

A Short History of  
The Church of Christ  
At Leiper's Fork, TN  
By Leo Boles, Gospel Advocate, 12/11/30

There are very few people who have lived the allotted time but have an interesting biography, and there are very few congregations but have a very profitable history. The church at Leiper's Fork, now known as Hillsboro, TN, has a most interesting history. There are few, if any, who know the history of their congregation. It seems that it would be encouraging to the congregation if its history would be kept fresh in the minds of its members.

In 1815 there was a plot of land given John Dobbins and a house of worship built thereon, called "Union." This house was to be used freely by all denominations. At that time the Primitive Baptists were largely predominant in that community. Affairs moved along very amicably for some years, as there were few denominations represented in the community who cared to use the house. In 1829, Andrew Craig and Joel Anderson, Baptist preachers, were withdrawn from by neighboring congregations for preaching heresy, "or Campbellism." These preachers had been preaching for the Baptists at Union regularly. They had preached the New Testament record of conversion and had urged people to do just what the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, told them to do. This was branded by their fellow preachers as "Campbellism." They had preached the same at Union. So, on January 2, 1830, these two men assisted in forming a church of disciples after the New Testament pattern from the excluded Baptists of that community and the neighboring vicinity. This congregation is considered the oldest church in the South, south of Nashville, TN.

These pioneer preachers in Tennessee published a declaration of their convictions and gave the names of their co-workers of fellow disciples. It is as follows:

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, being the professed disciples of Jesus Christ in the vicinity of Leiper's Fork, do hereby agree to live together as a congregation of the Lord, to be denominated "the church of Christ on Leiper's Fork, "and we do hereby agree to take the Bible to be the word of God in such a sense as to hold ourselves bound to believe all it declares, do all that it requires of us as Christians, as well as to abstain from all it forbids. We do consider it the only rule of faith and practice in Matters of religion. So there is no occasion for any other judge of controversies, or for creeds, confession of faith, traditions, or acts of councils, to supply its supposed defects. We take that Book for our creed in all matters pertaining to us as a church and individuals.

(Signed) Jacob Carl, Nancy Brown, Mary Huggins, Frances Potter, Polly Meador, Elizabeth Allen, Merritt Brown, William Sparkman, Bird Dodson, Judas Dodson, Polly Walker, Elizabeth Hunter, and Margaret Dodson.

It will be noted that there were five men and eight women who constituted the first church at Leiper's Fork. Some of the descendants of these charter members still live in that community and worship at the Hillsboro church.

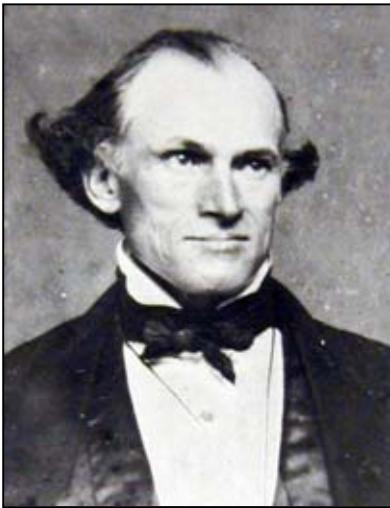
In March, 1831, Elder Seth Sparkman and wife were baptized by Andrew Craig. These were the first to be baptized for the remission of sins south of Nashville, TN. Seth Sparkman became a very strong preacher of the gospel in his generation. He did much to build up the congregation there. The cause grew rapidly in that community through his influence and teaching. It was not many years until the congregation was considered a powerful influence for the *Restoration Movement* in the South. The church endured persecution by the sects around them and in the midst of fiery trials continued to grow steadily and increase in favor with God and men. In 1855 the congregation decided to form another congregation at Boston, about four miles south of Leiper's Fork. This suited the convenience of a number of the members. One thing is to be noticed in establishing the congregation at Boston. The brethren and sisters took into consideration the spread of Christianity and the convenience of each other, and agreed, without any hard feeling or alienation, to separate and build another congregation. These early disciples in Tennessee set an example which congregations separating and some changing the place of worship to establish another congregation without bitter feeling arising and strife being engendered. We commend most earnestly the example of the brethren and sisters at Leiper's Fork in establishing the congregation at Boston. There are now splendid congregations at Hillsboro (old Leiper's Fork) and Boston.

Twenty-one years after the church at Boston was established, or in 1876, quite a number of disciples from the Leiper's Fork congregation helped to form a congregation at Berea, four miles east of Hillsboro. This separation also was done in peace, and all rejoiced that the cause of Christ was spreading so rapidly. There is today a splendid congregation at Berea, TN. The Leiper's Fork congregation (now Hillsboro) is the mother of the church at Boston and at Berea, TN. There is Christian fellowship between these three congregations today, and, so far as the history of all these congregations shows, there has never been any strife between them. Their example can be followed with much profit by all congregations today. It would be well for many large congregations to separate into smaller ones.

There is a bit of interesting history connected with the building of their church house. It will be remembered that the first house, built in 1915, at Leiper's Fork, was called "Union," and all denominations had free use of it. In 1845 this old house was pulled down and another one built upon an adjoining lot, which was also still called "Union." It was deeded to "Baptists, Methodist, Cumberland Presbyterians, and Christians." The "Christians" had proposed to sell their interest or buy the interests of others. The disciples bought the others out and the house was put in good repair. It will be remembered that from 1830 to 1877 – forty-seven years – the "Christians" had no house of their own, but they

continued to grow and increase in number so that they established congregations at Boston and at Berea, TN. Though they had no house which they could call their own and had possession of the Union house only one Sunday in the month, yet they met regularly on the first day of the week to break bread. On the Sunday that belonged to one of the denominations they would meet in the schoolhouse. They were severely persecuted; but persecution has never hurt the Churches of Christ, but the Lord has blessed them through persecution. In 1880 the church at Leiper's Fork numbered more than two hundred.

E. G. Sewell, F.H. Davis, James Litton, and E.B. Cayce did much to instruct and encourage the church there while it was struggling through the fires of persecution. The memory of these good men still lingers in the minds of a few of the present congregation. May the churches at Hillsboro and Boston and Berea be encouraged by this bit of history of their congregations and continue steadfast in the service of the Lord, ever abounding more and more in love for each other and in the work of the Lord.



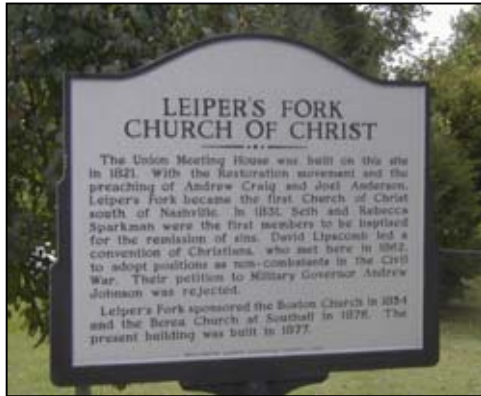
Joel B. Anderson  
s/o William Anderson &  
Catherine Shirley



Church of Christ Leiper's Fork , Franklin, TN 1916.  
Picture found in the Community Library of Leiper's Fork, TN



Andrew Craig



*My husband and I went to visit Leiper's Fork Church of Christ and the town in October of 2001. It had a mechanic's shop, a grocery store, and a local restaurant. We found the Church of Christ and a historical marker was in the front of the church. It said: Leiper's Fork Church of Christ. The Union Meeting House was built on this site in 1821. With the Restoration Movement and the preaching of Andrew Craig and Joel Anderson, Leiper's Fork became the first*

*Church of Christ south of Nashville. In 1831, Seth and Rebecca Sparkman were the first members to be baptized for the remission of sins. David Lipscomb led a convention of Christians who met here in 1862, to adopt positions as non-combatants in the Civil War. Their petition to Military Governor Andrew Johnson was rejected.*

*Leiper's Fork sponsored the Boston Church in 1854 and the Berea Church of Southall in 1876. The present building was built in 1877.*



*The present church looks like this picture on the left, as seen in October of 2001. I had been told stories about Joel Anderson and him being a preacher at Leiper's Fork by a cousin. I wanted to go inside this church and have a look. I was given a name of a local woman named Elna Sweeney. We went to her house. She told us*



*that she was the youngest of 13 brothers and sisters and that her family had been in the area for generations. She*

*told us to follow her and she would let us inside the church. She got her car and off we went. It was a race to keep up with her, Elna was in her eighties.*

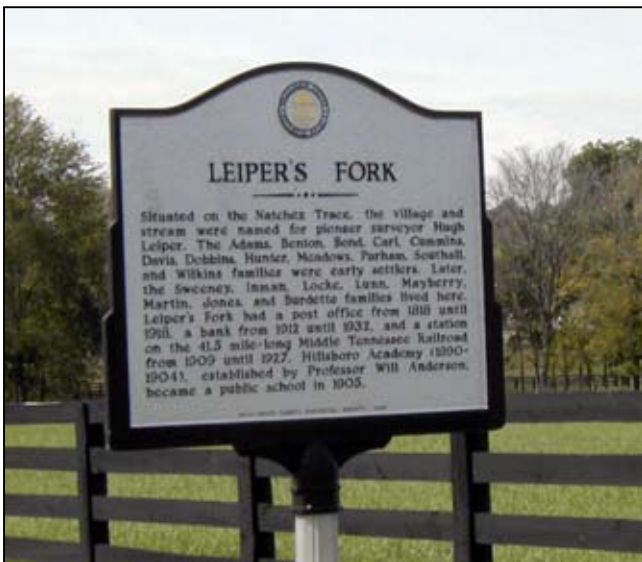
L to R: Audrey J. Lambert & Elna Sweeney

*Elna and her husband attend this church at present. Money is being collected to enhance the entrance to this historical church. The church had two entrance doors, one for the women and one for the men to enter. Once inside Elna told us how the room used to look. Instead of being open when you first entered the room there was a wall and a door to enter the area for worshipping. The room was full of wooden pews with a aisle in the middle. Three of the original pews were at the front of the room by the podium. There was a baptism area at the front of the church. Each side of the baptism had its own entrance and changing room, one for the boys and one for the girls. Right behind the church was a creek. The members of this church used to baptize their members in this creek*

at one time. As we left and said goodbye to Elna she pointed toward a white house and said it used to belong to her parents and that was where she grew up.

I was brought up by my parents as a Christian and attended East Detroit Church of Christ in Michigan. When you come of age and are aware of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ you get baptized. Your sins are washed away and you are pure in Christ's eyes. The baptism is full of water and a preacher dips your whole body in the water. First he stands behind you and while one hand is pointed towards heaven and the other one is behind your neck, he places you under the water. When the baptism is over the congregation sings a song as you get dressed. All the congregation smile as you leave the building. A saved soul. The Church of Christ believe you must be baptized or you cannot go to heaven.

A local man named Richard Warwick has written two books on Leiper's Fork, TN. First book – *Leiper's Fork and Surrounding Communities* and a 2<sup>nd</sup> book continuing the story of Leiper's Fork, TN. Reference to the Sweeney family is in one of these books according to Elna Sweeney.



#### Leiper's Fork

Situated on the Natchez Trace, the village and stream were named for pioneer surveyor Hugh Leiper. The Adams, Benton, Bond, Carl, Cummins, Davis, Dobbins, Hunter, Meadows, Parham, Southall, and Wilkins families were early settlers. Later, the Sweeney, Inman, Locke, Lunn, Mayberry, Martin, Jones, and Burdette families lived here. Leiper's Fork had a post office from 1818 until 1918, a bank from 1912 until 1932, and a station on the 41.5 mile-long Middle Tennessee Railroad from 1909 until 1927. Hillsboro Academy (1890-1904), established by Professor Will Anderson, became a public school in 1905.

Williamson County Historical Society



Leiper's Fork Church of Christ in 1941



Inside Leiper's Fork Church of Christ, Leiper's Fork, TN October 2001