



BICENTENNIAL MOMENT

REV. ROBERT HENDERSON, D. D. [1764-1834] Dr. Henderson, the first minister of our church, was born 31 May 1764 in Washington County, near Abingdon, Virginia. He began his ministry in our church in 1811 and continued until 1814 when he moved to Columbia where he taught the young James K. Polk. In 1817 Rev. Robert Henderson returned to Murfree Spring Church to assume pastoral duties. He also encouraged James K. Polk to attend Bradley Academy in Murfreesboro. Later he married Polk and Sarah Childress, the only local pastor who married a future president of the United States. That year, Greeneville College in East Tennessee bestowed upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. Greeneville College was probably the present-day Tusculum College in Greeneville, TN. It is the oldest college in Tennessee. John C. Spence in his Annals of Rutherford Co. states in April 1818: "The Dr. [Henderson] was popular, having a fine education, a good reasoner on points in controversy, a reasonable amount of sarcasm tinged in his composition. At times a little taunting, cutting in his remarks, showing disgust for things not pleasing. When in the humor, a considerable fund of wit and anecdote, often blended in his sermons, which generally gave interest to those less concerned with the importance of pity. At times his remarks oftener drawing a smile than a tear. Little occurrences happening during the week, amusing, he would relate in the course of his sermon in a witty, sometimes sarcastic manner. Many of his sermons were blended, more or less, with this style of religious anecdote. It all having a tendency in drawing the attention of the young people to hear him preach, feeling sure of hearing something said that was good, if they were not otherwise impressed. His congregations always large. He had the love and respect of all who knew him." During the period 1822-1825 when the church was used by the Tennessee Legislature as its State Capital, Dr. Henderson preached a sermon on the subject of dueling and horse-racing, with Andrew Jackson in the congregation. Andrew Jackson respected and appreciated courage. Although his toes had been heavily stepped on, he sent Dr. Henderson a valuable gift. Dr. Robert Henderson published [in 1823] two volumes of "Practical Sermons." Copies of these 2 volumes were purchased by 1st Presbyterian Church and presented to the Historical Foundation at Montreat in 1925. In October 1825 Dr. Henderson resigned and moved to the Franklin church. A newspaper notice expressing thanks indicated that he also taught school while in Murfreesboro. As a preacher, Dr. Henderson is said to have been a unique figure, eccentric but powerful. "Sometimes he was overwhelmingly solemn; at other times, witty and humorous; and then again, most severe and scathing. His appeals were bold and passionate, and at times awfully grand. He possessed a well nigh matchless power of mimicry, and could accomplish more by voice, countenance, attitude, and gesture, than almost any other man. . ." [Dr. R. B. McMullen]. After his second tenure in Murfreesboro, Dr. Henderson made his home in Franklin where he taught school and preached in the surrounding country. He died in July 1834 at his home called "Pilgrim's Rest," near Franklin, Tennessee. [Information researched by Susan Daniel & the late Ernest Hooper].