



Ferguson Has a History Museum

Ferguson has a Historical Society and a History Museum. We encourage any people reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

In the last four issues, we have been presenting information about five of the earliest church buildings in Ferguson: First Presbyterian Church (1871), St. Stephens Episcopal Church (1872), Mt. Olive (1880), Sts John & James Catholic (Blessed Theresa) (1882) and Ferguson Methodist Church (1886). We still have two more churches to cover – however – this month we will simply take a look at early Ferguson. One of the sources for the Ferguson Methodist Church article was a booklet put out by the members of the church at its hundred-year anniversary (1986). The article begins with what was happening in 1886 then goes on to give the beginning of the church. The remainder of the article just talks about daily life in Ferguson Station. It is a delightful article which, in part, we will present here.

“The year 1886 brought some significant additions to the American scene. On January 1, the first Tournament of Roses parade was staged in Pasadena, California. . . In October of that year President Grover Cleveland unveiled and dedicated the Statue of Liberty on Bedlow’s Island. In the same year a big event was taking place in the very heart of the nation – Ferguson Station, Missouri. Here in the evening of November 7, 1886, a small group of Christians led by Dr. Charles L Smith gathered in the Tiffin Town Hall and held the first organized service for the Ferguson Methodist Church.”

“Organizing or planning without telephones, home mail delivery, cement walks, automobiles, or electricity was a challenge.” (*Since this was written in 1986, the author also didn’t mention cel phones, computers, the internet, or social media.*) “Ferguson Station, Missouri, in the 1880’s was home to less than 1000 people. Houses sat back from the streets on plots of ground sometimes containing as much as six acres. There were cisterns (*wells that collected rain water*) or some type of well in the yards, and nearby were gardens and outdoor toilets. Coal oil lights were used of evenings, and bedrooms were equipped with wash stands which sometimes had marble tops. Bowls and pitchers of water were provided for bathing.”

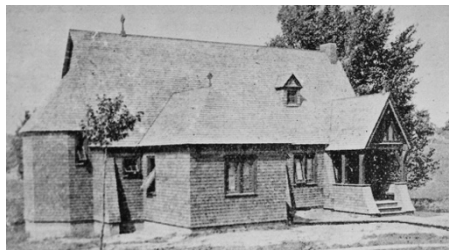
“Early residents of Ferguson Station, in recording memories have made numerous references to the plank sidewalks. These walks were about four planks wide and sometimes spanned gulleys. People in Ferguson Station used

these walks to keep their shoes out of the mud and water as they went about the town. Extreme caution was required to keep the walker from falling off the planks. Following a rain storm the planks became ‘rafts’. Mr. Williamson in **Ferguson—in the Old Days** recalled, ‘As the pedestrian approached, he was lulled into a false sense of security by the fact that the tops of the planks were an inch or so above the surface of the water. As soon as he stepped on them, he found himself wading through the pool,—usually to his great surprise.’”

“The post office at Church and Florissant Road was a busy place. There was no mail delivery to homes, so the citizens went to the post office there twice a day to collect anything that might have been deposited in their boxes.”

The Wabash Railroad provided transportation for the Ferguson Station residents who were employed in St. Louis. Three trains left Ferguson Station each morning. The early train carried the ‘works’; the second train took the ‘clerks’ and was the most popular ride; the third train and final run was for the ‘shirks.” The trip to St. Louis was inconvenient; and unless people worked in the city, they spent most of their time in Ferguson Station and depended on each other for social entertainments. ‘They lived together like a big happy family’, according to Charles A Cunningham, who moved to Ferguson in 1887. Homes and churches were the centers of their activities.”

“According to previous writings of Ferguson’s history, the first church in the village, the Presbyterian, was founded in 1871. The small frame building with a spire provided a place of worship for all protestant groups until they had places of their own.”



“In 1872 the congregation of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church held its first service at the home of a member. About 1884 regular services were organized and a small church with brown shingles was built in 1891.”

“The Roman Catholic Church of Sts. John and James was founded in 1882. The first building was a small frame church with a spire and stood on the southeast corner of Chambers Road and North Elizabeth Avenue.”



“In the fall of 1886 the Rev. Charles L. Smith came from Guthrie , Kentucky to establish a preaching place in Ferguson Station – to become the Ferguson Methodist Church”

“By 1894 Ferguson’s population passed the 1000 mark, and it became a city of fourth class! In 1895 electric lights came to the town, and seven years later Fergusonians saw water mains being laid and the first general telephones.”

The author left out the establishment of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, the African-American Church created by the freed enslaved people from the January plantation (1880). We don't know who the "works" and "shirks" are unless they were the workers and those who avoided work. There is no author given for this month's brief social history of early Ferguson. We hope that as you walk or drive around Ferguson and as you put your cel phone to your ear as you are checking e-mails on your computer, you think back on how things were over one hundred years ago.

Two churches remain to be presented: Immanuel United Church of Christ and Zion Lutheran Church.

Stories of churches in the Ferguson area come from documents in the Ferguson Historical Society archives. Special thanks to Sandy Hunter, long time member of Ferguson UMC, for the Centennial Methodist Church Booklet.

If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact Jerry Benner at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum at 1064 Smith (behind the Community Center) by e-mailing the above address. Note: we will need to schedule a date for you, so ask well in advance.

"The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest."