

Editor's note: Don Porter of Stayton, Oregon (Sublimity's neighbor) is the principal historian of St. Boniface Archives & Museum. The Porters arrived in the area in the 1848, and Don is an invaluable and broad link to our past. He suggested the following two articles for inclusion here. But first here's a fine photo of the Turner Tabernacle, a few miles further down Mill Creek from us. Not specifically Sublimity history, but connected, as you will see.



The Turner Tabernacle was built in 1891. There's great human interest in this gathering - variety in beards and bonnets, a distracted young boy clutching his kitten, a couple of dark visaged blacks and Indians. The building is noted for using wood pegs rather than nails in its construction. (From a original photo donated by Henry Strobel Jr)

In 1993, Clare Buhler at Pepperdine University wrote:

"The Tabernacle, which in fact wound up being 110 by 160 feet in dimension, remains in use to this day with a few changes. The round stained glass window that once adorned the front of the building was shot out by vandals and eventually replaced by a wooden design. The same fate befell the two stainless steel balls that were painted to represent globes and placed atop the front towers. Because of vandalism they were removed sometime in the 1950s. Up until the 1940s, to cut the noise, fresh sawdust was spread on the wooden floor in the spring and removed in the fall. Today the floor is carpeted. The Columbus Day storm of 1962 sheered off and destroyed one of the two towers on the front of the building. Rather than replacing the tower with the insurance money, it was decided to install some restrooms in the tabernacle instead. The Tabernacle eventually received electric lights, a sound system, and some gas heaters."

THE MILL CREEK CHURCH OF CHRIST

from its beginning in 1855 until May 31, 1921, when this history was written
by H.C. (Henry Clay) Porter

In Marion County, Territory of Oregon, one mile southwest from the present town of Aumsville, in a little frame schoolhouse, 16 x 20 feet, the Aumsville or Mill Creek Church of Christ was organized in 1855, by Elder George W. Richardson. then of Linn County, but afterwards a resident of Polk County, where he resided the rest of his life. This little schoolhouse was used as a place of worship for a few years when it became necessary to erect a larger building, which was completed in 1858.

Among the preachers ministering to this congregation in those pioneer days, we find the names of Elders George W. Richardson. Caleb Chapman, A.H. Elder, John A. Powell, Glen O. Burnett, G.M. Whitney, John Johnnie Rigdon, J.H.. Sharp (nephew of father and mother Turner), and others.

The state annual meeting was held at this place in 1858, commencing September 9th and continuing six days. This building was used about ten years, when H. L. Turner, (afterwards the founder of the town of Turner) built the flouring mill here and laid out the town, naming it Aumsville, in memory of his son-in-law, Amos Davis, who was interested in the mill property, but he died a short time after its completion. Mr Davis was of German descent and this accounts for the pronunciation of his name "Amos" as "Aumus," or AUMS-ville.

Aumsville being more of a central point, the old church building was abandoned in 1868 and the- congregation changed their place of meeting to this place, and the name "Mill Creek Church of Christ" was changed to "Aumsville Church of Christ." Meetings were held here in the schoolhouse, which soon proved to be inadequate to accommodate the large gatherings during the summer months. In June 1873 a protracted meeting was held in the grove, about three miles southeast of this place, near the road leading from here to Stayton. This was the commencement of annual grove-gatherings being held by this congregation, assisted by members from Rocky Point, Salem and other places.

In 1876, in order to accommodate the increasing attendance from Salem and other points, the meeting place was changed to Turner and held in a grove that had previously been prepared for a Fourth of July celebration. This grove was where the present

Tabernacle now stands. Here a brush arbor served for a place of meeting until about 1883, when the old tabernacle, which is now used for a restaurant, was built. On May 17, 1878, Turners deeded to the Christian Church Association of Marion County 6.19 acres of land to be used for the purpose of holding annual meetings.

These annual meetings finally gave place to the state meeting of the State Board held in the parlors of the Christian Church in Salem on October 9, 1888. It was moved and carried that the Board incorporate under the laws of the state of Oregon, which motion was carried into effect on that date, Present at the meeting were D.M. Doty, president; Peter Burnett, corresponding secretary; and H.C. Porter, recording secretary. Bro. Cowles, vice president was absent.

In 1891 the present tabernacle was erected by the Turner brothers and their sister. Mrs. Davis, as a memorial to their father and mother who had been pioneers in helping to build up and establish the church of Christ in this state. As this fine tabernacle is really the outgrowth of the Mill Creek Church of Christ organised in 1855 the reader will be interested in the picture herewith presented of this little schoolhouse as it appears today, in which this church was organised.

In those early days as the country became more densely populated it became necessary to revise and change boundary lines of school districts. This necessitated the abandoning of this house for school purposes and it was sold to O.P. Taylor for \$35.00, who in December 1861, by the help of neighbors with 8 or 10 yoke of oxen, moved it to his premises to be used for a kitchen. It has since been moved twice and today stands about 40 rods east of the Aumsville S.P. depot, at the home of Mrs. Brown having served as schoolhouse, church house, kitchen, dwelling house, and is now being used for a work shop and store room. Slight changes have been made to the building. Originally, the door was near the corner at one end of the house, and in the same end of the building was a fireplace.

The early membership of the Mill Creek church was as follows: Nebusaradan Coffey, Elizabeth Coffey, O.P. Taylor, William H. Brayton, Felix H. Taylor, Rachel Taylor, Jemima Taylor, John Taylor, Elisabeth Baylor, Emily Luce, F.G. Taylor, Isaac M. Sullens, John T. Foster, Adaline Foster, John Nash, Mary Nash, Gilliam

H. Walker, Rhoda Walker, Edison Kimsey, Melinda Kimsey, Stephen Porter, W.H. Tucker, Mary Tucker, E..J. Tucker, Martha L. Tucker, William Porter, Martha Porter, W. N. Porter, J.B. Greer, Mrs. Greer, H.A. Johnson, Elizabeth Johnson (colored), Thomas C. Coffey, Lucille J. Coffey, George W. Taylor, Julia A. Taylor, Sarah Taylor, Mary A. Lewis, Martha Read, N.T. Cayton, Benj. Stanton, Mary Luce, George M Whitney, Melville Taylor, Cyrena Taylor, John Walker, Lucy M. Neal, C.K. Read, Susan T. Smith, Nancy Drinkwater, Amanda C. Drinkwater, Barthena W. Drinkwater, Martha Drinkwater. Samuel Tucker, Sarah Tucker, Joseph M. Jones, Polly L. Jones, J.W. Shaff, H.L. Turner and Julia A Turner, the last two mentioned being father and mother Turner, for whom the memorial tabernacle was erected.

Of the membership here given, as far as known, three only are living: E.J. and Martha L. Tucker, now Mrs. Howard, and Mrs Bilyeu, both of Salem, and E.N. Porter, now Mrs. Read of Aumsville, who has been a regular and faithful attendant of this congregation ever since her baptism in 1855. She is now assisting in bearing burdens of the church from which much younger members are willing to shirk.

Some may imagine that the preaching in those pioneer days was of the backwoods style delivered by ministers lacking in Bible knowledge, but such was not the case. Their Bible knowledge would compare favorably with that of our best ministers of today. In fact, they had to more earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, for they met with more opposition in those days than do our ministers at the present time. Therefore, they had to study to show themselves approved unto God, workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

In speaking or writing those ministers' names, the title or prefix "Rev." was never used, We would often hear them spoken of as Bro. Wash Richardson, Uncle Johnni Powell or Uncle Johnnie Rigdon. They seldom, if ever, announced beforehand subjects of sermons to be delivered, but believing that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, they preached Christ and Him crucified and stayed strictly within the limits of the Book. This was before the time when T. DeWitt Talmage, of Brooklyn Tabernacle fame, introduced catchy or sensational subjects for sermons, a fad which at the present day has gone to seed.

This reminds me of the young man who came to us less than a hundred years ago, fresh from school, and after

preaching a few sermons, announced that on a certain evening he would preach the funeral sermon for the Aumsville Church. When the time arrived, no doubt believing that standing room would be at a premium, he was on hand early and tolled the bell. When the audience arrived and he found there were not enough-present to act as pall bearers, the sermon was indefinitely postponed and the church is still unburied. This young man will, no doubt, learn as he gets older.

It might be of interest to mention the fact that my grandfather, N. Coffey, whose name appears at the head of this membership list, was converted under the preaching of and baptized into the church of Christ in Illinois, by Col, Edward D, Baker, who sacrificed his life upon his country's altar at the Battle of Ball's Bluff early in the Civil war. Col. Baker was twice elected to Congress from Illinois and afterwards came to Oregon where he was elected to serve in the United States Senate, from which position he resigned and raised a California regiment which was leading in the battle when he fell, his body being pierced by six bullets. It is said that Lincoln wept when he heard of his death. I mention this matter for the reason that there are, perhaps, very few people who are aware of the fact that Col. Baker was at one time a preacher of the church of Christ. Such, however, is the case, and he was not only an able and eloquent speaker as a preacher, but he also sustained that reputation-in the halls of Congress.

This little church history would not be complete without mentioning the name of Henry Smith, who united with the Mill Creek congregation in about the year 1865. Uncle Henry, as he was called by everyone, was the prime mover in the building of our present house of worship, and besides contributing more than double the amount given by any one person for its erection, also donated the half block on which the building stood. He was a strong supporter of the church by his faithful attendance and financial aid, his pocketbook having been converted with him.

Eulogistic words could be penned on the lives of many others of those old pioneers of the early church movement here, but it is unnecessary. I often visit the spot where the old schoolhouse and church building stood, and aa I stand and look down into the clear bubbling spring, my mind goes back to the tine when those pioneer Christian men and women drank of its clear, cool waters.

These thoughts would bring a shadow of sadness were it not for the fact that by faith I can realize that those dear ones, having fought a good fight and finished their

courses, are now resting in "The land that is fairer than day," where they can drink from the fountain which satisfies.

In conclusion, I will state that Milton Bower of Eugene Bible University is our present pastor. He is a promising young man and a good preacher. It is needless to add that he keeps strictly within the limits of the old Book, for if he did not, he would not be preaching for the old Mill Creek or Aumsville Church.

Written at Aumsville, Oregon, May 31, 1921, by H.C. Porter.

SUPPLEMENT

The following is being written by Lloyd A. Read as a supplement to the history of the Mill Creek-Aumsville Church of Christ written by Henry Clay Porter, dated May 31, 1921. Henry Porter was a half-brother to my paternal grand-mother, Elizabeth Nancy Porter-Read. In this account I shall use the first person (I) in bringing to attention the names and events that are mentioned.

The Wm. C. Porter family came to the Aumsville area in the year 1848. With them were several members of the Coffey family. The two wives of Wm. C. Porter were from the Coffey family. They were sisters. He married the second one after the death of the first. Graves of the Porter, Coffey and Read families can be found in the old Aumsville Cemetery, just northeast of Aumsville. Henry Porter (I shall call him "Uncle Henry") speaks of E.N. Read as one of the faithful members of the Aumsville Church down through the years. She was my Grandma Read and married my grandfather Clifton K. Read in 1964.

The William C. Porter family settled in the area just south and west of Aumsville. Their property lay east (roughly) of the railroad that runs south from Aumsville and south from a point about a quarter of a mile south from Aumsville. This farm was more than a mile square, and members of the younger generation added to the original piece until it extended south to the present Shaff Road. The original Mill Creek Church, mentioned by Uncle Henry, was located in the abandoned school-house and located on the Porter property. Nearly 80 acres of the old Porter homestead is now owned and occupied by Harold and Beulah Porter. Harold is a grandson of John Porter, a son of Wm. C. Porter. The road past Harold's house has a permanent designation of "Porter Road."

Clifton K. Read jr., son of Clifton K. Read sr., at one time owned the acreage south and east from the present Hall's corner in east Turner, that is, it was a father and son partnership. The property was later sold to the Turner estate. It extended south to Little Road and east beyond the present 70th Avenue.

When I became old enough to understand just what was going on around me, my grandparents were stalwart supporters of the Aumsville Church. I can well remember when my father's family visited our grandparents, the two-horse team being hitched to the surrey or hack every Sunday morning for the trip to Aumsville Sunday-school and church. Uncle Henry Porter was superintendent of the Sunday-school for as long as I can remember - of course far beyond that. He graced that position for about 50 years, if my figures are correct. He was the dominant figure in the church organization. We would call him the "sparkplug" now. Besides being Sunday-school Superintendent, he was head elder and chairman of the church board. He did preach occasionally, if a scheduled preacher failed to show up.

Transportation facilities were not too dependable in those days. For many years after "the turn of the century", students from Eugene Bible University filled the pulpit on Sundays. Seldom was the same student sent on two consecutive Sundays. This created variety; but those folks held the church together on that basis until they could afford the luxury of a paid resident minister. Uncle Henry does not say as much, but I can deduce that the church began hiring a regular minister in about the year 1910. One of the early century ministers was a man named Roberts, who had been a "circuit rider" type of preacher. His grave is in the Aumsville cemetery.

My wife, Lillie, and I moved to Aumsville with our little girl, Viola, in June 1914. Ralph and Edith Putnam came to be the regular ministers at about the time we came to Aumsville. Ralph's wife, Edith, was the eldest daughter of Henry & Mary Jane Von Behren. Mary Jane was Uncle Henry Porter's sister. Thus, the church was pretty much a "Family affair". However, the family never did attempt to control the business affairs of the church. There were no "dictators" in our family, We were all hard workers, and we made the church grow and GO. Incidentally, many hired preachers of that day were paid only about \$5.00 per week; but house rent was usually taken care of by someone, and, as most of us were farmers, food was furnished. Not much money was needed by anyone, and most of us were in the same condition economically; so we all helped one another, whenever help was needed.

This was before the day of the automobile, radio and T.V., of electric lights and water and gas pipes. Very few people had any money. Most of us paid accumulated bills on the first of the month, or whenever we could get the money. Then we started the next month "broke" as usual. However, all of us, including preachers were in the "same boat."

I remember some of the names of the members of the Aumsville Church while we were there from June 1914 until December 1917. I recall besides the Reads and Porters a few of these, as follows: Frank and Pearl Rahn and 2 daughters, Rita and Aileen.. Rita Musgrave is registrar for the Turner Convention and Aileen is Mrs. Rex Lawson of Westlake Henry & Mary Jane Von Behren and three daughters, Edith, Mayme and Grace. Edith later became Mrs. Ralph Putnam. There were also Mrs. Charles Ransom, Mr. & Mrs. George Robinson, the Herman and Arthur Lewis families, the Charles and Robert Colvin families; Mr. & Mrs. Ed Wallace and daughter; Mrs Chas. Hein & daughter Lela and Mae Smith, who stayed with the Heins; Ed & Grace Darby family members; Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Winslow; Alonzo P. Speer and family; the Tom Arthur family and several members of the Gildow family. I know I am omitting some names, but this is as far as my memory serves me.

When my wife Lillie and I and our daughter, Viola, moved to Aumsville in June 1914 from Portland, my grandma got a job for me in the Aumsville Flour Mill, owned by Sherman Swank. I was paid \$35.00 per month for a 60 hour week. I had considerable training by my parents in church and Sunday school work. This training became quite useful as I assessed the need for each one to help in the Aumsville Church. I became

substitute teacher for the adult class where Lon Speer was the regular teacher; Choir leader and soloist, and also janitor.

I remember when we had periodic visits from Bro. C.F. Swander, the Church State Secretary, and someone had come in early to the church and filled the old heating stove with a load of dry fir sticks. Temperature in the building soon rose into the 90s. When Bro. Swander got up to speak, he said, "Folks, this is the hottest place that I ever expect to be in."

I had helped to install an electric generator at the flour mill, which operated from the same water wheel that propelled the mill during the day. I also helped to place the necessary wiring for the electricity in most of the homes and businesses in the town. I helped to wire the church building, which was a major operation, due to the 20 foot high ceiling. Later with donated material and labor, we put in a concrete walk from the street to the front church steps. It was eight feet wide and 30 feet long. This was a needed thing as most of the funerals in the area were conducted at this church. The old church was "my church" to many folks who never attended it. I can recall that Sherman Swank, who owned and operated the flour mill, always came to the church when there was a funeral, and performed the ushering service. I never saw him at church at any other time, though he did help when the concrete walk was put in.

As far as memory serves me, I think Ralph Putnam was the last resident minister in the Aumsville Church. Jesse Kellems did serve for a while, maybe a year or so in the middle 1920s, but not sure that he was a resident minister. Jesse passed away early in 1980. Floyd Ross also preached here for a while, but I cannot confirm any dates. Interest in the old church as a pioneer organization gradually diminished, as the old families passed on in death or moved away. The older Reads and Porters went on to their rewards. The Martins, Wallaces, Heins, Speers and Winslows all moved away. Uncle Henry Porter died in 1940.

In the Spring of 1939 my daughter Charlotte and I came from our home in McMinnville to visit and I preached a sermon for the Aumsville folks who had been conducting only a Sunday school service for some time. Charlotte played the piano as they had no regular accompanist for singing. With the death of Uncle Henry Porter, the church ceased activities. Maude Boone was the daughter of Henry Porter and she and Charles Colvin were trustees of the church. I understand that they deeded the property to the Court

Street church in Salem.

The bell in the steeple of the church was donated to a church in Japan, where it now calls Christians to the services. I have a clipping from the Salem Capitol-Journal, dated February 24, 1961, showing a picture of the old church and the bell after it was lowered to the ground by the two men in the picture. They were noted as James Johnson and Phil Loveland of Salem, probably from the Court Street Church. A note says that the bell weighed between 300 and 400 pounds. The newspaper article stated that the bell was received by Grace Farnham, a missionary of the Christian Church.

Further quoting from the Capitol-Journal article: "The old Aumsville Church was built in 1886 on a lot donated by Henry Smith, who also made a substantial contribution to the erection of the church building." Brother Elmore Gilstrap, who was a leader in establishing Turner Memorial Home, was also pastor during its closing years. The pews from the church were donated to the Oregon Christian Convention and the fine material in them was used to build tables and benches that are still in use on the convention grounds. And so the church lives on.

As Uncle Henry Porter states, the Aumsville Church was the motivating and organizing force in the selection of the present Oregon Christian Convention grounds and the erection of the tabernacle there. Not until years later was there a Christian Church in Turner. So in conclusion, I believe it is fitting to state that the old Aumsville Church ably fulfilled its mission in providing and establishing the means for our present privilege of being able to meet on the Turner tabernacle grounds, which is now enjoyed by so many of our folks.

As an ironical finale to the saga of the old church, it was a descendent of William & Henry Porter who dismantled the old building in 1976. He is Donald Porter of Stayton, son of Kenneth & Louise Porter and a grand-nephew of Henry Porter. Thus we come to the close of this part of the record. Personally I have no regrets in its passing. The Mill Creek - Aumsville Church served its generations well, then, its mission accomplished, it passed on. Its legacy to us is the Turner Memorial Tabernacle grounds which will be an enduring monument to those who so faithfully supported the old church through its eventful period of existence.

We salute you, our old friend of the past. We who

knew you so well can only say, "May God bless our memories of you."

Lloyd A. Read
Turner, Oregon
June 5, 1980