L. Strock	1928
Alfred E. Barrows	1943
George H. Yount	1944

* The first two ministers were pastors of the parent church at Falls Church and divided their time with the Ballston branch.