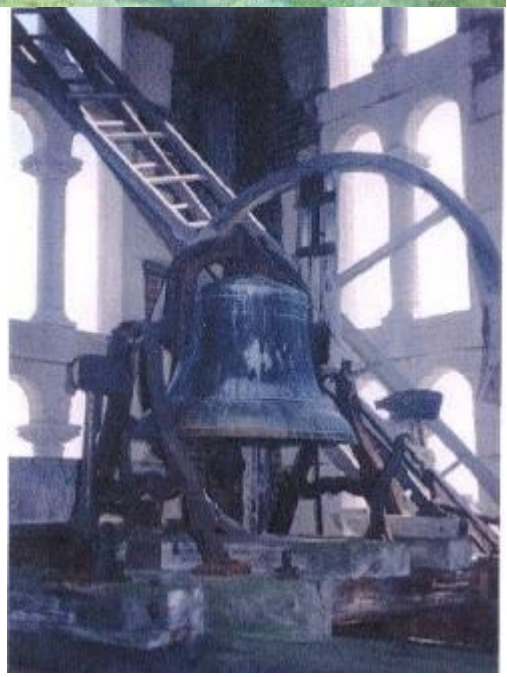


A Grave Yard History of The Presbyterian Church in Morristown



Sanctuary at 57 Park Place
Offices at 65 South Street
(973) 538-1776
fax (973) 538-7879
mail@pcmorristown.org
www.pcmorristown.org

Updated March 2011



Scott Shepherd
July 2007



A Gift from King George II

“Hitherto the people had assembled for divine worship on Sunday, for the space of nearly a quarter of a century, without the use of a bell, but after the completion of the new steeple, a bell was placed in its tower. On this bell, which has been used from the year it was first placed in position until the present time, a period of 141 year, is the impress of the British crown, and also the names of the makers, “Lister & Pack, of London fecit.” Tradition informs us that this bell was presented to the Presbyterian Church of Morristown by the King of Great Britain. This bell, it is said, was brought from Elizabeth Town to Morris Town, by Benjamin Freeman; he who was subsequently the proprietor of a tavern formerly kept by Jacob Arnold, and who late in the seventeenth century, ran a stage coach to Elizabeth Town.”

Sherman goes on to say that the bell “has been twice recast in consequence of its cracking” and, once again, in 1905 was cracked. When we last visited the bell, it bore the inscription “Meneely & Co. West Troy, NY 1907,” and it appeared to be up to its weekly task of summoning church goers for many years to come. As we departed, we noticed the bell was not alone. Nearby was the figure of a paper maché owl, no doubt placed to discourage visits by the local pigeon population.

The bell in the tower of our church sanctuary on The Green has been heard by generations of church goers over the years, but only on rare occasions has it been visited up close and in person. It was a sunny afternoon in June a few years ago that Bruce Frazier and I climbed the series of four ladders which lead to the level in the tower where the bell, often said to be the gift of King George II of England, is located. That level of the tower offers a breathtaking view of the surrounding area in all four directions, particularly the Civil War Monument on The Green below. On the interior faces of the tower at this level a number of names appear in the stone work. They are presumed to have been carved by craftsmen at the time they were building the tower back in 1894.

There is no reason to rewrite history, as the story of the bell itself is related by Andrew Sherman in his 1905 classic, *Historic Morristown, New Jersey—The Story of Its First Century*, in which he tells how the bell first appeared on the scene in 1764.



A Grave Yard History of The Presbyterian Church in Morristown

Honoring Those Who Served Long Ago	2
Early Grave Stone Art—A Museum in Our Midst (1)	3
Early Grave Stone Art—A Museum in Our Midst (2)	4
Early Grave Yard Beliefs	5
They Used To Be Buried There	6
A Famous Communion’s 230th Anniversary	7
A Gift from King George II	8



Honoring Those Who Served Long Ago

Recent Congressional action to approve creation of The Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area undoubtedly will bring more visitors to Morristown and our church's historic Burying Ground—the Final Resting Place of so many who served long ago. Visitors entering The Green will be attracted to the fountain adorned by several figures entitled “A Patriot’s Farewell.” The scene depicted is that of a militiaman saying goodbye to his family as he goes off to serve his country at the time of the American Revolution. Unlike those who served in the Continental Army, militiamen served for periods of one month on and one month off. Hence the scene was replayed many times.

It is particularly appropriate that this sculpture stands such a short distance from our church as 105 of those who served in the militia are documented as having found their final resting place in the Burying Grounds behind the church. In total, there are 133 persons who served in the military located in our church Burying Ground.

Patriot memorials are not limited to statues on The Green. Careful examination of the frieze that bedecks the Century-21 department store on North Park Place reveals that five of the 12 medallions depict persons interred in the Burying Ground: Silas Condict, Jacob Arnold, John Doughty, Caleb Russell, and Jacob Ford, Jr.

A sixth person depicted on the frieze is Reverend Timothy Johnes, who served as Pastor of the Church for more than a half century. Although Reverend Johnes is memorialized by a large marker in the Burying Ground, his remains were moved to Evergreen Cemetery more than a century ago. However, two of Reverend Johnes’ children, Timothy and Theodosia, are at rest in our Burying Ground. Both played significant roles during the American Revolution. Timothy, frequently referred to as “The Surgeon on Horseback,” served in that capacity during George Washington’s retreat across New Jersey in the autumn of 1776. Theodosia, who married Jacob Ford, Jr. prior to the American Revolution, welcomed General Washington into her mansion, which served as his Headquarters during “The Second Encampment” in the winter of 1779-80.

Finally, appearing on the frieze is Alfred Vail, co-inventor of the Telegraph, who attempted to honor those interred in the Burying Ground by preserving inscriptions on grave markers almost 150 years ago. His compilation was updated in 1931 by Mary Johnson Parker and again in 2002. The latest compilation entitled “Who’s Who In The Grave Yard Of The Presbyterian Church In Morristown” can be found at www.pcmorristown.org.

Famous Communion’s 230th Anniversary

It was in the Spring of 1777—over two hundred and thirty years ago—that General George Washington established his headquarters in Morristown for the first time. The headquarters were at Arnold’s Tavern. The proprietor of the tavern was Jacob Arnold, who years later, in October of 1790, would be elected to serve as a Trustee of The Presbyterian Church in Morristown.

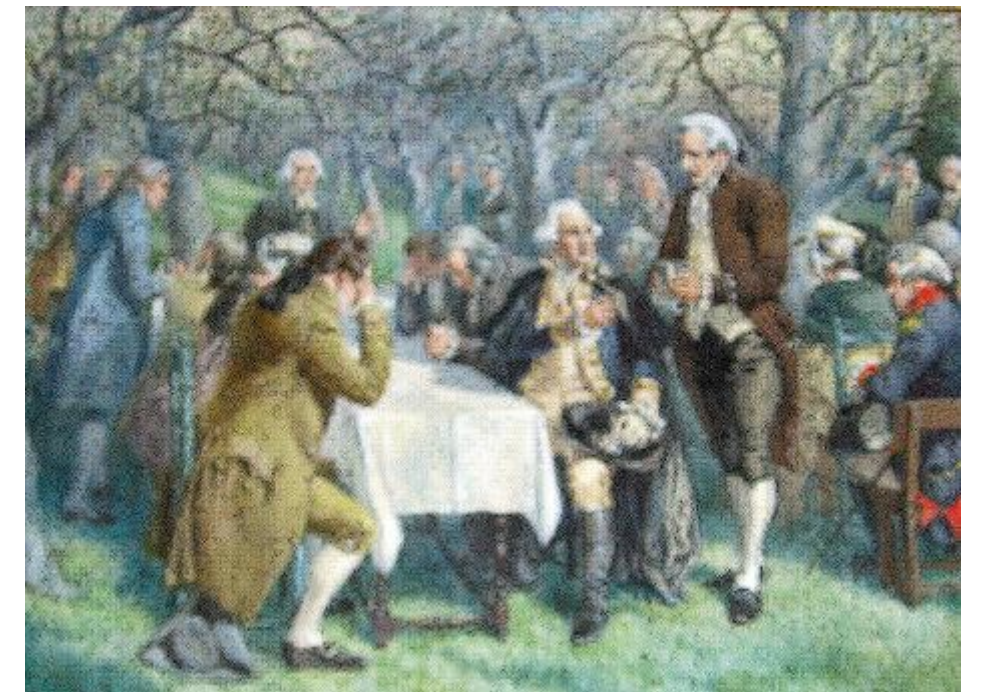
During his stay at Arnold’s Tavern, Washington, a member of the Church of England, is said to have visited Reverend Timothy Johnes and inquired as to whether he could join the congregation the following Sunday in their semi-annual celebration of the Lord’s Supper even though he was of another denomination. The Reverend is said to have replied, “Most certainly, ours is not the Presbyterian, but the Lord’s table, and we hence give the Lord’s invitation to all his followers of whatever name.”

Because the Meeting House was being used as a Small Pox hospital at the time, the Communion Service was held in the orchard behind the parsonage, which stood on the Road to Whippany, present day Morris Street at the site of the Mid-Town Shopping Plaza. Indeed during the first several months of 1777, because the Meeting House was

not available, the congregation regularly conducted church services in the orchard, often bundled up and carrying foot warmers as protection against the chilling blasts of Winter.

Accounts of the Communion, depicted in the “Communion Window” that graces our sanctuary, have been called into question by some historians, citing the absence of any reference to the event in Washington’s Diaries. I have always eschewed such views for fear of becoming the first Elder of The Presbyterian Church in Morristown to be excommunicated.

The late Phillip Hoffman, who was one of the purchasers of the Arnold Tavern property in 1863, took it upon himself to collect and preserve items of interest relating to the tavern and Washington’s stay there. In 1903 he finally took the time to commit his findings to print. It is there that he relates first person accounts of the Communion, which appeared in the *New York Independent* in February of 1898. The accounts passed down through generations of prominent local families from some of those who actually took part in the event appear to confirm the event beyond a reasonable doubt. In one case the great granddaughter of Reverend Johnes, who was living in Morristown at an advanced age in 1898, stated, “It has always been the tradition in our family that Washington took the communion with the church in a hollow back of the parsonage....”





They Used To Be Buried There

long since have been relocated to a cemetery in Philadelphia.

Encroachments are not always planned. One of an accidental variety took place in 1969 when the Headquarters Plaza complex was under construction and a temporary retaining wall proved to be inadequate. The remains along with the associated markers were recovered and relocated to the rear boundary of the Burying Ground.

Some reports of encroachment appear to be unfounded. For many years it was thought that the construction of buildings along Morris Street in the mid 1800s had resulted in disturbing grave sites along that boundary. Supporting evidence was the existence, at one time or another, of cemetery markers used as capstones atop a wall and as stepping stones leading to the rear of the Morris Street properties. Further research revealed that the properties once were the place of business of H. H. Davis Marble Works suggesting what was thought to be evidence of encroachment could have been the proprietor's attempt to put his stone cutters' mistakes to a useful purpose. Confirming this assumption was the recent discovery of a portion of a marker along the Morris Street boundary of the cemetery. On one side of the marker was the name of the deceased known to have been interred at Evergreen Cemetery. On the reverse of the fragment were two carefully carved rows reading "abcd." Clearly someone had been practicing the stone cutter's art.

As time goes by, development of the properties bordering on early grave yards inevitably results in encroachment leading to re-interments. Such was the case in 1893 when the current sanctuary was being built. Painstaking digging by hand resulted in 174 graves being moved to other locations in the Burying Ground. Three more were relocated to Evergreen Cemetery.

Since it opened in 1855, there have been 134 documented cases of re-interments from our Burying Ground to Evergreen Cemetery. Most were the result of families opting to relocate remains to the new cemetery allowing future generations to be interred alongside their ancestors. The re-interment of Rev. Timothy Johnes, first pastor of our church, is particularly noteworthy. Although the marker, which is pictured, has been placed in the Burying Ground to commemorate his ministry, his remains were relocated to Evergreen Cemetery in 1876.

Another re-interment involved Don Juan de Miralles, a Spaniard of great distinction, who died in Morristown in April 1780 while visiting General Washington. His elaborate burial in the Church Yard resulted in a guard being placed at this grave site to protect his jewel bedecked remains from being unearthed by fortune hunters. His remains



The vast majority of grave stones in our Burying Ground were placed between the 1730s and the 1850s and are a virtual museum of early grave stone art in America. The earliest grave stones were of sandstone. This sedimentary stone, found along the banks of New Jersey rivers, was popular with local carvers because of its ready availability and the ease with which it could be worked.

In the early 19th century, perhaps due to the growing classical influence, marble gained in popularity. Because it was not available locally, marble was more expensive than sandstone. It also was more difficult to carve. Unfortunately both sandstone and marble have difficulty standing up to the ravages of time. Sandstone tends to come apart in layers due to repeated freezing and thawing of moisture trapped between its layers. Marble dissolves when subjected to repeated bathing in acid rain.

Carving grave stones requires special skills and tools. In the earliest days of the colonies carvers plied their trade as a sideline to their regular occupation, such as carpenters or stone masons. At the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, grave stones displayed only the crudely carved initials of the deceased. Although it cannot be documented as the earliest grave stone in our burying ground, a stone in the corner of the King Family plot bearing the solitary initials "SD" is an example of this early style of marker.

Early Gravestone Art Museum in Our Midst (1)



As better tools were developed, more elaborate motifs reflecting the prevailing concepts of death began to appear. Perhaps the earliest of these were "Death Heads" with their distinguishing hollow eye sockets, square toothed grin, and angular nose. The wings on the side of the head emphasized the Puritan belief that flight from death, sin, and damnation was impossible. A crown over the "Death Head" was to attest to the "goodness of character" of the deceased. The grave marker of Martha Parson, bearing the date 1731, is an example of this style.

As the stark Puritan view of death, sin, and damnation softened, the figures atop grave markers began to take on a more cherub-like appearance representing the ascending angel or soul and "the hope of resurrection." The marker of Hannah Wood, bearing the date 1768, offers an example of this style and distinguishes the marker as being of a somewhat later period than that of Martha Parson.



Early Gravestone Art Museum in Our Midst (2)

While the “Death Heads” depicted on 18th century grave stones enjoyed popularity for many years, as time went on, carvers became more venturesome. The marker of Abigail Goble, bearing the date 1742, is an example of one of the earliest departures from the “Death Head” motif. Here the carver depicts the arm, presumably that of God, reaching down from the clouds with an axe in hand to cut down “The Tree of Life.”

By the beginning of the 19th century other forms became to appear on grave markers. Two of the more common carvings included three flowers representing “The Trinity” and a shell, which was a metaphor for “The Resurrection of Life Everlasting.”

With the advent of marble grave markers, carvings became more intricate and lifelike. The grave stone of Jacob Ford Lewis displays an urn suggesting a container for the body of the deceased after the soul has departed. The urn motif also is carried forth in the shape of the marker itself. A variety of other motifs can be found in the Grave Yard. One such example is the grave stone of Emma Pierson which displays clasping hands representing “Welcome to the Afterlife.”

Over the years the sentiments carved on grave stones have ranged from expressions of Christian



Faith, to love of the deceased, to the belief that those left behind will one day be rejoined, to the cause of death, and particularly in the case of children, to the shortness of life itself. An example of such a sentiment is that of Benjamin Pierson, Jr. who died January 1, 1792, at age 55:

*A pale consumption gave the fatal blow.
The stroke was certain but the effect was slow.
With wasting pain death found me long oppressed.
Pity'd my fight that kindly brought me rest.*

Still another sentiment is that on the grave stone of Isaac Ayers, who died January 30, 1807 at age 16. The grave stone states “...who was killed by the fall of a log.” The epitaph reads:

*How sudden was the stroke of death
That did from his friends remove.
He in an instant lost his breath
And winged his flight to worlds above.*



While the evolution of the art work depicted on grave stones in our Burying Ground qualifies as a “Museum In Our Midst,” the layout of the Burying Ground itself also is noteworthy. Until the early days of the 19th century it was the custom to place the bodies of the deceased on the side of the grave stone away from the inscription. The markers themselves were aligned in a north-south direction. This resulted in the departed facing east, so they would be able to rise up and greet the “Angel Gabriel,” who on “Judgment Day” would be coming from that direction. This explains why so many of the grave stones in the older portion of the Burying Ground run off at an angle from the church buildings.

In the early 1830s Trustees of the Church became increasingly concerned that the practice of selecting grave sites at random was resulting in haphazard placements. There were numerous cases in which the graves of a husband and wife and other family members were separated by the grave of someone unknown to them. Accordingly a plan was adopted in 1834 to correct these practices which included providing family plots. This accounts for the square plots visible on the left side and to the rear of the Burying Ground.

Early Grave Yard Beliefs

By the middle of the 19th century there were two other burying grounds within easy walking distance of The Green, namely The Baptist Church Burying Ground where Century 21 Department Store stands today and The Methodist Burying Ground near the foot of Ann Street. It is unclear exactly why interments at the three burying grounds came to a virtual stop in the 1850s. Some say it was because the upkeep of the properties became too burdensome for their congregations. Also, Evergreen Cemetery, which opened in 1855, was offering a park-like alternative for interments. Others believe there was increasing public concern with the potential health risk to local citizens caused by “the fumes of pestilence in the air” attributed to so many graves near the center of town. That might seem somewhat ridiculous today, but there are many still living who can recall the warning of their parents that it was “bad luck” to take a breath when passing by a cemetery.

No matter what the reason, interments at the Baptist and Methodist Episcopal Burying Grounds terminated once Evergreen Cemetery opened. Years later, both burying grounds were vacated—the Methodist in 1888 and the Baptist in 1892. Interments in the Presbyterian Burying Ground slowed to a snail’s pace with fewer than 150 from 1855 until the opening of the Memorial Garden in 1990.