

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN MIDVALE, IDAHO 1871-1995

By Terry Bonner

July 1995, Rocky Mountain Christian

The source of much of this information is a church history written by Ethel Hooper, who died in March, 1967 and Myrtle Linder, who died December, 1964.

In 1871, John and Levi Keithly and their families arrived at an area called Middle Valley, Idaho, one hundred miles north of Boise on the Weiser River. At that time there was only one other family living in the valley.

Seeing this was a good farming area, the Keithly's sent word to their friends and neighbors in Missouri, telling them to come on out, even planting extra large gardens to help feed everyone after they arrived. A wagon train of settlers arrived in 1881 with enough Christians to form a congregation.

The first preacher for this congregation was Joel Jones, who spent the night at the home of Alexander Towell, one of the new arrivals from Missouri. Jones didn't stay on as a located preacher. A few years later, when brother Jones was a Mann Creek, ten miles south over the mountains, the Towell boys were sent on horseback to ask him to come to Midvale and preach. He accepted their invitation, preaching one sermon for them on the Lord's day.

The next preacher was Benjamin Smith, who came from Long Valley in 1891. He held two meetings in two different school houses. Even though his sermons were an hour and a half long, it was reported that they were very interesting.

In the winter of 1893, a brother Wells came to hold a meeting and "set the church in Stephen Settle preached the first sermon in the building.

Some years later, a full basement was dug under this building by hand, with horse

order", appointing elders. Griff Keithly, Levi Keithly and Alexander Towell were appointed overseers of the flock of about twenty-five. They met in alternating school houses each Sunday.

A brother Richard Boyles from Pine, Oregon, came in 1895 and held meetings at the school houses, baptizing quite a few young people. For the next two years he came to Midvale once a month, preaching on Saturday night, Sunday morning and Sunday night. He also conducted several meetings and the church increased to over 100. In 1898, a brother Swift came for a meeting. The, in the summer of 1899, G.W. Williams and Claude Witty came from Illinois to spend the summer with the church. Our pioneer members said, "both were able preachers." At the turn of the century, brother G.W. Williams moved his family from Illinois and for a number of years taught school, farmed and preached. His family has been an important part of Midvale, although not all have been faithful. One of his grandsons, Delbert Williams, served as an elder.

It was in 1903 that the name of the post office was changed from Middle Valley to Midvale. Then, in 1905, the first meeting house was erected by the church. Denton Collins preached the first sermon in the new building, located at the corner of Depot and Canary Streets. Sadly, this building was destroyed by fire in 1924 which spread from a nearby home. All church records were burned, but the members were asked to write histories of the earlier years. The same year, a new building was constructed on the same site. Hale Castle was the minister at the time.

and fresno, intending to use this for Bible classrooms. They soon discovered there was a problem with this because every spring, when the river rises, the basement floods.

This problem was finally solved in 1982 when a two-story classroom addition was built and the basement abandoned.

Through the years, the church has always represented a healthy cross section of the town. The town has never been over 1,000, while the church never been much over 200. Winter meetings and baptisms in the frozen river are remembered by many. This congregation was the first Church of Christ in the state and possibly the oldest continual worshiping congregation west of the Rockies. Many fine men have preached and served in the congregation in Midvale and many fine Christians have gone from here to other areas. Some of the preachers who have served in one way or another are: R.P. Williams, J.A. Jones, E.C. Love, Ed Mackey, E.G. Johnson, L.F. Clipp, W.R. Reedy, J.C. Roady, brother Owens, T.L. Gray, W.J. Whaley (or Haley?), J.C. Bunn, J.J. Hogan, Jesse Smith, R.H. Thornhill, Joseph Sherman, Roy Lanier, I.E. Wilkerson, L.D. Webb, Claude Guild, L.J. Anderson, Henry Towell, A.R. Kepple, Fred Amick, V.M. Gilbert, Maurice Meredith, Melvin Evans, Austin Matheny, Max Towell, Lyle Dalzell, Marvin Towell, brothers Pagent and Linsay, Stanley Poole, brothers Watson and Storm, Claudis Gurley, Frank Towell, Darol Ady, Herman Pope, Steve Taulbee, H.W. McClish, Dub McClish, Jerris Bullard, T.A. Gibson, John Hollingsworth, Hale Miller, Vern Carrithers, Bill McDonough, Bill Crowley, Richard M. Williams, Bobby Watts, Gerald Bristol, Ervin L. Driskill, Roland Barton, Chuck Miller, Bob Dudman, Bill Free, Dick Nichols, David Price, Roy Wilson, Tom Sibley and Terry Bonner.

In recent years, farming is no longer very lucrative and it is difficult to make a living on small acreage. Because of this, the population of the town is only 140 and church attendance around 35 to 40. But it is a faithful congregation, still attempting to reach the world by word and deed. The only other church in town is the Baptist church whose

ancestors came in the same 1881 wagon train which brought ours. Their numbers are comparable to ours.

I am in my tenth year as the congregation's preacher. For the first nine years, my wife and I commuted 75 miles from Caldwell, Idaho each weekend. A year ago, we moved to Midvale. Like many of the early preachers, I must supplement my part-time salary that I receive from the church. I build fence, raise horses and practice woodcarving. My wife, Kay, is the town's librarian and cleans houses. We also have bought a historic 1907 house across the street from the church building and have converted it into a bed and breakfast.

When I graduated from Preston Road School of Preaching in 1972, I had no idea where I'd serve. As small as Midvale is, it's been one of the most gratifying places and feels most like home. The church here is very much alive and well.

When people begin to rediscover rural American, perhaps the town and church will grow again. I think like the original settlers. I tell all good Christians that I meet that if they want a more quiet way of life, a good place to raise children and a loving fellowship of Christians, come and help us grow the town and the church in Midvale, Idaho.

Terry Bonner
PO Box 27
Midvale, Idaho 83645