

PIONEER ANDERSON FOUNDED CHURCH

By John Wilson Free Press Writer
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When he was 18, William Walker Anderson of Rockbridge County, VA, left his plow in the field at noon and embarked on an adventure in the Tennessee frontier. He became one of the first settlers of Chattanooga and a founder of its Presbyterian Church.

Anderson was born June 10, 1804, near the old Rock Church six miles from Lexington. That day in 1822 he found his uncle stopping at his home and he decided to go with him to Maryville, where the uncle had a store. W. W. Anderson returned to Virginia long enough to marry his sweetheart Elizabeth McChesney, then they set up housekeeping at Maryville.

Anderson began driving horses through the Indian nation, selling them in Alabama and Mississippi. On one of these trips, his horse became entangled in vines while trying to swim Chickamauga Creek. Anderson lost his saddle bags full of papers and clothing. An Indian witnessed the accident, and a few years later when he spotted W. W. Anderson he returned the bags to him.

W. W. Anderson, who was over six feet tall and was called "Skygusty" by the Indians, after two years moved to Athens. For his general merchandise store there, he would annually load up his four-horse wagons with bacon and exchanged it for dry goods at Baltimore. This was a two-month trip, but a set of cups and saucers would fetch \$5 on the frontier and a lady's Leghorn bonnet was worth \$25.

W. W. Anderson was "an unusually fine looking man" and was "strictly temperate in all things." He was made colonel of the militia at Athens and "with cocked hat on horseback made a striking appearance."

Three of the five Anderson children died at a young age, leaving James and William Jr. In hopes of benefiting the family's health, W. W. Anderson in 1840 pushed on to Chattanooga. They occupied a frame dwelling on the southeast corner of Fourth and Walnut. The Andersons were joined by James Berry, who had married Rebecca McChesney, a sister of Mrs. Anderson.

However, Mrs. Anderson became ill and died September 12, 184___. Two years later, Anderson married Louisa Penelope Campbell Smith, widow of James Smith. Her sister, Mary, was married to the Chattanooga merchant D. C. McMillin.

W. W. Anderson was clerk of the Presbyterian congregation and would regularly lead the hymns. The visiting minister would often stay in the Anderson home. W. W. Anderson started Sunday School for blacks. Anderson owned several slaves "and always treated them kindly. He would not sell or separate them."

The children of W. W. Anderson by his second wife included Jefferson Campbell who married Mary Ellen Burton, Sarah Anne who married Thomas Rowland, Milo Smith who married Mary Bush, and Mary Louisa who married George Vinson.

His eldest son, James, married Mary Morrow, daughter of the Indian agent Dr. William Morrow. James Anderson became a physician and went to California in 1850. Two years later he started home for his family on the steamer Philadelphia. But the cholera broke out off the coast of Havana and he died at sea.

The other son, William Jr., attended Burritt College and in 1857 he was returning on the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. There he renewed his acquaintance with Lydia Cravens, daughter of the ironmaster Robert Cravens. They were married in 1859 and set up housekeeping at the old Anderson place at Fourth and Walnut.

However, the health of Lydia Cravens Anderson became bad and they moved to the side of Lookout Mountain to the cabin that Robert Cravens had first occupied. A son, Charles Cravens Anderson, was born there, and a second son, William Franklin Anderson, came along in 1862.

W. W. Anderson Sr. was “a decided Whig and thought it best for the South to make the fight in the Union, but when his state seceded he went with it in good will.” He was too old to fight, but he “took great interest in the Southern cause.”

Following a skirmish on Citico Creek, he found a Confederate soldier badly wounded and hid him upstairs until he recovered. The Yankees later found revenge by filling his well with rocks and tearing down his house.

W. W. Anderson Jr. in the early part of the war with Robert Cravens manufactured saltpeter in a furnace at the mouth of a cave near Moccasin Bend. Then he joined the Lookout Artillery and was made first sergeant. When his wife’s health worsened, he took a leave of absence and found his wife had hired a substitute for him. He then shipped coal and coke to Confederate authorities in Memphis.

Just before the Battle Above the Clouds, the Andersons fled the mountain, hauling their goods in wagons to Chickamauga Station and taking the train to Dawson, GA. W. W. Anderson Sr. went with them and the following January his second wife died at Dawson. Three months later, Lydia Cravens Anderson died also. Then two-year-old Frank became sick and died. He was given a “repugnant” black medicine and the doctor said it was “pure ink.” W. W. Anderson Jr. later surmised the doctor may have been “merely experimenting.”

After the war, W. W. Anderson Jr. made his home at Forsyth, GA. He had a number of children by his second wife, Louisa Estelle Sharp.

His son, Charles Cravens Anderson, moved to Chattanooga and in 1888 married Mary Bachman, daughter of the Presbyterian minister Dr. Jonathan Bachman. After her death, he was a widower about seven years before marrying Julia Leach in 1901.

C. C. Anderson resided just below the old Cravens property on the mountainside, and he discovered “Mystery Falls,” an underground waterfall. This was developed as a water source for St. Elmo. Anderson was also an investor in oil well drilling, but his syndicate was unsuccessful in a project at Franklin County, TN, and he was forced to declare bankruptcy. He was so distraught that he shot himself with a revolver on November 20, 1902 – hours before his creditors were set to meet.

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