



BICENTENNIAL MOMENT

CHURCH DIVISION & REUNIFICATION In the Fall of 1839 the Synod of West Tennessee, meeting at Huntsville, Alabama, divided and Dr. Eagleton and Elder William D. Baird affiliated with the New School Synod, causing controversy among the Elders. 18 members favored the “Old School” and 188 members were for the “New School.” From 1839 to the fall of 1841 the protracted meetings concerning this controversy continued for eighteen day and nineteen night services. Apparently, the sermons averaged between 2 and 3 hours. Some sixty or more members left the church over the controversy and were encouraged to organize a congregation at Kelton’s Camp Ground—the nucleus of the Mt. Tabor Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The “New School” Presbyterians wanted to continue, as they had been, in close connection with the Congregational and other churches in mission as they sought to evangelize the frontier. The “Old School” group wanted to change and become a stricter Calvinist denomination. They objected to receiving ministers into Presbyterian fellowship unless they fully accepted the standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The “Old School” group secured control in the assemblies of 1837 and 1838, expelled several presbyteries and synods, and established denominational boards. Negotiations concerning the New vs. Old Schools had proceeded, but there is no explanation in the record of 1st Presbyterian, Murfreesboro, except that the elders who had disagreed resumed their seats. In November 1841 the minutes do reflect the tensions: “. . . the saving arm of the Lord had been uncovered and his mercy is gloriously triumphant. The [fearful] difficulties which have distracted the councils and paralyzed the energies of this Church have been healed and we are once more an undivided and harmonious church.” In his authoritative Presbyterians of the South, Ernest Trice Thompson cites the Murfreesboro congregation as one in which the spirit of love overcame strife and the breach was soon healed. In 1843 some of the members who had left the church over the “School” controversy, returned to our church. Later, both the Old School and New School branches further split over the issue of slavery, into southern and northern churches. After three decades of separate operation, the two sides of the controversy merged, in 1865 in the south and in 1870 in the north, to form united Presbyterian churches, although these were still separated into two (as opposed to four) branches based upon the civil war divisions. [Information researched by Susan Daniel & the late Ernest Hooper].