

# HAT CREEK CHURCH, VIRGINIA

By L. C. Asher

Hat Creek Church is situated in the north-eastern part of Campbell County, near the line between that county and Charlotte, and is, with probably one exception (Cub Creek), the oldest church in Roanoke Presbytery.

"In 1738 the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia petitioned the Governor of Virginia that those of their denomination moving to the valley of Virginia, might have the free enjoyment of their religious liberty; and the writer of this petition, John Caldwell, grandfather of John C. Calhoun, having received a courteous response, proceeded to settle Presbyterian families also in the counties of Prince Edward, Charlotte and Campbell.

One of these Presbyterian families was that of Mr. John Irvin, a native of Ireland, who came to America and settled in Pennsylvania. After living there about twenty years he moved to Virginia about the year 1739, and settled one mile from where Hat Creek now is. There was no other family within many miles of him but he was soon followed by others from Pennsylvania, and in 1742 they set to work to build a house for the Lord, which however was only a rude log structure. As soon as the church was completed, Mr. Irvin wrote to Rev. Gilbert Tennent asking him to come, in fulfillment of a promise made before Mr. Irvin left Pennsylvania, and preach for them.

Mr. Tennent came and remained one year, during which time he organized a church, with Mr. Irvin as one of the elders. At the end of Mr. Tennent's year he returned to Pennsylvania and for a season the church had no preaching, except an occasional sermon from some traveling minister who might pass by. At length, Mr. Waddell was secured as supply, and remained several years, during which time the church prospered greatly. Next came Mr. David Rice who supplied the church very acceptably for a number of years. After him came Rev. Messrs William Mahon, Carey Allen, William Irvin (son of the founder of the church, John Irvin) and James Mitchell, each of whom supplied the church for a short time.

About this time (between 1780 and 1785) the second church building was erected. At the time this second church building was erected, the eldership of the church consisted of Mr. John Irvin (founder of the church), Major John Irvin (his son), Capt. John Marshall, Charles Cobbs, Publius Jones, and Joshua Morris. Not long after this, however, Mr. Cobbs left Hat Creek and joined the Baptist church, and in 1788 or 1789, Mr. Irvin, Sr. died.

After this the church had no regular preaching for several years, but only an occasional sermon by ministers of other denominations. In 1799, Rev. Archibald McRoberts was secured as stated supply, and continued as such until 1806, after which the church was without regular preaching. In 1807 Rev. John H. Rice visited the church and preached twice. During the next year Rev. Clement Read and Rev. Mr. Lumpkin visited the church and preached for them. In the fall of 1809, Rev. Nash Legrand became supply and the next year four new elders were elected. About the same time the third church building was erected. In January 1814, Mr. Legrand bade farewell and the church was again vacant.

In the summer of 1814, Presbytery met at Hat Creek, and at the same time Rev. John S. McLean was installed pastor of the church. Among those present at this meeting of Presbytery were Rev. Messrs. Drury Lacy, Mathew Lyle, William B. Read, Clement Read and Nash Legrand.

Mr. Legrand remained nine or ten years, and was followed by J. Cochran as supply. During Mr. Cochran's time, three new elders were elected. Mr. Cochran remained only a short time and was followed by Rev. Samuel Armistead, who was installed pastor in 1826, against the wishes of a number of the members.

This produced a breach in the church which could not be healed. At length the Presbytery appointed a committee to visit the church and settle the matter, which was done by cutting off the members composing the dissatisfied faction and giving them to Concord Church (then known as Little Concord).

After this all was quiet until the controversy which divided the church into "Old School" and "New School" sprung up, when another split occurred. Mr. Armistead sided with the "New School", whereupon those members who composed the "Old School" withdrew and worshipped at a place known as "Rudd's Old Store", about one and one half miles from the church. This faction was supplied with preaching by Rev. Mr. Cunningham, while those that remained at the church retained Mr. Armistead as pastor for a number of years, probably ten or fifteen. After the pastoral relationship between the church and Mr. Armistead was dissolved, Rev. James McDearman preached as supply for a while and finally received a call to become pastor. A committee of Presbytery, consisting of Andrew Hart, William Hamersley, William Pollard and Mathew Jackson was appointed to ordain and install him. This committee, however, did not sustain his examination and he was not ordained.

After Mr. McDearman left, the two factions (the one worshipping at "Rudd's Old Store", and the other at the church agreed to come together again at the church and secure the services of Rev. William Hamersley, as pastor. He took charge of the united church in 1844, and from that time it seemed to start on a new era of prosperity, and some precious outpourings of the Holy Ghost were experienced during his pastorate.

In 1846, the fourth church building, the one now standing, was built. Mr. Hamersley remained pastor until his death in 1860. After his death the church was vacant nearly a year. Rev. C. R. Vaughan D.D. commenced preaching as supply in August 1861, and continued about a year. Then for a year or more Rev. John A. Scott, D.D., supplied the church.

During the years 1864-1865, the church had preaching only at irregular intervals, by Rev. John A. Scott, D.D., Rev. Alexander Martin, D.D., Rev. A.B. Carrington and others. A congregational meeting was held November 11, 1865 and Rev. A. B. Carrington was called to the pastorate for half his time. He took charge of the church immediately, but was not installed until May 1871. He remained until December 1880. In the beginning of 1881 the church was supplied for a few months by Rev. H. A. Brown, D.D. In July of that year a call was made out for the pastoral services of Rev. J. A. McMurray who was then in Texas, but the call was declined.

In December of the same year, Rev. John A. Scott, Jr. was called for half his time and took charge of the church in January 1882. He was installed on the fourth Sabbath of the following July by a committee of Presbytery, consisting of Rev. Messrs. J.H. Davis, D.D., and J. C. Dindwiddle. During Mr. Scott's pastorate of seven years the church was greatly built up, and the membership increased considerably. He bade farewell in January 1889 and in September of this same year, Rev. Hugh Henry took charge of the church and was installed in March 1890 by a committee consisting of Rev. J. A. McMurray and Rev. John E. Wool. He remained until September 1893, when the church was again left vacant. In May, 1894, Rev. ~~Beck~~, Houston became supply and continued until November, 1895, since time the church has been vacant.

The church at present consists of about one hundred and forty members, with five elders and four deacons. Thus this old church has stood for one hundred and fifty eight years, and none can compute the influence for good it has exerted on the surrounding country. Many good and noble men have been reared under its influence.

Several ministers, prominent in the Presbyterian church at different times, were descendants of Mr. John Irvin, the founder of the church. Among them may be mentioned Rev. William Irvin, one of the early pastors of the church, who was one of four ministers composing the Presbytery, which met at Cub Creek church in Charlotte County, Virginia in October, 1774, and took the initiatory steps for the establishment of Hampden Sidney College. The Rev. A.R. Cocke, D.D., the present chaplain of the University of Virginia, is also a descendant of Mr. Irvin.

Long may this old church live and flourish, and may the great God who has guided her thus far, still guide and bless her. (See Christian Observer, May 27, 1896. Page 10.)

By HISTORICAL FOUNDATION  
MONTREAT, N. C.  
September 1934.

## HAT CREEK CHURCH

The early records of this church were destroyed by fire in 1854, when the house of Ruling Elder Paulett Clark was burned. The loss of these documents was a deplorable event, for directly and incidentally they would have illustrated the pioneer history of the Presbyterian church in Colonial America.

For the history of this church during the first century of its existence, we are compelled to depend principally on the M. S. History of Hat Creek Church, written by William Irvin. He was a pious and scholarly man, a member of this church, and a grandson of John Irvin, the founder of the settlement of Hat Creek. (N.B. The M.S. is deposited in the Presbyterian Historical Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.)

In 1740 a colony of Scotch-Irish migrated from Pennsylvania to the slopes of Eastern Virginia, allured by the cheapness of the land and its suitability for tobacco growing. These people were Presbyterians. Their leader was John Irvin. He was a typical Scotch-Irish; a man pious, sagacious, bold and persevering.

During the first year the settlers cleared land, built log cabins, and planted crops. The next year they assembled and by their united efforts, built on a gentle eminence, a log church. (On that site, the present house of worship, the fourth in succession, stands.) This done they sent back to Pennsylvania for the Rev't Gilbert Tennant, who had promised to visit them when the church was completed. He came and preached for them a whole year and before he left, he organized the church. This was done in 1742. The only elder of the original Session whose name has come down is John Irvin, the founder of the settlement.

It is not known to what Presbytery this church was, at its organization, attached. Though it is conjectured that it was in the Presbytery of Snow Hill

Rooted in the midst of a sturdy and upright people, this church has pursued an honored and useful course. It has had at various times precious seasons of revival. This was notably true during the pastorates of William Hamersley (1837-1860) and A.B. Carrington (1865-1880)

The church became divided in 1837. Under the lead of Rev. Samuel Armistead, a part of the people went off in the New School movement. A result of this secession was the erection of Morris Church. But such of the people as were really Presbyterians afterwards returned to Hat Creek. Morris Church became extinct.

The following ministers have as pastor or as S. Supply served the church. The list is necessarily imperfect, yet is reliable as far as it goes, and in William Irvin's M.S. many interesting facts are mentioned in regard to each of the ministers. It is regrettable that the dates of their labors cannot be given. They are: Rev. Gilbert Tennant (1741-1742), James Waddell, David Rice, Wm. Mahon, Carey Allen, Wm. Irvin, James Mitchell, Mr. McRobert, Nash Legrand, Samuel Armistead (from about 1830 to 1837), Wm. Hammersley (1837-1860) A. B. Carrington (1865-1880), J. A. Scott, Jr. 1882-

At present the membership of the Church is about 160. Its ruling elders are O.C. Clark, W. Williams, S.H. Hud-----, Albert Clark, ----- Clark, and H. N. Elliott. The deacons are Wm. Smith, - Williams, J.Y. Foster, - B. Holt, and M. -egann.

The Rev. J.A. Scott, Jr., was installed pastor of this church on the 4th Sabbath, July 1882, by a committee of Roanoke Presbytery, consisting of Rev. John Davis and J. C. Dinwiddie.

O.C. Clark  
C.S.