

HISTORY OF THE MINNESOTA BAPTISTS

WILLIAM CATHCART
(1826-1908)

The First Baptist Church of St. Paul was the first church of our denomination organized in the State of Minnesota. The Elder John P. Parsons, under the appointment of the Baptist Home Mission Society, came to St. Paul in May, 1849. After a search of six months for Baptists he found twelve persons in St. Paul and vicinity who were ready for the formation of a church. The organization took place Dec. 30, 1849. The first baptism was administered in April, 1851. The first meeting house was built the same year, and the funeral service of its pastor was the first held within its walls.

The church grew in numbers, both by conversion and by letter, until they were compelled to build a larger house of worship, which they entered on New Year's morning, 1863. The little Indian trading-post had now become a commercial city. (Continued on page 5, column 2)

Minnesota Baptists

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The church continued to enjoy the divine presence until it was again found necessary to erect a more spacious house, which was built, and for the first time occupied May 30, 1875. The edifice cost \$130,000, and it is now free from debt, with money in the treasury of the church.

This church is a child of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, as indeed most of the churches in Minnesota are. It has had eight good pastors. The longest pastorate was that of Elder J. D. Pope, covering a period of nine years. Some of the membership have fallen asleep. Prominent among these we mention the name of the Hon. Horace Thompson, a brother of great wealth, and a generous giver to the cause of Christ. Others who have gone to the better land have left a worthy record. Among the living we mention Deacon A. H. Cavender, a constituent member, and D. D. Merrill, who for a period of about sixteen years has held the position of treasurer of the Minnesota Baptist State Convention. Many others are worthy, and would receive honorable mention if space permitted.

Five of the Sunday school scholars and one Sunday school superintendent are now preaching the gospel.

The First Baptist Church, Minneapolis, was organized March 5, 1853, with ten members. It was publicly recognized June 23, 1853. For one year it was supplied with occasional preaching by Elder Edwin W. Cressey and Eld. T. B. Rogers, both of whom were missionaries of the Baptist Home Mission Society. They have since enjoyed the labors of seven worthy pastors, viz.: Elder A. A. Russell, Elder Memory Gale, Elder J. R. Manton, B. Allen, Elder W. T. Lowry, Elder T. W. Powell, Elder H. C. Woods. This church and the First Church of St. Paul are and have been towers of strength to the use of Christ in Minnesota.

In June, 1852, Elder T. R. Cressey became pastor of the Baptist Church of St. Paul, and incipient measures were taken by him for the organization of the Minnesota Baptist Association. A call having been extended, delegates from our churches convened in St. Paul, Oct. 24, 1852. The churches represented were St. Paul, St. Anthony,

Stillwater, and Willow River, New Hudson, Wis. The combined membership of these four churches was 82; 60 of this number were residents of Minnesota. This was the entire number of Baptists then in Minnesota so far as known. At the second annual meeting the aggregate membership of the churches was 180. The third annual meeting showed a constituency in the churches of 202. The fourth a membership of 331. The fifth anniversary was held in Minneapolis, at which sixteen churches were represented, having in all 349 members.

STATE CONVENTION

The following statement pertaining to the organization of the Minnesota Baptist State Convention, we copy from the minutes of the Convention of 1861:

"As early as the summer of 1858, many brethren thought that a State organization was demanded by the interests of the denomination. At the anniversary of the Minnesota Baptist Association of that year a committee was appointed to take the matter into consideration. This committee recommended the formation of a State Convention, and immediately after the adjournment of the Association a meeting was called for that purpose, when a preliminary organization was effected, of which Hon. J. H. Keith was President, Elder J. D. Pope, Secretary, and William Wakefield, Esq., Treasurer."

But little was done that year, except to procure a charter and prepare the way for future operations.

The first annual meeting was held at Winona, Aug. 29, 1859, when the Convention assumed a permanent form by the adoption of the charter and constitution. The principal officers were re-elected. The board agreed to raise \$200 towards the salary of Elder A. Gale, exploring missionary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society for Minnesota.

The second anniversary of the Convention was held at Minneapolis, Sept. 7, 1860. The meeting was largely attended, and manifested a commendable interest in the work of the Convention. J. D. Ford, M.D., was elected President, Elder J. D. Pope, Secretary, and Wm. Wakefield, Esq., Treasurer. The members of the Convention pledged \$200 for colporteur work, with the understanding that two colporteurs would be employed through the year. The services of Elder B. Wharton and Brother G. L. Case were secured in connection with the American Baptist Publication Society.

The third anniversary of the State Convention was held in Owatonna in 1861, and reveals a gratifying advance. The number of ministers then in the State was 68; number of churches, 96; number of Associations, 6; with a total membership of 2,384. At the close of the first decade of conventional work (1868) the statistics show seven Associations, with a membership of 3,940. In 1869 the board reported that ten of the churches in the State are self-supporting. The whole number of Associations reported at the last anniversary (1879), counting the Scandinavian Baptist Conference as one, is eight, and the total membership in the State is 6,854. The three churches

reporting the largest membership are First Minneapolis, 421; First St. Paul, 346; First Rochester, 245.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Early in the history of the State an effort was made to found a university. A charter was obtained and a primary building erected in the city of Hastings, but the financial embarrassments which occurred in 1857 and 1858 were so severe as to fatally cripple the enterprise.

For a number of years no further effort was made to found a literary institution, but at the annual meeting of the State Convention, in the autumn of 1874, "a centennial committee" was appointed, who reported favorably, and at the annual meeting of the Convention, in 1875, three committees were appointed: 1. On location for an academy. 2. On finance. 3. On charter. The committee on location recommended the city of Owatonna as an eligible place for Minnesota Academy. The report was adopted. The committee on finance were authorized at the same meeting to erect an academic building, and if their judgment approved, to commence a school.

At the next Conventional meeting (1877) a building had been erected at an expense of \$4400, five teachers were employed, and a school in successful operation having 101 students. During the following winter the committee on charter obtained from the Legislature a revision of the old university charter, under which the Minnesota Academy was organized. The finance committee is to be perpetual, having entire charge of the pecuniary affairs of the institution. The endowment fund now amounts to \$5500. The academy is already doing a noble service for sound learning. It receives much encouragement from Congressman M. H. Hunnell, a member of the Baptist church in Owatonna, who is deeply interested in the educational affairs of the State, and from other enlightened and liberal Baptists.

In 1880 there were in Minnesota nine Associations, 154 churches, 112 ordained ministers, and 7,056 members.

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