

# Clifton Presbyterian Church

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



### *1890'S-1900'S - Trains, Planes, Automobiles, Telephones, and the Silent Film Era!*

The decade began at Clifton Presbyterian Church with the call of another new pastor, the eighth since Reverend Bradley left Clifton in early 1877. Reverend M. P. Snell served until 1895 when an “elegant and distinguished old gentleman,” Reverend William H. Edwards, and his wife were called to serve at CPC. They were known and loved for “their untiring efforts . . . to strengthen the Christian love and fellowship of the community.” Clifton was their community, as they lived on a small farm at the edge of the village and ran a commercial orchard. Everyone looked forward to their annual New Year’s Day Receptions. Mrs. Edwards wasted no time in organizing the Missionary and Aid Societies. (In the early years, men could be members of these societies, too!) Mrs. Edwards also involved the children. The “Mission Band” as they were called, were a group of little ones that met with Mrs. Edwards on Saturday mornings. They loved the many “good and wonderful books” that Mrs. Edwards gave to them. The Christian Endeavor Society, an organization for youth, was started by Miss Ruth Richards and some of her friends. Catherine Doak Dewey worked tirelessly to keep it going. Unfortunately, it would become one of the casualties of World War II. As the new century began, the Aid Society that Mrs. Edwards had founded, raised money to replace the plain walls and slat benches with plaster walls and oak pews. The aisles and pulpit were carpeted and 4 stained glass windows were installed. Sadly, on June 23, 1903 the Trustee minutes recorded the following: “Secretary {Lewis Quigg} was instructed to post notices offering five dollars reward for evidence that will lead to the conviction of persons committing depredations on the church property. President, M.M. Payne was requested to make an estimate of the cost of repairing the windows.”

In Clifton, over twenty years after its designation as a post office in 1869, an article in the *Fairfax Herald* in 1891 described Clifton Station as a thriving center with “many and varied industries . . . good schools and churches, and the beautiful stream of Popeshead nearly encircling the whole village, with a dozen or more passenger trains running daily.” (Brigadoon in Virginia). As the new century dawned, Clifton continued to grow. Real estate boomed. The Buckley Brothers’ store was built. Clifton was celebrated in guide books as a resort, and visitors from Washington came to enjoy the quiet and beauty of the countryside. The village became an incorporated town in 1902 with a population of 138. In 1903 the Telephone Company of Clifton was established.\* In 1905, with a goal of the town fathers to light the town, five street lights on poles ten feet long were installed.\*\* They sometimes worked – sometimes not . . . The village of Clifton was “modernizing” – and having fun! In 1906, Clifton’s “Hungry Nine” were so good, they were ready to play any baseball team within a 50 mile radius. The tennis team, not so much . . .

And in the nation, as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century ended and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century dawned, the industrial revolution was still going strong. We can imagine that Clifton and the Clifton Presbyterian Church must have been affected by many of the events during these years. Were they proud that two of the founders of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), founded in Washington, D.C. in 1890, were Clifton residents? (Margaretta or Margaret Hetzel and her daughter, Susan Riviere Hetzel lived in Clifton for about 25 years.) Were families affected by the panic of 1893 which sparked an economic depression that lasted for most of the 90’s in the United States? What did they think when the *USS Maine* was sunk in Havana Harbor in 1898 starting the Spanish American War, or when President McKinley was assassinated in Sept. 1901, just 20 years to the month after President James A. Garfield was assassinated? Was any child in town or in Mrs. Edward’s Mission Band or the Christian Endeavor Society at CPC inspired by the first flight of the Wright Brothers in Kitty Hawk, NC in 1903? Ford Motor Company was established that same year. Who in the congregation may have owned an automobile . . . or (besides Lewis Quigg) a telephone? And in December, the silent film, *The Great Train Robbery*, was released! Who may have seen it? Did it play at the “moving picture hall” in town? (The exact years of the hall’s coming and going are not clear.) We can be certain, however, that tears were shed, prayers were raised up, and aid was offered not only by the Missionary and Aid Societies started by Mrs. Edwards, but by all Clifton residents for the more than 6000 lives lost in the most deadly national disaster in U.S. history, The Great Galveston Storm of 1900, and for the over 3000 lives lost in the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. We know the Edwards believed strongly in mission and the power of prayer and worked tirelessly to make the church a vital part not only of the Clifton community, but also the world community. We are grateful for their caring!

\*The Bell Telephone Company had been launched by Alexander Graham Bell in 1877 when he was just 30 years old!

\*\*Edison Electric Light Company had begun making light bulbs in 1880.