

## Book Review

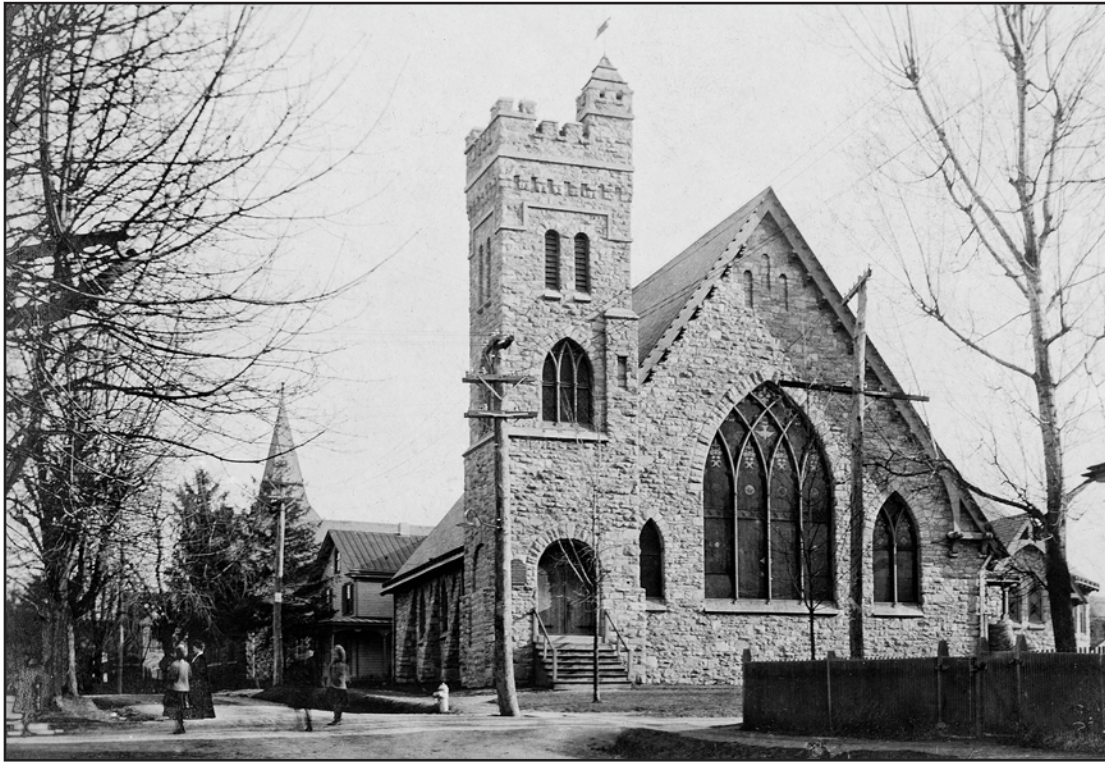
### Trinity Remembers...

**A 150th Anniversary History of Trinity Presbyterian Church of Berwyn, Pennsylvania, 1863 – 2013,  
including an account of life in the village that grew beside it.**

By Barbara M. Fry, completed by co-author C. Herbert Fry

Published in 2012 by Trinity Presbyterian Church, 640 Berwyn Avenue, Berwyn, Pennsylvania 19312

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**Trinity Presbyterian Church in Berwyn – 1904**

Taken by Berwyn photographer Lucy Sampson around 1904, this image of Trinity Presbyterian, built in 1890 and dedicated in 1893, looks south down what was then called Church Street (today's Main Avenue) at the intersection of Berwyn Avenue. The sanctuary's main entrance door at the northeast corner of the structure is today virtually unused. This image also shows the church before the addition of four reinforcing buttresses built as the result of a 1920s maintenance project. The building immediately south of the church was the Berwyn Town Hall, and farther south can be seen the bell tower and spire of the Berwyn Methodist Episcopal Church.

*Courtesy of the Herb & Barbara Fry Collection*

### Introduction by Roger D. Thorne

Herb and Barbara Fry resided together in Berwyn for almost 50 years, raising a family, staying active as members of the Trinity Presbyterian Church, and providing leadership within the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club. Barbara was researching a book about the history of Berwyn, Pennsylvania, (formerly known as Reeseville) and Trinity Presbyterian, the first church erected in that village, when she fell victim to a malignant disease in 2003.

Herb, a retired Acme Markets executive and former History Club president who remains active in what is now the Historical Society, undertook to carry on with the project started by his beloved wife. He completed the manuscript, found a publisher, and sought and received approval from the church's Session. The publication of Barbara's dream was presented for distribution during the celebration of Trinity's sesquicentennial in 2013.

Richard Kurtz is a longtime Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society member and devotee of local history. He is also a Trinity Church member and retired intellectual property attorney in Philadelphia. Dick currently heads up Trinity's mission project to Honduras to improve much-needed medical care and the quality of the water supply in the arid southwest part of the country. Those efforts are making a difference.

## Review by Richard E. Kurtz

This is a book about a church in Berwyn, Pennsylvania but it is much more. It is a book which starts in 1861 coincidental with the beginning of the Civil War. It tells how the war touched the congregation and ends with the church's involvement in international mission work which transcends religious denominations. In between, it chronicles the wars and cultural and social changes which unalterably transformed the small town of Berwyn and the people who have lived there during the past 150 years.

A great map of Berwyn showing the landowners in 1881 immediately grabs the attention of any reader with a historical bent. The book flows easily into the religious and social needs of the Scotch-Irish and Welsh immigrants who had settled on the rocky, infertile land along the Lancaster Turnpike. These immigrants formed a church which served these needs.

A constantly recurring theme is turmoil among the congregation testing the officers of the church. During the "War of the Rebellion," later called the Civil War, the political sentiments of the congregation quickly coalesced around abolition. Subsequent political causes embraced by the congregation included temperance and woman suffrage. These political issues should have provided sufficient controversy to occupy the congregation for the entire 150 years. Instead, one controversy or another emerges to seize the attention of the church. Chapter 12 is entitled "TROUBLES ON THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES" and the next chapter is entitled "TROUBLES ON THE SESSION." At times, one pastor after another is called to serve and then dismissed. The longest term on record is 28 years and the shortest term is 208 days. Mercifully, we are spared the details of most of the disputes between and among the congregation and officers. Some are so trivial that they are humorous in the retelling. An example is the dispute between Thomas Aiken, who became a strong lay leader at Trinity Presbyterian Church, and his former parish, Great Valley Presbyterian Church. Thomas Aiken and his family were with the Great Valley Church for 23 years but he fell into disfavor there because he was "accused of questioning the actions of the Church's Board of Trustees." He contended that the Trustees were "unduly influenced" in the hiring of a sexton and asked for a letter of dismissal to Trinity Church. Action on the letter by Great Valley was postponed for five years.

In another silly dispute, Miss Lotta Burns, who had been choir director for 30 years at Trinity was asked to put the church music more in line with the church services. "In ensuing negotiations, she was alternately fired, retired, and/or the choirs were abolished." Unfortunately, in the span of 150 years such bickering occurs many times.

The book touches on a poignant period of World War II when telegrams arrived announcing the demise of three church members on the honor roll of 59 names who served in the military. This angst is repeated during the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts. The mood of Trinity takes a more positive turn when 56 homeless Vietnamese were relocated to Berwyn under the auspices of the Pearl Buck Foundation and the Trinity congregation. The inclination of this congregation to reach out to help mitigate international needs manifests itself in several ways. Mission projects in Haiti, Jamaica, and more recently in Honduras, demonstrate how a church in a small village spreads good will all over the world.

The number of people in the congregation explodes as the move to suburbia becomes popular and wanes as attendance at main stream churches falls out of favor. The finances of the church changed dramatically with the abolition of pew rent but take a huge upward spike when bequests are made by wealthy congregants.

The changes in small town church life are best summarized by the comment of the most recently departed pastor of eleven years, Jay Wilkins, that "we are all learning to do church differently these days."

