



*First Presbyterian*

*150 years*

...AND OUR STORY  
IS STILL UNFOLDING

## SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION 1871-2021



Rev. Henry T. Darnall (Pastor: 1880-1893)

### **ON THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDING: A SNAPSHOT FROM 1896**

Celebrations of our church's founding on New Year's Eve 1871 is a long-standing tradition. As the congregation celebrates our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we, like those who have gone before us, look back to our past as well as to our posterity. That is what our congregation did in 1896 when celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding.

On Sunday the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, the congregation gathered for worship in the red brick sanctuary with its belfry completed six years earlier. At the Mason & Hamlin organ was Miss Willie Smoot accompanied by the choir. In the central pulpit to propound the Word of God was the only living pastor of the four who had served the church since its beginnings. The first full time minister, **Rev. Henry T. Darnall (1880-1893)**, had come down from Hampton, Virginia to preach from the text of 1 Samuel 12:24, "Only fear the Lord, and serve

him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you (KJV). And, He had done “great things” for the congregation meeting that morning at 305 East Main Street.



### **Founding Elder William H. Hanks**

From eleven founding members in 1871, the church had grown and in 1896 reported to Orange Presbytery a membership of 272. Among them was one of the three original officers, the Sunday School Superintendent, **William H. Hanks**.

Impressive indeed had been the church organization and extensive foreign and local missions of the church that had developed during the previous quarter century amid a burgeoning industrial city of the New South. Elder Richard D. Blacknall recounted that story of the Presbyterian Church of Durham, North Carolina as it was then called.

Congregational worship, open to all Durham Christians, continued on Sunday evening the 27<sup>th</sup> with the preaching of the Rev. James Young Fair, pastor of Grace Street Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia. Rev. Fair was well known to the congregation because he had preached at the dedication of the new church building in 1890. His text, drawn from the Letter of James 4:14, looked to the future as Rev. Darnall's had looked to the past, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (KJV). With God as Sovereign, however, the possibilities, opportunities and responsibilities of present life would unfold.



### 1890 “red brick” church at Roxboro & Main streets

That same evening, Rev. Darnall preached at the nearby First Baptist Church and participated the next morning in a service billed as an all-churches service in our sanctuary sponsored by the **Ministers Association of Durham**. Notably absent from the gathering were clergy of the city’s Black churches, including Pine Street Presbyterian Church (UPCNA) organized in 1887, and which, in recognition of the then existing “Color Line,” belonged to the separate **Durham Ministerial Alliance**. At the service, the Rector of St. Philips Church presided and Methodist bishop and President of Trinity College, the Rev. John C. Kilgo, offered the opening prayer. Ministers of three other churches followed with words of “congratulation and expressions of fraternal good will and God speed.” It was a celebration, the anniversary report noted, that “will long be remembered by the members of the church, and its influence will long be felt in and upon the whole community.”

Submitted by the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Team