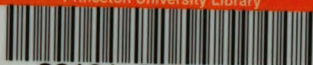


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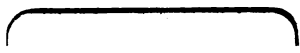
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# AN ADDRESS

—BY—

## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTH JERSEY, ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS.



Delivered at the 150th Anniversary of the organization of the  
Presbyterian Church of Deerfield, N. J.,

August 25th, 1887,

—BY—

REV. ALLEN H. BROWN.



BRIDGETON, N. J.

BRIDGETON, N. J.:  
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## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTH JERSEY, ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS.

The term South Jersey is here applied to all of New Jersey, south of a line drawn from Sandy Hook through Amboy to Bordentown. Ecclesiastically, it contains the Presbyteries of Monmouth and West Jersey. These two Presbyteries cover nine and a half counties, or more than all the combined territory of the six other Presbyteries of the Synod of New Jersey.\*

Among the early settlers of South Jersey were Friends or Quakers, Baptists, and Episcopalians. Some emigrants came from Sweden; Huguenots from France; the Reformed from Holland; Presbyterians came from England, Scotland and Ireland, while from New England and by the way of Long Island, many came to our coast, ascended its rivers where now familiar names of persons and places indicate the origin of the first settlers.

Assembled to celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the Deerfield Church, let us go back a hundred years or more to learn the condition of the country. In the last century there must have been an intimate relation between the Egg Harbour district, and Pittsgrove and Deerfield.

Enoch Green having been licensed to preach in 1761, labored in Egg Harbour, how long we know not. Thence he was called to settle at Deerfield, and was installed in 1767. He died December 2, 1776.

John Brainerd, failing in health, was called from Egg Harbour missions in 1777, to succeed Mr. Green at Deerfield, but was not installed. Here he died in 1781. Both these men were buried in this church, beneath the aisles, which were originally paved with bricks. Can we recall them from the grave? Enoch Green! John Brainerd! In the spirit world are they cognizant of these scenes? However that may be, they being dead, yet speak to us by their deeds and writings.

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\*Omitting the Presbytery of Corisco in Africa.

In August, 1761, John Brainerd wrote to Mrs. Smith, \*  
 "I spend something more than half my Sabbaths here at Brotherton, the rest are divided. At this place I have but few white people. The other places are in the midst of the inhabitants, and whenever I preach there I have a large number of white people that meet to attend divine service. But besides these, I have preached at eight different places on Lord's days, and near twenty on other days of the week, and never fail of a considerable congregation, so large and extensive is this vacancy. Two large counties and a considerable part of two more almost wholly destitute of a preached gospel, except what the Quakers do in their way, and many of the people but one remove from a state of heathenism."

John Brainerd's letter to Enoch Green, earlier in the same year, (June 1861), illustrates both the destitutions of the country and how diligently those men labored to supply the people with the gospel. The field is from Toms River to Tuckahoe. He mentions only one meeting house, but gives the names of seventeen heads of families, at whose houses meetings are usually held, viz: at Toms River, Goodluck, Barnegat, Manahocking, Wading River, Great Egg Harbour and Tuckahoe, and advises Mr. Green to make appointments for Mr. Smith and Mr. McKnight, who will succeed him.

Although Dr. Thomas Brainerd published the life of John Brainerd in a large volume, (492 pages) full justice has not yet been done to his memory.

In 1886 Judge Joel Parker delivered at Mount Holly an address, recounting the work of John Brainerd, and the obligation of the churches of other denominations in that region to his abundant labors. He quotes from a remarkable diary discovered since Dr. Brainerd published the life of John Brainerd. That journal was brought from London by Doctor George Macloskie, when he came to Princeton college. The little book mentioned Princeton, but not the name of the writer. In Princeton, it was proven to be John Brainerd's Journal from January 1761 to October 1762. It is the more valuable because Doctor Brainerd, in his memoir, gives little notice of 1761, and of the year 1762 says, we have no report of Mr. Brainerd's missionary labors this year.

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\*See Sprague's Annals, volume 3, page 152.

The Diary gives a daily account of incessant itinerant work. Thus Brainerd visited Bridgetown, (now Mount Holly); Bordentown, Wepink, Timber Creek, Woodbury, Salem, Penn's Neck, Cape May, Great Egg Harbour, the Forks of the Little Egg Harbour, Cedar Bridge, Mannahawkin, Toms River, extending over a wide district. He attends to the repair of meeting houses at Timber Creek and Woodbury, promotes a subscription for the support of the Gospel in various places, and at Great Egg Harbour secured a subscription of £80 annually for the support of the Gospel ministry. Well does Doctor Macloskie say, "The Journal furnishes a striking picture of missionary zeal, such as had few parallels in the century to which it belonged."

The Journal of Philip V. Fithian sheds light upon the progress of the Presbyterian Church up to the Revolutionary War. He and Enoch Green married daughters of Beatty. Both were Chaplains in the army. Both died of camp fever. At White Plains Mr. Fithian fought in the ranks. In 1775, or fourteen years after Mr. Green's first missionary tour above mentioned, Mr. Fithian visited a portion of the same district, viz: Egg Harbour and the Forks, and proves that several houses of worship had been erected in the interval. Besides preaching at private houses, Mr. Fithian preached at Mr. Clark's little log meeting house; also at Brotherton and at Clark's Mill meeting house, and at Blackman's meeting house. Other churches are known to have been erected, though not mentioned by Mr. Fithian.

Thus have we noticed the diligent work of itinerants, and the progress of the Presbyterian church up to the Revolutionary War. Then followed times of trial and retrogression, disaster and decline. New Jersey was a battle field. The Presbyterian Church suffered much from the long desolating war, and was impoverished in men and means. None exceeded John Brainerd in zeal for independence. His churches among the Indians disappeared with them. His church at Mount Holly was burned. Rev. Charles McKnight preached at Middletown Point, Shrewsbury and Shark River. He was seized by the British and his church was burned. He died soon after his release in 1778.\* Crosswick's church ceased to exist. The

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\*See Webster's History, page 486.

site of a church at Middletown is now a tangled thicket. That of Shark River is an open common. The location of Barnegat church, mentioned in Webster's History and in John Griffith's Journal, has not yet been identified. A few grave stones mark the ground which John Leake by his will gave for a Presbyterian meeting house at Wading River in 1777. All the above mentioned were located in the territory of the present Monmouth Presbytery. The churches which survived the war in that portion of South Jersey and came down from the last century were Shrewsbury, which at one time was almost extinct; old Tennent, (or Freehold), Cranbury and Allentown.

In the territory of the present West Jersey Presbytery, we look in vain for Mr. Clark's little log meeting house. A burial ground marks the site of Clark's Mill meeting house; and Blackman's meeting house fell into the possession of the Methodist Church. Long ago the churches of Longacoming, Aloes Creek and Penn's Neck or Quihawken disappeared. The churches which came down to us from the last century now existing in West Jersey Presbytery, are Woodbury, Blackwoodtown, Pittsgrove, Deerfield, Greenwich, Bridgeton, Fairfield, (or Cohansey), and Cape May.

Thus, of our ninety extant churches in South Jersey, only twelve had their origin in the last century. After the Revolutionary war the Old Stone Church was erected at Fairfield, and a brick edifice at Bridgeton was dedicated in 1795. With these exceptions we know of no efforts to build up, much less to extend the Presbyterian Church in West or South Jersey, from the beginning of the war in 1775 to 1820, a period of forty-five years.

In 1820 there was a remarkable revival of missionary zeal, and under the influence of Rev. Jonathan Freeman, of Bridgeton, the Domestic Missionary Society of West Jersey arose and accomplished an important work during the remaining two years of his life.

Then the churches of Salem and Millville were established. The appeals for help from Mr. Freeman and Col. Johnson on behalf of the infant church at Salem might now amuse the good people of that flourishing church. History repeats itself and

those appeals should inspire our sympathy and hope for other churches now struggling for existence.

The Presbytery of West Jersey was organized in 1839, and from that time the Presbyterian Church has made steady progress within the six counties which this Presbytery now covers.

In 1840, and for many previous years, in Atlantic county, (or Egg Harbour), we had no church, and now have eight.

In the present Camden County, Blackwoodtown Church then stood alone, now there are nine Presbyterian churches.

In Gloucester County are ten, and all of these excepting Woodbury have been organized since 1840. In Salem County, where were two before 1840, are now four, and in Cape May County, where was one, are also four.

In Cumberland County, always the stronghold of the Presbyterian Church, were eight and now are ten churches.

Thus thirty-five churches have been organized in forty-seven years, and while the population has increased two and one-half times, the membership of our churches has increased about four-fold.

A similar report of progress might be made of Monmouth Presbytery, which was organized first in 1859, and reconstructed in 1870.

History repeats itself and has its lessons:

I. Were the former days better than these? Some assert that our churches in former years did not call for so much financial aid as now, because they sustained the Gospel by uniting contiguous churches, and that therefore we should do the same.

Tis true that once Woodbury and Pittsgrove were united.

In 1750 the Presbytery of New Brunswick directed as to Penn's Neck and Woodbury, that in the place which provided a house to live in, Mr. Chestnut should preach two-thirds of the time, and in the other one-third. In 1751 the same Presbytery decided that Mr. Hunter should preach at Greenwich one-half, Deerfield one-fourth, and at Pilesgrove one-fourth of his time. In 1794 the two churches, Greenwich and Bridgeton, united in calling Mr. Clarkson. Not until 1823 and 24 did the church of Bridgeton venture to sustain the gospel alone, and



then terminated the collegiate relation which had existed for thirty years.

Times have changed, and so have the habits and demands of churches. Do you wish to return to those old times as better than the present? You do not realize the struggles of your Fathers to establish the ordinances which you now enjoy. Place yourselves in their circumstances, if you can, and you will sympathize with other feeble struggling churches of the present day.

II. History teaches us to cultivate diligently the field, which is committed to our care. The churches of Penns Neck and Aloes Creek had vigor enough in 1797 to secure a pastor, and in 1803 had eighty communicants at a time when the two churches of Woodbury and Timber Creek, (Blackwoodtown), were reduced to seven members. Once we wondered what were the causes of the decline of Aloes Creek and Penn's Neck churches. Now we wonder that they lived so long, when we read that for twenty years, and again for nine years, the people had no regular preaching; but only occasional supplies, and for another period of seven years only an annual supply.\*

Has the Lord committed to us any portion of his vineyard to cultivate for Christ? If we are unfaithful in its cultivation, the Lord of the vineyard will take it away and give it unto other husbandmen.

III. Deerfield owes a debt to Egg Harbour. John Leake waited upon or escorted both Enoch Green and John Brainerd from Egg Harbour to Deerfield. Thus Deerfield church obtained the ministry of the Gospel at the expense of Egg Harbour. Deerfield survived and the churches of Egg Harbour, which were planted by John Brainerd, declined and became extinct.

Suppose the process had been reversed; then Deerfield Church had become extinct. Deerfield owes a debt to Egg Harbour and to John Brainerd, and to the Great Head of the Church.

How shall that debt be repaid?

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\*See the Presbyterian, April 26, 1856.



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