



The research was done by Charles Dailey. The website is no longer online but we were able to recover an archived portion of the website. We thank him for his incredible wealth of information that he shared.

By 1871, Jonathan (Rice) and Nancy Gerking, pioneers of 1862, had arrived in what became Centerville and were holding services. They had spent several years with the *Bethany Church* in Marion County. Their granddaughter Florence married Isaac Newton Richardson in 1878. Dr. Richardson had a dental practice located in the hotel in Centerville. Both families became leaders in the *Athena Church*.

The charter members were: Adarene Clark, Charles and Epsie Ann Geiss, Nancy Angeline "Angie" Gerking, Benjamin F. Gerking, Jonathan Napoleon Bonaparte and Lucy Gerking, John E. L. Gerking, Jonathan Rice and Nancy Gerking, Jasper Gerking, Samantha (Stone) Gerking, Isaiah M. and Mary Sophia Johns, Mary Mason, William Mason, Dr. M. B. Morris, Abel and Elizabeth Russell, Sims Russell, Jacob Scott, Mary Margaret (Gerking) Scott, Josephine Shaw, Amelia and Nancy Stone, and Sarah Ann (Gerking) Taylor.

Mr. Richardson wrote the following letter to the editor of *Pacific Christian Messenger*, published at Monmouth:

Weston, OR. Aug. 5, 1877

D. T. Stanley,

Dear Bro.: I improve this opportunity of writing a word to let the readers of our valuable paper, the *P. C. Messenger*, know how the cause of Christ is prospering in this part of the country.

Since Bro. C. M. Ely's last report there have been four additions by relation, two reclaimed and one by baptism.

This (Wild Horse) congregation numbers 52 members in good standing. It was fully organized in 1875.

The elders are J. R. Gerking, P. Ely and E. Moser; deacons, A. Russel and J. B. Gerking.

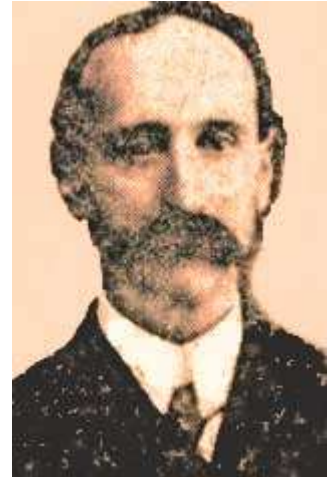
These statements are given in part to correct the report of No. 19 of the *Messenger*.

The church is in a prosperous condition, and we hope to be able to do more for the cause in the near future than we have in the past.

Our scattered condition prevents us from getting together oftener than once a month.

The brethren are generally poor having labored under the disadvantages of a new country and the squirrels. But we have learned how to kill squirrels by the thousand and are now able to raise good crops.

We meet on the first Sunday in each month for preaching. Our audiences are very large considering the newness of the country, and the respect shown religious exercises by the young ladies and gentlemen far exceeds that of any other neighborhood I ever preached in. I trust they will maintain their good reputation.



Dr. I. N. Richardson

We have a Sunday school at the Gerking school house. Supt., W. E. Junkin.

Query: Is there such an office spoken of in the New Testament, as that of clerk. If not why does the Christian church have the clerks office.



1880 Building Earlier, the church had met in schoolhouses. Courtesy of Athena Christian Church.

Yours in Christian love,

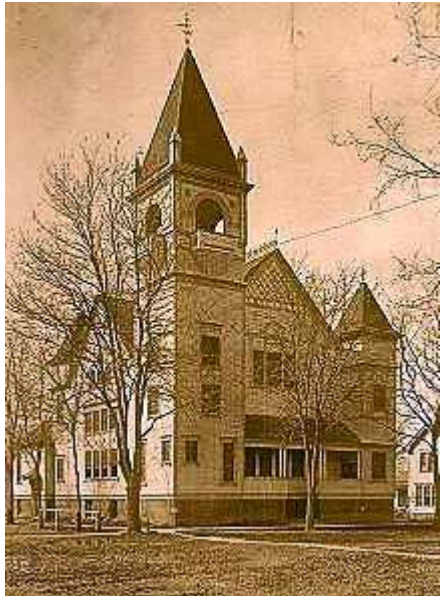
I. N. Richardson
(We have maintained the spelling and punctuation of the original.)

In the letter, elder "P. Ely" is Philologus Ely.

This small-town congregation near Milton began in 1873 according to their own records. J. H. Moore reported to the *Christian Messenger* in 1880 that he was preaching here. He was raised among the Baptists, but became convinced of the claim for being Christians only.

By 1885, the congregation was showing more strength. An article in the January 31 issue of the *Christian Standard* by R. H. Moss reports:

Centerville, Dec. 18. -- We have just closed a meeting of twenty-four days, resulting in 34 additions - 23 by primary obedience and 11 by relation and letter. Bro. C. J. Wright was with us the last half of the time. He did some of the best preaching, both in the assembly and by the fireside. Eleven heads of families were among those baptized, and were of the best and most intelligent in the community. The others, with one or two exceptions, were from the Sunday school.



Historic Athena Christian Church. The church will celebrate its Centennial in this building August 10, 2003. The bell tower was removed in the 1940s.

that he immersed 54 into Christ at Athena and that 16 others were added to the church.

The church constructed its beautiful, historic building in 1903. A 1910 map notes that the building had electric lights.

J. W. Jenkins was minister in 1903. That same year, a seven-week gospel meeting was conducted by William A. "Bill" Moore with 80 baptisms and 103 total responses.

Bob Gilliland had provided a photo of the Gerking family headstone at the Blue Mountain (Kees) Cemetery.

The meeting had accomplished a revolution in our community that will tell for good in time to come. The interest was intense and attendance large throughout. The hearts of parents were made to rejoice by seeing their children yielding obedience to the Savior. Ours were gladdened by the obedience of our two eldest sons. We thank the Lord and take courage.

The 1887 *Christian Standard* reports the preacher that year was "Bro. McDonald." Late in 1887 or early 1888 Neal Cheetham was preaching there while still living in Waitsburg, WA. Almost certainly, he commuted by train.

In 1889 the town's name was changed to Athena. One record places the size of the congregation in 1893 at 275 members.

Dr. I. N. Richardson returned to Athena in January of 1895 to conduct a gospel meeting. He reported in some personal correspondence

Early Ministers:

Jonathan R. Gerking	1871 -- 1874
<u>Dr. Isaac N. Richardson</u>	1875 -- 1878
Jonathan R. Gerking	1879 -- 1881
J. H. Moore	1881 -- 1882
Rufus H. Moss	1882 -- 1885
"Bro. McDonald"	1887
<u>Neal Cheetham</u>	1887 -- 1888
<u>S. Wm. P. Richardson</u>	1889 -- 1890
Samuel B. Letson	1891 -- 1892
<u>John B. Daisley</u>	1893 -- 1894
Gentry Rushing (photo)	1895 -- 1897
Samuel Lawson Greene	1897 -- 1899
Melford W. Smith	1900 -- 1902
Charles Arba Sias	1902 -- 1903
<u>J. W. Jenkins</u>	1903 -- 1906
Victor Emanuel Hoven	1906 -- 1908