



## Trinity Presbyterian Church 150th Anniversary

Trinity Presbyterian Church, on Berwyn Avenue in Berwyn, is celebrating its 150th anniversary. What else is 150 years old, and with whom and what does one share such an anniversary? Abraham Lincoln became the 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. president and the Civil War began; the first transcontinental telegraph ended the Pony Express; the founder of General Motors, William Durant, was born; and Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, died. To tell the early history of the church, we turn to an article by Ruth Moore that appeared in the first volume of the *History Quarterly*, April 1938. Sketches of the "old" and "new" churches from that article appear above.

About the middle of the 19th century, a wave of Scotch and Scotch-Irish immigration distributed in this neighborhood many farmers possessed of the requisite perseverance and rigid economy to thrive on the thin hill soil, for after the first bloom of the virgin soil many of our farms had become poor and sold cheap.

The new owners were seldom really natural and skillful agriculturists; their maxim was not that of the thrifty German-American, "A rich farm makes a rich farmer," but they made the attempt, at least, to maintain the balance of nature, taking no more than they put in the soil, and as a class, with their alert intellects and their ambition to educate at least one son for professional life, were a distinct acquisition to the community.

There had been union, followed by Presbyterian, services in Dr. Reese's office opposite the Drove tavern, as early as 1849, but the incoming Scotch-Irish Presbyterians longed for a church of their own and talked it over at a meeting at the house of Richard Mathews (on the site of the late James Francis' residence) in the spring of 1861, and at the services held at the MacLeods.

The meeting was conducted by the Rev. Dr. John McLeod, who had recently bought the Springhouse Tavern property from the Kuglers. He was formerly of Guelph, Ontario, and was married to Elizabeth Weeks Frost, nee Seaver, who is described as "a saintly woman."

On September 4, 1861, it was decided to build, and a subscription book was circulated about the town. Rev. MacLeod and his wife gave the site for the building. The deed covers a tract of land formerly owned by John Kugler and wife, consideration one dollar. Deeded to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, meeting at Syracuse, N. Y., May 16, 1861 (?) to be used only for church purposes or, if vacated, to revert to the "Trustees of the Pennsylvania House for Home Missions." The deed also mentioned 40 foot wide avenues from the Lancaster Pike and from Waterloo Road, East Town.

The cemetery ground was deeded by William Clark, merchant, of Philadelphia, and Eliza A., his wife, for \$150.

Ground was broken on September 28, and on October 22, 1861, the cornerstone laid for a well-proportioned dashed stone structure of quaint Gothic architecture, with slate roof, at a cost of \$3,000. There was some trouble over the stone walls, as the town masons engaged for the work found great difficulty in working the stubborn Easttown boulders into a permanent standing wall, especially the long, sloping gables, which twice fell in. A local mason, Peter Burns, Jr., then reconstructed them successfully. The wages at this time varied from \$1.12 1/2 to \$1.57 1/2 a day of 12 hours, according to the skill of the mason.

The building was dedicated free of debt on December 30, 1861, and the sermon preached by Dr. Thomas Brainerd of the Old Pine Street Church, Philadelphia, whose congregation had contributed to the building fund and presented the Bible.

The church organization was effected on January 4, 1863, by a committee from the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia: Dr. William E. Moore, West Chester, and Dr. McLeod, Reeseville, with visiting members, Dr. B. B. Hotchkin, Marple, and Elder William F. Wyers, West Chester.

Eighteen persons were taken in by letter and two by profession of faith. They were: John and Margaret Henthorn, John and Amanda Leamy, Richard and Martha Mathews, Joseph Williams, Elizabeth Clyde, Jane Cunningham, Mary E.

Finley, Margaret Gowdy, Margaret Gwinn, Elizabeth McLeod, Mary McKim, Catharine Piercy, Mary S. Thropp, Mary Jane Semple, Eliza Williams, Frances Ann Wilson and Emma White. At the close of the service the Lord's Supper was celebrated.

This was the first church erected in East Town, a township organized for one hundred and sixty years. The members of the Trinity Presbyterian Church of Guelph, Ontario, had cast a fine silver-toned bell, which they presented to the Trinity Church of Reeseville, in honor of their former minister, Dr. McLeod, who became the first pastor of the new church, 1861-64. His salary was \$300 per annum, and he also preached at the Frazer Presbyterian Church. During his pastorate thirty-seven united with the church.

The church was incorporated April 29, 1862, with the following trustees: Peter Burns, Sr., Joseph C. Smith, Alexander Wilson, William Clark, Peter Burns, Jr., Charles Thompson, Abel Reese, Patrick Williams, Joseph Williams, James Evans, John Gowdy, Davis Taylor, John Leamy, Robert Neeley and Eber Beaumont.

The first elders were Richard Mathews, who served until his death, and John Henthorn, who soon went off to the war, not to return; both elected January 15, 1863. The next elders elected were Joseph Williams and Thomas Aiken, Sr., who served from 1865 to 1875.

Rev. N. P. Jones from the Old Pine Street Church supplied the pulpit during 1865, during which time there were seven accessions. He was followed by Rev. A. M. Stewart, 1866 to April 1868, under whose ministry eighteen united with the church. Rev. Thomas J. Aiken was pastor from May 1868 to January 1874, acting as stated supply for the first year, while still attending Princeton. He was ordained and installed in April 1869. Fifty-six united with the church during these years. The pastorate was connected with the Frazer Church until 1871, each congregation paying \$500 a year.

Thomas Aiken, Sr., and Elizabeth, his wife, in 1871, conveyed the ground for a manse, which Henry Fritz erected.

The Sunday School was organized in 1866, the first superintendent being Peter Bloom. He was soon followed by Thomas Aiken, Sr., who served until about 1874. Many anecdotes are still current regarding the latter's efforts to enroll and teach every young American in the vicinity of Reeseville and Howellville. Frank H. Stauffer was for many years superintendent.

The English sexton first appointed, eager to add to his small salary by grave digging, finally threw up his job in despair, saying that he "never saw such a place, nobody ever dies." The first interment occurred shortly after his resignation.

There were at this period no new roads or avenues laid out except Church Avenue from the station to Trinity Presbyterian Church, and Berwyn Avenue from Waterloo Road to the same edifice, and a little beyond eastward. The Leopard Road crossed the P. R. R. above the Drove.

Although Reeseville appeared at this time the typical little rural village devoted wholly to the simple life, one could easily compare the mental equipment of most of its inhabitants with that of a college settlement. The buildings and grounds were exceptionally well-kept, with fine trees, old fashioned flowers, neat green pastures and gardens, surrounded by whitewashed picket fences.

Dr. Willard M. Rice, from Fourth Presbyterian, Philadelphia, served from 1874 to October 1876, during which time nineteen were added to the rolls. He received \$800 a year. Dr. Rice was stated clerk of Philadelphia Presbytery from 1858 to 1902, with the exception of the years at Reeseville, when he was connected with Chester Presbytery.

The elders at this time were James T. Doran, John McAfee and Frank H. Stauffer. The first two served a term and retired. Elder Stauffer continued until his death.

It might be interesting to look at the background of this early church. James T. Doran was secretary of the Corn Exchange National Bank. Abel Reese was a farmer. Charles Thompson was president of the Spruce and Pine Street car lines. William Clark was also a city business man. Henry Fritz was in the coal and lumber business. Frank H. Stauffer had been a newspaper reporter, and contributed to St. Nicholas, Harper's Young People, Saturday Night, and other publications. Two books of his poems were compiled.

Thomas Aiken, Sr., had one son, John, a surgeon in the Union Army; another, Thomas, a minister who preached at Trinity for many years. A third, Dr. James Aiken, practised all his professional life in the community—a kindly charitable man, especially sought for the ills of childhood. There were three daughters, Elizabeth, Sarah and Mary Jane, The last two named, with Mary Neeley, taught the primary class.

Mary Jane married Enoch Wells, local Methodist preacher, who supplied the pulpit at Trinity many times. Two of their children, Ximena (Mrs. W. H. Burns) and Lillie (Mrs. Harry Schofield) served for many years as organists of the church.

The next minister was Rev. Daniel Hartman of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who supplied from October 16, 1876 to April 1879. He also for a time preached at Wayne Presbyterian Church. Rev. Hartman was a deep-voiced speaker of undoubted sincerity. Twenty-one united with the church during his ministry.

Rev. Algernon Marcellus was the pastor from October 13, 1879, to February 1885. He was a former missionary to China. He also preached at the Charlestown Presbyterian Church, which made his Sunday labors great, since after the

Sunday School and church services in the morning he had to snatch a hasty lunch and make the long trip to Charlestown over the often almost impassable roads, and journey back barely in time for the evening services. An interesting light on the roads is cast by a letter from a Phoenixville resident to a trustee about this time, "If the roads were not so bad I should go to your place, and will as soon as roads get a little better for travelling."

Rev. Marcellus was a slight, ruddy-bearded man of great enthusiasm. He was faithful and sensitive. The "Mum Society" was organized by the young people of his congregation to provide him with a stable for his horse. This was later the Mite Society. During his pastorate sixty-three were added to the rolls. In the spring of 1885, the church was repainted, and other repairs made.

On September 21, 1881, David Graham Clark was elected as an elder, and on October 11, 1882, Joseph Williams.

Rev. Thomas J. Aiken was recalled by Trinity's congregation in September 1885, and preached from October of that year to May 28, 1901. He was an eloquent speaker.

On April 20, 1891, John M. Rowe was elected elder, to serve for five years, Frank H. Stauffer and J. Frank Beale for four years, Joseph Williams and Dr. James Aiken for three years.

During Rev. Aiken's pastorate 435 members united with the church, and the quaint old building was thought too small to contain the various activities. Communion services were held for the last time in the old church September 6, 1891. The Valley Baptists cordially offered the use of their chapel from June 1 to November 1, for all services, including Sunday evenings, when Rev. Aiken was invited to occupy the pulpit on alternate weeks. This letter was signed by their pastor, Rev. H. B. Garner, I. A. Cleaver and James J. Dewees.

Before the church was razed, a new Sunday School room was erected on its western side; the entire eastern side was boarded up to connect with the contemplated new church building, services in the meantime being held in the Sunday School room, which was formally opened in August, 1891.

The Cornerstone of the church was laid on October 29, 1891, having been postponed a week on account of inclement weather. It had been planned to lay the stone thirty years to the day after the first one. Dr. Matthew Newkirk conducted the services and placed the cornerstone; Dr. W. A. Patton of the Wayne Presbyterian Church, Dr. Rice, former pastor, of Philadelphia, Rev. Garner of the Great Valley Baptist Church, and Rev. C. W. Straw of the Methodist Church, also took part. The first communion service in the building was held in the Sunday School room December 6, 1891.

The church is of Avondale limestone with a slate roof, built by W. H. Burns at a cost of \$16,000. The large window on Berwyn Avenue is in memory of Henry Fritz, and the one to the rear of the pulpit in memory of Elizabeth Aiken. Other memorial windows bear names of Isabella Allen, Rev. T. J. Aiken, John Eyre Webster, Elizabeth and Peter Burns, Sr., Elizabeth Seaver MacLeod, Charles Thompson, the Workmen and Francis D. Kramer, this latter being the manufacturer of the windows. Three windows in the Sunday School room are also memorials--to Paul and Henry Longenecker, Allen Heberton Aiken and Grover E. Trego.

Dedication services started September 11, 1892, and lasted a week. Rev. Dr. James A. Worden of Philadelphia preached the first sermon in the new building. Other speakers that week included Rev. Dr. R. M. Patterson of the Valley Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. W. A. Patton, of Wayne, Rev. Dr. L. Y. Graham, of Olivet Presbyterian, Philadelphia, Rev. H. A. MacKubbin of Coatesville, Rev. Dr. S. Wilbur Chapman of Bethany Presbyterian, Philadelphia, Rev. Dr. W. W. Heberton of Wayne, Rev. Dr. John Hemphill of Arch Street Presbyterian, and Rev. W. D. Roberts, of Bethany Temple, Philadelphia. Imported vocal and instrumental music was also heard.

The Church was dedicated with a debt of \$8,000, the mortgage being signed jointly by Peter Burns, Jr., and Martin V. Yerkes. On January 6, 1906, impressive exercises were held to celebrate the burning of the mortgage.

On December 25, 1892, there were 177 enrolled in the Sunday School, including 87 females and 90 males. Many of these are names prominent in the community today.

In July, 1892, a Sunday School was organized at Paoli, with thirty members, and the attendance more than tripled in the next three years. Toward the close of the century a church was established there. A Sunday School had also been conducted at Howellville for some time. There were several revivals held during this period.

The next minister was the Rev. Robert N. Powers, December 10, 1901, to 1908. Rev. Powers was a greatly beloved pastor, who now lives in California. Accessions during his ministry were ninety-one.

On November 27, 1908, Rev. William Potter Van Tries was installed, and served until 1912. He had been for a year assistant pastor in a Newark church. He later married Daisy, the daughter of Dr. James Aiken. He was a good preacher and popular with the congregation, making several innovations, one of which was a live Boys Club. He is now at the Church of the Redeemer, in Germantown. Thirty-six were added during his service.

The present pastor, Rev. J. Charles Levensgood, D. D., came in 1912. The son of a Honeybrook doctor, he has a wide background of education and travel which is a distinct asset to the pulpit. He has labored faithfully and endeared himself to many hearts. In 1937 the congregation marked his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with ceremonies at the annual congregational meeting, while in May, the anniversary month, the Christian Endeavor Society honored him with a dinner. 414 have united during his ministry. A son, S. Lawrence, teaches at Princeton University.

There have been two missionaries connected with the church—Carroll H. Yerkes who, with his good wife, labored in China for nearly thirty years, and is now pastor at New Providence, N. J. The Yerkes had one daughter, Elizabeth, who in December 1936 sailed with her husband, Frank Kline, to work in India. The other missionary Frank D. P. Hickman, spent twenty-five years on the west African coast, returning to Berwyn several years ago to take an active interest in his home church, until his death in January 1938. In 1923 Jesse P. Peirce left to study for the ministry, and now has a charge in Huntington, West Virginia.

The church has always been interested in music. As early as June, 1873, we find a program of a concert given by Reeseville Sunday School. Mrs. W. H. Burns was organist, following Mrs. James T. Doran. Then, after her death, Mrs. Harry Schofield. The latter's son, Chester, played for the church from about 1904 until he enlisted in the Navy during the World War. An interesting item concerning his early talent appeared in a Philadelphia paper:

"Probably the youngest church organist in the country is Chester M. Schofield, the 11 year old son of Harry and Lillian Wells Schofield. This lad has for several months held the position of organist in the Presbyterian Church at Berwyn, and has rendered the most difficult music without apparent effort. When 7 years old he was organist of the Howellville Sunday School, and since that time has played in many concerts in this county. Mr. and Mrs. Schofield are both talented musicians, and the mother has been Chester's only teacher. The boy first showed his sympathy for music at the age of 3 years. From that time on he has been trained, and those who know him expect him to rank with the great musicians."

Unfortunately this prediction was not fulfilled, for not long after the war, Chester Schofield died. His father was one of the choristers. Louis W. Burns, son of Mrs. W. H. Burns, led the choir for awhile, followed by the present chorister, his sister, Miss Lotta M. Burns. Another sister, Miss M. Helen Burns, is the capable organist.

In 1916 a fine pipe organ was presented to the church by William H. Fritz, in memory of his parents, Henry and Mary Fritz.

The "Sociable" was an early institution with Trinity, and flourished for many years, until World War times. It met monthly, with various programs. Occasionally a public entertainment was given, and one is impressed, in reading of these, with the quality of talent presented. Besides fulfilling a social need, this organization contributed much financially to the church.

The Ladies' Home and Foreign Missionary Society was organized in 1886, and throughout this half century of existence, has done a fine work in maintaining the church's interest in missions. The president is now Mrs. Ralph Peirce.

The Ladies' Aid Society was organized later. This group works tirelessly in caring for the material needs of the church. The president is Mrs. Austin M. Burns.

In February 1891 a Christian Endeavor Society was formed—this only ten years after the very first society in Portland—and shortly had a membership of 51. It disbanded in 1909. In October, 1920, a new society was organized, and is still active, the president being John Toroni. There have also been Intermediate and Junior Societies, filling specific needs at the time.

The Kings' Daughters were active for many years. There was also a Westminster Guild. As this is written there is a live Junior Missionary society, organized in 1936, under the direction of Mrs. Eric Corkhill, whose father, Rev. A. W. Spooner, was for long pastor of the Great Valley Presbyterian Church.

Sextons have included William B. Nuzum, Samuel Bewley, Samuel Tompkins, Samuel Burkey, James Sibley and Thomas McKee.

The church has 221 members. While this may not seem many in view of the large number of accessions, it must be remembered that as other churches were organized, those of that denomination left the Presbyterian ranks. Then, too, other Presbyterian churches came into existence at Paoli and Devon, and those people in that territory withdrew to unite there. With the population shifting at a rate undreamed of in the past, church rolls are naturally affected. Nevertheless, one member, Miss Estella J. Burns, has been on the roll continuously since 1878. William H. Fritz united with Trinity in February 1880, Joseph Williams in November 1880, and Miss Fannie Nixon in November 1885. It is to loyal members such as these that the church owes its existence.

The Sunday School has 218 members. For many years, prior to 1935, J. Alexander Clarke was superintendent, with E. W. Fees assistant. Professor Clarke, as he was affectionately known, was a teacher in Overbrook High School until his retirement, and an elder for nearly that long. Charles E. Gibb is the present superintendent, with George B. Roberts assistant. There is an active Men's Bible Class, of which M. B. Wolf is president, and an active ladies' Class, of which Mrs. E. Stewart McCaughey is president. Cooperation is given the union Summer Bible School.

In 1929 the basement of the church was renovated and supplied the need for an additional room. In 1937 the church tower was partially rebuilt, but an effort was made to conform to the original lines.

Ruling elders today are Austin M. Burns, Charles E. Gibb, John F. Heagy, Clarence H. Osborne, George B. Roberts, and Michael B. Wolf, with Joseph Williams and W. T. McLees elders emeritus. Joseph Williams is a son of one of the first elders.

Trustees include Eric Corkhill, E. Stewart McCaughey, Howard L. Moore, Ralph Peirce, Wayne J. Pennell, S. Alfred Ritner, T. W. Stecher, Henry Toroni and Frank F. Walker.

In looking over the church rolls, one is impressed with the recurrence of family names. Probably the record is held by the Burns family, four generations of whom have served as trustees—Peter Burns, Sr., Peter Burns, Jr., W. H. Burns, and Austin M. Burns, The fourth generation of the Peoples family is active in the church today, and a young member of the fourth generation Williams' is in the Sunday School. There are perhaps others.

So Trinity has flourished throughout the years, thanks to the good people who founded and nourished it spiritually as physically. The Wednesday evening prayer meetings probably contributed more to the spiritual life of the church than even the Sunday services. While the attendance was never large, this was a group of sincere, prayerful people — and still is. With seventy-two years of service past, Trinity looks confidently to the future.

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Significant changes have occurred since Ruth's article was penned. Following World War II, Trinity removed its cemetery from the corner of Berwyn and Waterloo Avenues into the Great Valley Presbyterian churchyard.

A 1954 expansion included a large hall, separate classrooms, a kitchen and pastor's study, and in 1973 a two-story education wing was added. The Church now provides facilities for a weekday nursery school, as well as meeting rooms for evening use by varied church and community groups.

In 1975, Trinity Presbyterian seized a "memorable opportunity" to shelter 83 refugees, including many orphans, fleeing the collapse of South Vietnam. For its service, the church received a Humanitarian Activities Award from the Freedoms Foundation.

Not seeking to live in their 150-year-old past, Trinity members began to video record Sunday services, which now appear on Comcast Cable TV Channel 2 five times weekly.

Worship continues today in that 1892 church building, recognized by the American Presbyterian Historic Sites Register. Eleven-year pastor Rev. Walter "Jay" Wilkins, PhD, left at the end of April to take an administrative position for the Presbytery in San Francisco, CA. The search for his successor is ongoing.

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