

THE PROVINCIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY
OF ST. PETER'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,
1753-1783.

BY C. P. B. JEFFERYS.

I.

As one stands today in the vestryroom of St. Peter's Church, Philadelphia, one cannot escape a feeling of reverence and awe. The whole room breathes the atmosphere of a venerable past. It still seems to be peopled with the distinguished laity and clergy from whom the present dignified, but active and prosperous life of the old Church was derived and by whom the work of the parish was for so many years carried on. From three walls portraits with their strong, kindly faces look down upon the visitor, the portraits of men whose names frequently occur in the early annals of Philadelphia, in the Provincial and later records of Pennsylvania, and in the archives of Colonial America and of the United States. The fame of these men has not been confined to America, but is recorded across the Atlantic in public documents and records of the Anglican Church. One of the portraits is that of Bishop William White, the father of the Episcopal Church in America, that fine old gentleman, who for sixty-four years was intimately connected with St. Peter's Church as assistant minister and rector. Another portrait is that of William Smith, D.D., first Provost of the College of Philadelphia,¹ in his black gown and crimson Oxford hood. His was the first sermon preached in St. Peter's.

¹ Now the University of Pennsylvania.

A closer study of the walls may provoke a smile. There is, for example, near the East door a framed lottery ticket, dated 1765, bearing the inscription, "St. Peter's & Church Lottery." Above the lottery ticket, in a frame, hangs an apparently brand new copper coin, a half-cent piece dated 1800.² This coin was probably dropped by some not too generous parishioner when reaching for the alms-box in the early years of the last century, or by some restless child whiling away the time during one of Dr. Abercrombie's excellent but rather lengthy sermons.³

The present vergers takes pride in showing to the visitor the large Church of England Prayer Book, with hand-written date, "St. Peter's Church 1784," and with the prayers for "Our most gracious Sovereign Lord King George," "Our gracious Queen Charlotte, his royal highness George Prince of Wales, and all the Royal Family," stricken out and replaced with a prayer for the President, in handwriting. Other interesting books are to be seen, including a "Vinegar Bible." A silhouette portrait of Bishop White in "small clothes" and a framed lock of his hair also hang on the East wall of the vestryroom. An unverified tradition says that Bishop White and Mr. Chew were the last two gentlemen to wear the "small clothes" in Philadelphia. Bishop DeLancey's clock stands on a pedestal over the south door. On the window-sill stand two ornate candlesticks reputed to have come from the country home of Joseph Bonaparte, near Bordentown, N. J.

Turning aside from these interesting relics, the visitor can look out through the many paned colonial

² The inscription on the frame reads: "Found under pew nos. 32 and 33 when workmen were excavating for the organ blower, July, 1912." This pew is the large double one on the south side of the chancel.

³ James Abercrombie, D.D.: *Sermons, Lectures and Charges, 1798-1809*, Phila., n. d.

window upon the beautiful churchyard lying quietly within its old brick walls, shaded by many fine trees and carpeted in spring, summer and autumn with its well-kept grass. Herein lie the bodies of statesmen and clerks, merchants and laborers, officers of the Army and Navy and Indian Chiefs, of many members of Philadelphia's aristocracy and also of some of her lowliest citizens. Many of the gravestones are crumbling with age. One of these dates back to August 23rd, 1760, that is, a year and a month before the Church building was opened for service.⁴

All these things and many more and especially the quaint, beautiful old Church itself, with its high-back square pews, its colonial windows, its wine-glass pulpit and sounding-board, its stone passageways, its prayer-desk underneath the pulpit, its North and South galleries, inevitably suggest to the observer "history."

Strange to say, the history of St. Peter's has never been written. Bishop DeLancey in 1861 preached a sermon in St. Peter's on the occasion of the Centennial Celebration of the opening of the church. This was admirably done, but could under the circumstances be nothing more than a historic summary. This sermon, together with an appendix containing some historical material, was published the following year.⁵ Somewhat later Mr. John Welsh, for many years a Vestryman of St. Peter's and a distinguished citizen of Philadelphia, delivered in the church a historic sketch of the parish. Unhappily this sketch was abbreviated for publication, some of the intimate details having been omitted, while the original manuscript has been lost.

⁴ This stone bears the following inscription—"In memory of Rosanna Smallman Died August 23rd, 1760 Aged 56 years"—See Wm. White Bronson: *Inscriptions in St. Peter's Churchyard*, Camden, N. J., 1879, 119.

⁵ William H. DeLancey, D.D.: *A Sermon preached at the Centennial Celebration of the Opening of St. Peter's Church*, Phila., 1862.

Charles Henry Jones, a Vestryman, published in 1909 a short pamphlet entitled *Old St. Peter's Church*, but that author largely confined himself to generalities, most of which are contained in Bishop DeLancey's Centennial Sermon. His purpose was merely to keep alive the traditions of the Church and apparently not to go to original sources for his information. Miss M. Atherton Leach in the Sesqui-Centennial Year Book of the Parish (Philadelphia, 1911) wrote a brief article entitled *Sketches from the History of St. Peter's Church*. Her sketches, however, are mostly very short biographical notices of the rectors. The most valuable piece of historical work done in connection with St. Peter's was the copying of all the inscriptions on the monuments and tombstones which could then be deciphered in the churchyard, by Rev. W. W. Bronson, then assistant minister of St. Peter's. These were carefully edited, brought up to date and published by Charles R. Hildeburn of the Pennsylvania Historical Society in 1879.⁶ The Rev. Mr. Bronson thus saved some inscriptions which became illegible after his day. It has also been possible to recut some of the inscriptions by reference to his work.

The neglect of such an interesting and valuable subject, as the history of St. Peter's, would appear almost as a sacrilege to a Bostonian, but unhappily not so to the average Philadelphian. With the Philadelphian the neglect of his history appears to be the rule rather than the exception. Sidney George Fisher, the iconoclastic historian of Pennsylvania has said—"The most effective injury the Pennsylvanians inflict on their distinguished men is neglect after they are dead."⁷ The same may be said of the historical neglect of the institutions of Pennsylvania. Christ Church, which stood on

⁶ Wm. White Bronson: *Inscriptions in St. Peter's Churchyard*, Camden, N. J., 1879, p. V.

⁷ Fisher: *The Making of Pennsylvania*, 361.

the very spot on which the present building stands, was built only thirteen years after the city of Philadelphia was laid out by Penn, but how inexplicably has its history been neglected! Old Swedes (Gloria Dei) has suffered from a similar neglect. Such neglect has not always been intentional. In many cases, as in the case of St. Peter's, the officers in charge of public institutions have been too much occupied with parochial or civic duties to take time to record the doings of either themselves or others, while outsiders have not considered it their province to make up the deficiency. The writer hopes some day to complete the history of St. Peter's Church, of which this contribution is a mere beginning. There has already been collected a vast amount of material for such a work.

The history of the early years of St. Peter's (1761-1832) is really one with that of Christ Church, as these two Churches were united during that period under the same Vestry, Rector and Charter. Space and time, however, prohibit here and now any detailed reference to the Mother Church. Benjamin Dorr's⁸ *History of Christ Church* (1695-1841) may be used to supplement this work to some extent, although it contains only short extracts from the minutes of the Vestry, not always accurately quoted, and even passes over the years of 1797 to 1806 with the comment, "nothing appears in the records of the vestry, which is deemed of sufficient importance to introduce in this history."⁹ There are many years that do not even get this recognition.¹⁰

⁸ Rector of Christ Church, 1837-1869.

⁹ Dorr, 219.

¹⁰ The original minutes, records, cash-books and numerous odd papers of the United Churches have been carefully studied. The writer is indebted to the Rev. Herbert B. Satcher, assistant minister of St. Peter's, for invaluable aid in performing this task. He is also indebted to his father, Dr. Edward M. Jefferys, the present rector of St. Peter's, for his kind suggestions in regard to certain lines of inquiry and re-

II.

SOCIETY HILL.

The corner stone of old St. Peter's was laid the week before the 21st of September, 1758, on a lot at Third and Pine Streets, recently granted by the proprietaries, in that part of Philadelphia commonly known as Society Hill. The name Society Hill came from "The Free Society of Traders," which in 1682 was granted a charter by William Penn, and soon set up a warehouse and office in the infant city, on the west side of Front Street, near the south side of Dock Creek. It was located at the foot of the hill known as Society Hill and thence its city tract of about one hundred acres extended westerly in a tier of lots from Front Street on the Delaware to Front Street on the Schuylkill River. A map of the surveyor Thomas Holme made about 1683 shows its location.¹¹

The Society's total purchases in the province amounted to nearly 5000 acres of land, and its officers, Nicholas Moore, the president, and James Claypoole, treasurer, took up their residence in the new city in the early 1680's. Descendants of both of these men were signers of the petition to the "Honorable Proprietaries" for a "Lott on the west side of third street for a church and yard" (St. Peter's) in 1754.¹² The treasurer, James Claypoole, brought his family to

search and for his advice as to possible sources of information. The writer is also indebted to Dr. Louis C. Washburn for his kind permission to peruse the archives of Christ Church; to Dr. Louis F. Benson for his kindly criticism and suggestions in reading the manuscript; and to Professor St. George L. Sioussat for his kind aid in preparing the manuscript for the press.

¹¹ *A Portraiture of the City of Philadelphia . . . in America by Thomas Holme, Surveyor General, Sold by Andrew Sowle . . . London.* (1683). Original in N. Y. Hist. Soc. Facsimile in Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, I, 96.

¹² Wm. Moore, George and James Claypoole. See *infra*, 23.

Philadelphia, arriving on the ship "Concord," Wm. Jefferies master, in October 1683. The first winter was spent in a cave in the bank of Front Street, and in the spring he built a house on Walnut Street a few doors east of Second.¹³ The manuscript letter book of James Claypoole from 1681-1684, printed in part in *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE* is a valuable historical source for the period.¹⁴

The Society does not seem to have prospered, as the city's early growth went toward the north instead of south; collections on goods brought over from England and sold at a profit were difficult to make, and the president, Nicholas Moore, was of a quarrelsome nature. In the minutes of the Executive Council for "12 of 6 mo., 1682" we find he was summoned before them for "disrespectful words" and forced to apologize.¹⁵ At any rate the Society came to an end in March, 1723, an Act of Assembly having put its property into the hands of trustees. While the Society itself died out, its name stuck to that part of the city below Pine Street for many years. Watson writing in 1844 says: "'Society Hill,' a name once so prevalent for all the region south of Pine Street, even down to the Swede's Church, has been discontinued for the last sixty-eight or seventy-eight years. In olden times, we used to read of 'Cherry Garden on Society Hill,' the 'Friends Meeting on Society Hill,' the 'Theatre (in 1759) on Society Hill,' etc."¹⁶

It is interesting to note that about the time St. Peter's was built the origin of the name had become considerably confused and it was thought by some that that portion of the town derived its name from the social life there. This is shown by the Latin inscrip-

¹³ Watson: *Annals of Philadelphia*, I, 558.

¹⁴ *PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY*, X, 1886.

¹⁵ Watson, I, 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 484.

tion on the stone over Dr. Robert Jenney's grave in the floor of Christ Church. It is almost illegible now but in 1882 Charles R. Hildeburn copied what was left, which was, in part, as follows:

“() M ()
Robertus Jenney LL.D.
Quid () huic Eccle ()
hoc ejus sac ()
) jura ()
Sub suis ()
C iqua ()
) sunt
() structa vidit
Similiter parietes junioris Ecclesiae S. Petri
in Monte sociali sitae
Tempore ejus constructae fuerunt . . . ”¹⁷

This part of town developed very slowly in comparison to the northern section known as “Northern Liberties.” A picture of the city, probably made about 1702, shows a duck pond located at about Third and Pine Streets (the present location of St. Peter's), having for its outlet a stream running into Dock Creek.¹⁸ Around the pond are the tepees of an Indian camp. William Penn's surveyor, Captain Thomas Holme, in

¹⁷ PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY, VII, 477. If the author had realized the origin of “Society Hill” he should have used some such phrase as “*in collegii Monte sitae*”—The stone is directly in front of the Chancel in the center aisle. By supplying a few letters “*S. Petri in Monte sociali sitae*” can still be made out.

¹⁸ This was filled in by Act of Legislature, March 30, 1784, and is now Dock Street. This picture is reproduced in H. M. Lippincott: *Early Philadelphia, Its People, and Progress*. Phila., 1917, op. p. 29. Mr. Lippincott in a letter to Dr. Edward M. Jefferys dated 28 March, 1922, says: “The picture to which you refer in your note of March 27th was a lithograph in the possession of Mrs. George H. Perkins, 420 South Broad Street, who had a very valuable collection of historical material upon which I was allowed to draw. I never was able to discover the original of the lithograph. . . . Mrs. Perkins is now deceased and her effects have been sold, so that I am sorry to tell you that I do not know where this particular picture that belonged to her has gone.”

his map of 1683 also marks this stream as arising at about Third and Pine Streets. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, this pond and stream seemed to have dried up, for in later maps there is no trace of either. Gradually prominent citizens began to build in this part of town. King Street (now Water Street) by 1720 was fairly well filled up with trading and warehouses.¹⁹ Front Street running along the top of the bluff overlooking the Delaware River afforded beautiful sites for private residences, and as these were taken up Second and Third Streets were built upon south of Walnut. Edward Shippen, one of the very earliest settlers in Philadelphia, had a beautiful house and garden with "240 acres on the south side of said city."²⁰ Gabriel Thomas in 1698 was much struck by the place and wrote it "equalizes (if not exceeds) any I have ever seen."²¹ Shippen's descendants today occupy a pew in St. Peter's Church (No. 81). In 1767, nevertheless, Society Hill was so unsettled that we see public advertisement is made by Joseph Wharton and others proposing to bestow lots "for the promotion of religion, learning and industry" adding that the market place was already fixed upon, having a length of 1200 feet, and a width of 100 feet.²² Samuel Powel, mayor of Philadelphia for fifteen years (1775-90) built his afterwards famous house, sometime during the 1760's on Third Street,²³ and about this time built a row of houses on the north side of Pine Street, east of

¹⁹ "The South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia by Peter Cooper—Painter." Original painting in the possession of the Philadelphia Library Company, dated 1720.

²⁰ Advertisement of his estate on his death in 1730, Watson, I, 483.

²¹ *An Historical and Geographical Account of Pennsylvania, etc.* London, 1698; reprinted in *Original Narratives of Early American History*, XII, p. 332.

²² Watson, I, 483. Present Second Street Market running from Pine to South Street.

²³ Still standing, No. 244 S. 3rd St., but in decay.

Second. For many years he was an active member of St. Peter's and his relations still sit in the same pew he rented (No. 41).

John Stamper, who was mayor of the city at the time St. Peter's was being built, erected, about 1761, a fine house on Pine Street a few steps from the new church.²⁴ His body lies in St. Peter's churchyard.²⁵ Many other prominent Churchmen in the 1750's and 60's built in this newly opened residential section, Society Hill. It meant a good deal of an effort to plow through the filthy, muddy streets,²⁶ or over the large cobbles of Second Street to Christ Church, situated on Second between High (Market) and Mulberry (Arch) Streets in the then Northern part of the city.

Philadelphia in 1760 was still a small city if compared with our modern cities; yet its rich hinterland and excellent commercial advantages gave it an opportunity for rapid and steady growth. Its population of about 19,000 seems minute when compared to its one million eight hundred thousand today.²⁷ It was less than one-third the size of the present city of Chester. Nevertheless it was the largest city in America.²⁸

The Quakers had gradually lost their hold on the provincial and city government, many having joined the Church of England, among whom were the Honorable Proprietaries of Pennsylvania, Thomas and

²⁴ This house at 224 Pine Street still stands and until recently was one of the most perfect examples of pure Georgian city architecture in Philadelphia. After it had sunk to the level of a tenement house, in 1920 its old doorway was replaced by a modern one and the house was turned into a cigar factory.

²⁵ Bronson, 2.

²⁶ Watson, III, 92.

²⁷ Hazard gives an estimate, made in 1760, showing the population to be 18,756; Watson, III, 237. *The U. S. Census Report, 1920*, gives the population of Philadelphia as 1,823,778.

²⁸ *A Century of Population and Growth*, U. S. Bureau of Census, Washington, 1909.

Richard Penn.²⁹ By 1760 the Churchmen and Presbyterians held the reins and had things "pretty much their own way." It was generally considered, in certain circles, that one could be a "Christian in any church, but could not be a gentleman outside the Church of England."³⁰

The Presbyterians who lived on Society Hill and attended the First Presbyterian Church on Market Street, were induced by the same considerations which affected the Churchmen of the neighborhood to build a church which would be more conveniently located. The first proposal for the erection of the Third Presbyterian Church (Old Pine Street Church) was made in 1761, the year St. Peter's was opened for service. The lot at Fourth and Pine Streets was granted by the Proprietaries in 1764 and the church was first occupied four years later. The two churches with their graveyards standing so close together have been, ever since, an outstanding feature of the neighborhood.

III.

THE MOTHER CHURCH.

For sixty-five years (1695-1760) all Churchmen in Philadelphia worshipped at Christ Church. The original building was put up about 1695 on the site of the present building, and Gabriel Thomas in 1698 tells us "The English have four sorts of Assemblies or Religious Meetings here; as first, the Church of England, who built a very fine Church in the city of Philadelphia

²⁹ An address to Governor Penn on his arrival in the colony, from the Rector, vestrymen, etc. of Christ Church and St. Peter's, dated 9 Nov., 1763, says: "to your kind patronage and protection as our governor, and as a member of the Church of England, we humbly recommend, etc." Vestry Minutes, 9 Nov., 1763.

³⁰ Quoted in H. M. Lippincott: *Colonial Homes of Philadelphia*, 45.

in the year 1695 . . . ”³¹ This was probably a very small affair and we judge very modest rather than “very fine.” An old drawing (not dated) in the possession of the Philadelphia Library Company shows the first Christ Church as a low wooden structure with large overhanging eaves. As the number of Churchmen grew the building was rebuilt or enlarged to accommodate them. “Two additions” had “been made thereto” by 1723³² and the cornerstone for the present edifice was laid April 27, 1727. Burials up to 1719 had been made in the church or around it, but in that year a lot was purchased at the southeast corner of Arch and Fifth Streets and thereafter interments were usually made there, until about 1850. It is here that Benjamin Franklin is buried. In digging for the foundations of the new building, workmen disturbed some old graves and the vestry resolved that “1s. 6d. per diem” be paid to the widow of a former sexton for “packing up and burying the bones.”³³

The Church of England supplied ministers for Christ Church through the Bishop of London, to whose diocese the American Colonies had been annexed.³⁴ Every minister had to be licensed by him, by law, and when a new Bishop was translated to that see, new licenses had to be issued. As it was necessary for the minister to present himself in person to receive this license, often great inconvenience was caused on account of the long and uncomfortable journey. This procedure continued up to the Revolution.³⁵

³¹ *An Historical . . . Account of . . . Pennsylvania*, London, 1698. *Original Narratives of Early American History*, XII, 335.

³² An address of the vestry to the Bishop of London dated December, 1723. Dorr, 53-4.

³³ Minutes of the Vestry of Christ Church, 1 July, 1728.

³⁴ Vestry to Bishop of London, 7 Feb., 1759, Dorr, 116-18.

³⁵ Rectors of Christ Church to 1762 were Rev. Mr. Clayton (1695-97?); Evan Evans, D.D. (1700-1718); John Vicary (1719-1722); Richard Welton, D.D. (1724-1726); Archibald Cummings (1726-41);

The new church soon was crowded and in 1743, 1744 and 1745 different pew arrangements were tried to crowd in the "great number of persons wholly destitute of seats in the church."⁸⁶ Conditions were so bad during these alterations that a Virginian visiting the city in 1744 made the following entry in his journal:

"Philadelphia Sunday June 3rd

. . . in company with Mr. Secretary [Richard Peters], Col. Beverley, and some more of our gang, I went to Christ Church where I heard a very Good Discourse. . . . This Church is a very Stately Building but . . . the Peughs and Boxes were not all done so that everything seemed half finished."⁸⁷

This lack of seats and the ever growing congregation caused the Churchmen to consider the advisability of building a new church. The first mention, in writing, that can be found of this is dated four years later, 1749. The Rev. Richard Peters, then Secretary to Governor Hamilton, in a letter to the proprietaries of the Province says: "The church (Christ) . . . is too little by one half to hold the members, and there is an absolute necessity for building another church." In this letter he also says that the new church "must be a chapel of ease to the present church."⁸⁸ This shows that the question of whether the new church (St. Peter's) should be a separate institution or united with Christ Church had been discussed by the members of the Church of England and it was the general feeling that they should be united.⁸⁹

and Robert Jenney, L.L.D. (1742-82). Welton took charge at the invitation of the Vestry but was not licensed by the Bishop of London. The British Government called him home in 1726, but he did not obey and fled to Portugal where he died the same year. Dorr, 280-282.

⁸⁶ Minutes, 8 Feb., 1745. During the XIX century many alterations were made on the interior of Christ Church and the old square pews were replaced by the present straight ones.

⁸⁷ *Journal of William Black*, in PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY, I, 411.

⁸⁸ Watson, I, 383.

⁸⁹ The United Congregations were not separated until 1832.

IV.

BEGINNINGS AND CHURCH LOTS.

The Churchmen living in the south end of the city, *in Monte sociali*, were, as we have seen, growing more numerous every year. The long tramp through filthy muddy streets to the very overcrowded Christ Church was becoming more and more distasteful to these fine gentlemen and beautiful belles, in damasks and brocades, velvet breeches and silk stockings, powdered hair and periwigs. It was not, however, until March, 1753, that they took any direct action on the question. In that month "some gentlemen from the South End of the City" waited on the Reverend Dr. Robert Jenney, their feeble old rector, and told him that they had decided to build a new Church. They evidently were not disagreeable about it, as they desired "his opinion and encouragement." Dr. Jenney was probably taken aback by this "radical" move on the part of his flock. The South End was considered quite out of town. People were actually talking of building a theatre on Society Hill so as to be out of reach of the city control.⁴⁰ To build a church there would be preposterous! Nevertheless, the Rector promised he would take the matter up with the Vestry, which he did at their next meeting on March 19th. They took "the same into consideration" and appointed Henry Harrison, Jacob Duché (the elder) and Evan Morgan a committee "in conjunction with" Dr. Jenney to "draw up their sentiments thereon" and lay the same before the Vestry at their meeting the following Wednesday.⁴¹

This committee reported on March 21st that upon more "mature consideration" they had decided that

⁴⁰ Southwark Theatre was built in 1758 at Vernon and Cedar Streets just out of the city bounds.

⁴¹ *Minutes*, 19 Mar., 1753.

“Dr. Jenney himself should answer the gentlemen according to his promise.” They then produced a draft of a letter which they had persuaded the Rector to write and it was decided that the “said letter be sent by Him.”⁴²

This letter, on the whole, was not favorable to the plan, but more or less non-committal. Jenney seemed to be in great fear lest the proposed church should become a distinct and separate institution, thus destroying the unity and peace of his congregation, as well as the scope of his personal influence.⁴³ Nevertheless, the “Gentlemen from the south end” went ahead with their plan. The first step was to acquire some land on which to build. Accordingly they drew up a petition to the Honorable Thomas Penn and Richard Penn, proprietaries of the Province for a “Lott on the west side of Third Street,” which property was part of a large section owned by them, extending from Second Street to Fourth. They then went about getting signatures of prominent men interested in the proposal. That of the merchant prince, William Plumsted, heads the list. This practically made the matter an assured project. He was perhaps the most prominent Philadelphian of the day; already having served one term as mayor (1750), he was again chosen in 1755. To go through the list and recount the deeds of all these prominent men would require a separate volume. Such prominent names as those of the famous Dr. Phineas Bond; Redmond Conyngham, merchant and social leader; the three McCalls, Samuel, Archibald and George; the wealthy merchant, William Bingham; General Daniel Roberdeau, of Revolutionary fame; and numerous others are met again and again in Philadelphia history. This document, the foundation of the

⁴² *Minutes*, 21 Mar., 1753.

⁴³ Mss. draft copy in Christ Church tower vault, drawer 11. Jenney to Subscribers for the New Church, 21 Mar., 1753.

History of St. Peter's Church, is now among the archives of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.⁴⁴ Its contents are as follows:

"To the Honorable Thomas and Richard Penn Esquires
Proprietaries of the Province of Pennsylvania,
The Petition of divers Inhabitants of the City of Philadelphia humbly shews

That the Members of the Church of England residing in this City being grown so numerous that the present Church is little more than sufficient to accomodate one half of the Familys of that perswasion with Seats and it being judged most proper that another Church should be built towards the South end of the City; and no vacant ground being to be had so commodiously situated for the purpose, as some part of your 102 Feet Lott which extends from Second Street to fourth Street and is bounded on the North by Pine Street: We your petitioners do humbly entreat your Honours to grant us a Lott on the west side of third Street for a Church and Yard, for the use of the Church of England in and about this City, on such Terms as to Your Honours shall seem meet.

And your Petitioners will pray &
Philadelphia, 1st August 1754.

[Signed]

Wm. Plumsted	Enoch Hobart	Philip Benezet
John Wilcocks	Wm Peters	Francis Many
Pr. Turner	Sam: McCall, Jun'r	Evan Morgan
Hen. Harrison	Arch'd McCall	John Wilkinson
Jno Ord	George McCall	Jos. Redman
Buckridge Sims	Wm Bingham	Philip Hurlburt
Charles Merideth	Rob't Ellis, jun'r	Wm Healston
Edwd Dowers	Thos Hatton	Lester Falkner
Henry Schleydorn	Sam Carson	John Palmer
Wm Jackson	John Baynton	Thomas Wells
Jno Searle	Jacob Duché sr.	John Wise
Phineas Bond	Townsend White	George Eckles
Alex'r Barclay	Daniel Roberdeau	James Payne
Alex Huston	George Sheed	Zach Nieman
James Claypoole	Rich'd Farmar	Warwick Coats
Charles Stedman	Rob't Greenway	Richard Dennis
John Inglis	Amos Stre[tt]ell ⁴⁵	Francis Molton
John Grovey	Th. Bond	John Yeates
Wm Murdock	Atwood Shute	Wm. Dowell
James Peller	George Okill	Wm. Craddock
John Nixon	Redm'd Conyngham	John Wood

⁴⁴ Penn Papers, VII, 109.

⁴⁵ An ink blot obscures part of this signature.

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Wm. Moore	Jn° Reily	John Phillips
Tho's Charlton	William Shute	Abr'm Masson
James Keappock ⁴⁶	John Swift	Francis Garrigues
John Leacock	Thos Lawrence	Matthew Johns
Dani Rundle	Tho Coombe	John Lee
Thos. Gordon	George Claypoole	Tho's Penrose
Will'm Leech		

When confronted with this imposing document the two Penns, proving themselves to be hearty friends of the Church of England, presented the petitioners in 1757 with the lot asked for.⁴⁷ Richard Peters, writing a few years later to the Archbishop of Canterbury⁴⁸ tells of their interest and of their grant, adding that their "father came early over to the Church of England and bred up all his children in a regular conformity to it."

After the south end men acquired the lot, there was considerable delay in completing their plans. The Vestry did not push the business and no mention of it occurs in their minutes for nearly a year.

The gentlemen interested, however, did not give up hope. They went about getting subscribers, and on the 1st of June, 1758, a letter from Dr. Peter Sonmans "containing sundry proposals for promoting of building a new church and for the government of the same" was read before the Vestry of Christ Church.⁴⁹ No action was taken, then, but at their next meeting on the 12th, William Plumstead during the "consideration" of the matter, "produced a proposal of sundry persons, subscribers for the said Church." These proposals implied that the collecting of money and building as well as the management of it should be in the

⁴⁶ Possibly Reappock.

⁴⁷ City Hall, Philadelphia; Patent Book AA. VI, 178 *et. seq.* Dated 2 May, 1757. As the Churches were not incorporated, the Penns conveyed this lot to 5 trustees (Plumsted, Penrose, Duché, *et al.*). Duché, the surviving member, conveyed the same to the United Church in 1766.

⁴⁸ 16 Sept., 1763. Perry: *Historical Collections* II, 392.

⁴⁹ Minutes 1 June, 1758.

hands of the Vestry "until otherwise ordered by a majority of the subscribers." A vote was then taken to see if this paper should be accepted but the result was in the negative, and the business was again referred to the next meeting.⁵⁰

During the week considerable pressure must have been brought to bear upon the more conservative element in the Vestry, for on the 20th of June they "unanimously agreed that another church was much wanted." The gentlemen engineering the business had drawn up still another proposal and sent it to the Vestry in writing. Its contents were similar to the one presented at the previous meeting, putting the collection of subscriptions, building and management of the new church into the hands of the "Minister, Church-wardens and Vestry of Christ Church"; but left out the clause "until otherwise ordered by a majority of the subscribers." It went on to give the title and preamble to the several subscription papers which were as follows: "We the subscribers do hereby for ourselves severally promise to pay unto Joseph Sims the Treasurer for the New intended Church to be erected at the South End of the city of Philadelphia the sum of money against our names by us respectively hereunder sett down, to be applied for building and finishing a Church for devine Service, according to the rules and usage of the Church of England as by law established and for paying for the contiguous piece of ground purchased for the use of the said Church."⁵¹ It had been already decided, we see by this, that the lot granted by the Penns was too small and an adjoining piece was to be bought. This proposal was approved and a committee from the Vestry consisting of Dr. John Kearsley, the architect of Christ Church, William Plumsted, Jacob Duché senior, Alexander

⁵⁰ Minutes 12 June, 1758.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20 June, 1758.

Stedman, James Child, Evan Morgan and Redmond Conyngham, was appointed to take subscriptions and manage the building of the new church. They were requested to draw up plans and an estimate of the expense and to report the same at the next meeting for approval. All this while the aged rector, Dr. Jenney, feared the new church would destroy the unity of his flock. He was present at the meeting just referred to, but "was afflicted with a shortness of Breath," and therefore could not express his sentiments except in writing. This he did and they were incorporated in the minutes. It was probably for the reasons he then gave that the new church was so closely united with Christ Church for so many years. For this reason I give the address entire.

"Gentlemen,—

The condition which I am in, makes it impossible for me to express my sentiments, which I would freely do in relation to the new Church you propose to build, and therefore I think it necessary for me to deliver them in writing. Your proposal of the thing in vestry, seems to intimate that you design that it shall be in such a manner as may regularly fall under the consideration of that body, which I think it cannot do unless the design is, that both the congregations shall be united in the closest manner in doctrine, discipline, and Church government; otherwise you would make us to be *felo de se*, by contributing to ruin the peace, unity and concord of our Church, and gratify the worst motives of our enemies. And I see no way that we can keep up this unity, but by making the new Church a Chapel of ease to the old, and both together to be one congregation, under one minister or rector, (any other minister engaged, besides being his assistant, and acting as such) to be also under the same set of Church wardens and vestrymen, chosen as usual, every one having a vote in the election, and being entitled to be chosen (if a majority shall think fit) by those who have a seat or sittings in either of the Churches; and that nothing done by one, separate from the other, shall be good and valid. If you keep to this unity, I heartily join in recommending the promoting of it; otherwise I am against it, and declare that if the vestry consent to promote the building without this understanding, we betray our trust, give up the unity of the Church, and contribute to promote discord, division, and schism in it. I hope, gentlemen, as you know the condition I am in, you cannot imagine that I have any selfish view in what I say. If I had, I cannot enjoy the benefits of it long, and I solemnly declare, that the real interests of our holy Church are my sole motive.

I pray God may direct you to consider in all your consultations his glory, the good of his Church, and the eternal salvation of souls.

Robert Jenney." ⁵²

Thus given something definite to work on, the committee appointed quickly drew up a ground plan of the church, ninety feet long by sixty feet broad. This being approved by the Vestry they were given the power to proceed with the work, make contracts for laying the foundations in the fall of that year, and carry on "the whole business on the most reasonable terms." The committee was "desired to apply to George Fudge and the owner of the lott adjoining him on the South side of the church ground and know on what terms they will sell their said lotts."⁵³ To this committee was added Joseph Sims "Treasurer for ye new church" on June 27th, and in September at the request of the others, Atwood Shute, John Wilcocks, Samuel McCall Jr., James Humphreys and William Bingham were ordered to join them "for ye better carrying on the collection, etc."⁵⁴

The lot granted by the Penns was situated, as shown above, on the corner of Third and Pine Streets, having a frontage of 102 feet on Third and 178 feet on Pine Street.⁵⁵ The committee lost no time in acquiring adjoining lots and on July 28, 1758, bought from a certain Charles Edgar one of the lots referred to above on the "South side of the Church ground." It was 62 feet wide and 396 feet long extending all the way from Third to Fourth Streets. At the same time they bought a lot joining this, and fronting on Fourth Street, 40 feet wide and 198 feet long.⁵⁶ They paid £360 for the two lots. The remaining section at the corner of

⁵² Minutes 20 June, 1758.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 27 June, 1758.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 Sept., 1758.

⁵⁵ Patent Book (City Hall, Phila.), A.A. VI, 178 *et seq.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 357 *et seq.*

Fourth and Pine Streets, comprising eleven city lots was not acquired until October 14, 1782. This was 102 feet deep and 218 feet long.⁵⁷ This gave to the Church and burial ground from Third to Fourth on Pine Street (396 feet) and a frontage of 164 feet on Third and 204 feet on Fourth Street.⁵⁸

V.

BUILDING ST. PETER'S CHURCH.

Of the actual building of the new church, not named until 1761, little is known. From the financial statements and reference in the Vestry minutes⁵⁹ it is evident that Robert Smith was the master architect-builder in charge. Dr. John Kearsley, who had designed Christ Church, without a doubt worked with Smith in drawing up the plans. He headed the building committee. Both Smith and the physician belonged to the Carpenter's Company, and may have worked in co-operation before. In the published history of the Carpenter's Company the statement is made that the State House was erected from the plans by Robert Smith "assisted by the amateur labors of Rev. J. Kearsley." Mr. Jackson, however, points out the fact that Smith's plans were rejected by the commission of which he was a member. Smith, nevertheless, had a considerable reputation as an architect. Not only was he a master carpenter, but a designer of buildings as well. He drew the plans for Carpenter's Hall, and as chairman of their building committee was in charge of its construction. He is said to have designed Zion

⁵⁷ Patent Book (City Hall, Phila.), No. 1, p. 78 *et seq.*

⁵⁸ For brief of these deeds see "Register of Real Estate of United Churches," pp. 10-13. In Christ Church tower vault.

⁵⁹ 3 Apr., 1764.

Lutheran Church, which stood at 4th and Cherry Streets; a beautiful piece of church architecture. He also was the architect of the original Nassau Hall, Princeton; and as engineer for the local defense of Philadelphia during the Revolution, built the *chevaux-de-frise* for the obstruction of the Delaware River. "By all odds," says Mr. Jackson, "he was the most distinguished architect in Philadelphia during the middle eighteenth century."⁶⁰

The committee on building the new church was somewhat hampered by the financial problem, as we shall see later; but they went right ahead. The cornerstone was laid, in the fall of 1758 at the southeast corner of the building, on the lot given by the Penns. As Dr. Jenney, then seventy years old, was indisposed, William Sturgeon, his assistant, represented him at the ceremonies.

The Pennsylvania Gazette (21 Sept., 1758) gives the following account. "Last week the wall of the new Church on the corner of Pine and Third streets, was begun, upon the Lot given by the Honorable the Proprietaries. The first Stone was laid in the South-east Corner by one of the Wardens of Christ Church. The reverend Dr. Jenney, who was then much indisposed, could not be there, but the reverend Mr. Sturgeon being present, offered up proper Prayers on the Occasion: and among other Petitions, intreated the Almighty to bless and prosper the Undertaking, and that he would be pleased so to touch the Hearts of all our People, as to dispose them generously to contribute towards carrying on and finishing the Work, and that his Glory and the Salvation of Souls, might be promoted thereby.

"Contributions for this Church are taken in by Doctor John Kearsley, William Plumstead, Jacob Duché, Alexander Doctman, James Child, Evan Morgan, Redmond Conyngham, Attwood Shute, John Wilcocks, Joseph Sims, Samuel McCall, junior; William Bingham and James Humphreys; who are appointed for that service by the vestry of Christ Church."⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Early Philadelphia Architects and Engineers*, Part II, "Pioneer Builders." Phila. 1922, 55-69.

⁶¹ Through carelessness the date of the laying of the cornerstone has been erroneously given and is generally believed to be the 21st of September, 1758. cf. *St. Peter's Parish, Sesquicentennial Number*, Phila., 1911, p. xxv.

The original plans for the church evidently called for small windows above the tall ones, as in Christ Church; for on the 7th of February, 1759, the committee decided to alter the plan and place the taller above and the shorter below. They reported it to the Vestry and received its approval.⁶²

The Vestry by this time felt they should inform the Bishop of London of their undertaking and the reason for it, with a hint for a little financial assistance. It is amusing to note that they seemed to have changed their opinions as to why they were building the new church. The letter reads: "This is become a large and populous city and in great need of more churches for want of which we loose our people among the many Societies of Dissenters with which this city abounds and some who are not inclined to join them stay at home for want of Room at church for which reason the vestry lately came to a resolution to build another large church as soon as possible by the Voluntary Contributions of our own people, the work is accordingly begun and many have given bountifully thereto and we are in hopes that *with a little assistance from our Mother Country* it will in another year be ready for devine service—it is to be a neat and handsome building, 90 feet long and 60 broad founded on a lott of ground given for that purpose by the honble our Proprietaries."⁶³ Whether or not they received the "little assistance" is not known.

By April of 1760 the new building was well on its way to completion and ready to receive the two old bells of Christ Church which the vestry ordered to be removed there for its use.⁶⁴ Watson writing in 1830 says "the bell in its [St. Peter's] cupola, (the best at

⁶² Minutes 7 Feb., 1759.

⁶³ Vestry to the Bishop of London 7 Feb., 1759. Mss. draft copy in Christ Church tower vault, Drawer 11.

⁶⁴ Minutes 14 Apr., 1760.

present in the city for its tones) was the same, as told to me by Bishop White, which had occupied the tree-crotch at Christ Church.'⁶⁵ Watson got the tradition that a bell once hung in the tree-crotch, from a friend of his who had talked with an old negro woman who died in 1802 at the age of one hundred and sixteen years!⁶⁶ She, according to Watson, said she remembered the first wooden structure of Christ Church and described the bell. The probability of truth in such tradition seems very small. At any rate, as early as 1712 "the little bell" and "great bell" were spoken of in a proposition to the Vestry, according to Dorr,⁶⁷ so that we can infer these bells were very old.

On August 14th, 1761, the Building Committee reported to the Vestry that the new church was then ready to be opened. At this meeting the question of a name for it was discussed and it was finally resolved "that the said church be named St. Peter's."⁶⁸

It does not seem out of place here to give a brief description of the church. It stands today, with the exception of the substitution of a belfry-tower and spire for its quaint belfry-cupola in 1842, practically the same as it was in the 1760's. The type of architecture is what has been called "pure Colonial" or "Georgian." Its walls were built entirely of brick; and were, as has been seen, 90 feet long and 60 broad.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Watson, I, 413.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 378.

⁶⁷ Dorr, 38. Vestry minutes before 1717 have been destroyed and I have not found this "proposition" referred to. Dorr, 37, also makes the statement that the large bell was presented in 1702.

⁶⁸ Minutes 14 Aug., 1761.

⁶⁹ Jackson, in *Pioneer Builders* (p. 31), after quoting from a letter of Robert Turner to Penn, says: "His statement [i.e. Turner's] concerning brick manufacture should set at rest the frequently repeated assertion that this or that building in Philadelphia was erected with brick brought from England. No building erected in this city was built from imported brick and many years' research has failed to discover the origin of the legend."

The structure is $2\frac{1}{2}$ stories high, having pedimental ends. Its fenestration has been very much admired by architectural critics.⁷⁰ The round-headed upper windows have fifteen-paned lower sashes and twenty-paned upper, above which twelve keystone-shaped panes and one semicircular pane form the round top. The large chancel window at the East end has one hundred and eight rectangular panes in its central section, with twenty-eight keystone-shaped ones arranged around the semicircular one at its round top. On each side of this is a side section forming altogether what is called the Palladium. Arranged about this are four smaller round-headed windows, with a circular one in the pediment above, giving a beautiful impression of symmetry.

Within are the original white square-box pews with doors, and seats facing both ways, those of the gallery being similarly arranged. The galleries, supported by plain columns, are panelled in front, as well as the pews, reading desk and pulpit. This quaint reading desk and lofty wine-glass pulpit, together with the sounding board overhead and chancel rail were not completed when the church was opened but were finished a few years later (1764). A unique feature is the location of the reading desk and pulpit at the west end and the chancel at the east end, compelling the minister to walk down the center aisle from one to the other preceded by the vergers with his mace. The congregation can face either way.

Above and behind the pulpit is a large handsomely moulded panel surmounted by a broken pedimental head, with a carved floreated design in high relief within the break. Tradition has it that this panel was originally intended to contain the Penn Coat of Arms, but I find no historical evidence of the fact. At any rate it has remained plain. The whole aspect is one

⁷⁰ Cousins and Riley: *Colonial Architecture of Philadelphia*, 134, 150 et seq.

of plainness and simple dignity which is very pleasing and restful. The structure was surmounted by a small wooden cupola or belfry, giving the whole a quaint atmosphere.⁷¹

VI.

ORGANIZATION AND OPENING.

Upon the building committee's report that St. Peter's was ready to be opened the Vestry appointed the Church-wardens, Henry Harrison and Alexander Stedman, together with Jacob Duché, Evan Morgan and Dr. John Kearsley to "prepare a plan for regulating and opening the said church."⁷²

The plan which they drew up provided that St. Peter's was to be on an equal footing with Christ Church "in every respect whatever" and was to be under the same government with it. The two congregations were to be called "The United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter's in the City of Philadelphia." Each was to be supplied by the same ministers "in such order and manner that neither of the said Churches shall claim or enjoy the service of any particular minister oftener than the other." Upon Dr. Jenney's death, which apparently was expected any day, the Vestry were to choose as many officiating ministers as they "thought fit" who were to be styled "Ministers of the United Congregations, etc."

The pews in St. Peter's were to be rented at the same rates as those in Christ Church having "the like situation." Only persons paying for a pew or sitting in either Church were entitled to a vote in the choice of a Vestry for both, which, after the next election on Easter Monday, was to be called "the Vestry of

⁷¹ Engraving of St. Peter's drawn by W. L. Breton, 1829, Vestry Room.

⁷² Minutes 13 Aug., 1761.

the United Congregations, etc." This relic of the eighteenth century suffrage remains, in form at least, today.⁷³ In thanks for the "generous gift made of the ground whereon the said St. Peter's Church stands by the Honorable, the Proprietaries of the Province," the first and best pew⁷⁴ was to be "set apart forever" for the Proprietary family and their Governors. These plans were accordingly adopted by the Vestry.⁷⁵

Dr. Jenney asked the Rev. Richard Peters, Secretary to the Governor, to preach at the Opening of St. Peter's because of his abilities and the "many services that he had done to our Church, and in particular, for having procured many generous subscriptions for the building." He, however, felt he could not accept on account of his many engagements in public business. The Rector then asked the Rev. Dr. William Smith, first Provost of the College of Philadelphia, who accepted.⁷⁶

Friday, the fourth of September, 1761, was the day set for the opening. Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, for September 10th of that year, tells us that

"The officiating clergy, and several of their Brethren together with the Church-Wardens and Vestrymen, met at Christ Church from whence they walked in regular procession [in the following order, Clerk and Sexton, Questmen; Vestrymen, two and two; the Church Wardens; the officiating clergy; other clergy]⁷⁷ to the Governor's House, and being there joined by his Honour [James Hamilton] and some members of his Council, went on to St. Peter's where an animated and well adapted Sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Smith, Provost of the College in this City, to a polite and crowded audience from these words:

"I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in forever."

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"

⁷³ By Laws of St. Peter's, adopted Dec. 8. 1891. Sec. I, Art. 2.

⁷⁴ No. 105, North Gallery.

⁷⁵ Minutes 19 Aug., 1761.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 Aug., 1761.

⁷⁷ Minutes 4 Sept., 1761.

“The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers;
let him not leave us, nor forsake us:’

“That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord
is God, and there is none else.’

I Kings, VIII, 13, 27, 57, 60.

“Everything was conducted with the utmost Decency Order and Solemnity; and after the Sermon the words of the text, which had been previously composed into an Anthem were elegantly sung by a Number of Ladies and Gentlemen to the vast Satisfaction of every Body present.”

Dr. William Smith has described the order of the service.⁷⁸ It was opened by pronouncing four verses of Scripture, from St. Matthew, Malachi, and two from Isaiah, which were followed by an occasional prayer from the Reading Desk. Then Morning Prayer was read and Psalms 84, 122 and 132. The Lessons were I Kings, Ch. VIII, and St. Matthew, Ch. XXI, 1-14. Thus far, with the exception of the Absolution, the service was conducted by the young deacon, Jacob Duché, the new assistant minister. Then followed a prayer and Baptism at the font by Dr. Smith. The remainder of the Morning Service, substituting the Collect for St. Peter's Day and the last for Good Friday for the Collect of the Day, was read by the “eldest missionary present,” Rev. Dr. Hugh Niell. This was followed by another occasional prayer with the Communion Service, the reading of the Epistle from Haggai II, 1-10, and the Gospel for St. Peter's Day, performed at the Altar by the eldest officiating Minister, William Sturgeon.⁷⁹ Dr. Smith says “to this succeeded the Sermon; and if Judgement might be formed from the attention wherewith it was received by a very crowded audience, the Author may flatter himself that now when it appears from the Press, and solicits a candid Perusal in the Closet, it may be of

⁷⁸ Smith: *Discourses on Public Occasions*, 2nd ed. London, 1762, 168, *et seq.*

⁷⁹ Dr. Jenney was apparently too ill to attend. He died four months later.

some Service; more especially that part which regards our neglected Sabbath and public Ordinances.'⁸⁰

The Vestrymen who attended this service were Redmond Conyngham, James Child, James Humphreys, Evan Morgan, Charles Stedman, William Plumsted, Jacob Duché sr., then Mayor of Philadelphia; Joseph Redman, John Kearsley, Joseph Sims, William Pyewell, Peter Sonmans, Edward Duffield, William Bingham and John Ross. The Questmen⁸¹ were Townsend White and Peter Turner; and the Wardens, both of whom attended, were Henry Harrison and Alexander Stedman.⁸²

Dr. William Smith's sermon was much appreciated and a vote of thanks was given him at the next meeting of the Vestry, which was held in St. Peter's. They also ordered that the Wardens request Dr. Smith to furnish them with a printed copy of the sermon.⁸³

St. Peter's Church was never Episcopally consecrated, as of course there was no bishop in America at that time; but, as Bishop William H. DeLancey said a century later, it was "Given to God by the hearts of its pious founders."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Smith, *Discourses*, 173.

⁸¹ Later called sidesmen, who were members of the Vestry, but seem to have had the special duty of taking up the "box-collection" on Sundays.

⁸² Minutes 4 Sept., 1761.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7 Sept., 1761.

⁸⁴ *Sermon preached at the Centennial Celebration of the Opening of St. Peter's Church. . . .* Sept. 4, 1861, p. 10.

(To be continued.)