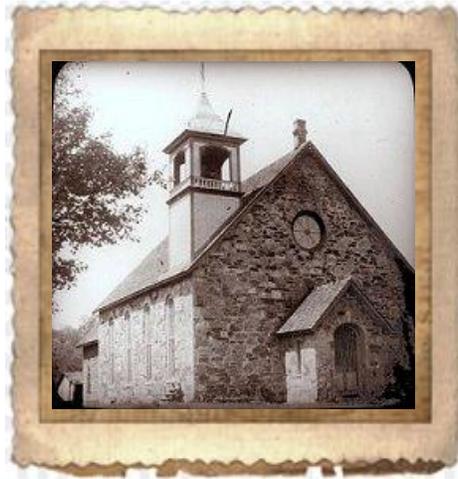


# Clifton Presbyterian Church

## Celebrating Fifteen (15) Decades of Service and Gratitude



### *1870's - 1880's: Early Beginnings*

Following the Civil War, men from the northern states were attracted to northern Virginia by the milder climate, proximity to the nation's capital, abundant timber, and cheap land. One of these men, Harrison G. Otis from Ontario County, NY, began purchasing land in the area in 1868. He was followed to the newly named Clifton Station in 1869 by his brother, J. Sanford Otis and his family from New Jersey, and Mr. H.C. Newman and family from Brooklyn, NY among others.

Clifton Station was known as Devereaux Station during the war. Of the several theories regarding the new name, the most likely is that a northern settler named the village after Clifton Springs, a popular resort in Ontario County, NY. As the village grew, a Sabbath school was organized and worship services were held, at first in a large building owned by Mr. H. G. Otis, and later in the school house owned by Mrs. Margaret Hetzel. Miss Harriet Thorne was one of the Sunday school teachers. The Reverend J. E. Nourse of Washington, dividing his time between Manassas and Clifton, preached his first sermon in March of 1869 and continued to supply Clifton – usually every other week - until 1872.

The need for a dedicated place for public worship was strongly felt by several families, and in the spring of 1870, Mr. H.C. Newman sent a petition signed by 24 persons and dated April 17, 1870 to the Presbytery of the Potomac requesting a church be organized in Clifton. On May 8, 1870, the Clifton Presbyterian Church was formally established under the authority and care of the Presbytery with 9 of the petitioners\* presented with certificates of membership.

On May 15, 1870, J. Sanford Otis and Hiram C. Newman were elected the first elders. It was noted in the Record of Trustees dated Dec. 19, 1870 that H.G. Otis offered to donate one acre of land on a bluff north of the hotel\*\* for the new church. A building committee was immediately established, and on December 31, 1870, in a ceremony officiated by Rev. Nourse, the cornerstone of Clifton Presbyterian Church was laid.

By the spring of 1871 the side walls of local stone and roof timbers were up, but money had run out and the building stood unfinished. In May of 1872 the Reverend William Bradley who had previously purchased land and built a home in Clifton was called as acting pastor and on the Sabbath of August 5, 1872, delivered a sermon entitled, “The People Had a Mind to Work.” This so stirred the congregation that with help from friends abroad, the Board of Missions, and the Church Election Board, \$2000 was secured which enabled work to continue until the new church was ready for worship. The Indenture, (Deed of Trust) dated December 20, 1872, conveying the land to the Trustees\*\*\* of Clifton Presbyterian Church for the sum of \$5.00, and stipulating that “...the church lot to be forever occupied as a site for a Presbyterian church...” was signed by Harrison G. and Mary Otis on Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1873. In Book Number 1 of the Session Minutes dated 1870-1906, Reverend Bradley wrote his account of the early struggles of the Church. It was dated July, 1876. In December of that year, tragedy struck when fire destroyed his home along with all his possessions and he barely escaped. He declined to serve another year and relocated to Tennessee. The remainder of the 1870’s and 1880’s were an unsettled period for the new church, with 7 ministers conducting services at various times.

\*The nine original members were Mr. Hiram C. Newman, Mrs. Elizabeth M. Newman, Hiram Newman, Jr., Mr. Edwin T. Newman, Miss Harriet E. Thorne – all from Lafayette Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, Long Island; Mr. Anson B. Nodine from St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Washington, D.C.; and Mr. J. Sanford Otis, Mrs. Julia H. Otis and Mrs. E.W. Hamilton by statement of Church memberships.

\*\*The Clifton House (Hotel) at Clifton Station, (built by Mr. H.G. Otis in 1869) was listed as a resort in the 1882 Excursion Guide of the Virginia Midland Railroad. It held 50 guests. Fees were \$7 per week or \$27 per month.

\*\*\*Trustees on the deed were J. S. Otis, William Green, Charles F. Newman, William E. Ford, and A. B. Nodine.

The inscription at the base of the bell tower reads “Legacy from Mrs. E.A. Bradley – Being dead she yet speaketh, Troy Bell Foundry, Jones & Company Troy, NY, 1873.” We are grateful to the voices of these early visionaries and to their faithful service to this newly formed church and to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (And yes, we still hear Mrs. Bradley “speaketh” at the end of every Sunday service and wedding!)