



# “A petition having been sent...”

**1844.** It was a year of great disappointment for the Millerites who had predicted Christ's second coming. It was a year of great achievement for S. F. B. Morse, whose “magnetic telegraph” first tapped out “What God hath wrought.” The “Great Compromiser,” Henry Clay, opposed James Polk for the presidency. The mighty Mississippi overflowed its banks in a record breaking flood and St. Louisans surveyed the twelve mile wide lake that formed between Second Street and the Illinois bluffs.

Echoes of another kind of outpouring, a spiritual one, resulted in the establishment of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in April. In the spring of 1846, it would change its name to Central Presbyterian Church.

However small its congregations, it was remarkable that St. Louis could support several Presbyterian churches at all. The city had been founded in 1763/64 and, under French and subsequently Spanish rule, was officially Roman Catholic. Although the Louisiana Purchase opened the territory to overwhelmingly Protestant America, St. Louis remained the “citadel of Romanism.”

Among the early American settlers was Stephen Hempstead. Citing “the Spiritually destitute and needy territory of Missouri,” Hempstead appealed to the Connecticut Missionary Society for help. The Society responded by sending Salmon Giddings in 1816. Giddings was a tireless worker who went on to establish twelve churches in Missouri and Illinois, including the first Presbyterian church in the city of St. Louis.

Following Giddings' death in 1827, First Church was without a pastor until 1828 when William S. Potts was ordained and installed. The 1830's and 1840's were a time of great revival in Missouri, aided by gifted preach-



*The "Layfather of Missouri Presbyterianism", Stephen Hempstead. His farm became Bellefontaine Cemetery, the final resting place of future Central ministers, Revs. VanCourt and Anderson. (Missouri Historical Society)*

*Far left, Salmon Giddings, one of the first Presbyterian missionaries to Missouri in 1816. (Missouri Historical Society)*



*John Wimer, the first member of Central, was finishing his first term as mayor of St. Louis when the church was established in April, 1844. (Missouri Historical Society)*



*William S. Potts, pastor of Second Presbyterian Church, which was the mother church of Central Presbyterian Church. "William S. Potts", photo by A.J. Fox, Missouri Historical Society)*

ers including Dr. Potts. Said one St. Louisan, surveying the religious scene, "I go to no church, but the Presbyterian minister [Dr. Potts] is a rage."

Protracted (revival) meetings at First Church resulted in two "colonies" in 1832: Des Peres Church and Second Church in St. Louis. Although the Second Church failed to take root, a second effort succeeded in 1838. Dr. Potts, who was then serving as president of Marion College, was called as pastor. A history of Second Presbyterian Church notes that "the missionary zeal of that early church is astonishing." Indeed, just six years after its own founding, it established a colony of its own...Fourth Presbyterian Church (Central).

Central's official records begin with a "History of the organization of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of St. Louis - April 18th 1844":

*A petition having been sent to the Presbytery of St. Louis, asking the presbytery to organize another Old School Presbyterian Church in the city of St. Louis, the Presbytery appointed a Committee to organize such a Church.*

*Accordingly, Doct. Wm. S. Potts and William Gilbreath met with the petitioners April the 18th 1844 and after a sermon by the Revd. Wm. Gilbreath the committee proceeded to examine such letters of dismission as were placed in their hands.*

*Friday the 19th...After a sermon by Dr. Wm. S. Potts those who had been received by letter and examination...proceeded by ballot to the election of three Ruling Elders, and on counting the ballots Philip Skinner, George W. Myers and John Suydam were declared to be elected.*

*Met sabbath 21th at 3 Oclk...The committee proceeded to the ordination ... and installation of Philip Skinner, George W. Myers and John Suydam as Elders of the 4th Presbyterian Church of St. Louis...The Lord's supper was administered and the duties of the Committee finished. The Church was then regarded as fully and constitutionally organized.*

It was an inauspicious beginning: 32 charter members meeting in a small frame building on the southeast corner of Sixth and St. Charles streets. Yet it was a church born in the spirit of revival. Central was a "second generation" church - the direct descendent of those earlier Presbyterian churches, pastors and missionaries who sought to bring the gospel to the western frontier.