

## PROLOGUE

From the slave, Moses, in 1811, to George King in 1986, Old Philadelphia Church of Christ has had a unique role in the restoration movement in that blacks have played a prominent and continuing influence in the existence of this venerable religious group.

Uniqueness does not end with its Black involvement, because Philadelphia is the only congregation in our area of Tennessee known to have evolved out of the James O'Kelly movement in Western North Carolina in the late 1700s. Independent, autonomous, evangelistic, innovative, and conciliatory, Old Philadelphia earnestly searched for a true restoration pattern of first century Christianity. Unfettered by ministers with preconceived thoughts or interpretations, and sufficiently removed from established religious centers and schools, this group determined to "study the word" and be "Christians" only.

Incorporating the teachings of Barton W. Stone in the 1820s and Alexander Campbell in later years, Philadelphia continued a flexible and innovative approach to worshipping Jehovah so typical of the restoration movement. They organized a form of missionary society in the early 1840s and spearheaded the development of the State society in the late 1840s. They gave support to Christian colleges as early as 1837, when Irving College was first organized with a degree of support from Churches within the restoration cause. Franklin College and Burritt College had much support from Philadelphia's members and ministers such as Rees Jones, W. D. Carnes, Isaac Jones, L. N. Murphy, and the Sewells.

An interesting facet of Philadelphia's history is a total lack of controversy on instrumental music. The cooperative, or society plan, was of great benefit in early days when a lack of funds, preachers, and education seriously as growth and evangelism. As these deficiencies became minor, cooperative efforts diminished. The Civil War created

problems for the society, and undoubtedly added to its repudiation after the conflict. Sunday school was readily accepted as were located ministers.

A study of Old Philadelphia's history is truly a microcosm of the restoration movement, and, as the years go by, and more is learned of this congregation's history an even greater insight into the restoration cause will unfold.

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Historian,

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May 4, 1986

## THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH OF CHRIST

(Warren County, Tennessee)

As you delve into the beginnings of the restoration movement in religion, you are quickly aware of the multitude of endeavors by a varied and usually diverse people which culminated in the development of North America's first indigenous religious group. The early stirrings were, for the most part, not an effort to establish a new formal religious division, but to simply follow the Bible. For the most part, little documentation was made of these efforts and, since each group was autonomous, there was little cohesiveness or communication between the groups. Because of these acts, there are undoubtedly many early restoration efforts of which little is known or researched.

Warren County has had strong ties with the restoration movement since its establishment in 1807. When you review the personalities that have been associated with the movement in Warren County, it reads like a who's who in the history of the restoration movement in America. Probably the strongest influence in creating this historical fact was the old Philadelphia Church.

With the opening of the territory south of the Caney Fork River, created by the treaty with the Cherokee Indians in 1805, a flood of emigrants entered the area from Southwest Virginia and Western North Carolina. The Great Road, also known variously as the Lexington, Kentucky to Alabama Road and the Old Kentucky Trail, was the route most emigrants used to reach the area.<sup>1</sup> Among the earliest settlers were the Price Brothers: Elisha, John, Hugh & William who homesteaded an area along the Great Road on the banks of Hickory Creek some 8 miles south of the future township of

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<sup>1</sup> McMinnville at a Milestone, 1960, p. 174.

McMinnville.<sup>2</sup> Scotch Irish, by ethnic background, they, as well as their neighbors, were Presbyterian and Episcopalian (Anglican) in their religious background. The Price's came to Warren County from the Asheville, North Carolina area (Buncombe County).<sup>3</sup> They called their new home Philadelphia. Unlike most emigrants to the area, they possessed a deep religious fervor and began meeting as a group almost immediately after arrival. Since Hugh Price signed the petition to form Warren County in August, 1806, it can be assumed that he was probably here in 1805, and thus, it is most likely, that the beginnings of Philadelphia Church date from 1805 or early 1806.

Tradition says that the church which assembled at Philadelphia determined to call themselves Christians, and the church to be called the Church of Christ.<sup>4</sup> By 1810 the people of this neighborhood were worshipping as one body, assembling each Lord's Day for worship and the Lord's Supper. A totally autonomous group. Their only deviation from later practices was baptism by sprinkling rather than immersion. From this early history, including the founders' previous home in North Carolina, we can easily determine that these emigrants had come under the influence of the teachings of James O'Kelly, a wayward disciple of the noted Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury.<sup>5</sup>

The Price family played a significant role in the restoration movement in Warren County. John, Elisha, and Richard are listed on the 1812 tax list and the 1820 list included John and William. Elisha and John Price became noted preachers in the restoration movement. It is interesting to note that by 1830, John Price was living on

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<sup>2</sup> Alabama's Oldest Church of Christ, Pamphlet by Ernest Clevenger (History of Rocky spring Church Nnear Bridgeport, Alabama) date unknown. Petition to form Warren County, August 6, 1806, lists Hugh Price. The 1812 Warren County Tax List lists all the brothers. Deed records indicate they followed Hugh within a few months.

<sup>3</sup> IBID

<sup>4</sup> Article by J. Lynwood Mathis entitled The Restoration Movement in Warren County. Dated 1978. Mathis is a former minister of Morrison, Tennessee Church of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> The Search for the Ancient Order, Vol. I, by West, p. 6.

Rocky River and Anger Price at Fountain Springs. Both the Rocky River and Fountain Springs Churches began in 1820 's.<sup>6</sup>

By using the Bible as their only guide, they learned, contrary to former belief and practice, that baptism was a burial and for remission of sins, and began to practice it in that manner and for that purpose.<sup>7</sup>

A detailed history of those earliest years is difficult to determine. As was the custom in those earliest days, worship was probably held in a home, or if a subscription school (old field) had been erected in the area, it is possible this school building was used. One thing is certain, the congregation at Philadelphia was an active, viable, functioning organization structured along present day Churches of Christ. Of interest is a letter of recommendation written in 1818 to the Antioch Church in Alabama on behalf of one Elizabeth Brown as follows: State of Tennessee, Warren County, October 22, 1818. The Church of Christ at Philadelphia commends to the fellowship of the faithful in Christ Jesus our beloved sister, Elizabeth Brown, as a faithful member in the Kingdom of Christ. Signed: George Stroud and David Ramsay, Bishops. Both George Stroud and David Ramsay had long and influential careers in the history of the church in Warren County. George Stroud was a early preacher of note.<sup>8</sup>

In 1811, William J. Price, (1793-1868) who had been baptised at Philadelphia the same year, moved to Northern Alabama near present day Bridgeport and founded the Rocky Springs Church of Christ in the Antioch community. Since Elisha M. Price was listed as an Elder at Rocky Springs in 1827, he apparently left Warren County after 1820,

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<sup>6</sup> Census Records, Warren County for 1820 and 1830. Also 1812 tax list.

<sup>7</sup> History of Morrison Church of Christ, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> IBID

joining William V. Price in Alabama. The Rocky Springs Church is Alabama's oldest restoration church.<sup>9</sup>

Elisha Price (1770-1876), John Price, who died at 110 years of age and William J. Price (1793-1868) all lived long and active lives in service to the restoration movement and, along with Brother Hugh Price and their offspring, contributed greatly to the stability of the early congregations in Warren County and later in Northern Alabama where most of them resided in later years. Many of their progeny maintain an active role in Church of Christ affairs in modern times.<sup>10</sup>

A book written by W. Ralph Wharton of Moberly, Missouri, entitled Restoration Movement around the World, some years ago states the following concerning the location of the Philadelphia church building "One such trail ran from the present vicinity of Monticello, Kentucky through Tennessee to near Huntsville, Alabama. In it's meanderings it followed the base of Ben Lomand Mountain to the proximity of the present Bonner Church of Christ, followed the route now taken by Viola Road to cross Hickory Creek at Scotts Ford and wandered on South.--- A building was erected in which to worship near Scotts Ford on Hickory Creek. Hammonds Tavern stood nearby just south of the church building and was one of the first in the county." Since this site is adjacent to an original grant of the Ramsey Family, who were active in the congregation, the Wharton statement has credence.<sup>11</sup>

From its beginning until 1830 the leaders at Philadelphia, in addition to the large Price family, included David Ramsey, George Stroud, Major William D. Gains baptised 1811 and later a noted Alabama politician, Nicholas Hughes, Stephen Blevins, Benjamin Garner, William Garner, probably John & Andrew Davis and others. An examination of

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<sup>9</sup> Alabama's Oldest Church of Christ, Clevenger.

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the minutes of the Blue Springs Baptist Church, located just 2 miles south of the original Philadelphia Church reveals some interesting facts. Blue Springs began about 1806, but the earliest minute book has been lost. The second minute book lists George Stroud, Elizabeth Price, Isabel Stroud, John Overton, Benjamin Garner, Catherine Eaton, William Garner, Margaret Garner, John Garner, John Miller and wife, Ann Darnell, N. Jolley, James Lynn, Jacob Myers and several others as being excluded from membership at Blue Springs for their activities with the Campbellites. This occurred between 1830 and 1848. Noting the negligible doctrinal differences between the two groups at that time and a more liberal attitude towards open membership, it is understandable that doctrinal differences prior to 1830 were largely discounted among the 20% of the population that professed active church membership in any group. By 1830 the teachings of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were crystallizing the difference between the restoration movement and other prominent religious doctrines. One thing is certain from the Blue Springs minute books, by 1830, the restoration movement and its adherents posed a seeming threat to established religious groups and was growing rapidly.<sup>12</sup>

Sometime before 1832, another church building was erected on the present site. Tradition says 1830. The site of the new building was downstream on the newly built Winchester Turnpike or Stagecoach Road, now known as the Vervilla Road, a site some 3 miles northwest of the original site. On September 25, 1835, the site with the building on it, was deeded to David Ramsey and Benjamin Garner by Elcana D. Blevins, "For and in consideration of his desire to promote the cause of religion and worship of the Almighty God." Carter Blevins and John Brown were witnesses to the conveyance

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<sup>11</sup> History of Rocky Springs Church of Christ by W. Ralph Wharton, p. 2, October 23, 1962.

which included 1/2 acre and appurtenances that were to be used as a meeting house and nothing else.<sup>13</sup>

By the late 1820's the Barton W. Stone restoration movement, begun in Kentucky, had now reached Warren County and definitely influenced the growth of Philadelphia. As early as 1826 there were Stone followers in Warren County. In 1833, G. W. Banton established a congregation near the mouth of Mountain Creek. In 1830, Sandy E. Jones held an evangelistic meeting at the court house in McMinnville but no congregation resulted. In 1834, Robert G. Spicer held a meeting, baptising 6 and resulting in a congregation which soon disbanded. In 1836, another congregation was organized with 35 members which also later disbanded.<sup>14</sup> With the help of John and Elisha Price, congregations were formed at Fountain Springs, assisted by the John Lemon family, and on Rocky River.<sup>15</sup>

Stone followers were evangelistic, enthusiastic and aggressive. They also helped self-taught restoration efforts such as Philadelphia to solidify their interpretation of the scriptures, meet on a regular basis, and organize more effectively. Early churches were noted for long periods of inactivity when no minister or speaker was available.<sup>16</sup> Thus Philadelphia Church, with the impetus of the Stone movement entered the 1830 's with itinerant preachers such as William D. Carnes, Levi Nix Murphee, John Lemon, John and Elisha Price, Sandy E. Jones, Robert G. Spicer, Issac Jones, George Stroud, Rees

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<sup>12</sup> Minutes of Blue Springs Baptist Church. Republished by Coffee County Historical Society. Vol. X, No. 2, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Book F. p. 79 Warren County Deed book dated September 25, 1835.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Messenger. Barton W. Stone, Nov. 1835 and Feb. 1836.

<sup>15</sup> There is strong evidence supported by information from both the Price family and the Lemmons families that these families had close ties in Buncombe County, North Carolina prior to their move to Warren County. The Lemmons family came some 10 years after the first Price family arrived. The Fountain Springs Church was most active until the Civil War. The Lemmons family moved to Northeast Arkansas in the late 1850's. John Lemmons is buried at Fountain Springs Cemetery. He was the progenitor of this well-known family who is still active in the restoration movement.

<sup>16</sup> Religion in Tennessee, H.W. Norton, 1981, pp. 15-16.



Jones and Tolbert Fanning. In the 1840's, in addition to the aforementioned, J. J. Trott, J. D. Eichbaum and Joshua K. Speer were evangelizing in Warren County. The work of these men had a profound influence on the growth and influence of the Philadelphia Church.<sup>17</sup>

By 1840, Philadelphia was the center of evangelistic efforts by the restoration movement in Eastern Middle Tennessee. Most of the better known evangelists headquartered at Philadelphia when engaged in meetings in the area. The new Stagecoach Road from McMinnville to Winchester had replaced the original trail and had probably been the deciding factor in locating the church building some two miles west of its original site. A heavily traveled route, Philadelphia's growth was undoubtedly enhanced by the road. By this time there were at least eight congregations meeting in the county; Philadelphia, Smyrna, Irving College, Ivy Bluff, Fountain Springs, Mountain Creek, Rocky River and McMinnville. At least three of these met erratically and were loosely organized: Ivy Bluff, Smyrna and Mountain Creek, which due to its isolated location, soon ceased to exist.<sup>18</sup>

The efforts by Carnes, Stroud, Trott, Eichbaum, and Fanning were bearing fruit, creating enthusiasm and interest. In 1846, a meeting was held by area churches to discuss and organize better evangelism. The outgrowth of this meeting was formation of a cooperative to hire a full time evangelist at an annual salary of \$150.00 year. It appears from later items in the Christian Messenger, Christian Baptist and other restoration papers that J.J. Trott and John Eichbaum were the major evangelists and spent several days each year at Philadelphia.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Tennessee Christians. H.W. Norton, pp. 56, 71, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Restoration Movement in Warren County. 1982 by Perry C. Cotham. (History of Movement by James Dillon. pp. 1-3).

<sup>19</sup> Tennessee Christians. p. 49; Crying in the Wilderness, p. 52

In 1848, there were 350 members of the movement in Warren County divided among six congregations. Neither Mountain Creek nor Smyrna were mentioned.<sup>20</sup> By November 1850, Philadelphia had 108 members, “met regularly every Lord’s Day, was organized with bishops and one deacon and contributed to both the county and state cooperation.” It was the largest restoration church in Warren County. McMinnville had 82 members, no bishops and two deacons. The cooperatives referred to were, in effect, missionary societies, indicating the evangelistic thrust of the Philadelphia brethren.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the 1850’s Philadelphia’s influence in the restoration movement grew as the movement itself expanded. George Stroud had a great influence during this period. Undoubtedly his preaching was reaching various individuals who would have a great impact on the church in the next few decades. Sometime before 1856, Stroud came in contact with a young convert in Franklin County, who, he believed had great potential as a preacher. Although a farmer at the time, young David Lipscomb was known as a devout Christian who lived his religion. Years later Lipscomb attributed his decision to preach to George Stroud’s encouragement. As a young preacher, Lipscomb preached often at Philadelphia and was probably influenced to take the minister’s position at the McMinnville church in 1857.<sup>22</sup>

Another young men getting started at the time was Jesse Londerman Sewell of Overton County. Stroud was a friend of Jesse and also his brother Elisha, and obviously encouraged both in their evangelistic efforts. Another factor that was bringing attention to the restoration plea, was the establishment of Burritt College in 1848. Among the leaders at Burritt during its early years were Issac N. Jones and W. D. Carnes, who had maintained close relations with Philadelphia in past years. When cooperative meetings

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<sup>20</sup> Restoration Movement in Warren County, 1978, J. Lynwood Mathis.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics of Churches, Nashville, Tennessee, 1850.

of congregational leaders were held during this period it was usually at Philadelphia. The inmost important meeting concerning cooperative efforts assembled at Philadelphia in 1847. From this meeting came the establishment of the State Cooperative at a later date. The concept was generally accepted by those present. J. J. Trott and Tolbert Fanning were most enthusiastic in support of the cooperative.<sup>23</sup>

By 1855, the Christian Evangelizing Association of Tennessee, as the cooperative was known, was functioning well. Secretary of the Association was William Lipscomb, David's brother. He called for a meeting of the Association at Philadelphia for the third Lord's Day of October, 1855. The focus of the meeting was organization and support of a state missionary society. Among the speakers were Tolbert Fanning on Reformation, i.e. the Restoration Movement, J. J. Trott spoke on the authority of churches, and W. D. Carnes spoke on Christian Union. The meeting resulted in support of the groundwork for a state society. Thus it can be said that Philadelphia was the birthplace of the Tennessee Missionary Society in Warren county and indeed supported and nurtured the movement for some years before rejecting it.<sup>24</sup> Philadelphia's prestige among the brethren was certainly at a zenith during this period of searching for sound doctrinal ground upon which to operate, and most of the more effective evangelists, during this time, used Philadelphia as a base of operations when preaching in the mountain area of Middle Tennessee.<sup>25</sup>

If Philadelphia had prominence in the middle 1850's, this prominence became greater with the entrance of Jesse L. Sewell upon the scene in 1858. A native of Overton County and former Baptist minister who became attracted to the restoration cause in

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<sup>22</sup> Crying in the Wilderness, Hooper, p. 52.

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<sup>24</sup> Crying in the Wilderness, Hooper, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> Restoration Movement, Mathis, p. 2.

1843, Sewell had acquired considerable notice as an effective evangelist for the cause in the Upper Cumberland. Having spent considerable time in neighboring White County, where his efforts were most effective, he was aware of Philadelphia's stability, potential and dedication. It was a union of minister and congregation that had a profound effect on the restoration movement in Warren and surrounding counties. Forty years old, when he moved to Philadelphia, he then purchased a large farm some 2 miles south of the church which is known today as the Hillis Farm (1986). Sewell and his wife Elizabeth Speer had 8 children when they moved to Warren County. At least two of the sons, William and Caleb followed Jesse into the ministry.<sup>26</sup>

As Sewell's evangelistic powers increased, so did the size and fame of Philadelphia. More than ever before, the church on Hickory Creek had great preeminence among restoration congregations. A keen Bible student, logical in his reasoning, projecting great sincerity and capable and eloquent in speech, Jesse L. Sewell enjoyed immediate success in his evangelistic efforts and only the coming of the Civil War curtailed a great surge of growth in the movement.<sup>27</sup>

Sewell was anti-war and a pacifist, but his beliefs in the area had little effect on his congregation, who were largely pro-southern, pro-slavery, and pro-secession. Among Philadelphia's more prominent members was John Jenkins Lowry and his wife Amanda Bonner. A born leader, Lowry became Warren County 's only representative in the Confederate Tennessee Legislature. A noted cavalry officer in Forrest's Brigade, Lowry enlisted many of the young men in Philadelphia area into the confederate cause.<sup>28</sup>

A. E. Myers, a christian evangelist living in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1860 and a native Warren Countian, visited local churches in 1860. In a letter dated October 22, 1860, he

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<sup>26</sup> Jesse L. Sewell, *His Life and Sermons*, David Lipscomb.

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preached at New Smyrna, Rocky River, Mountain Creek, McMinnville and Philadelphia. He stated churches were active, at peace, and growing, and that they “met each week to observe the ordinances.” Among ministers living in Warren County in 1860, Myers mentioned J. L. Sewell, J. D. Eichbaum, Brothers Witherspoon and Huddleston. He also stated that noted educator and evangelist, William Davis Carnes, had recently moved from Warren County to teach at Franklin College.<sup>29</sup>

The Union and Confederate armies stripped Warren County not only of its young men, but its food, livestock and everything else of value. The Philadelphia area was especially vulnerable since it lay on a route parallel to the railroad and was constantly overrun by both armies vying to control the rail line. Farms in the area were stripped, and many people fled south or into McMinnville for their safety. The last year of the war 453 citizens were killed by marauders, guerrillas, or soldiers of opposing armies, seeking food and forage.<sup>30</sup> During this trying time, Sewell continued to preach wherever he was invited or allowed. When Bragg’s army bivouacked at Tullahoma in the early months of 1863, Sewell traveled regularly from Philadelphia to the Army of Tennessee Headquarters to hold evangelistic meetings. He also preached to Rosecran’s Union army stationed at Murfreesboro. Sewell never failed to preach when an opportunity appeared, and he appeared to lead a charmed life as he worked his way back and forth through enemy lines during those traumatic days of 1863, 1864 and 1865.<sup>31</sup>

The years 1865 and 1866 were trying years in Warren County. Hunger, starvation, disease and lawlessness were widespread. Restoration churches in the North rushed food and money into this area. As the local churches struggled to survive, they also laid

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<sup>28</sup> Biographical Sketch on John J. Lowry, (unpublished) Dillon.

<sup>29</sup> Millennial Harbinger, Campbell, p. 150 (2-1867), p 712 (10-1860).

<sup>30</sup> Numerous diaries, personal accounts, letters and memoirs attest to the ravages of the Civil War in Warren County. The L. Virginia French Diary, 1862-1865 is typical.

the groundwork for greater acceptance among the populace. Concern for physical as well as spiritual needs generated exceptional good will among a people who had never before known hunger and want.<sup>32</sup>

Beginning with the noted evangelist Benjamin Franklin's visit to McMinnville in 1867, the restoration movement again surged forth in growth. Aided by his brother, Elisha C. Sewell, his son, William A. Sewell and old timers, W. D. Carnes, David Lipscomb, E. A. Elam and others, conversions continued at a steady pace. Coupled with numerical growth was the prosperity which became noticeable in Hickory Creek valley. During the period 1870-1895, this valley prospered with the breeding of mules, horses and pedigree cattle and the growing of grass seed and wheat. Grass seed and wheat were shipped nationwide, while mules and horses were in great demand on the cotton and sugar plantations in the south.<sup>33</sup>

Among prominent families which joined Philadelphia were the R. L. Stubblefields in 1861, a son, J. R. Stubblefield in 1873, (he became a noted evangelist), the D. H. Wootens in 1856, Mrs. M. W. Wagner, who was baptised by Elder Levi M. Murphy in 1850.<sup>34</sup> Prominent among the membership after the Civil War were Ramseys, Bonners, McAfees, Strouds, Darnells and Lowrys. In 1870 there 850 members of the Christian Church spread among 10 congregations in the county.<sup>35</sup>

Philadelphia was always a missionary-minded church. In fact, some of its creations eventually caused its demise. As early as 1835, it seems that Philadelphia was instrumental in the formation of the Bean's Creek Church in Coffee County. Spearheaded by R. J. and Mary Ellen Martin Price who were married and baptised at

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<sup>31</sup> Life of J.L. Sewell, Lipscomb.

<sup>32</sup> Letters by A.B. Myers in Millennial Harbinger. 1866 & 1867 (see p. 150).

<sup>33</sup> See J.B. Killebrew's Resources of Tennessee. 1874, p. 962-968.

<sup>34</sup> Southern Standard. Oct. 1, 1892. Article on Viola.

Philadelphia in 1834, and then moved to Bean Creek, it was one of Coffee County's earliest restoration churches.<sup>36</sup>

Prior to 1854, the Antioch congregation was formed by Philadelphia members including the Jonathan Wooten and Dr. A. B. Davis families. Located near the junction of the Hillsboro and ninth model roads some 2 miles south of Viola, it was 5 miles south of Philadelphia. Although it was moved some years ago, the Antioch building still exists and is used as a barn on the Tom Murphy Farm.<sup>37</sup>

Through evangelistic efforts conducted by Antioch and Philadelphia, several residents of Viola were baptised in the early 1880's. In 1885, the Viola group began meeting at Viola, probably in the Hickory Creek Academy, a school in the area. Efforts were also fruitful in the Morrison area which was growing by virtue of being a prominent railhead. E. G. Sewell, William A. Sewell, L. R. Sewell, J. L. Sewell and E. A. Elam were active evangelists in the area during the 1880's. Around 1886, J. L. Sewell moved to Lebanon to work with the church there. Ministerial duties at Philadelphia were left with son, William A. Sewell.<sup>38</sup>

That Philadelphia continued an aggressive and progressive religious stance within the restoration movement is evidenced by an announcement which appeared in the Southern Standard of McMinnville on May 9, 1885 which stated "Sunday School at Philadelphia was reorganized last Sunday (May 3rd) with prospects good for a good school throughout the summer." Like the original congregation founders, the leadership realized the importance of Bible knowledge to an active congregation. Three

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<sup>35</sup> Tennessee Christians, Norton. p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Restoration Movement in Warren County, J.L. Mathis. 1978. p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> No documentation is found to verify the exact date of Antioch's establishment. The first known burial in the adjacent cemetery is dated 1854. (Mary E. Davis died Nov. 15, 1854, the wife of Dr. A.B. Davis.) The building now existing appears to have been built after the Civil War and may be the second building on the site.

<sup>38</sup> Southern Standard: Issues of 5/30/1885, 4/23/1887, 6/4/1887.

day meetings were another innovation used by Philadelphia which engaged L. R. Sewell for an evangelistic effort in early June 1887 with services Sunday morning and Sunday, Monday and Tuesday nights. In April of that same year, E. A. Elam held a week meeting with 13 baptisms.<sup>39</sup>

Ironically, the prosperity brought about by the fertile Hickory Creek farms and the railroad also sounded the death knell of Philadelphia. In 1890, Viola built a building which stands today.<sup>40</sup> A growing thriving community, its citizens saw the need for a congregation. By 1895, Morrison also formed its own congregation. The formation of these groups took the majority of Philadelphia's membership and the building was soon turned over to the black brethren who continued to meet at Philadelphia for many years.<sup>41</sup>

It was a well known fact that until after the Civil War that blacks and whites worshipped together at Philadelphia. This was customary throughout the area and slave owners encouraged their slaves to become christians. Exactly where the black brethren met for 30 years after the war is not clear. They most likely met in homes or the neighborhood schools created for blacks after 1865.

The black brethren maintained a strong and viable congregation at Philadelphia. Like former days, some of the great black evangelists held meetings at Philadelphia. The spring meeting each year brought throngs of people both black and white from far and near. Among the earliest black ministers were Brother Smith, distinguished by his long white beard who always tied his horse to "that" tree, a Brother Johnson of Nashville, Thomas Busby, who labored with Philadelphia many years, the highly noted

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<sup>39</sup> IBID

<sup>40</sup> Southern Standard. Oct. 1, 1892.

<sup>41</sup> History of Morrison Church of Christ. 1981.



Marshall Keeble, Elonzo Jones, Harrison Ramsey, Loxie Donohue and a Brother Taylor and Brother Howland.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to note the names of early members of the black congregation, for it denotes the influence the restoration movement had on the slaves of that time. Prominent among the membership were Ramseys, Northcutts, Gwynns, Thomas, Smartt, Starkey, Wood, Solomon, Morford, Finger, King, Scott, Roach, Macon, Spurlock, Coonrod, Winton, Guest, Thaxton, Bonner, Biles, Blue, Brown, Cope, Crisp, and Hammons. Practically all of the former great plantations of Warren County are represented by these names.<sup>43</sup>

A tradition developed among the black brethren as the years went by known as "Old Philadelphia Day." Customarily held the first Sunday in May or thereabouts, black brethren gathered from many states for a homecoming. Activities included dinner "on the grounds," sermons and of course, lots of singing. A former school superintendent recalls, while teaching at the Crossroads school on Old Well Crossing, that he attended Old Philadelphia Day in 1922. He remarked that this was the largest gathering of black people he had ever seen. While there he visited the gravesite of Jesse L. Sewell and remembered his father recalling the eloquence and sincerity of his gospel messages in earlier years.<sup>44</sup> No doubt as the beautiful strains of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" wafted across the beautiful Hickory Creek Valley and echoed off the lofty peaks of Ben Lomand Mountain, one could visualize the profound influence Philadelphia had exerted for the cause of Restoration Christianity in Warren County.

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<sup>42</sup> Interviews conducted by Clifford McClain with Abe Thomas and other black brethren in February, 1986.

<sup>43</sup> Unpublished research on Warren County Plantations by County Historian James A. Dillon.

<sup>44</sup> Letter dated Jan. 14, 1981 from former Warren County School Superintendent Theodore Hammer to the writer.

## ADDENDUM

Sometime in the 1940s, regular church services ceased at Philadelphia. The migration of blacks from the community left too few to carry on the work, and, except for special spring and fall gatherings, the Philadelphia building dilapidated and struggled to survive. Somehow it did. Numerous efforts were made to renovate and restore, but, somehow, the needed drive and initiative to perform the restoration did not materialize until 1955.

Realizing the significance of the Philadelphia congregation's work in the restoration cause, a coalition of interested whites and blacks organized to restore. Funds have come from across the Nation to accomplish this noble effort, and, under the dedicated supervision of Clifford McClain, the restoration work has proceeded in a remarkable way.

As you view the church building in the spring of 1986, you behold not only a labor of love for those actively engaged in the work, but you are viewing an authentic restoration of an 1830 building which helps you more fully appreciate the efforts of 180 years of religious restoration in Warren County. The work continues, and just like William J. Price, George Stroud, Jesse Sewell, Marshall Keeble and multitudes of others who sacrificed and struggled to present religious freedom in Jesus Christ, so will others that follow after us.

## EPILOGUE

As early as the 1960s, the Old Philadelphia church building was used twice each year when the Black brethren assembled biennially in May and September. The building was dilapidated, and, while much talk issued concerning its restoration, nothing developed.

Church leaders such as Lynnwood Mathis, Richard Bonner, W. Ralph Wharton, Ernest Clevenger and others kept the thought alive by articles and papers which they researched and then published. James Ramsey, noted black religious leader and Elder of the East End Drive Church of Christ in McMinnville promoted the restoration project until his death in 1984. Finally, some of the black brethren, spearheaded by Lenard “Abe” Thomas of Viola, enlisted the support and aid of Clifford McClain. Known as “Mr. Warren County Fair”, Clifford is noted for his persistence, tenacity, leadership ability, and overall talent as a carpenter, historian, friend and Christian. By the spring of 1985, a committee was formed, the plea for funds issued, and the restoration process begun.

So many people have generously donated time, talent, funds and other support, that naming them is an impossibility, but the beautifully restored building with its vast memories of restoration church greats attests to the fine work which has been accomplished. As you sit on 1830 pews facing the podium, you cannot help but recall such greats as Tolbert Fanning, E. G. Sewell, E. A. Elam, J. J. Trott, David Lipscomb, W. D. Carnes, Jesse Sewell,

L.M. Murphy, Rees Jones, J. M. Kidwell, Isaac Jones and Elisha and John Price. They all made their pleas for God’s plan of salvation from this place. As you see the loving care used by those who carefully restored this historic site, you get a feel for those who

exhibited this same loving care as they reached out to the community about them during the past 180 years.

As was the case at Philadelphia, may the restoration movement continue to be innovative, flexible, conciliatory, and ever searching.

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