



Henderlite: Our Namesake, Guide and Legacy

A study of our past gives us an
understanding of our future



Main Avenue, Gastonia, N.C. circa 1920

Our History

At First Presbyterian Church, the Men's Henderlite Bible Class is seen as an exemplary ideal of Christian legacy, lore and leaning.

Dr. James H. Henderlite's name and character embody the same as the class's namesake, guide and legacy.

History shows the Men's Bible Class at the old First Presbyterian Church on Marietta Street (built in ~1905) as a prominent force in the congregation and community, and it has remained that throughout the decades. The Henderlite Bible Class evolved into not only a church school academy of excellence, but a fraternity of Presbyterian men willing to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel and to encourage, with vision and finance, Christian fellowship, study and meaningful church and community outreach programs.

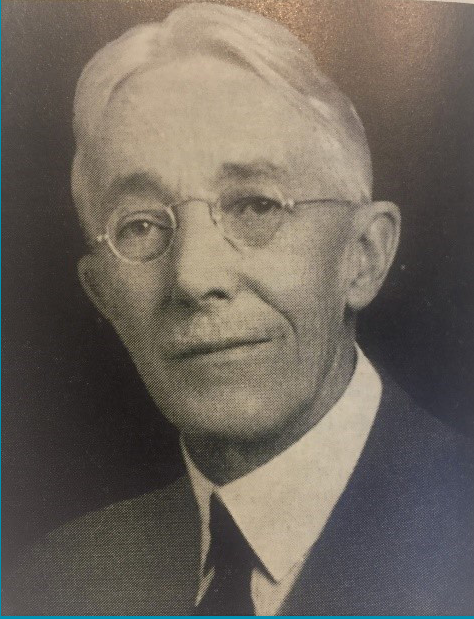


*First Presbyterian
Church on
Marietta Street
circa 1931*

The Men's Bible Class, now known as the Men's Henderlite Bible Class, honors the esteemed pulpit-years of Dr. James H. Henderlite. His 27-year ministry remains a marvel of pastoral and community leadership. Dr. Henderlite himself taught this "sabbath school class", as he referred to church school, until he retired in 1940. Dr Henderlite died in 1942, never fully recovering from influenza.

With great affection and appreciation for Dr. Henderlite, the 1942 Men's Bible Class adopted the new name, the Men's Henderlite Bible Class. Today, a bronze plaque remembering and honoring Dr. Henderlite and his years of grace is on the wall just outside the Heritage Room at the Church.

The Men's Henderlite Bible Class today reflects the inspiration of this beloved Renaissance Minster – Dr. James H. Henderlite. The class traditionally uses the Uniform Lesson Series as its study guide. However, as time and topic have elevated interest in secular and cultural movements, the Men's Henderlite Bible Class has sculpted its fellowship and faith study to be relevant in achieving meaningful mission and radical hospitality.



*Dr. James H. Henderlite,
Senior Minister
1912-1940*

Dr. James H. Henderlight

Dr. Henderlite's service as minister to FPC was surely an intentional call from God. In 1912, Dr. Henderlite was the fourth choice of the Pulpit Committee, now referred to as the Pastor Nominating Committee or PNC. He came to FPC when he was 40 years old with his wife, Nelle, and three children, Virginia, Rachel and James. At that time, the Church had 644 members and an annual budget of \$8,242.78. He was paid a salary of \$1,500.00 plus housing in the church's manse.

Dr. Henderlite was a graduate of Hampton-Sydney College and held degrees from Columbia and Louisville Seminaries, and in 1918 he received a Doctor of Divinity degree from Davidson College. Prior to accepting the call to FPC in Gastonia, Dr. Henderlite served 5 years each at pastorates in Accomac, VA, Henderson, NC and Fredericksburg, VA.

He was the quintessential Presbyterian minister – well educated and informed, giver of thoughtful sermons, articulate, pastoral, and committed to local civic, charitable and community affairs. He was one of four brothers, all whom were ministers. He was renowned for his good judgment, thoughtfulness, kindness and high degree of caring. He defined the mission of the Church, giving it a new standard and a legacy that demanded excellence, diligence and reverence. He demonstrated a natural tension between traditionalism and innovation in all he did. His ministry was marked by relentless shepherding and determination to live the Gospel he preached. Under his leadership and indelible spirit, the church quickly grew its congregation, facilities and finances to serving 1,200 congregates.

The early years as FPC's preacher coincided with impressive commercial growth in Gastonia. The city was spinning its way to prominence in the textile industry. However, the Great Depression was equally as devastating to Gastonia's economy and workforce and to the church's people. In 1931, two years after the onset of the Depression, Dr. Henderlite requested that the session significantly reduce his salary. These lean years did not hinder the resolve of Dr. Henderlite. If anything, it deepened his care for his congregation in crisis.

In 1937, the Church celebrated Dr. Henderlite's 25th anniversary of service at an occasion where he responded:

“You have been mighty good to me. These 25 years have been the happiest of my life. There has been no discord, no factions, no splits nor quarrels in the Church. No one has said an unkind or cross word to me in all this time, and harmony and satisfaction have prevailed.”

Today, the Men's Henderlite Bible Class:

- Emphasizes the importance of men's Christian fellowship and learning.
- Practices quiet philanthropy to which all contribute (supportive of selected ministries of the church and community).

Each Sunday, the Men's Henderlite Bible Class:

- Welcomes each other in Christian fellowship.
- Emphasizes praise through the singing of 2 hymns (1st and last verses.)
- Communicates church news and announcements.
- Shares member concerns, prayers and praises.
- Reads the lesson's scriptures.
- Enjoys a well-prepared lecture-style lesson.
- Opens and closes the time together with prayer.
- Utilizes technology (through PowerPoint presentations and videos) to increase and enhance the joy of the learning experience.

In fellowship, the class hosts and supports:

- Quarterly dinner cookouts and special events at a member's home.
- Semi-annual men-of-the-church breakfasts at the PAD; and selected special projects for the membership.



Men of the Church, First Presbyterian Church Marietta Street, circa 1922

Dr. Henderlite also recalled that he had preached 2,500 sermons, baptized 780 infants, performed 257 marriages, conducted 383 funerals, and made between 25,000 – 30,000 home or hospital visits.

Beyond Dr. Henderlite's church blessing to FPC, he was a marvel of community leadership, as well as to the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly of the church.

Dr. Henderlite served as: Chairman of the Board, Garrison General Hospital; President, Gastonia Rotary Club; a high-ranking member of the Masonic Lodge; Member of the Inter-racial Council in Gastonia; a major figure in the Gastonia Chamber of Commerce, the Gastonia Red Cross, the Salvation Army of Gastonia, the Gastonia Public Library, and the Christmas Seal Committee; a Trustee at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA, Queens College, Charlotte, NC, Montreat College, Montreat, NC, and Presbyterian Junior College, Maxton, NC; a member of the Committee of Forty-four, a policy-making organization of the Southern Presbyterian Church; Member of the General Assembly Stewardship Committee; Member of the Christian Education Board; Moderator of the Synod of NC in 1923; and Commissioner to General Assembly on multiple occasions.



The Men's Henderlite Bible Class meets each Sunday morning from 9:55-10:45 a.m., in the chapel. We welcome your visit and hope that you will join us as we share in Christian fellowship and learning.

For more information, please contact David Ratchford at davidratchford@outlook.com

The information included in this booklet was written and compiled by Cookie Brenner

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