

Thornwell's journal allows journey into Presbyterian past

When the Rev. James Henley Thornwell, joint pastor of York County's Unity and Ebenezer Presbyterian churches, died in 1907, he left a remarkable record of his pastoral duties and accomplishments.

Thornwell kept journals and notebooks in which he recorded everything from the number of baccalaureate sermons he preached to how many miles he had walked.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

Under "Sermons, Addresses and Lectures," he recorded 3,647 services beginning in Fort Mill's Unity in February 1882. He was hired half time at Ebenezer near Rock Hill in May 1883.

"Addresses" included seven to college audiences, to a nursing school and to 10 YMCA audiences in 10 cities. On one occasion he delivered the address awarding a prize to the best lady bicycle rider.

Thornwell lectured on his trip to Europe 25 times. There were 20 speeches on behalf of Presbyterian College. He was offered the presidency of the college but turned it down.

He also served as a trustee of Thornwell Orphanage, which was named for his father. Thornwell also sponsored a Presbyterian history medal awarded each year to an outstanding student.

Thornwell wrote that he had preached in 11 states, in Canada, on the Atlantic Ocean and in Glasgow, Scotland.

He served as chaplain general of the S.C. Confederate Veterans

and as chaplain of the York Regiment and the Fort Mill Confederate camp. Thornwell was a Confederate veteran, appointed a lieutenant and drill master at the age of 18 and later served in the cavalry. After the war, he studied law with the firm of Wilson & Witherspoon in Yorkville but only practiced a year in Anderson.

Thornwell also was a member of, and often addressed, the Sons of the Revolution, Woodmen of the World, the Knights of Pythias and the Masons.

As part of his pastoral duties Thornwell preached for funerals. This notebook list is in the York County Library's Local History Room. Thornwell noted that he conducted 131 funerals at Fort Mill's Unity and 60 at Ebenezer.

Thornwell recorded more than 30,000 pastoral visits along with 1,365 baptisms of children and adults. He married 133 couples and noted that fees for performing marriages totaled \$750 and ranged from a low of 25 cents to \$100.

Evidently Thornwell was just as interested in noting the amount of money collected at each church. Over the years of his pastorate, he wrote that the Fort Mill congregation offering was \$37,900 and Ebenezer \$33,750.

Thornwell wrote, "I have traveled in the railroad 30,000 miles, by water 6,500 miles, by private conveyance 7,000 miles and walked over 9,000 miles and with it all have been in only one collision and suffered a sprained ankle."

Samuel Mendenhall in his "History of the Ebenezer Presbyterian Church" quotes a contemporary of Thornwell as saying Thornwell "had the happy art of easily making acquaintances with strangers

and mingling freely and pleasantly with all classes of people. He had a ready wit and was an interesting talker."

Mendenhall also wrote of the Ebenezer "dinner on the grounds," which occurred the first Sunday of May and September. It seems that in those times, each family ate together the meal that they had brought rather than placing their food on tables for all to share. Thornwell would move from family to family, eating a part of each family's meal.

Bessie Salters, an Ebenezer communicant, recalled that after his church service, Thornwell often ate with her family and then took a nap before starting the long journey back to Fort Mill.

A contrast might be made between the senior and the junior Thornwell. The father was no doubt more brilliant and gifted but not as social and congenial as his son. James H. Thornwell Sr. was the youngest man to be chosen as moderator of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. He was equally gifted in the classroom and the pulpit. In 1846, three colleges gave him honorary doctorates.

The elder Thornwell was also far more controversial.

He believed that the Bible justified slavery and that the Southern states were prosperous because of slavery. He taught this and he expressed these views in the Southern Quarterly Review, which he edited.

As such he was labeled "Calhoun of the Church" and in the South was considered the church's leading Presbyterian.

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