



William Maxwell Blackburn

Dakota Images

William M. Blackburn was born on 30 December 1828 near Carlisle, Indiana. He received his M.A. degree from Hanover College in 1849 and graduated from Princeton Seminary in 1854. He first preached at Three Rivers, Michigan, and then moved to Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1856, where he stayed until 1863. Then he moved to the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Trenton, New Jersey. In June 1868 he was elected to the professorship of ecclesiastical and church history at the Theological Seminary of the Northwest in Chicago, Illinois.

After resigning from the seminary under unpleasant circumstances, Dr. Blackburn moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he served as pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church until 1884. The failing health of himself and members of his family prompted him to accept the position of president of the University of North Dakota. In June 1885 he became president of the Presbyterian Synodical College of South Dakota in Pierre, later known as Pierre University. For thirteen years he served as president, professor, and pastor of the institution.

In the 1890s the school began to suffer from money problems and could not meet its financial obligations. In its final years, the college could not even pay Blackburn's salary. In June 1898 the college was moved to Huron, South Dakota, and Blackburn became president emeritus, with the chair of mental, moral, and political science and geology. In December of that same year he died. Blackburn not only had a long career as an educator and pastor, but also was known for his writing ability. Many of his sermons, historical manuscripts, and poems are on file at the Historical Resource Center.

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