

OLD ST. JOHN'S, PEQUEA

St. John's parish is located in the extreme eastern section of the beautiful Pequea Valley, on the "King's Highway," or "Old Road," leading from Lancaster to Philadelphia. In the survey of 1733 the English Church (St. John's, Pequea) is one of the points mentioned. It is interesting to note that the first church building was erected here the same year (1729) that a dividing line was run in Chester county, "the upper part of the province described erected into a county called Lancaster." This leaves the church in Chester county, but so near the line that it seems to be part of each.

From the "Vestry book belonging to St. John's Pequay, in ye country of Chester and province of Pennsylvania," we find the following record:

"We adventurers from those parts of His Majesty's dominions called England, Scotland and Ireland, transplanting ourselves and families into America, and taking up our first settlement in the township of Pequay, Lancaster county, and in the township of Salisbury, Chester county, both in the province of Pennsylvania. We from a due sense of duty to God, finding no part of the universe agreeable to us without a place of public worship where we might perform Divine Adoration to the Great Creator of the universe after the form and manner of the Episcopal Church of England and that for the good of our own immortal souls as well as those of our posterity. We therefore according to our

small abilities did erect in the year of our Lord 1729 a wooden frame Church of about 22 feet long and 20 feet broad upon a plot of ground containing about an acre."

The ground upon which the church was built was deeded to St. John's, Pequea, by John Miller and wife, Esther. The following is copied from the deed: "This indenture made the fifteenth day of August in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifty seven, between John Miller of Saulsbury township, in the county of Lancaster, and Province of Pennsylvania, and Esther his wife of the one part, and the Rev. George Craig, Thomas Halliday, Esq., John Cowan, William Darlington, Thomas Dawson, John Douglass, Esq., Isaac Richardson, Thomas Douglass, members of St. John's Church, situate on a branch of Pequea in West Caln township, in the county of Chester of province aforesaid of the other part.....Now this indenture witnesses that the said John Miller and Esther, his wife, in consideration of having liberty, privilege and right of erecting and building a seat or pew in the Church aforesaid in the same manner and under the same regulations as the other pews are or may be in the same church, and of holding the same to him and his heirs, and also in the consideration of the sum of five shillings lawful money of Pennsylvaniaeach of them hath granted, bargained, sold, aliened, released, enfeoffed and confirmed.....all that piece or parcel of ground situate, lying and being in West Caln township aforesaid and on part of which the church aforesaid is erected and built, et .

"Witness, WILLIAM BROWN,
JAMES HOPKINS,"

Some of the First Members.

This ground contained about one acre and one perch. When the Church was organized the principal members were: Samuel Bishop, Thomas Dawson, Isaac Richardson, Henry Cowan, David Cowan, Archibald Little, James Douglass, Andrew Douglass, Thomas Henderson, William Stringer, William Richardson, David Verner, Richard Percival, Archibald Douglass, George Carr.

The Church being finished, it was agreed by Rev. Richard Backhouse, the Society's missionary at Chester, and the above members, that it should be called by the name of St. John's church. (Rev. Mr. Backhouse was appointed missionary at Chester Aug. 3, 1728, by S. P. G.) Mr. Backhouse attended the congregation on the first Tuesday of every month until the year 1739, when the Rev. John Blackhall entered upon the cure at the request of the congregation, and attended the same about three years. He then moving to the borough of Lancaster, Rev. Mr. Backhouse took the cure again and officiated as formerly until 1750, when he departed this life.

In 1751 Rev. George Craig came from England as the Society's itinerant missionary for the province of Pennsylvania. He attended the above Church as he had opportunity, at least eight Sundays of the year. In this year John Cowan and Robert Little were chosen wardens.

The First Vestry.

The first list we have of the members of the vestry is March 29, 1752:

MR. CRAIG, present.

JOHN BRADY,

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, wardens.

ARCHIBALD DOUGLASS,
EDWARD DOUGLASS, sidesmen.
WILLIAM DARLINGTON,
JOHN COWAN,
DAVID COWAN,
THOMAS HALIDAY,
ISAAC RICHARDSON,
JOHN ELLIOTT,
PATRICK CARRIGAN,
GEORGE BOYD,
THOMAS HENDERSON,
DANIEL McNEIL,
JOHN DOUGLASS,
THOMAS DAWSON, JR., Vestry.

The custom of sidesmen was continued until 1776 and again in 1786-1787. In 1821 Barton Henderson and Diller Baker were appointed to assist the wardens in the transactions of the ensuing year. This was the duty of sidesmen.

New Church of Stone.

In 1753, the wooden Church being decayed, it was thought advisable to erect a new church of stone, 48 by 29 feet. A subscription was opened, Martha Bezzellon heading the list of fifty-two contributors. The new building contained 24 pews, as shown in the rating September 21, 1759, the first year of ministry of Rev. Thomas Barton. It was agreed at this meeting that whoever shall refuse to pay the sum rated on his pew shall immediately relinquish it to some other. It was also agreed that persons to whom ground is allotted to build pews and have not yet built them do and shall build pews in three months from the date of this act, or else to quit all claim to said ground, and any other who shall apply and are approved by the vestry shall and may occupy said ground, provided they build in a reasonable time. The enforcing of these acts was attended with much

difficulty, and delinquents were numerous, as shown by the records. The pew money was "collected" and "collections lifted"

September 21, 1759, it was agreed in vestry that a pulpit and reading desk be built before Christmas next. A subscription was opened for this purpose, the following persons generously contributing to that "pious and useful work:" Isaac Richardson, Esq., Thomas Haliday, Esq., John Cowan, John Douglass, Thomas Henderson, Thomas Dawson, James Henderson, Abraham Dawson, Joseph Darlington, Edward Douglass, John Anderson, Andrew Litle, John Cunningham, Captain John Clark, Andrew Campbell.

Hindrance to the Work.

There appears to have been some hindrance to the work. At a meeting of the vestry December 22, 1760, it was agreed that Francis Leech and John Anderson be employed to erect a pulpit, reading desk and chancel, and to make three gates to the church yard, which they agreed to complete before the first day of May; that Matthew Henderson and Archibald Douglass, present sidesmen, furnish the carpenters with proper materials at the expense of congregation.

May 31, 1762, it was agreed in vestry that a gallery be erected at the west end of the church as soon as possible. At a meeting of vestry, April 11, 1763, an act of vestry being passed in 1762 for erecting a gallery at the west end of the church, and which act not having been put in force, it is agreed in present vestry that the gallery be immediately built. To defray the expense thereof Mr. Barton agreed to collect the money. John Douglass, Esq., and Thomas Henderson were appointed supervisors of the work. Thomas Haliday

agreed to furnish the scantling, James Clempson the nails and Isaac Darlington found the boards. The record was signed by John Douglass, Charles Johnston, W. Armstrong, James Clempson, S. Atlee.

April, 1764, it was agreed in vestry that the act of the two preceding years relating to the building of the gallery and making the gates to the grave yard be enforced.

In July, 1765, it was agreed in vestry that the gates be immediately finished, the scantling to be brought from Philadelphia by Matthew Henderson, the expense of which was to be discharged by the collections.

April, 1767, John Anderson and Samuel Atlee agreed immediately to get the gates for the church yard finished. It is comforting to note the following entry:

“July, 1767, paid Thomas Shannon, for hinges, steeples, etc., £2, s2, d0; paid George Warner, for painting gates, £0, s10, d0.”

An Interesting Circumstance.

It would appear from the following interesting circumstance that the gallery was not yet built:

At a meeting of the vestry, September 5, 1768, Rev. Thomas Barton, present, it is agreed unanimously and hereby enacted that John Miller, Esq., of the county of Chester, who stands charged with having privately taken out of the vestry room of said church some timber and scantling, the property of congregation of said church and designed for a gallery therein, to the value of at least nine shillings, be bound over to answer said charge at the next Court of Quarter Sessions, to be held for the county of Chester. It is further enacted and agreed that the prosecution of said Miller for the timber and scantling, aforesaid, be

supported and carried on at the instance and on the behalf of the congregation of said church, and that Samuel Atlee, John Boyd, George Warner, Thomas Giggs, Thomas Hali-day, William Armstrong, Thomas Dawson, James Clempson, Esq., Andrew Litle, Hugh McGuire, John Douglass, and Thomas McGraa, be summoned as witnesses in the case.

Copy of a paper signed and delivered to the congregation of St. John's Church, at Pequea, by John Miller, Esq.:

"Whereas, I, the subscriber, have indiscreetly and for want of due attention, some time since, taken from St. John's Church, Pequea, some seasoned scantling belonging to the congregation of that church without the consent and approbation of the members of that church or any of them, and did also very indiscreetly order some of my servants to drive and enclose my cattle by night in the burying ground of the said church while my corn was growing and near ready for reaping, for all which I am extremely sorry and am willing to make the congregation every satisfaction in my power, and pray their charitable forgiveness of my indiscretion, and trust I shall hereafter behave and act toward that church and people as becomes a Christian brother.

"(Signed.)

"JOHN MILLER.

"November 15, 1768.

"Witness present:

"James Hamilton, Whitehead Weatherby."

The congregation, inclinable to mercy and unwilling to expose the said John Miller and his family, upon the receipt of the above paper, dropped the prosecution.

April 3, 1769, a motion made that

the thanks of the congregation be returned to Hugh McGuire and Andrew Litle for their services to the church in the affair of Mr. John Miller's encroachments upon it.

April 10, 1773, it was agreed that the church be floored and the pews and the pulpit "sett firm." This appears to have had prompt attention, as seen by payments to carpenters. Samuel Atlee, who was rector's warden at this time, paid James Douglass £2, 0s., 0d. for five hundred feet of boards. While it is not to be supposed that they had paid choirs, we find this entry: "1776, paid by James Clempson to singers £0, 10s., 0d."

April 29th, 1776, the following vestrymen were elected (Rev. Thomas Barton, present). James Clempson, Thomas Douglass, Jr., wardens; Thomas Douglass, Sr., Archibald Henderson, sidesmen; Andrew Litle, James Armstrong, Matthew Henderson, Samuel Atlee, James Henderson, John Anderson, James Litle, James Douglass, Sr., Leonard Elmaker, James Douglass, Jr., John Lee, William Dawson.

The records cease with this until the year 1783, when at a "meeting of a number of St. John's, Pequea," Friday, August 15, 1783, it was unanimously chosen that James Lytle and Leonard Elmaker are to settle with James Douglass for the rent of the plantation which is past and likewise for the time to come, to further meeting. "That James Clemson is to settle with the executors of Mr. Barton for all arrearages unsettled in their hands and belonging to said Church in Pequea."

On Monday, May 17, 1784, it was unanimously agreed the Rev. Frederick Illing was chosen and appointed to be minister for the term of one

year from the 15th of April—the pew money to be paid every six months and Mr. Illing to receive the rent of the glebe lands for the year now coming. The record was signed as follows:

James Clemson, Leonard Elmaker, wardens; Septimus Coats, John Armstrong, Thomas Douglass, John Anderson, Matthew Henderson, Andrew Lytle, Andrew Allison, James Lytle, John Douglass, Doctor, Archibald Henderson.

Rev. Illing's Pastorate.

Mr. Illing (sometimes spelled Elling) was a Lutheran minister (we can imagine our good and staunch churchmen groaning at such irregularities) and continued to serve as pastor every third Sunday at a salary of £40, until 1788. During his ministry the graveyard wall was repaired at a cost of £92. By special act of Legislature, passed November 28, 1785, Samuel J. Atlee, Thomas Douglass, James Clemson and John Anderson, trustees, were empowered to sell the glebe land belonging to the Church. On February 15, 1786, this was put up for sale by "publick outcry," and purchased by Matthew Henderson for £1,757 3s. lawful money of the State of Pennsylvania. This sum was placed on interest that "the congregation become the better enabled to fulfill their pious and religious intentions toward the decent support and maintenance of regular ministry of the word of God, in the administration of the sacraments and the other particular duties of the said ministry."

April 16, 1787, Aaron Cowling was appointed clerk at the salary of £5 per year. James Litle was chosen trustee concerning the glebe lands in place of Samuel Atlee, deceased.

At a meeting of the vestry Saturday, December 13, 1788, the following agreement was entered into with Mr. Elisha Rigg: "That Mr. Rigg attend and perform the duties every other Sunday beginning at or upon the first day of May next at a salary of £60 yearly during the time that said vestry and congregation may think expedient to consider said minister." About this time Mr. Rigg was ordained deacon by Bishop White. We find him serving as minister in the spring of 1791.

While there appears no record of the appointing of Mr. Heath as rector, we find in 1795 and 1796 receipts signed by Levi Heath for salary. August, 1797, George Leech paid Mr. Heath £3 for preaching funeral sermon. From this time, while the vestry was yearly appointed, there is no record of a minister until the call of Rev. Joseph Clarkson in 1799. In 1797 the church was "covered," the shingles being hauled from Wilmington, 6,000 costing £45. German Davis, George Leech and Peter Elmaker, Esq., were to settle with the workmen for "covering the church and discharge what they may think may be the worth of the business." In August, 1798, a sun dial was placed in the old graveyard. In May, 1799, Thomas Douglass left £10 for making a hearse and Jacob Miller £3 and 15s. for box for hearse. A hearse-house was also erected. In March, 1823, this hearse was sold to John Engle for \$5.

A Charter Obtained.

A charter was obtained April 5, 1799, the corporation consisting of Rev. Joseph Clarkson, minister; Archibald Henderson, Jr., James Dunlap, wardens; Jerman Davis, John Ander-

son, James Lytle, Matthew Henderson, Archibald Henderson, John Hopkins, Daniel Buckley, John Wilson, Leonard Elmaker, James Clemson, Christopher Griffith, James Henderson.

The vestry, consisting of fourteen members (according to Section 9), met May 20, 1799, and made the following agreement: That Rev. Joseph Clarkson engages to give his services one-third of his time to St. John's, Pequea, for £100 annually. Signed by John Hopkins, chairman. It was also agreed to pay Mr. Clarkson for the sermon preached prior to Easter Sunday, 1799. It was agreed that John Alison be employed to make a seat for the black people in a plain, substantial manner along the west end in the vacancy. Mr. Clarkson and family were brought from Wilmington at a cost for teams of £7, 10s.

Effort to Unite Three Churches.

At a vestry April 12, 1819, the following was adopted: "Whereas, to restore unanimity, peace and harmony to said church and to extend to every individual of the said Church every benefit which we ourselves enjoy and to unite the three Churches, St. John's, Christ Church and St. James', resolved, that a committee be appointed to meet similar committees from Christ Church and St. James' to take into consideration of having two clergymen, Mr. Clarkson being one of them, attached to the three churches.....Resolved, That in order to accomplish this present purposed plan Mr. Clarkson dissolves his present contract with St. John's and St. James', provided the above meets the approbation of the State Convention." The delegates to

the Convention were John Yeates, Barton Henderson and Thomas G. Henderson. The committees appointed met at Lancaster, August 15th, 1820, C. Smith acting as Chairman of the three committees.

A meeting was held at St. John's, September 16, 1820, to consider the proposals made at the Lancaster meetings: "First—They do agree to unite with them in engaging two pastors for said churches; second—\$400 can be raised annually at St. John's; third—that the Bishop furnish supplies for a reasonable time, and, as it is the desire of the congregation to have preaching every other Sunday, the Rev. John Clarkson agrees to accommodate their wishes and will perform Divine Worship and preach for us once in four weeks instead of three, as heretofore.....and will accept a proportionate compensation.—Doctor Matthew Henderson, Chairman."

December 27, 1820, it was agreed that the Rev. William A. Muhlenberg be invited to preach at St. John's in the morning once every four weeks (Sunday), dating the 24th of December, at \$200 per annum.

Easter Monday, April 19th, 1824, it was agreed the Rev. Samuel Bowman be and is hereby engaged another fourth of his time, having been previously engaged for one-half of his time, at the rate of \$800 per year. He resigned in 1827.

The 17th of February, 1828, the Rev. J. B. Clemson, of Harrisburg, was called and entered on his duties in April, giving one-half of his time, and Rev. Mr. Clarkson one-eighth of his time. At the time of Mr. Clarkson's death (1830) it was recorded—the pulpit, desk and table be shrouded in black for one year. In 1830 the whole interior wood work was

"torn out and renewed in very handsome and convenient style." Rev. Mr. Clemson resigned in 1830, and Rev. Richard Morgan entered upon his duties as rector April 1st, 1831, for half his time. He resigned August, 1834. In 1835 Rev. Edward Y. Buchanan became rector, giving one-half his time.

January 29, 1838, it was resolved to build a new church of brick, 65x40 feet. This is the present building, but of stone.

Old Pew Holders.

Those holding pews in the old church when it was torn down were:

Abner, William and George Ubil, James, William and Lightner Henderson, Thomas and Thomas G. Henderson, John McNeil, Diller and Mary Ferree, Amos and Elizabeth Henderson, Jarvis Mott, Frederick D. Baker, George Buckley, John Yeates, John, Barton and Amos Henderson, Margaret Henix, James Gibbs, Robert Baldwin, John D. Wilson, Samuel Jones, Davis Clemson, Miss Cowan, Margaret Piersol, John Henderson, Jacob Keisor, John Ubil, Samuel Martin, James Boyd, William Gibbs, Rudolph Feister.

The clergy who have officiated since the resignation of Mr. Buchanan, in 1845, are:

Rev. Henry Tullidge, of Erie, 1846; resigned 1856, and was succeeded by Rev. E. P. Wright. (The venerable E. Purdon Wright is living in Wisconsin, and until a few months ago was chaplain of the National Home, Wisconsin.) Mr. Wright resigned in May, 1856, and Rev. W. G. Hawkins served as rector, but resigned November 21, 1858. (Mr. Hawkins is living at Paonia, Colorado.) Rev. George G. Hepburn was rector until January 27, 1861. Henry R. Smith accepted a

call in 1861. The Rev. Henry Purdon assisted the first year, but in 1862 went to Titusville, Pa. Mr. Smith was deacon, but never advanced to the priesthood, and served St. John's until 1872. Rev. Dr. Isaac Martin supplied the church for some months. April, 1874, Rev. C. B. Mee was called, but resigned the following year. He is now in New York State. April 17, 1875, Rev. Dr. Tullidge was again called to the rectorship, but resigned in 1882. Charles Wesley Geiger (deacon) officiated one year. He was deposed from the ministry by Bishop Stevens. In 1885 Rev. S. K. Boyer became rector, and continued until May, 1904. (Mr. Boyer resides in Germantown, Pa.) Rev. Francis McFetrich became rector June, 1904, and resigned May, 1907, to become assistant at St. Simeon's Church, Philadelphia. (Mr. McFetrich was formally received into the Church of Rome September 15th, 1908.) Rev. H. Q. Miller, the present rector, was called May 7th, 1908.

During the time of Mr. Smith's ministry a mission was established in Parkesburg, Chester county, and known as Grace Church, and continued until about 1875. In May, 1890, Mr. Boyer, rector of St. John's, opened services at Parkesburg, and there is now a fine church building. It is called Ascension Mission.

Present Church Edifice.

The present church edifice of St. John's, erected in 1838, has undergone several changes in the interior. About 1850 a pipe organ (still in use) was placed in the church at a cost of \$600, collected from the congregation. Formerly the "pulpit end" of the church was "decorated" on either side of the chancel by tablets, enclosing a blue shield, containing the fol-

lowing in gold letters: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," upon one, and "No man cometh unto the Father except by me" upon the other. Directly above the pulpit was painted a broken cloud, and, as a recent writer describes it: "The rays of Heaven fall across the head of a meek and lowly-looking lamb reclining on the bank of the cloud and holding between its forelegs a cross." Above in letters of gold is inscribed "Behold the Lamb of God!" A few years ago this "Agnus Dei" was obliterated. A large gallery and vestibule extended across the rear end of the church, and contained the choir loft.

A Relic of 1766.

The church has in its possession a pewter Communion service, a sacred relic, bearing the date 1766. In 1871 a walnut Communion table was placed as a memorial to Frederick D. Baker. This serves as an altar. In 1904 a brass altar cross and vases were given as a memorial to Robert and Harriet DeH. Baldwin.

In 1908 a handsome pulpit Bible, memorial to John and Mary McNeil, was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Reese Himes.

In the fall of 1907 the whole interior of the church was torn out, the galleries and vestibule removed, the box pews, with doors, replaced by modern pews; the organ placed in the chancel end of the church, and galleries erected on either side of the chancel; the tablets necessarily covered, and a chancel window put in.

The interest is not centered in the present building, but the surroundings—the noble, old forest trees, oak and hickory, standing mute witnesses of the past, each year adding new dignity and grandeur; giants they are, but one by one becoming a victim to

the hand of the spoiler, and in the interesting old burying-ground, a hallowed spot, where we find on the tombs the names of many of those associated with the early history of the parish—Boyd, Douglass, Richardson, Cowan, Lytle, Henderson, Bezelon, Hopkins, Carrigan, Davis, Ellmaker, Piersol, Leech, Anderson, Clemson, Rutter, Skiles, Wilson, McNeil, Haliday, Darlington, &c. Only a very few bearing the above names are now identified with the parish.

A verbatim type-written copy of the church records, from 1729 to 1800 inclusive, together with extracts of important entries after that date, with photographic reproductions of folios 1, 36, 73, 171 and views of the church as it was in 1891, have been deposited among the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania by Julius F. Sachse.

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