

During the early days of American history, all the major denominations of the European reformation found their way to this continent. Each one settled into the new environment, comfortable with their own unique beliefs and traditions. However, during the years surrounding the Revolutionary War, religious interest sharply declined. The added stress and trauma of war-time tension proved to be a great distraction to many people. Popular books by Thomas Paine led people to trust in human reasoning rather than Biblical inspiration. Only about 10% of American people claimed any kind of church affiliation toward the end of the 1700's.

In 1792, a great religious awakening was initiated by Timothy Dewight, president of Yale University. He delivered a baccalaureate address that year entitled: "Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy." Many students were excited by his message and turned back to a faith in God. The fever was contagious. It spread throughout the east, and then was taken westward by a powerful and emotional preacher named James McGready. He held revival meetings throughout Kentucky and Tennessee, climaxing in a massive gathering at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801. Preachers from many denominations took turns speaking ... nonstop ... 24 hours a day, for 6 days and 6 nights, to an estimated crowd of 20 to 30 thousand people. The emotional frenzy was high and multitudes of people "responded" to the preaching. But still, the level of scriptural accuracy was low and the terms of salvation presented was contrary to that in the Bible.

It was about this time, with the level of religious interest again on the rise, that a timely idea was conceived. From all around the country, from a host of different denominations, and totally separate from one another, this similar, simple idea began to enter the minds of various gospel preachers. They were thinking: "Why can't we all become ONE in Christ? Let us not remain alienated from each other with denominational names and creeds ... and let us not waste time with another futile effort to "reform" the church in its present state. But rather, let us put forth effort to "restore" the church which is described in the New Testament." And so ... this message began to be heard from pulpits of various denominations, and from preachers who had no idea that any one else was preaching it.

In Baltimore, James O'Kelly left his position as presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church Conference and led a small group of other preachers away from the Methodist Church. They determined to lay aside all creeds and follow the Bible alone. Rice Haggard, one of the members of the group, pointed out that the Bible teaches that "disciples were called Christians," and he said, "I move that henceforth and forever that followers of Christ be called Christians simply." In 1801 this group changed its name to the Christian Church. Meanwhile, in the spring of 1802, a Baptist Church preacher named Elias Smith was professing that the name "Christian was enough for the followers of Christ without the addition of Baptist, Methodist, or any other name." Like O'Kelly, he also stressed that Christ is the only head of the church and that the Bible is her only creed. About this same time, but in Vermont, Abner Jones also left the Baptist Church to form an independent Christian Church in New England. Eventually, these three groups found each other and united in 1811.

This same process was happening all across the country. Barton W. Stone led a group away from the Presbyterian Church, also concerned with names and titles, source of authority, and autonomy of preachers and congregations. On April 24, 1831, the Stone movement united with the movement of Alexander Campbell, a fellow restoration leader. Later, Stone wrote about their union: "We plainly saw that we were on the same foundation, in the same spirit, and preached the same gospel." Others continued to join them. The movement was growing rapidly, and has continued to this very day. We have become known as The Church of Christ. Our membership is presently estimated to be about 2½ to 3 million people in some 20,000 congregations worldwide. However, every congregation has always been autonomous, with no central headquarters, and existing independently from every other congregation. Our motto is simple and direct: "Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." We have always said: "In matters of faith -- let their be unity. In matters of opinion -- let there be liberty. In all things -- let there be love."

The spirit of the Restoration Movement is alive today ... right here in Laramie. A group of Christians meet in an old, renovated bakery building at 18th and Custer to faithfully serve God according to the pattern of the New Testament. We have no creed but the Bible. We have no head except Christ. Our purpose for existing is three-fold: evangelism, edification, and benevolence. That is ... to spread the gospel message so people can be reconciled to God, to encourage each other in the Christian walk, and to assist one another with the physical necessities of life. Our worship assemblies are simple and practical. We are there to worship God ... not to entertain nor exonerate each other. In other words, we try to retain the spirit and practices of first century Christians to the best of our knowledge and ability. If this sounds like the kind of church that you have been looking for ... why not come and pay us a visit?