

For over 280 years, members of the First Presbyterian Church have worshipped God here in the Cumberland Valley. Our heritage goes back to 1734, when a large settlement of sturdy, God-fearing Scots-Irish from Lancaster County established a Presbyterian Church at Meeting House Springs, located on the Conodoguinet Creek about two miles west of the Carlisle Public Square.

The first minister was installed there in 1739 and preached from a crude pulpit in a one-room log church. Eventually, Meeting House Springs proved to be too far removed from the new county seat of Carlisle, established in 1751, so the congregation moved to town in 1757 and subsequently built the edifice in which we worship today. Behind the old stone walls at Meeting House Springs endures what is left of our earliest heritage – an old church graveyard with stones that date back to 1744 – the oldest anywhere in the Cumberland Valley.

At the new meeting house in Carlisle, the doors of the sanctuary faced south, and the pulpit was situated on the north side between two arched windows. It was a high pulpit with stairs leading up to it, a sounding board over it and a desk for the clerk in front. Worshippers furnished their own benches before pews were installed and could bring their own foot warmers, since there was no heat. A south balcony was added in 1785.

In 1827 a brick chapel was added to the west side of the meeting house and the interior of the church was remodeled. The entrance doors were made to face Hanover Street. Evidence of these changes can be seen in a close inspection of the outside walls. The pulpit was moved from the north to its current location on the west side, and a new, lower pulpit, without the clerk's desk, but with winding stairways on both sides replaced the high pulpit. The balcony was modified as it appears today. The gas lights were installed in 1857. They still hang from the gallery and have been electrified.

The present chapel, built to replace the old brick chapel, was dedicated in 1873 as a memorial to Presbyterian reunion. It corresponded in style to the main building and was topped by the tower.

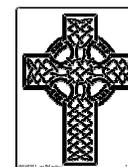
It was in 1876 that the interior of our church was made to look as it does today. At that time, stained glass windows were added and the pulpit with winding stairways was removed. The box pews were replaced with the current ones made of Victorian walnut.

Few subsequent changes were made to our church building until 1952, when the Sunday school annex was constructed. Built of native limestone to match the old meeting house, it served our congregation well for thirty-four years. In 1986 the roof of this wing was raised to a full second story, providing classroom, fellowship and administrative space.

Our church served its community well. Within the stone walls of the meeting house, men of the colony met in 1774 to support defiance of England by Massachusetts and to call for united action by the colonies. Here President Washington worshipped in 1794. Here the shells fired by the Confederates struck in 1863. Here Dickinson College commencements were held for half a century. Here, troops from Carlisle Barracks worshipped.

In addition to their religious and patriotic fervor, our Scots-Irish ancestors vehemently supported education, and for that reason, built a Presbyterian grammar school which evolved into Dickinson College. The first Sunday school in the valley was organized in this church, as was the first Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor. After the Civil War, a large class of Afro-Americans found religious instruction here. For many years Native American pupils from the Carlisle Industrial Training School attended Sunday school here. Many of them later joined the church.

With religious, civic and educational interests finding expression here, our church has ever been and continues to be a part of the life of this community. Bearing its years with grace and dignity, this historic building stands as a testament to the life and heritage of the First Presbyterian Church.



Pastorates and Pastors

- Rev. Samuel Thomson 1739-1749
- Rev. John Steel (Old Side) 1759-1779
- Rev. George Duffield, D.D. (New Side) 1759-1772
- Rev. Robert Davidson, D.D. 1785-1812
- Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D. (co-pastor) 1785-1804
- Rev. Henry R. Wilson, D.D. (co-pastor) 1809-1813
- Rev. George Duffield III, D.D. 1816-1835
- Rev. William Sprole, D.D. 1837-1843
- Rev. Ellis J. Newlin, D.D. 1844-1847
- Rev. Conway P. Wing, D.D. 1848-1875
- Rev. Joseph Vance, D.D. 1876-1886
- Rev. Eugene L. Mapes, D.D. 1887-1892
- Rev. Andrew N. Hagerty, D.D. 1893-1929
- Rev. R. Walter Anderson 1930-1949
- Rev. Charles C. Smith, D.Th. 1950-1952
- Rev. Russell M. Weer, D.D. 1953-1976
- Rev. Jacquel E. Kelewae 1976-1981
- Rev. James Skimins, D.Min. 1982-1994
- Rev. Jon A. Black 1996-2013
- Rev. Anthony D. Lorenz 2015-

History of the First Presbyterian Church On the Square Carlisle, Pennsylvania



Founded 1734