

# Clifton Presbyterian Church

Celebrating Fifteen (15) Decades of Service and Gratitude



*1910'S - The World at War, Tragedies on land and sea, the "Separable Fastener," and a new church organ!*

Reverend and Mrs. Edwards will have served Clifton for almost 20 years by the middle of this decade. Margaret Detwiler Webb, shared her memory of Rev. Edwards. "I recall the picture of him driving in his carriage drawn by spirited horses to his Sunday worship service . . .attired in frock coat, striped trousers, and high silk hat." On May 1, 1913 the congregation celebrated their beloved Rev. Edwards 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of preaching the Gospel of Christ! His health now declining, Rev. Edwards delivered his last sermon in February of 1915 and died a few weeks later at the age of 80, when most of the world was engaged in war. Sessional records at his death showed a church membership of 39 and a Sabbath School membership of 74! His beloved wife moved to Yonkers, NY to live with their son. Rev. Edward's last prayers were for his people, that "a man after God's own heart would be sent to preach Jesus Christ." His prayers were answered when in the fall of 1915, Clifton again joined with Manassas and called Rev. Alford Kelly, a brilliant scholar from Princeton as well as a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary.

Rev. Kelly, traveled from Manassas to Clifton by train, holding services every other week. He participated in youth activities whenever possible. The annual fall Sunday school picnic, sometimes held on the lawn of the "Old Clifton House," was an occasion he tried not to miss. For the picnic in 1916, he inaugurated a series of races – sack races, potato races, 3 legged races . . . which the children enthusiastically ran!\*\* When America entered WWI in April 1917, the Aid Society, continuing their good works, wrote letters to local servicemen. They suspended serving refreshments during meetings when shortages had become acute, and did not resume until the war ended in November 1918. \*\* The union with Manassas continued until 1919 when Rev. Kelly and his sister, Isabelle moved to Clifton allowing them to give their full time to our church. Rev. Kelly's service was one of the high points in the history of the church. Attendance once more rose – 60 to 70 people attended the now weekly Sunday service and contributions climbed 250%. Reverend Edwards, generous as he was, had practically donated his services. Reverend Kelly reminded the congregation that, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and

this new found generosity enabled an organ to be purchased and paid for promptly! Reverend Kelly and his sister, Isabelle served faithfully for the remainder of the decade.

Clifton saw growth, too. The muddy streets, which were a continuous problem were helped in 1910 by the placement of a temporary walk of wood slats, this time on School Street, and a few concrete sidewalks were also laid on Main St., west side. A new Elementary-High School was built in 1912 on the site where the closed Clifton Elementary School is today. There were 140 pupils from 52 families. The primary room was so crowded that 2/3 of the children went half days. \*\* In 1914, one mile of Clifton Road going north toward Centreville was macadam. R.R. Buckley, (a prominent Presbyterian) and 1<sup>st</sup> mayor of Clifton drove on the new road – thought it was fine, just not long enough . . . Several tracts of land in and around Clifton had been purchased in 1910 by the Clifton Land Improvement Co. – William Mathers, (a prominent Baptist) was President. The unsold properties were later divided among the members – Buckley brothers, R. C. Hickey, and William Mathers. William Mathers got the deed to the Old Clifton House in 1919. The significance of this will be revealed in the next decade.

And in the nation, events were interwoven with our church and our community. Young men and women of Clifton wanted to do their part for The Great War. Joseph Garland Spraker, a new member of CPC in 1915, was assigned to the *U.S.S Louisiana*, graduating from Clifton High School **in absentia!** Several other church members – Walter and C. L. Fowler, William Richards Jr., Walter A. Richards, Charles Adams, Elmer T. Ayre, and Dr. William E. Ford all went into the Army or Navy. By 1918 there were 60 members of the Clifton chapter of the Red Cross and they had made sweaters, trench candles, and other items for the war effort. The war ended in 1918 with over 16 million casualties, but the largest loss of life was due to the Spanish Flu – an estimated 50 million souls perished, 675,000 of which were Americans. (History Channel video)

The last decade of America's Progressive Era, (1890-1920) the philosophy of which was fresh air, education, and physical exercise, brought three Progressive Institutions to this area: The Lorton Reformatory, constructed on land purchased in 1910; Ivakota Farm – home for unwed pregnant girls, 1917; and the Occoquan Workhouse – where in 1917, 123 women were sent for peacefully protesting for the right to vote.\* Prayers were raised for these women, for the victims of the pandemic of 1918, for the casualties of the war, for the 145 lives lost in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York in 1911, and for those who perished when the “unsinkable” Titanic went down in 1912. Clifton resident and Acacia Lodge member, Oscar Woody was one of the casualties. \*\* Gideon Sundback designed the modern zipper and received a patent in 1917 for his “Separable Fastener” although it wouldn't be widely used until the 1940's! And at the close of this decade, with New Mexico and Arizona receiving statehood in 1912, our Nation's flag proudly flew with 48 stars. We are grateful for the innovative – and the courageous – those saints who wore the uniform of our services to defend our freedoms and the freedoms of God's people around the world during The Great War, “the war to end all wars”. . .

Thank you to the following: \*(*Images of America, Clifton* by Lynne Garvey Hodge)  
\*\*Clifton Brigadoon in Virginia, Netherton