



Old Trinity Steeple

OLD TRINITY STEEPLE

By John W. Lippold

"A century of service to mankind;
And still the steeple stands beneath the sky,
Thrones rise and fall and fashions drop behind,
The church is all we have that doesn't die."

—By Edgar A. Guest.

Slowly but steadily the early buildings of our city are fading from view. The old tavern whose fireside once reflected on the notables of another day and whose ballroom echoed the strain of the fiddle and the trip of the minuet, has given way to a great mercantile establishment. The court house, where once were enacted the stirring scenes of Revolutionary fame and where that august body, our Continental Congress sat, has made way for the ever increasing stream of traffic over that highway on which the Conestoga wagon once rolled.

And the stately mansion, with pedimented doorway, palladian window, and broad and generous fireside, has passed with the others, and those who hewed and fashioned them from the rough product of the virgin forest, have long since mouldered into dust.

Even now these scenes are but a memory to our grandsires, and a twice told tale for us, a few generations hence and they shall have passed entirely except for the pen of the historian.

Old Trinity, however, stands today, like the shadow of a day gone by, a mute but striking testimonial of the vigor and perseverance of those generations who founded it, and maintained it in the days of its youth. Its lofty spire, glowing in the sunlight reveals the beauty of the work of long past artists and artisans, whose unsung praises have ever been dormant in their priceless handiwork.

It stands a monument without precedent or parallel to that period in early American architecture, of transition from the necessary crude, but substantial, to the decorative and ornamental, when craftsmen vied with each other to produce the beautiful. As one generation planted its base on solid rock, firm and substantial, a succeeding generation completed its beautiful spire, and the descendants of its builders, still assist to maintain and preserve it.

The first steeple of "Old Trinity" was on the old stone church erected in 1738. The "Hallische Nachrichten" gave the meager report "It was adorned with steeple and bells." In 1861, Dr. Krotel also writes of the reminiscence of a nonagenarian parishioner, "He distinctly recollects that the bells on the shaking steeple of the old building in the graveyard were rung for the services of the new church, long before the latter was supplied with tower and bells."

Just what sort of steeple this was is a matter of conjecture, for there are apparently no existing records, reports, or descriptions, other than the above mentioned. It can be supposed, however, that it was a plainly constructed affair, just sufficient to serve its purpose, a container for the bells. It was the first recorded belfry in the town of Lancaster, that of the Reformed Church having been erected in 1741, and that on the Court House in 1748. As stated heretofore, it was in use even after the construction of the new church, and we are led to believe until that portion of the masonry of the new tower, wherein the bells are now hanging, was constructed.

When in the latter part of the 18th century, a wave of interest and pride in the building of church spires took place, the vestry of Trinity, after much discussion, in 1785, decided to undertake the construction of one if the necessary funds could be raised.

The cost was estimated at 1500 pounds. A subscription list was drawn up, and the pastor and elders visited the people, and secured 210 liberal sub-

scriptions. This subscription list exists today in the church archives, and on it was found the names of the leading citizens of that day, such as Henry Muhlenberg (the pastor), Ludwig Lauman, Michael Hubley, Bernhard Hubley, Matthias Slaugh, Adam Hubley, Jr., Paul Zantzinger, Frederick and John Kuhn, (sons of Adam Simon Kuhn), Leonard Eicholtz, Christopher Hager, Carl Heinitsh, Gottlieb Nauman, Gottlieb Sener, Edward Hand, Casper Shaffner, Peter Muhlenberg, Adam Reigart, etc.

George Lotman, mason and Frederick Mann, carpenter, were engaged to do the work. Bernhard Hubley, Matthias Slaugh, Jacob Krug, Valentine Breneisen, and Melchoir Rudisill were appointed the building committee, and actual work on the foundations was begun in the fall of 1785.

The foundation walls, seven feet in thickness, and in places seventeen feet in depth, were raised and covered before the winter set in, and the following spring operations were resumed, and the masonry, limestone on the inside, and brick on the outside, was carried to the height of 86 feet. The cost at this point had reached the alarming sum of 1100 pounds, or almost four-fifth of the amount estimated for the entire steeple, and it was decided to let the work rest here for the time.

In 1788, the matter was again brought forward, and, on Feb. 25th, the vestry authorized Bernhard Hubley to draw on the Treasurer of the Church in the amount of 5 pounds, for the purpose of journeying to Philadelphia, and there observe the various spires, in order to get ideas for the completion of the new one at Lancaster, and also if possible to make some arrangements with an able contractor to complete the work. Information if this journey was made, or its results, is not recorded, but there was no immediate action taken.

In the fall of 1790, after a report had reached the vestry that some of its members had examined the old tower, and found it in an unsafe and alarming condition, a committee was appointed to ascertain the possibility of transferring the bells to the completed portion of the new tower. This committee reported that the bells could be hung in the completed portion of the new tower, without much expense and without hindering the builders. It was therefore concluded that the recommendations be done as soon as possible.

On Jan. 10, 1791, John Miller was authorized to write to Philadelphia, in order to secure a man to present an estimate for the spire. William Colliday, and his son, Abraham Colliday, two Philadelphia carpenters, were highly recommended, and while no definite negotiations seem to have been made until later, some understanding must have been had as early as April, 1791, for on that date the minutes of the vestry record, "One of the members moved, and it was passed by a majority, that Mr. Colliday make a list of the cedar wood necessary for the building of the new spire, and that we purchase this ourselves, and that John Hubley and Michael Moser, be appointed a committee to proceed to Newport and do so."

On Nov. 29th, 1791, the minutes of the vestry record that the Messrs. Colliday were invited to present a plan and model for the proposed spire for the approval of the vestry, and also that they may be placed before the congregation for their approval. A committee of Messrs. John Hubley, Michael Moser and John Miller, was also appointed to make further negotiations with the Messrs. Colliday, and on Dec. 1, 1791, the following agreement, (a copy of which is still preserved) was drawn up:

"The committee appointed by the corporation of the Lutheran Congregation of the Borough of Lancaster, to confer with Messrs. William Colliday and Abraham Colliday, on the subject of building and completing the steeple to the church of the said Congregation, have agreed with the said Messrs. Colliday, that a bill for the materials, Timbers, and Scantling, for the said steeple be immediately made out by them, that such part of the scantling and stuffs as are necessary to be got in Philadelphia, the said Messrs. Colliday shall procure, and the other parts shall be procured by the Congregation in

Lancaster. That the said Messrs. Colliday shall go to work with such a number of hands as they think necessary, in the beginning of next spring, and in the course of next summer, build and erect the said steeple, in a good, durable, and workmanlike manner, agreeable to the plan now produced. And as the building of the steeple is of such a nature as makes impossible at this time to agree with the said Messrs. Colliday, on the exact price of their work, it is agreed that the same shall remain until the same is finished, and that they shall be paid for it, what it may be reasonably worth, taking into consideration the time spent thereon and the expense of the workmen. In testimony whereof, we have hereto set our hands, this first day of December A. D. 1791

JOHN HUBLEY
MICHAEL MOHSER
JOHN MILLER
WILLIAM COLLIDAY
ABRAHAM COLLIDAY

Some members urged a contract but this was rejected as ungentlemanly.

At this point it is interesting to note that Mr. Hubley urged the leaving out of one story of the proposed structure, presumably that where the pedimented doors are located. This was apparently with the thought of economizing and the mover was seconded by the Pastor, but when the vote came, the mover stood alone, and the Pastor, congratulated them on their spirit. How fortunate this decision was, can be realized when we look at this splendid monument to this period of graceful and refined Colonial Architecture.

The Messrs. Colliday started their work in the spring of 1792, and were able to put up the framework by the beginning of August, and when the weather became too cold for outside work it was continued on the inside, until December. The following year the carpenters did not make their appearance, and to prevent damage it became necessary to remove some of the scaffolding. The work rested until August 4, 1794, when it took them two weeks to replace the scaffolding, and reach the point at which they had stopped two years before. Just why this delay of two years occurred is not recorded, but it apparently was no fault of the church for in March, 1793, John Hubley was directed to write to Messrs. Colliday to inquire whether they are going to proceed with the tower.

In June, 1794, one of the vestrymen presented a plan from David Tannenburg, the builder of the organ, for a frame to make it convenient to get in the tower. Messrs. Nauman and Hensel were appointed to purchase the necessary wood for the aforesaid.

From this point it seems to have progressed rapidly, and on September 5th, the four wooden figures were set in place. And on October 30th, the ball large enough to hold 95 gallons was elevated to its proper place, and on the 8th of December, 1794, the painting was finished and the whole work was completed, the height being 195 feet., just one foot eight inches less than that of Christ Church, Philadelphia.

The wooden portion of the spire is in some respects quite similar to that of Christ Church, from whence its origin can without doubt be traced. If the aforementioned visit of Mr. Hubley to Philadelphia, had any significance in this respect, we do not know, but it can be readily seen that when the Messrs. Colliday were engaged to present plans for this new spire, that they must surely have used this steeple as a pattern for their new model. The new spire was more ornate, however, and its adornment with festoons, garlands and drapery, and the use of delicate and graceful medallions and moldings, are characteristic of the art of a later era, and bear undoubted trace of the work of the Brothers Adam, whose book, "The Works of Architecture of Robert and James Adam," appeared in London in 1773, and was about this time having effect on Architecture in the new republic.

The beautiful pedimented doorways are rather unusual at this great height, and fill in a space that might have been reserved for clock dials, as in Christ Lutheran Church at York, erected at a later date. A curious feature of these doorways, is that the supposed fanlights surmounting them, are in reality made of wood painted black, excepting a small semi-circular piece of glass, just enough to light the interior.

One of the most attractive features, and rather unusual, are the four splendid and well preserved wood carvings of the four Apostles at its base. Diligent search in church records and elsewhere fail to reveal the identity of the artist who created them. They are four of a comparatively small number of existing works of this kind, which were carved about this period, and used in and about Philadelphia for the adornment of public buildings, etc. There can be little doubt that they are the work of William Rush of Philadelphia, and were done in his little work shop, No. 172 Front St., Philadelphia; in fact historians tell us that there were no other sculptors of any kind in this country at that early date.

A brief study of this distinguished artist is well worth while. He was known as the first American sculptor, a founder and for years a director of the Penna. Academy of the Fine Arts. Born in Philadelphia July 4th, 1756, he was apprenticed at an early age to Edward Catbush, a London ship carver, and gained much reputation as a maker of figure heads for ships. His figure-heads for the "Indian Trader" and "Spirit of the Ganges" brought great admiration at home and abroad, and it is stated that while in foreign ports, artists would row up to the ships in small boats and copy these figureheads.

Lorado Taft in "History of American Sculpture," states of Rush: "he had gradually perfected himself in the detail of his profession, and his skill was presently rewarded by a large and lucrative business, in the designing of figureheads for ships. Most of his examples of our earliest sculpture has disappeared from view, the figureheads having gone the way of the old time specimens of marine architecture to which they were attached. From what remains, we may well believe them to have been far more interesting artistically than the work of not a few of our professional sculptors. William Rush had ideas in abundance, a sense of grace, and much facility, and in style, the resultant of all these elements, he was not lacking."

Among some of his known works are a statue of Washington, at the Old State House, Philadelphia, busts of Linnaeus, William Bartram, Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg, and curiously enough, one of himself, still on exhibit at the Academy in Philadelphia. There is little doubt after comparison with his known works, that the Messrs. Colliday engaged this man to carve the figures for the Church at Lancaster. Close examination reveals wonderful workmanship, and they certainly can be classed as local art treasures, and most likely, perfect examples of the work of the first native American Sculptor, and the only use, of this form of decoration in early American Church spires.

There seemed to have been considerable debate as to whether the spire should be adorned with these figures or urns, presumably as those of Christ Church, and the minutes of the vestry for months refer to "Der Figurin" and "Der Urnin," in fact at one time it seems that it was destined to have the urns, but a sudden change took place, and on May 12, 1794, the Secretary of the vestry writes the Messrs. Colliday as follows:

Gentlemen:

In consequence of Mr. Muhlenberg's arrival from Philadelphia, a meeting of the corporation was accordingly convened this day, and the circumstances related by him what occurred between you, while he was in the city relative to the images, and after some time debating on the subject, the majority gave it in favor of the images, at the original prices first agreed upon. I feel an inward satisfaction in having the honor to inform you that I am instructed

to signify to you the above proceedings. There is nothing I hope may turn up now which will retard the business from going on successfully.

With the greatest esteem and respect, I remain your friend.

LEWIS HECK, Sect.

Messrs. William and Abraham Colliday,
Philadelphia.

The fact that the Rev. G. H. E. Muhlenberg, seems to have been instrumental in having this decision, is worthy of note, since it is most likely at this time he first viewed Mr. Rush's carving of his illustrious father.

A curiosity is the crude but substantial set of roller bearings, on which the huge weather vane turned. It is believed to have been the first of its kind in the country, and we can readily imagine the interest this must have aroused, when it gracefully and freely turned with the wind. The original set is now on display in the church, having some time since been replaced by a new set, though far from being worn out.

The Lutherans were proud of their steeple. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that the whole town was. An early record states of the Philadelphia Steeple (Christ Church), that one who had seen numerous similar architectural structures abroad says, "It is the handsomest structure of the kind, that I have ever seen in any part of the world, uniting in the peculiar features of that species of architecture, the most elegant variety of forms, with the most chaste simplicity of combination." The Lancaster steeple unites with this simplicity, the charming and graceful decoration of the Adam period, making it one of the finest of its type in the world.

The original agreement with the Messrs. Colliday in reference to materials seems to have been carried out to the letter. Most of the original bills and receipts for work and material for the steeple are in the possession of the church at the present day. The Messrs. Colliday's bill for work alone was 985 pounds, and including material 2370 pounds. Much of the material was purchased in Lancaster, and many of the parts were made by Lancaster craftsmen. On Jan. 6, 1795, Jacob Metzger gave receipts to Bernhard Hubley for 3 pounds 16 shillings, 7 pence for ropes made for the "steapell" at the Lutheran Church. Michael Gundaker rendered an invoice from June to Dec., 1795, for nails, lime, glass, etc. Dec. 10, 1795, George Peters and Jacob Lindenberger charge for bricks, and on Oct., 1796, James Williams for white pine shingles. In 1794 and 1795 Robert Moore rendered a statement for the masonry. A bill of scantling delivered by Martin Meily, a bill of paints from Frederick Mann, and a charge for stones quarried on the land of John Lightey, for the walls, are to be found among the accounts. Adam Hart, a wood turner, furnished most of the fine woodwork, as is indicated by an invoice of Dec. 13, 1794, for 1 pulley, 2 "roulers," 8 pullies, 32 hallow plates, 60 "metilians to a cornice," 4 boxes to the bell ropes, 120 large plates, 120 small plates, 4 dozen banisters, 24 collums, 4 round balls, 4 pullies. Numerous board bills were rendered by Adam Weaver, proprietor of the old Black Horse tavern, and reminiscent of other days, such entries as "1 pint of spirits for masons," "1 pint of wine for drivers," "1 bottle of wine for team driver."

Great care was taken of the steeple after its completion. The key was given the schoolmaster, with instructions that it was not to be given to anyone unless accompanied by a member of the Vestry, or in cases of fires, public worship, and funerals. No one was permitted to smoke a cigar in it, or to enter at night without a safe lantern.

The woodwork has always been carefully preserved by painting and any other necessary repairs. In a tiny cylindrical receptacle inside of the very tip of the spire is kept a small paper containing the names of all the men who at various times painted it. Interior decay made the rebuilding of seventeen feet of the top portion necessary. This was done on an exact plan of the

original. At this time a complete set of plans of the entire steeple was made to preserve in the safe of the church. In 1926 further precautions were taken by installing a sprinkler system over the entire frame portion and parts of the lower portion, so that in case of fire it could be immediately flooded with water.

This work would be quite incomplete without the story of the bells.

Of the first bell or bells we have no knowledge except the aforementioned reference in connection with the ancient steeple. They were probably small ones, as were in general use in that day. The next one however was larger, and destined to have a history far more complex and far more important. This was the famous "Ephrata bell." It was cast in England in the year 1745, by order of Israel Eckerlin, the monastic prior, or chief of the temporal affairs of the Society of Seventh Day Baptists of Ephrata. It was proposed to use the bell in calling from their scattered farms and mills, the quaint brethren and sisters, for assembly and for worship. The inscription placed on the bell read as follows: "Sub Auspicio Vire Venerandi Onisimi, Societ Ephrat. Praepositi A. D. MDCCXLV." (By the authority of the venerable Onisimus, appointed by the Ephrata Society, A. D. 1745.) Although ordered by the prior, it seemed to be a matter of surprise to the people, and in wrath it was condemned to be broken, and the pieces buried in the earth. Better judgment prevailed however and it was bought by the Lutheran Congregation of Lancaster, and placed in the old wooden steeple completed in 1738. It is probable that this made the other one of the "bells" mentioned in the reports to Halle.

When the new tower was of sufficient height, as stated heretofore, as a matter of safety the bells were moved to it. In 1853, in order to make room for new bells it was sold to Gottlieb Sener for the Washington Fire Co. It served in this capacity until 1882 when it was purchased by Mr. J. Frederick Sener, and presented to Grace Lutheran Church, as a memorial to his son. On Oct. 3, 1886, it cracked while being rung for services, and was later placed in the vestibule of the church, a mute reminder of the stirring days thru which it passed. Through the French and Indian war and in the dark days of the Revolution it rang. It called the faithful to hear the Patriarch Muhlenburg, and the famous Whitfield. And we can almost imagine its joyous peal, when it called that assembly of early church notables, to lay the cornerstone of the new church in 1761, and again five years later for its consecration. Like the great Liberty Bell, its tongue is now silenced forever.

The next bell was cast in London in 1768 at the order of the Congregation, and bears the following inscription: "Templo Ev Luth Germ Lancaster S S T. Sacrum Ao 1768." (Sacred to the Ev. Luth. German Church of the Holy Trinity, Lancaster, in the year 1768.) This bell was probably first used in the old steeple and later transferred to the new. It was in use until 1854, when it made way for the new set of chimes. It is still hanging in the steeple, tho not in use.

In 1854, during the remodeling of the church, a peal of eight bells was presented by a number of gentlemen of the congregation, and were used for the first time on May 28th.

On March 4, 1861, the committee on repairs reported that the large tenor bell used for services, was cracked and unfit for use, and that they had unsuccessfully endeavored to remedy the defect. On the 28th of March, a committee of Messrs, Charles Heinitsh, Michael Fisher, and Horace Rathvon, was appointed to make inquiry about cast steel bells and chimes. They reported having visited the establishment of Naylor and Co. in Philadelphia, examined a number of cast steel bells, and were pleased with their tone.

The Committee subsequently entered into agreement with Messrs. Naylor and Co. for the exchange of the old bells for a new cast steel chime, made in Sheffield, England, in the key of F, and weighing 7705 pounds, which was

then in New York. It was put in place in May of the same year, and since that time has been in constant use.

As the steeple has become a landmark in our city, so the bells have won a place in the hearts of its people.

In the words of our late fellow townsman, William Uhler Hensel: "the spire, after a hundred and twenty years, remains 'a joy forever' as it has always been 'a thing of beauty;' and the chime of bells which for seventy years have alternately sounded peals of joy and mourning, of worship and of praise, was a gift to this town that is without precedent or parallel. Dull must be that Lancastrian's sense of sight or sound who would spare from the morning service or the vesper air the harmony of that great octave, or who would not keenly miss from our glorious skyline that stately and graceful steeple.

For all these and tenfold more, O Trinity! I greet you—not as one of your faith or fold—but as a townsman, for my kin, my college and my city. Long may your spire point heavenward; long may that tower with its colossal figures of the Holy Apostles stand four square to every wind that blows; and long may the tuneful chorus of your bells, with 'their sacred sound,' ring out their messages of peace and prayer."

Author: Lippold, John W.

Title: Old Trinity Steeple / by John W. Lippold.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Trinity Lutheran Church (Lancaster, Pa.)
Spires.
Lutherans--Pennsylvania--Lancaster.
Lutheran Church--Pennsylvania--Lancaster.
Church architecture.
Lancaster (Pa.)--History--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775.
Lancaster (Pa.)--History--1775-1865.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1927

Description: [126]-133 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 31,
no. 9 & 10

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.31

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address