



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (BRISTOL, TENN.)
RECORDS,
1858-2009**

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

First Presbyterian Church (Bristol, Tenn.)

Inclusive Dates:

1858-2009

Scope & Content:

The First Presbyterian Church (Bristol, Tenn.) Records span the period 1858-2009. The collection is composed of a Register of Communicants, deacons' minutes, and session minutes.

The church register (Box 1, vol. 1) contains an alphabetical catalog of church members from around 1928. Death dates are listed for some affiliates through 1968. A list of baptisms from 1928 to 1947 and a list of marriages from 1945 to 1946 are also included in the chronicle. The baptism records list the parents' names and child's date of birth as well as the baptism date.

The session minutes (Box 1, vol. 2 - Box 6, vol. 4) are composed of 33 volumes that contain chronological minutes of the transactions and proceedings of the session. Most of the works contain a Register of Elders, Register of Deacons, Register of Communicants, Register of Baptisms, Register of Marriages, and Register of Deaths at the end of the books. The majority of the tomes do not have any lists of marriages or deaths. Some of the books contain statistical reports, correspondence, budgets, and financial statements as well as sessional reports on various church societies and Sabbath School. The minutes from August 21, 1862 (Box 1, vol. 2), describe a special request from a member who asked the session to "examine into certain rumors afloat prejudicial to his christian character."

Additional items of note include a church bulletin (Box 1, vol. 10) dated April 15, 1945, and a baptismal certificate (Box 2, vol. 1) for Douglas Steel Jones dated March 29, 1947.

The deacons' minutes (Box 6, vol. 5) contain chronological minutes of the deacons' meetings from 1894 to 1916. A memorial resolution and newsprint obituary for Joseph Lynn King (p. 39-40) are also included. The obituary has this to say about King's Civil War service: "When the civil war broke out, Mr. King entered the service as a member of the confederate forces. He was in some notable engagements, including the battle of Gettysburg, in which battle he was shot through and through, being so badly wounded that he was left on the field for dead. He lay there three days without food or water before he was taken to a hospital. For two years his relatives believed him dead, and knew no better until he returned home, after having been released from a northern prison." It goes on to say that a Knoxville paper published an obituary for King following the battle of Gettysburg.

Physical Description/Extent:

35 volumes

Accession/Record Group Number:

Mf. 2029

Language:

English

Permanent Location:

Mf. 2029 (available only on microfilm)

Repository:

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

The congregation owes its founding to the dedication of three prominent Presbyterian leaders: James King, Joseph R. Anderson, and George A. Caldwell. King was a local landowner whose extensive King's Meadows plantation encompassed much of present-day downtown Bristol. After experiencing an adult conversion, King became a Presbyterian minister and for almost 30 years preached at the nearby congregation of Paperville. In 1852 Anderson, a Blountville merchant and King's son-in-law, learned that two railroads would effect a junction at King's Meadows. Quick to realize the opportunity for commercial development, Anderson approached King and negotiated a sale of

one hundred acres. Anderson then proceeded to lay out the town of Bristol, built the first house, and in its parlor the first religious service in Bristol was celebrated on Christmas Day 1853.

Soon a congregation came into being, and the Bristol Presbyterian Church was officially organized September 5, 1858, affiliated with New River Presbytery of the United Synod of the South. A building was erected, and in those early years members were encouraged to contribute to benevolent causes by placing funds in a large sock hung on the church door. When the first minister employed to serve the congregation died unexpectedly, King stepped in and preached much of the time through the Civil War. In July 1865, a bare three months after Appomattox, George A. Caldwell, a recent Presbyterian chaplain for the Confederacy, arrived in Bristol and was called to the pulpit of the church, a position he would hold for twenty-six years.

Under Caldwell's leadership the Bristol church grew rapidly. His winsome personality and the intellectual quality of his sermons brought increased attendance, and complaints were heard that there was not enough room in the church house. The congregation responded to the challenge, and a new larger church was dedicated on October 4, 1885, a sturdy Victorian brick structure with a steeple that soared to the sky (until it had to be taken down because of repeated lightning strikes).

Another period of growth came in the early twentieth century during the long pastorate of Charles C. Carson (1908-1927). In the spring of 1912 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met in Bristol, and the Session carried through an extensive remodeling of the building. To make it suitable, a Sunday School wing was added to handle the increased attention being paid to religious education for children. The 1912 General Assembly in Bristol was itself noteworthy in that the Presbyterian Church officially endorsed for the first time a program of women's work in the denomination.

When William Hart McCorkle arrived in Bristol in 1957 as the newly elected pastor, he realized that the time had come to give serious consideration to the aging building. It was deteriorating; no longer did most of the membership live within walking distance, and there was insufficient space for parking. The future of the church called for a new building and a new location. Planning committees were organized, and a financial campaign was initiated. The church acquired ten acres of land on Florida Avenue from King College, and on July 22, 1962, the congregation gathered at the new site for a formal ground-breaking. Members visited the location frequently as a grand structure of Romanesque design took shape. Formal dedication of the new building took place in September 1965. Its spacious facilities encouraged the Presbyterian Church to return to Bristol for a second General Assembly in 1967.

The congregation's concern for mission through the years has led to programs of outreach that are both local and global. The church is currently involved in some 20 community endeavors, such as Habitat for Humanity and a local Healing Hands ministry. Globally, First Church has established mission outreach programs in Brazil and Ethiopia and has developed a project to provide safe drinking water to distressed areas in Africa. The church has also enjoyed close relations with King College; a senior institution related to the Presbyterian Church. Soon after the Civil War, Presbyterian leaders in East Tennessee became concerned about the lack of educational opportunities in their region, and they resolved to establish a college. The Reverend James King offered land and buildings in Bristol, and in accepting the gift, it was decided to name the institution King College. Today the church and the college are on adjacent tracts of land, and each complements the mission of the other.

In September 2008 the congregation celebrated its sesquicentennial, and so much interest was generated that efforts are now underway to assemble an archival collection of documents and other materials relevant to its history. Because all of the sessional records have been preserved along with various registries of membership, the church is also seeking to create a complete database of all members from its founding in 1858.

Additional information may be found in [A Long Communion: History of First Presbyterian Church of Bristol, Tennessee-Virginia: 1820 to 1976](#) by Ann Strickland Harrison (1979).

Source: Biographical history provided by William J. Wade of Bristol, Tennessee.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Thirty-five single-volume ledgers with a church register occurring first, thirty-three volumes of session minutes occurring next, and deacons' minutes occurring last. Entries are chronological within each volume with the exception of the church register which contains an alphabetical listing of communicants and a chronological record of baptisms.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

No restrictions.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

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Index Terms

Personal Names:

King, Joseph Lynn, 1842-1900

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

First Presbyterian Church (Bristol, Tenn.)

King College (Bristol, Tenn.)

Subjects:

Presbyterians -- History -- Tennessee -- Sources

Document Types:

Minute books

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition:

This collection was loaned to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by the First Presbyterian Church of Bristol, Tennessee, on July 31, 2012. The collection was microfilmed by TSLA and returned to the donor.

Processing and Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:

First Presbyterian Church Records (Bristol, Tenn.), 1858-2009, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Processing Information:

The collection was reviewed and prepared for microfilming by Lori D. Lockhart in August 2012.

Existence and Location of Originals:

Held privately.

Electronic Location and Access:

<http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/history/manuscripts/findingaids/mf2029.pdf>

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Volume
Church register	1928-1968	1	1
Session minutes, Vol. 1	1858-1873	1	2
Session minutes, Vol. 2	1873-1893	1	3
Session minutes, Vol. 3	1893-1906	1	4
Session minutes, Vol. 4	1906-1912	1	5
Session minutes, Vol. 5	1912-1917	1	6
Session minutes, Vol. 6	1917-1922	1	7
Session minutes, Vol. 7	1922-1927	1	8
Session minutes, Vol. 8	1927-1938	1	9
Session minutes, Vol. 9	1938-1947	1	10
Session minutes, Vol. 10	1947-1952	2	1
Session minutes, Vol. 11	1953-1956	2	2
Session minutes, Vol. 12	1957-1961	2	3
Session minutes, Vol. 13	1962-1964	2	4
Session minutes, Vol. 14	1965-1967	2	5
Session minutes, Vol. 15	1968-1970	3	1
Session minutes, Vol. 16	1971-1973	3	2
Session minutes, Vol. 17	1974-1976	3	3
Session minutes, Vol. 18	1977-1978	3	4
Session minutes, Vol. 19	1979-1980	3	5
Session minutes, Vol. 20	1981-1982	4	1
Session minutes, Vol. 21	1983-1984	4	2
Session minutes, Vol. 22	1985-1987	4	3
Session minutes, Vol. 23	1988-1989	4	4
Session minutes, Vol. 24	1990-1991	4	5
Session minutes, Vol. 25	1992-1993	5	1
Session minutes, Vol. 26	1994-1995	5	2
Session minutes, Vol. 27	1996-1997	5	3
Session minutes, Vol. 28	1998-1999	5	4
Session minutes, Vol. 29	2000-2001	5	5
Session minutes, Vol. 30	2002-2003	6	1
Session minutes, Vol. 31	2004-2005	6	2
Session minutes, Vol. 32	2006-2007	6	3
Session minutes, Vol. 33	2007-2009	6	4
Deacons' minutes	1894-1916	6	5