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# A HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TEXAS

*By*

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GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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## REV. JOHN McCULLOUGH



HE name of McCullough is linked with the history of the Galveston and San Antonio churches.

John McCullough was born in Lower Oxford Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania, April 3, 1805. His father died in 1815, leaving seven children. Eleven years later, the family moved to Lancaster County, and became teachers and pupils in a school under the care of Rev. Joseph Barr. In 1830 they moved to Moscow Academy, near Parkersburg, Chester County.

He was an apt student and remarkable for his knowledge of books. Even in his boyhood he purposed to study for the ministry, and by his energy of character, surmounted many difficulties in the attainment of the desired end. He was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1830 to 1832, was licensed by the Presbytery of New Castle, April 4, 1834, and ordained by the Presbytery of Newton nearly two years later. After his ordination, he became the supply of Lower Mt. Bethel Church, for about two and one-half years.

In November, 1838, McCullough and W. Y. Allen met for the first time, in New Orleans. They proceeded to Houston, where they were elected chaplains of the Third Congress, Allen of the House, and McCullough of the Senate. On the adjournment of Congress, Mr. McCullough returned to Galveston. Yellow fever soon appeared, but he remained at his post, ministering to the needs of the sick and dying. In the fall of 1839 the citizens of Galveston, in a public meeting, united in commencing the erection of a house of worship for his congregation.<sup>1</sup>

On January 1, 1840, he organized the First Presbyterian Church of Galveston. In the same year, he made a trip to San Antonio with a view to preaching to the Mexicans. He remained only a few days and returned to Columbia, where he ministered to the little church and supplemented his income by teaching, until the early part of the year 1846. Then a portion of the Columbia Church was organized by

<sup>1</sup> *Texas Presbyterian*, June 9, 1876.

the Presbytery of Brazos into a church to be known as the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, "since they intended soon to remove to San Antonio, and desired to promote their own spiritual welfare and usefulness."<sup>2</sup>

The year previous, McCullough had gone to the States to secure the assistance of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Old School Assembly, with special regard to the work in San Antonio. In August, 1847, his wife assisted him in opening a day school for Mexican children there. This was soon followed by a Sunday School of thirty-five children, "all Americans except three or four Mexicans and as many Germans." In the fall of 1847 a lot was purchased, and the congregation commenced the erection of an adobe house of worship on Commerce Street. Mr. McCullough did much of the work with his own hands. That same fall the agent of the American Sunday School Union attended his services and wrote, "The sermon was truly evangelical in its character and couched in chaste language. As a pulpit exercise it would have been quite creditable to the speaker even in one of our largest cities."<sup>3</sup>

In the afternoon he preached to the negroes. He remained in San Antonio, preaching and teaching school until the death of his wife, when the strenuous life began to tell upon his health.

In 1849 Mr. McCullough returned to Galveston, where, in collaboration with Rev. William Baker, he established a bureau of information concerning "places destitute of churches and schools," so that preachers and teachers coming to Texas might be guided to that locality where they could be of the greatest service.<sup>4</sup> But his chief purpose in going to Galveston was the founding of a Female Seminary. This school was maintained with success for five years, until the city was visited by an epidemic of yellow fever. By its ravages he lost his two sisters, a nephew, and a niece. As a result his school was broken up and never resumed.

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<sup>2</sup> Minutes of Presbytery of Brazos, April 4, 1846.

<sup>3</sup> *Texas Presbyterian*, October 23, 1847.

<sup>4</sup> *Texas State Gazette*, October 27, 1849.

He then went to Ohio, where he supplied the Muskingum Church for three years. Next he appeared as a resident of Burnett County, Texas, where he supported himself and engaged in missionary work up to the time of his removal, in 1869, to Prairie Lea. He had been invited to take charge of the school and church there, but he was stricken with apoplexy, on Sunday evening, January 9, 1870, and soon expired.

Rev. H. S. Thrall, the historian, who was a personal friend of Mr. McCullough, laboring by his side in San Antonio, Columbia, and Galveston, said of him:

"Among all the dear ministerial brethren, whose acquaintance I formed in my younger days, none stood higher in my esteem or had a warmer place in my affections than John McCullough. In the ordinary acceptation of the word, Brother McCullough was not eloquent; but his clear perception of truth, his thorough mental training and his careful preparation for the pulpit made him to me a most interesting preacher. While he was cordial and genial in his manners, there was about him a certain independence which impressed those with whom he associated that they might expect to be fearlessly and faithfully warned of their sins."<sup>5</sup>

He was twice married, the first time to Miss Lorena Sayre of Columbia, Texas, and the second time to Miss Margaret J. Riddell, of Pennsylvania, by whom he had a family of nine children, three sons and six daughters.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Texas Presbyterian*, March 12, 1880.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. M. J. McCullough to W. S. Red, Jan. 29, 1909.