



History of Marietta

Thomas Jefferson Summers

Illustration from *History of Marietta*, Summers, 1903.

The Religious History
Of Nineteenth Century Marietta
Reflections

History of Marietta
Chapter XIII
originally by
Thomas Jefferson Summers
1903
The Leader Publishing Co.
Marietta, Ohio

edited and adapted by
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Pilgrim Platform
Marietta, Ohio



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ISBN: 978-0-9839046-2-5
Edition: 2.20.2012

Published by

Pilgrim Platform
149 E. Spring St., Marietta
Ohio, 45750
www.pilgrim-platform.org

Biblical quotations are from the *English Standard Version*, Standard Bible Society, unless otherwise cited.

Printed in the United States of America

*for Christ's Church
at Marietta, Ohio*

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INTRODUCTION

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

—John 8:33

The seed planted becomes the plant harvested.

How a thing begins, to a great measure, determines what it becomes and how it will end. This is especially true with living things like human organizations. The original leadership imprint is difficult—if not impossible—to change.

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah wrote, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23). Jeremiah’s point was that his nation was beyond reproof. They could not avoid God’s judgment for their sin and sloth. However, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Jeremiah’s day was not the end of the story—nor was it the end of Jeremiah’s message.

His message was ultimately a message of hope, of repentance and renewal. Of course, we know that in Jeremiah’s day their hope for repentance and renewal would be found on the other side of destruction and captivity. That was Jeremiah’s message. God will not abandon His people—ever. Though He will chastise and discipline them/us. God’s purpose cannot be stopped, He will prevail in His effort to make His people actually be the people He created them to be.

That was good news for Jeremiah's day, and it is still good news for ours. It was good news for Jerusalem and it is good news for Marietta. No, I'm not comparing Jerusalem and Marietta. Rather, I'm simply saying that God will prevail. But I'm also saying that there is a case to be made for the original idea of what Marietta was to become.

Just as the Pilgrims and Puritans had come from Europe to America's shores to be a "city set on a hill" (Matthew 5:14), a model for a new kind of city, a new kind of society, a new kind of humanity, so the vision for Marietta was to take that vision from the shores of New England and plant it on the Western frontier. That is the legacy of Marietta. Little Marietta, founded in 1788 by an Act of Congress as the first settlement in the Northwest Territory, was to be—and still can be—a model city of the New World.

Is this a high calling or just a pipe dream? It is a high calling in Christ, but apart from Christ it is only a pipe dream. The difference between reality and fiction is faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Just as not all of those who came to America's shores from Europe were Christians looking to their manifest destiny, neither were all those who founded Marietta. But in both cases the most serious players were either on board personally or willing enough to go along with the idea. In either case and in both cases (for America and for Marietta) that vision was planted in the soul of the culture.

And in both cases that vision has fallen to the wayside for the similar reasons. G. K. Chesterton was right: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

The first effort to establish Christianity in Marietta did so under the rubric of the Congregational churches in the late 1700s, and those involved considered themselves to be the heirs of the Protestant Reformation. However, John Nevin (1803–1886) convincingly argued during the very period covered by this history that the Protestant Reformation had aban-

done some of its most important doctrines and principles within a century of its founding, by the mid-1600s.¹ Could this actually be true? Whether it was true then or not, it is most certainly true today.

If we are looking for a reason that America and/or Marietta did not fulfill their responsibility for being a proverbial city on a hill, we must seriously consider the possibility that the vision of that destiny in the minds of American Christians is not the vision of that destiny in God's mind. It is not only possible that the American vision of Christianity has fallen short of the biblical model, but—given God's promises and His faithfulness to His commitments—it must certainly be admitted that such is in fact the case. And even more distressing is the realization that, if the vision of the founders was flawed, then so is the vision of those who have followed them.

Care must be taken at this point because I am not suggesting that God's vision for His people to create a proverbial city on a hill is or was flawed. No! That is not the case. However, it is possible and increasingly likely that our vision of God's hope does not now, nor did it then, match the biblical model. Given the nature and extent of human sin, this cannot be denied.

But the case is not as distressing as it could be because God, in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty, has created a world of historic unfolding. History is real, and must always be factored into our understanding of ourselves and of the world. This simply means that God was well-aware that humanity would struggle and stumble with His message of salvation. Indeed, this is one of the central lessons provided by the Old Testament. Apart from Christ, Israel could not and did not ever get it right, not completely. Infant humanity understands infantly, just as adolescent humanity understands adolescently. The point is that human understanding is historical, or we could say that it is *progressive*.

1 Nevin, John & Ross, Phillip A. *The True Mystery of the Mystical Presence*, Pilgrim Platform, Marietta, Ohio, 2011.

I'm using the word in its definitional sense, not its contemporary political sense. The word simply means "gradually advancing in extent." The more history that is available to humanity, the more it applies to our understanding of ourselves and our world. And, interestingly, history is currently growing in both directions—toward the past and toward the future. Every year that passes provides us with more history to consider. And at the same time, historians uncover more information about our past every year. Taken together, these things mean that we must incorporate both the new history of each successive year and the additional historical information about our past into our current understanding of ourselves and our world.

As Christians, we realize that our understanding of the Bible is informed by our understanding of our history, and at the same time, our understanding of our history is also informed by the Bible. This means that the more we understand about our history, the more we understand about the Bible—which in turn increases our understanding of history. And conversely, the more we understand about the Bible, the more we understand about our history.

The two realities are both mutually penetrating and symbiotic. Taken together, then, we come to see that the revelation of Jesus Christ is progressive, in that it grows in both breadth and depth over time. Over time, the veracity and importance of the revelation of Jesus Christ to humanity through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit increases in both clarity and extent.

All of this, of course, is not a surprise to God. In fact, God anticipated it, and used the Old Testament to set up humanity for the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of the world. And as the Twenty-First Century begins we have come to see that the world—or reality—is far more complex than our ancestors ever could have imagined. Indeed, it is far more complex than we can still imagine.

However, this does not mean that the Bible or God's revelation in the past is untrue or inadequate for our current circumstance. Rather, God wrote the Bible in such a way that it is a living document. The Bible has always served as a kind of mirror, in that people are able to look into it and see themselves. So, as we grow and mature, the reflection that we see reflects that growth and maturity. In this way, the Bible provides an eternal or absolute function. This function is often described by Christians as providing "biblical absolutes." The Bible provides grounding for the categories of philosophical and theological ultimacy, apart from which humanity, human history and understanding can only float in a sea of relativity. The reality of this situation has recently been rediscovered by many people in many disciplines.²

The text before you was written by a Congregational minister at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. It covers the time from the founding of Marietta to about 1900. While the religious history of Marietta from that time forward is not unimportant, it follows the earlier patterns of unfolding. The historical failings of Christ's church in Marietta can be more clearly seen and understood with the perspective that historical reflection provides. The closer to our own time we get, the more difficult it is to see past our own presuppositions and prejudices. So, I have chosen to focus on the Nineteenth Century in the hope of making certain problems and issues regarding American Christianity and the religious history of Marietta more clear.

Why focus on our problems rather than our successes? Because God uses our problems and failures as a means of correction and improvement. Our failures more readily drive the growth and development of Christian character than do our successes. This is taught throughout Scripture.

2 The idea of the progressive revelation of Jesus Christ through history is discussed in *Peter's Vision of Christ's Purpose in First Peter* (2011) and *Peter's Vision of The End in Second Peter* (2012), by Phillip A. Ross, Pilgrim Platform, Marietta, Ohio.

“... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).

I have left Summers’ text intact, editing it only slightly. Where Summers used present tense verbs to describe things as they were in the early 1900s, I have changed the author’s use of the present tense (circa 1900) to the past tense in order to eliminate unnecessary confusion.

Why have I chosen to use the perspective of a Congregational minister for this project? Because I’m not aware of any other who has tried to provide an ecumenical or general history of Marietta, because Congregationalism is part of my own history and because I live in Marietta. However, it appears to me that Summers has glossed over any issues, concerns or problems that existed at the time between the various churches or denominations in order to present the illusion of a relatively harmonious ecumenical picture of Marietta. He does this by focusing on buildings and pastors, but not on the mission, ministry or theology that defines the various churches and denominations.

There is much reason to doubt any such harmony. And it is unlikely that Summers was ignorant of the issues, and if he was, others would not have been and would have provided their input if asked. Because various religious issues created national turmoil during the Nineteenth Century, it is highly unlikely that Marietta was spared such turmoil. And even more so because Marietta’s elite made every effort to be informed and onboard regarding the popular issues of the day.

Of course, there have been those in the churches who have hoped that these issues, concerns and divisions would simply melt away. But that has not happened, though many people today have abandoned the issues that once fired Chris-

tians up—probably because for the most part, they have abandoned any serious consideration or commitment to the faith by avoiding the study of or concern for Christian doctrine.

The heart of their avoidance is somewhat valid in that Christ has called His church(es) to unity not factionalism. Indeed, Christian unity has been the hope of Marietta's Christians since its founding, and that is the vision that must be rekindled today. But we cannot expect unity apart from enjoying some degree of shared mission, ministry and theology. Thus, it is toward this end that I have been working.

However, my approach has not been to ignore or deny differences but to embrace them. I have sought a way that Christians can embrace and enjoy their differences without letting those differences divide them with regard to the greater issues and elements of Christianity. Just as Christians with different beliefs are members of the same local church, so local churches with different beliefs are members of the same community. The role of Christian unity is not to quench the Spirit.

The Spirit of Christianity is not a spirit of ignorance or denial, but of intelligence, graciousness and compassion—as the Marietta founders acknowledged. God is not interested in a kind of cookie-cutter unanimity of biblical interpretation and opinion, but has created humanity in His own likeness. And God Himself enjoys a diverse or plural identity. He Himself enjoys a three-in-one and one-in-three identity. The Godhead, from which human likeness is derived, is a unified complex, a diverse singularity.³ Consequently, we should expect that unity in Christ will reflect a similar kind of union of diversity. However, the emphasis must be on the union, not the diversity.

Summers' book, and this one as well, may provide a launch vehicle for discussion and rekindling of the desire for Christ's church to actually be a city on the hill that He hoped

3 See Ross, Phillip A. *Colossians—Christos Singularis*, Pilgrim Platform, Marietta, Ohio, 2010.

it would become. Can Marietta's (and America's) Christians find unity in the Twenty First Century? I think so. It's not too late. In fact, the time could not be better for this kind of discussion. But we must approach the discussion honestly, just as individuals must approach the Lord honestly. The way forward is acknowledgment and confession of our sin, and then the engagement of repentance that drives renewal. And by focusing on the Nineteenth Century we might be able to find sufficient perspective and distance to avoid the kind of broad-sided anathematization that has characterized denominated Christians in previous ages.

Toward this end, I have provided footnotes and appendixes for various terms and people that Summers mentioned, and to provide context and the national or denominational history that Summers avoided. Without such references many people today could easily miss the importance and/or the underlying issues that have shaped Marietta (and America, as well). We cannot continue to gloss over the important issues of Christianity, nor can we continue to fight over them. Rather, we must come to a resolution that can acknowledge differences without rancor and divisiveness.

Much of that information has been taken and/or adapted from Wikipedia[®] (Creative Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0). I'm aware that many scholars discount Wikipedia because of its open editing policies, but this book is not a scholarly work. And because Wikipedia is a popular resource, it is further hoped that the information gleaned from that source will also be easily digestible by the average person. I have also included several articles in the Appendixes by other people to help the reader understand that the perspective provided here is not just that of the author.

Again, this book is not intended to be a definitive history, but to provide a goad and source for understanding and discussion. As such, it does not provide answers as much as it elicits questions about who we are, where we have been and where we are headed as a church and as a people—as a com-

munity and as a nation. The simple effort to understand what happened to the American Christian churches during the Nineteenth Century will hopefully arouse and facilitate such goals by putting sufficient time between the issues and our contemporary concerns and sensitivities so that people will not be personally threatened. The way forward will only come through discussion and mutual understanding, and will not come from ignorance and avoidance.

We must not be like those who first listened to Jesus, but were so filled with themselves that they couldn't *hear* Him.

We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, "You will become free"?
—John 8:34

The hope that Christ provides is not a hope that is devoid of the messy realities of life. Life is not a dream, not even the so-called American Dream. We can no longer afford to dream our lives away. Christ calls us to wakefulness!

I pray that this little book will be useful to the Lord and to His people as they/we endeavor to engage in Christ's mission and ministry in the Twenty-First Century. God speed.

Phillip A. Ross
Marietta, Ohio
January 2012

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

The seed which was brought to the New World by the Pilgrim fathers and their Puritan brethren resulted in a free church and a free school. Intelligence and Christianity formed the corner stone of New England society. As the colony that settled Marietta was composed of New Englanders, it was natural that institutions of learning and religion should be introduced at the beginning of the settlement.

At the last meeting of the Ohio Company held in Massachusetts, March 9, 1788, the following resolution was adopted:

“That the directors pay as early attention as possible to the education of the youth and the promotion of public worship among the first settlers, and for these important purposes they employ, if practicable, an instructor, eminent for literary accomplishments and the virtue of his character, who shall also superintend the first scholastic institution and direct the manner of instruction, and to enable the directors to carry into execution the intention expressed in these resolutions, the proprietors and others of benevolent and liberal minds are earnestly requested to contribute, by voluntary donations, to form a fund to be solely appropriated thereto.”

For the purpose of carrying out this resolution Doctor Manasseh Cutler was selected. A subscription paper was printed the same month, appealing to the “benevolent and liberal minded”⁴ to contribute for this worthy object. How extensively these papers were circulated, or how much money was raised, we have no means of ascertaining.

There was no public worship among the early settlers till July 20, 1788, when the first sermon in the Northwest Territory was preached by Rev. Daniel Breck, a member of the Ohio Company who came to Marietta on a tour of observation. On the Sunday following his arrival he preached his first sermon in a “bower”⁵ on the banks of the Muskingum, and thus inaugurated public worship in the Northwest Territory. For the next four, and perhaps five, Sundays Rev. Breck continued to preach for the inhabitants. On the 18th of August, 1788, he left Marietta for his home in Massachusetts. The day following marked the arrival of the Rev. Manasseh Cutler. Doctor Cutler, anxious to carry out the resolution passed by the Ohio Company, soon returned to Massachusetts to secure a suitable minister. In a letter to General Putnam he expressed his interest in this matter by saying:

“I can in truth declare that I know of no subject which lies with so much weight on my mind as that your settlement may be furnished with a number of able and faithful ministers; convinced, as I am, that religious establishments and social worship are essential in a civil view to the well-being of society, especially under free government. If no regard was had to the interests and concerns of a future world, you cannot be too solicitous to have them early established in your rising settlement.”

4 The term *liberal* in this quote predates Classical Liberalism, which developed in the Nineteenth Century, and all modern sense of the term.

5 Bower: a framework that supports climbing plants.

Dr. Cutler soon secured the services of Mr. Daniel Story, a native of Boston and a graduate of Dartmouth College. He arrived at Marietta on March 19, 1789, and on the following Sunday, March 22, preached his first sermon in his new field. From that time till 1796 he was in the employ of the Ohio Company and received a portion of his income from their funds.

Regular meetings were held in the northwest blockhouse, and occasionally in the upper story of the frame house in the garrison at the “point.”⁶ Thus, in the earliest days of Marietta, these pioneers did not forget to assemble for worship, and although troubled and embarrassed by annoying circumstances, and often scared and compelled to flee on account of the Indians, they remembered their duty, and only the more tenaciously clung to the faith of their New England fathers.

It was not long after the settlement of Marietta that a Sunday School was organized. In 1791 soon after the gathering of the settlers in the garrisons in consequence of the Indian War, the first Sunday School in the Northwest, and the second in America, was organized by Mrs. Mary Lake in the stockade. After the settlers had been driven to the blockhouses, she conceived the idea of gathering the children for religious instruction on Sunday afternoon. Dr. Hildreth says “the school was established in the single and only room occupied by the family, where each Sunday afternoon she taught the children lessons from the Scriptures, and from the Westminster Catechism.” The seats were rude and simple, and one of the scholars, then a boy of four years of age, afterward related that “his seat was a bag of meal.”

This school continued for about four years, when Mrs. Lake removed with her family to a farm on the Muskingum, near Rainbow,⁷ where she died on April 27, 1796, aged 68

6 A reference to Fort Harmar, at the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers, but no longer standing. See the Campus Martius Museum in Marietta.

7 Five or six miles north of Marietta.

years. In 1889 the Sunday Schools of Washington County erected a marble monument at her grave. On June 2, 3 and 4, 1891, was celebrated the 100th anniversary of the organization of this school by holding the annual meeting of the Ohio Sunday School Association at Marietta.

After Mrs. Lake's death the Sunday Schools in this county grew very slowly for about twenty years. Dr. Dickinson says that "it was a period of transition from secular to religious instructions." The first Sunday School work done by the church in Marietta was in 1817, some years after the church was organized.

For over eight years after the settlement at Marietta there was no organized church in place. Services were conducted in a way familiar to all, and the earliest ministers were members of the New England Congregational Church, as well as most of the worshippers. However, in one of the blockhouses it is claimed that the Episcopal services were read, but the number of members of this church must have been very few at that time.

On December 6, 1796, the people banded together and organized the first church in Marietta. It can not be claimed that this was the first church organized in the State, as two or three churches were previously formed elsewhere. It is difficult to explain why the people of Marietta waited so long, for they had a regular pastor almost as soon as any other settlement was commenced and had early established regular Sunday School services. But we will not judge the men who settled here, for we know they were Christians and for thus waiting so long they doubtless had reasons.⁸ There were, however, those in the settlement who were interested in the construction and organization of a church. Benjamin Tupper,

8 "The persons composing the church resided in Marietta, Belpre, Waterford, and Vienna, Virginia; and on this account it required some time to perfect the organization." Dickinson, Cornelius Evarts, D.D. *A Century of Church Life: A history of the First Congregational church of Marietta, Ohio*, R.R. Alderman & Sons, 1896.

anticipating a movement to Marietta, made application to the Hampshire Association in Massachusetts for a “form of church order and discipline fitted to a church to be collected in a new plantation.” He consequently received the proper aid, went to work to organize a church, but never accomplished his purpose. General Tupper died in 1792, honored for his efforts, but with no church set up in this new colony.

On December 4, 1796, a meeting was held for the purpose of considering the advisability of establishing a church. The matter was referred to a committee, which reported a confession of faith and covenant, which was unanimously adopted, and on December 6th, the Christian people of the various settlements banded themselves together in a church under a simple, but comprehensive confession of faith and covenant. Thus on December 6, 1796, The Congregational Church was organized, the first church in Marietta.



First Congregational Church

It was composed of thirty-one members, thirty being members of Congregational churches in New England and one of a Presbyterian church in Linlithgow, Scotland.

There is no record of a vote by which the above church assumed a denominational name.⁹ On March 20, 1797, a

9 “The charge (at the ordination of Mr. Daniel Story) given by Dr. Cutler

church meeting was held, at which it was “voted that persons producing evidence to the satisfaction of the church that they are members in regular standing in any Congregational or Presbyterian church, or any one of the dissenting Protestant churches of England, whose life and conversation whilst with us have been agreeable to the gospel, shall be admitted members of this church, notwithstanding they have not produced regular vouchers of their former membership.”¹⁰ Several members were so received. It seems that the purpose of Rev. Story and “his associates was to lay religious foundations sufficiently broad and catholic¹¹ to embrace all Christians.

On April 4, 1797, the church decided that “Mr. Daniel Story be invited to the office of pastor in this church, provided the people concur and make provision for his support.” Shortly after this meeting, Mr. Story left for New England. Canvassing was done and on February 5, 1798, it was reported that sufficient subscriptions had been raised to offer Mr. Story a salary of \$300. On February 8th a letter was sent to Mr. Story, extending to him the call of the church at the

is found in his recently published *Memoirs*. It was Christian and catholic in spirit. The only denominational allusion is as follows: ‘You have the honor, sir, to be the first regularly ordained and settled minister of the Congregational denomination in the extensive country westward of the Allegheny mountains. We, who are convinced that this denomination is most conformable to the sacred scriptures, and, from long experience, think it most consistent with the rights of conscience and religious liberty; most congenial with our national government and most favorable to those numerous municipal advantages which well founded Christian societies endeavor to promote, feel much satisfaction in seeing it transferred to that new country.’ We, who still believe in the scriptural church polity may well express our regret that such sentiments were not universally prevalent in the New England churches during the next half century.”
Ibid.

- 10 It was common at the time that churches would provide certificates of transfer when members moved away from their home church as prescribed in the *Cambridge Platform*, 1648.
- 11 The significance of this term cannot be understated. The word *catholic* (lower case) means *universal*, as in free from provincial or denominational prejudices or attachments. Today we would use the term *generic*.