

Clifton Presbyterian Church

Celebrating Fifteen (15) Decades of Service and Gratitude



1920's - 1930's From the Jazz Age to the Great Depression!

Women vote! Radios broadcast; Talkies are in; Lindbergh solos NY to Paris; Earhart crosses the Atlantic; Mickey Mouse debuts; **CPC gets Electricity!** The market crashes . . . Hitler rises, Amelia Earhart vanishes, and another World War looms!

As Rev. Kelly was leaving Clifton, the “Roaring 20’s” were roaring in - with the 18th Amendment in effect; and the Clifton Presbyterians and Clifton Baptists were celebrating together the enactment of Prohibition!

The ratification of the 19th Amendment followed in August 1920, so as Rev. Kelly’s replacement was arriving, **women** were celebrating their hard won right to vote! Times were definitely changing . . . except for the work of the women’s organizations. That hadn’t changed. CPC’s new minister, Reverend Thomas Hugh McLeod, lived in Washington City and had a full time government job, so there was no pastoral work or help from the minister’s wife (or sister) as the congregation had been used to for the past 25 years. Even without this support, CPC’s Aid and Missionary Societies continued to hold socials and raise money in support of the physical church and mission. The members paid their monthly dues of 10 cents per person, and though their numbers were small, they were able to raise funds for a new furnace (1927) and in 1928, donated funds for electrical wiring.

By the first of the year of 1929 the oil lamps were converted to **ELECTRIC LIGHTS!** The market crashed in October of that year, but the work of the church went on. A successful supper and bazaar was held at the Masonic Hall December 4, 1929. This event netted \$68.00, and along with money from the quilt made and sold by the ladies, they had the beginnings of their “Decorating Fund.” In the midst of the Great Depression with “lots of work and giving by the small group of ladies, \$300 was raised out of empty pockets.” They bought new carpet in 1932, and in 1937, built a small kitchen off the Sunday school room to which the Christian Endeavor Society (youth) also contributed, and purchased pulpit chairs from Minnieville Presbyterian Church.

Though Rev. McLeod's Sunday sermons were inspiring, the congregation felt a need for a resident pastor who could spend more time on pastoral duties especially among the young people. So, in 1927 a student pastor from Princeton Seminary was called for the summer months. "Scholarly" Keith Curtis was the first of these students followed by 5 more. During the summer of 1932, student pastor, "Golden voiced" John H. P. Strome, and the minister of the Baptist Church, Reverend Craig, led Vacation Bible School jointly in the now 20 year old Clifton High School, aided by the Sunday school teachers of both churches. (Photo in the Washington Post, July 3, 1932.)

The Sunday Schools had also formed a joint "Temperance and Welfare Committee" to help with enforcement of the town's prohibition and antigambling laws. The congregations of the two churches had long had a warm regard for one another, and often worked together for the good of the youth and the town.

In 1933, after 13 years with Rev. McLeod, we again joined with Manassas and called Rev. John H. DeChant. He and Mrs. DeChant and their 4 children lived in the manse in Manassas, but were very faithful workers in the Aid and Missionary societies. His work with the youth was outstanding. The congregation was honored by his selection as moderator of the Washington City Presbytery (previously the Presbytery of the Potomac.) His position kept them current on the happenings in the broader church, and he instituted such special occasions as World Wide Communion and Easter Sunrise Services.

In March of 1930 records show there were 42 members and 54 Sunday school members and teachers. By 1939, the Sessional records show 77 communicants and 73 Sunday school members and teachers.

In 1920 Clifton – population 200, speed limit 12mph, land priced in Fairfax County at \$61.39/acre – the new owner of the Clifton Hotel, Will Mathers, was building a new house on land deeded to him the year before, and according to the *Fairfax Herald*, by September 1920 {the family} had moved in to their "very pretty little bungalow." Mr. Mathers, trying to adapt to these rapidly changing times, converted the upstairs of the Clifton Hotel into housekeeping apartments, and the main floor into an automotive repair garage. In 1924, Mr. Mathers was stricken with paralysis. After 2 years of illness, he died at the age of 59. (Would Alexander Fleming's discovery of Penicillin two years later, in 1928, have made a difference?)

Janie Mathers remained in the house with her daughter, Ruth Pyle, who for a time, ran a lunch room in the first floor of the hotel, called "The Pyle Inn." (Brigadoon in VA) The year before Mathers' death, W.B. Doak among others, organized the Bull Run Power Co. The plant operated during the 30's after which they merged with the Prince William Electric Cooperative. In 1932, the state assumed the responsibility for most of the roads, more concrete sidewalks were added, and the town purchased 2 long extension ladders – fires were common and devastating and still the only fire equipment Clifton had were bucket brigades . . . That will change!

A few in our congregation today, remember the late 1930's. As a **very** little girl, "our Alice" remembers attending the debut of *Gone with the Wind* at the Fox Theater in Atlanta, GA in 1939! (Actually, she only remembers the fire scene and the twinkling lights in the ceiling of the theater that looked like stars – and that it was a very long trip!) She remembers her tonsillectomy – maybe ice cream? – and Santa on a firetruck in the Marion Christmas parade. She also remembers singing a solo at age 5, in her Baptist Church in Marion, NC. She had no idea that one day she would be singing in the choir and playing bells in a historic little Presbyterian church in Clifton, VA – But, God knew!

We are grateful for perseverance, cooperation, youthful energy and ideas, and memories. We are especially grateful for God's loving guidance in navigating change that is inevitable.



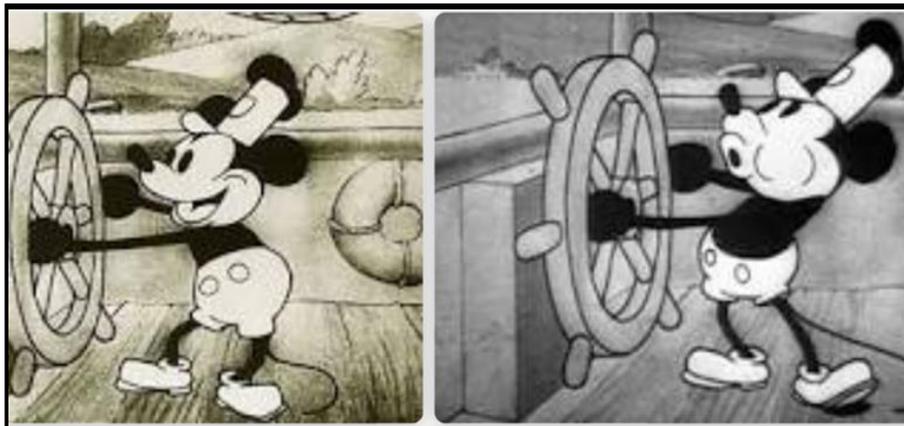
Washington Post Article

July 3, 1932

CPC and the Baptist Church sharing joint Vacation Bible School in the early 30's.



In 1928 the radio brought families together to hear the news and programs.



Micky Mouse as Steamboat Willy was a popular cartoon!