

*A Brief History of
The Presbyterian Church
in Morristown*



First Edifice

Gathered 1733

by Frederick B. Cobbett
Revised by Barbara R. King

On the occasion of the 275th Anniversary
of the church in Morristown



The
Presbyterian
Church in
Morristown

Published and distributed under the direction of the
Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church in Morristown.

Originally printed in January 1951
Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. David Mutchler

Updated in 2008 by Barbara King

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The first group of Presbyterians who settled in the County of Morris met at Whippany in the early part of the 18th century. This primitive village on the banks of the Whippanong River was in Hanover Township, which township embraced a far greater extent of country, even extending to and constituting a part of Hunterdon County. The territory inhabited by this congregation covered what is now Whippany, Chatham, Madison, Parsippany and Morristown. The movement for the establishment of a separate parish in Morristown took place in the 1720's, or possibly a few years earlier, but it is not known definitely when. The desire of the people living in or near to Morristown (then called West Hanover) for a separate parish was so great that a lot was cast by the members of the whole parish at Whippany as to whether there should be a division. This lot being cast on 1733 it was found not to favor the division; despite this, however, the members of the congregation residing in Morristown (West Hanover) "disregarded the lot," seceded from the parent church in Whippany, and continued their endeavors to bring the new parish into being. The Synod of Philadelphia, before whom the affairs of Hanover were brought stated that it "looked upon the practice of submitting of congregational affairs to the decision of the lot to be unwarrantable, inasmuch as lots are only warrantably used to decide matters that can't be otherwise determined in a rational way; particularly by applying to the higher judicatories."

The Synod then after deliberation considered it advisable for the people of Morristown (West Hanover) "to join themselves with the congregations of East Hanover and Basking Ridge until they as well as the said neighbouring congregations, be more able to subsist of themselves separately Yet in the meantime, as the case now stands with that people, if reunion between East and West Hanover be found impracticable, according to our above advice, the Synod judge that the people of West Hanover be left to their liberty to erect themselves into a separate congregation. Withal we earnestly obtest and beseech, that nothing be

done in that affair that may have a tendency to hurt the interest of religion in those places so far as in them lies.” *Minutes of Synod of Philadelphia, September 21, 1733.*

On September 24, 1733 Rev. John Nutman represented to the Synod the “great difficulty he was under as to his continuing as pastor of the congregation of East Hanover if they be allowed to erect themselves into a separate congregation.” Synod considering the same “did earnestly recommend it to the Presbytery of East Jersey to endeavor to prevail upon the people of West Hanover and East Hanover to agree upon conditions of reunion at least for a while until they be better able to subsist apart,” but if not it was the Synod’s judgment that Mr. Nutman be granted dismissal upon his application for the same.

On September 24, 1735 according to the minutes of Synod “the West part of Hanover having applied to the synod for the ordination of Mr. Cleverly, the Synod do order it to be left to the Presbytery of Philadelphia.” No record of any action by that Presbytery appears, and Mr. Cleverly was not ordained pastor, but did continue to preach for some years.

The Committee of Synod met at Hanover on July 26, 1738 and upon conclusion that the people of Morristown (West Hanover) had become much stronger it was “judged that said western people may be a separate society by themselves.” This decision and report was ratified by the Synod on May 24, 1739. For a period of three or four years there is no record of any of the doings of the society, which brings this story to the arrival of Parson Johnes, the first pastor.

Timothy Johnes was of Welsh descent, born in Southampton on May 24, 1717, and the entry made in the book kept by him is this: “The Record of the church in the Town of Morris, from the first erection and Founding of it there; and, under Christ, as Collected, and Setled, and Watered (in much weakness) by Timo. Johnes, Pastor; who first came Aug’t 13, 1742, stayed 6 Sab. & then fetched my Family and was ordained Feby. 1742-3. (1742 till after Equinox.)” Dr. Johnes was

pastor until his death on September 17, 1794. In 1783, Mr. Johnes received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Yale College. Dr. Johnes was a trustee of the College of New Jersey.

The Rev. Timothy Johnes in 1747 became the owner of a tract of land of nine acres on the north side of Morris Street. On that site was erected the home occupied by him for a great many years, and in the year 1893 long after it had passed out of the Johnes family, it became the home of Memorial Hospital, until a new building was erected in 1907 when the old Manse or Parsonage was moved across Morris Street to another location.

The first charter creating the parish as an official body recites "WHEREAS, Sundry of our loving Subjects of the Presbyterian Persuasion Inhabitants of and about the Township of Morris, within our Colony of New Jersey, by their humble petition presented to our Trusty and well beloved Jonathan Belcher, Esq., our Captain General and Commander in Chief of our Province of New Jersey and Vice Admiral in the same, shewing * * that the most advantageous support of religion among them necessarily requires that some persons should be incorporated as Trustees for the community * * to enable the Petitioners to erect and repair public buildings for the Worship of God, etc." In consequence of the petition so presented the said Governor on September 8, 1756 granted a charter to this church in the name of "George the Second, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith" under the corporate name of the TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN MORRISTOWN.

At a meeting of the congregation so established by the Charter of 1756, held in the meeting house on April 24th, 1788, new trustees were elected, Silas Condict, John Mills, Jonathan Ford, Benjamin Lindsley, Richard Johnson, Joseph Lewis and James Smith. On the 27th, the trustees assumed the corporate name of "THE TRUSTEES OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT MORRISTOWN," and chose as their common seal, the device and impression of which was a Sheaf of Wheat. By this choice of a new name, the earlier corporation

as well as the corporate name under the Governor Belcher charter passed out of existence. The reasons for the creation of this new corporate body were the new requirements occasioned by the War for Independence, and the necessity to conform to the provisions of an act of the Council and General Assembly, passed March 6, 1786, which re-established the charters granted before that time by the Government of Great Britain. An Act of the legislature passed June 13, 1799 confirmed those charter rights, and also ruled that real estate held under and by virtue of the old charters should be vested in the new corporations created in the place thereof.

ACQUISITION OF LAND

At a meeting of the Trustees January 18, 1758, it was announced that certain lands had been conveyed to the Trustees which were distinguished by separate and distinct descriptions: part of the land was called the Parsonage Land extending from the easterly edge of Morristown Green to as far as the present Pine Street, and bounded north by Morris Street and south by South Street. Present at the meeting were Benjamin Hatheway, president; Benjamin Bayles, Thomas Kent, Benjamin Coe, Charles Howell, Sam'l Robarts and Henry Primrose; and then quoting, "it was agreed that as the President had heretofore given a Deed for the Parsonage to Messrs. Mathew Lum, Thomas Cleverly and Timothy Mills that it might now fall under the Priviledges of the Charter, and it was agreed that said Parsonage Land by a Quit Claim be Conveyed to the President that said Lands by the President might be Directly Conveyed to the Trustees." The other portion of the land was called the Meeting House Land and included the Morristown Green or Common, and the burying ground as far as Spring Street. "It was also agreed to take a Quit Claim Deed for the Meeting House Land which is now in the hands of Joseph Prudden & the Heirs of John Lindsley Deceased. Both of the town of Morris." The earliest headstone now remaining bears the inscription: "Here Lyes ye Body of Martha, Wife of Abraham Parson Aged about 23 years, died Jan. 2nd, 1731."

It was on the Meeting House Land that the first meeting house had been built in 1729, a few feet easterly of where the present church edifice now stands, before any title whatsoever for it had been acquired, and actually before, the parish had asked for a separate Charter from the Synod.

It was this building that was used by the Army for the care and comfort of soldiers during the epidemic of small pox which was so prevalent during the year 1777. This was not the only building in the little country village lying nestled up here in the hills of Morris County that was so used then, for the meeting house of the Baptist Church of Morristown, then located on the present site of the Bamberger store [now Century 21] was also converted into a hospital for use by the Army in caring for the soldiers who wore the buff and the blue.

WASHINGTON ATTENDS COMMUNION

The Reverend Timothy Johnes was once visited by General Washington during one of his encampments with the Army in Morristown, demanding to be informed whether he, as a communicant of another denomination would be admitted at a communion service of the Presbyterian Church. Parson Johnes promptly assured the General that it was not the Presbyterian table but the Lord's table, and he would be glad to welcome him and administer the communion to him. Accordingly at next communion service General Washington was in attendance at the service held in the orchard.

This first meeting house continued to be the house of public worship until November 26, 1795, on which date the first service was held in the newly built second meeting house, erected a few yards to the west. Deliberations for the construction of the second meeting house were begun in 1788, but the actual work did not begin until 1791, and the house was ready by 1795. This second edifice was used for worship until February 12th, 1893, on which day was held the last service of worship in that building. The upper portion of the steeple of the second building, about twelve to fifteen feet of it, has been retained, and is now located in the rear of the old burying ground, adjoining the present building. Razing of the second edifice was begun shortly after the last service was held therein. The corner stone of the present building was laid on July 20th, 1893, with appropriate services conducted by the Rev. John Macnaughtan, the pastor of the church. During the work of construction services were held in the Chapel.

FOUNDING OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

At a meeting of the First Presbyterian Church held December 30th, 1840, upon a resolution dated December 19th, it was decided "in the opinion of this meeting the faith and doctrine of this church will be better promoted by a division of the present congregation into two distinct and separate congregations, to be called the first and second congregations in Morristown." This resolution was passed and adopted, and the Second Presbyterian Church began its life.

The first service of the newly created parish was held in the upper room of the old Academy on Sunday, February 21, 1841, in which place the meetings continued to be held until the 14th day of October of the same year when the new house of worship was dedicated and the pastor, Rev. Orlando L. Kirtland, was installed. On May 17th, 1841, at a meeting held in the Academy the corporate name was chosen, viz. "THE TRUSTEES OF THE SECOND CONGREGATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT MORRISTOWN." At this same meeting the trustees were elected consisting of Dr. John B. Johnes, Ephraim Young, Stephen Vail, Lewis B. Stiles, Jonathan H. Smith, Francis Child and B. O. Canfield. On the same day the certificate of incorporation was executed by these same trustees. On July 14th, 1841 the first building site was purchased of John W. Poinier and wife, on South Street which is the same lot now occupied by the parish house. Prior to the date of the deed, however, the corner stone of the first meeting house of the Second Presbyterian Church was laid on May 27th, 1841 with appropriate ceremonies, Rev. Alfred Chester giving the address. On January 10th, 1877 at five-thirty P.M., fire broke out in the church building and during a snow storm which set in about the same hour, the building was entirely destroyed. On July 12th, 1878 the present brown stone building was formally dedicated. During the period of construction the services were held regularly, at first in the chapel of the public school on Maple avenue, and afterward, until the completion of the building, in the hall of the Library and Lyceum. By an act of the New Jersey Legislature passed February 28th, 1863 the corporate name of "THE SECOND CONGREGATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT MORRISTOWN" was changed to "THE SOUTH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT MORRISTOWN," P. L. N. J., 1862, pp.69.

THE MARKET STREET MISSION

On March 18, 1889 the mission house established on Market Street by the South Street Presbyterian Church was formally opened, and has been known since that time as The Market Street Mission. In charge of the services at the opening was Jacob L. Sutphen, Chairman of the committee to organize the work. Identified with him in these services were Rev. John Macnaughtan; Rev. Andrew M. Sherman, of the Congregational Church; Rev. Addison Parker, of the Baptist Church; Rev. and Mrs. Simmons, of East Orange; George E. Voorhees, Major Henry M. Dalrymple. Daniel V. McCollum, E. A. Graves, Dr. Frederick W. Owen, Joseph F Randolph, T. B. Nutting, William L. R. Haven, D. B. Hatch, Frank D. Stanley, General Secretary of the Y.M.C.A.; Dr. Joseph R. Hoffman, organist; and John B. Vreeland and J. Frank Lindsley, ushers. The Rev. Dr. Erdman, pastor of the South Street Presbyterian Church, was not present at this opening service of the Mission, since he and Mrs. Erdman were on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Egypt.

THE REUNION

In 1925 the First Presbyterian Church and the South Street Presbyterian Church were merged into one corporate body. This merger was accomplished by the proposal of similar resolutions recommending the same and the concurrence therein by the two church societies, in separate congregational meetings, simultaneously held in their respective meeting houses on June 15th, 1925. The resolutions were then presented to the Morris & Orange Presbytery on June 16th, 1925 at a meeting held in the South Street Presbyterian Church, and upon being ratified, the merger was thus made complete. By the terms of the resolution, the name chosen and so used now was "THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN MORRISTOWN." The certificate properly executed by Samuel H. Gillespie, President of the Board of Trustees of The First Presbyterian Church, and by Willard W. Cutler, President of the Board of Trustees of the South Street Presbyterian Church, and dated June 23, 1925 was properly recorded.

SESSION HOUSE

In 1816 the First Presbyterian Church built a brick session house on the same site as that now occupied by the Chapel. This Session House was in use until the late 1860's when it was removed and the

present Chapel, also called the Lecture Room, was built as it now stands. This Chapel was used from the time of its construction in 1869, as the Sunday School room, and for other religious and social occasions until the merger, when the activities were thereafter held in the several parlors and auditorium of the South Street Presbyterian Church. On June 6th, 1948 the Chapel was dedicated, and by new decorations made adaptable for the holding of vesper services, weddings and funeral obsequies. The front wall of the newly decorated Chapel is adorned with two marble plaques taken from the South Street Building. These two plaques which were originally presented to the South Street Presbyterian Church by Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan W. Roberts, represent two Bible scenes and characters, one Naomi, Ruth and Orpah, and the other one that of Hagar and Ishmael.

MORRISTOWN GREEN

In 1816 the Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church executed a deed to the Trustees of Morristown Green conveying to the said trustees by a deed of joint tenancy, the land which from the early part of the 18th century was known and called "Morristown Green: or the Common. This deed provided that no dwelling house, store, shop, barn or any other building of any kind should be thereafter erected on the aforesaid Green or Common except a meeting house, a Court house and Jail and a market house. In 1867 conflicting claims between the Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church and the Trustees of Morristown Green grew up, and after a conference the Trustees of the Green, by reason of an agreement, executed a deed to the first Presbyterian Church, restoring the property to the Trustees of the Church as it was held in 1816; the Trustees of the Church immediately executed a new deed to the Trustees of Morristown Green on the understanding, and the deed so stated, that "no shop, dwelling house, warehouse, store, market house, engine house, court house, town hall, school house, church, place of public meeting or worship or any other building shall at any time hereafter be erected on any of the hereby granted premises, but the same shall be forever devoted to and used for the purpose of a public common or park."

MINISTERS

The ministers of the First Presbyterian Church have been as follows: Reverends Timothy Johnes, August 13, 1742 until his death September 17, 1794; Aaron C. Collins, January 6, 1791 to September 2, 1793; James Richards, May 1, 1795 to April 26, 1809; Samuel Fisher, July, 1809 to April 27, 1814; William A. McDowell, December 13, 1814 to October 23, 1823; Albert Barnes, from February 8, 1825 to June 8, 1830; Charles Hoover, February 8, 1832 to March 10, 1836; Orlando L. Kirtland, March 23, 1837 to August 26, 1840; A. Henry Dumont, January 20, 1841 to July 9, 1845; Alexander H. Thompson, January 14, 1846 to July 28, 1847; James R. Richards, December 28, 1847 to April 15, 1851; John T. Townley, December 27, 1851 to his death February 5, 1855; David Irving, November 5, 1855 to May 10, 1865; Gavin Langmuir, July 17, 1866 to September 9, 1868; John Abbott French, December 21, 1868 to January 31, 1877; Rufus S. Green, July, 1877 to October, 1881; William Durant, from 1882 to 1887; John Macnaughtan from June 19, 1888 to May 31, 1901; William Russell Bennett, December 22, 1902 to June 16, 1925. The ministers of the South Street Presbyterian Church have been: Reverends Orlando L. Kirtland, February 21, 1841 to October 9, 1851; James C. Edwards, January 6, 1852 to April 18, 1860; Arthur Mitchell, November 20, 1861 to September 28, 1868; Albert Erdman, May 19, 1869 to April 7, 1907; Alexander McColl, January 6, 1908 to January 16, 1911; Merle H. Anderson, from November 22, 1911 to February 1, 1919; James M. Howard, from June 17, 1920 through and after the merger of the reunited church until October 1, 1936. The present* pastor, Reverend Thomas S. Mutch, DD., was installed on October 30, 1936. * See addendum for updated information.

ADDENDUM

September 30, 1964 Rev. Oscar Walter Roberts was installed as Assistant Pastor. He served until March 1966. Dr. Mutch retired October 16, 1966, and was elected Pastor Emeritus. Rev. Robert Cleveland Holland was installed as Senior Minister January 29, 1967. Rev. Robert Lee Schmidt was installed as Associate Pastor on that same date. His pastorate was dissolved July 8, 1973. Rev. William James Cartmell was installed as Associate

Pastor March 1, 1970; his pastorate was dissolved April 15, 1973. Rev. John Michael Miller was installed as Senior Minister February 4, 1973. His Pastorate was dissolved July 1, 1979. Rev. Thomas Carl Sheffield was installed as Assistant Minister October 21, 1973, called as Associate Minister January 29, 1976, and was installed as Senior Minister September 21, 1980. His pastorate was dissolved May 7, 2001. Assistant Minister Duane Elton Ferris was installed October 21, 1973, called as Associate Minister January 29, 1976, and retired in 1988.

The Rev. Carol Benz Scott was installed as Assistant Pastor November 9, 1981 and served until 1987. The Rev. Joanne Scott Miller was Associate Pastor May 15, 1988 to October 8, 2000. The Rev. David C. Lawence was Parish Associate from August 1981 to May, 2007. The Rev. Marie Hulme Adam was interim Associate Pastor from August 15, 1999 to August 15, 2000. The Rev. Elizabeth Donnell Morrison was Interim Associate Pastor from October 11, 2000 to January 31, 2005. The Rev. Dr. Robert A. Colman was Interim Senior Pastor September 17, 2001 to October 31, 2003. The Rev. David Gordon Carpenter was installed as Senior Pastor May 2, 2004. The Rev. Dr. Virginia B. Smith served as part-time Interim Associate Pastor from June 16, 2005 to April 23, 2006. The Rev. Cynthia J. Alloway was installed as Associate Pastor of Mission and Pastoral Care May 13, 2006; the Rev, Dr. Robert J. Rogers was installed as Interim Associate Pastor October 1, 2007.

COMMITMENT TO MISSION IN MORRISTOWN

Following the war of 1812, the wife of the pastor of The Presbyterian Church in Morristown,, with the assistance of others in the congregation, founded the Female Charitable society to care for the widows and orphans of that war. This organization later became the Family Service of Morris County.

Also in the 1800's, the women of the church founded the Italian Mission to instruct recent Italian immigrants in the language and culture of their new home. Today that organization is known as the Neighborhood House.

In 1983 the church offered the Old Manse, now known as Howard House, to be used as a temporary shelter for the Homeless. Named The Morris Shelter, it could house fourteen people overnight, and was supported by many churches in the area. The Morris Shelter has grown and expanded its mission. It has moved to much larger quarters on West Hanover Avenue and is now known as Homeless Solutions.



Common Seal

Adopted April 27, 1788

The Presbyterian Church in Morristown

Sanctuary at 57 Park Place
Offices at 65 South Street
Morristown, NJ 07960

(973) 538-1776 mail@pcmorristown.org
www.pcmorristown.org

Reprint March 2011