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

BY C. P. B. JEFFERYS.

(Continued from page 65.)

X.

MUSIC AND SINGING AT ST. PETER'S, 1761–1783.

For at least two years after its opening, St. Peter's Church had no organ. The singing was conducted by a clerk who sat at the clerk's desk, probably the present "reading-desk." His other duty was to lead in the responses. This position was a coveted one, although the salary was small, and examinations or trials were held in reading and singing before the appointment. At times a failure in this test caused great disappointment and hard feelings. The reading desk is situated under the pulpit at the west end of the church. From there also prayers and the lessons were read by the officiating minister, and before the pulpit was finished (1764) the sermon was probably preached from there.

The first mention of a Clerk at St. Peter's occurs in 1762 when it was resolved by the Vestry "that William Carteright be the clerk of St. Peter's Church in the room of John Harrison who resigned." The next year it was resolved to pay the Clerk £25 a year. His

\^101 This statement is based upon comparison with a colonial church built 1713; St. Peter's Church in St. George Parish, Bermuda. Here the clerk's desk is one step below the reading desk and the pulpit above all. M. A. Leech; Sketches, 32, believes the clerk's desk at St. Peter's, Philadelphia, was in the north gallery in front of the organ.


\^103 Minutes 22 Apr., 1762.
name, however, is not given. In 1765 a Daniel Cartwright is mentioned as the "late clerk of St. Peter's church" no longer officiating there. Whether Daniel Cartwright and William Carteright are one is not known. At any rate, William Young was appointed in 1765 to take Cartwright's place. He held this office for a number of years although in 1768 he complained to the vestry that he had received no salary for "near two years." They agreed to pay the back salary and he continued in this office until about 1778 when a Mr. Tuckey is mentioned as clerk. Whether this was only a temporary appointment or not is not known. It is possible that Young was in the Continental Army. At any rate he was back at his place in 1783 and got himself into considerable trouble, on account of which he lost his position. A Mr. Brooks, who was considered "to be well-qualified for a clerk" was probably appointed in his place.

Members of the congregation apparently got together and practised special music to sing in St. Peter's before a clerk was appointed. At the opening service the words of the text of Provost Smith's sermon "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." Francis Hopkinson, in 1763, made *A collection of Psalm Tunes with a few Anthems and Hymns, for Use of the United Churches of Christ Church and St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia*. A copy of this collection is preserved in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This is prefaced by an open letter to Richard Peters

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194 Minutes 11 Apr., 1763.
195 Ibid., 24 June, 1765.
196 Ibid., 11 Apr., 1768.
197 Ibid., 19 June, 1778.
198 Ibid., 23, 28 Apr., 31 July, 1783.
199 Pennsylvania Gazette 10 Sept., 1761.
in which the editor hopes and expects the Churches will have organs in the near future.

The organ which was put in about 1764 by a subscription, turned out to be much too large. It was situated in the North gallery causing "near one-half" of it "incapable of being lett" for sittings.\textsuperscript{200} It also made the seats near it very undesirable. The rent for them was lowered to one dollar a sitting,\textsuperscript{201} but this apparently was no inducement to sit there.

John Bankson, in 1770, at the request of his father was appointed organist of St. Peter's, but only on the condition that he should serve without a salary until the church funds could afford it. Apparently the only remuneration which he received was a present from the Vestry of £10, five years later.\textsuperscript{202} The first regular organist was a Mr. Curtz appointed March 1st, 1782, and given a salary of £25 a year.\textsuperscript{203}

The Vestry after giving it about ten years' trial wanted to get rid of the huge organ, but felt obliged to ask permission of the various subscribers to it before taking any action. They therefore appointed a committee of Gerardus Clarkson and Thomas Cuthbert to wait on the subscribers and request them to sign the following preamble:

\begin{quote}
"PHILADELPHIA, December 1775.

Whereas it has been represented to us, the Subscribers, Contributers to the Organ at St. Peter's Church in this city, that the funds of the Churches have never yet enabled the Vestry to employ a regular Organist, and that the Organ is not only useless at present, but too large for the Church, and takes up the place of as many seats as if lett, would make a very considerable addition to the annual income of the Churches: We do, therefore, in consideration, of the premises and from a hearty goodwill to the prosperity of the Churches, freely consent and agree that the Rector, Church-Wardens and Vestrymen of Christ Church and St. Peter's in the city of etc. . . . do order the said organ to be taken down, as soon as they shall think proper and dispose of it on the best\
\end{quote}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textsuperscript{200} & Minutes 12 June, 1774. \\
\textsuperscript{201} & Ibid., 11 June, 1770. \\
\textsuperscript{202} & Ibid., 10 Dec., 1770; and 11 Dec., 1775. \\
\textsuperscript{203} & Ibid., 22 Nov., 1782. \\
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terms they can procure, on this express condition that the money arising from the sale of the said organ be put out to interest on good land security and at some future time applied to the purchase of an organ of more convenient size, and the support of an organist for the said Church."

Apparently the canvass was unsuccessful and the organ was left, unused. In 1779 the windows of St. Peter's needed some new panes of glass, so the glass from the doors of the organ was removed and used for the windows.

By 1782, however, the Church funds were in better shape and the Church Warden was ordered to have the organ put in good repair, but that summer the question of moving it came up again, due to the "number of persons applying for seats." The committee appointed to make alterations in Christ Church gallery was given charge of the matter. It reported on June 28th that the "Organ would be much better situated by being fixed at the west end of the Church, in a gallery to be erected for that purpose." The expense they thought would be about £225. The Vestry considered this well worth while, but thought those people who held pews in St. Peter's "in right of original subscriptions toward building the said Church" should be first consulted and given the option of the best pews built where the organ then stood, if they considered their present sittings injured by the alteration. Their consent was obtained and the present interior of St. Peter's shows the result, although the proposed alterations were not carried out until 1789. Instead, however, of the gallery being erected at the west end,
causing the pulpit and reading desk to be removed, it was built over the chancel at the east end.210

The Organ, however, was gotten into shape and a committee was appointed to regulate the singing of music at St. Peter’s, in 1782,211 consisting of Dr. Clarkson, Chaloner, Captain Price, and William Aldock. They were to make arrangements with Matthew Whitehead or some other suitable person to instruct twelve persons in singing, to accompany the organ.212 This is the first mention of a choir at St. Peter’s, which has grown today to be one of the finest in the country.

The following March (1783) Mr. Law, a “teacher of Church Psalmody from New England,” wanted to give a concert with his scholars at St. Peter’s and was granted permission to do so.213 Consequently Law put advertisements in the papers giving notice of the intended performance of “some religious pieces of music” and gave the price of admission as 2/6. Some “respectable members” of the congregation were very much incensed that admission should be charged and told the rector their feelings. Such objection was raised that another notice was sent to the papers, notifying the public that admission was free. The money was refunded to those who had bought tickets.214

Everything seemed to be smoothed out. The audience assembled and singing started when a commotion arose in the audience, apparently spoiling the concert. This “rude and disorderly behavior” due to “several corroborating circumstances” was partly laid to William Young, the Clerk of St. Peter’s. He was immediately ordered by the Vestry “to desist in officiating in his said clerkship” until the following

210 Minutes 31 Jan., 1789.
211 Ibid., 10 Dec., 1782.
212 Ibid., 7 Jan., 1783.
213 Ibid., 28 Mar., 1783.
214 Ibid., 18 Apr., 1783.
Monday, when he should appear before them to explain his misbehavior. The other persons concerned were brought before Justice Plunket Fleeson, then Presiding Judge of the City Court of Philadelphia, for a hearing. Upon full examination of the business, he "held the delinquents to bail for good behavior." Young appears to have been let off with a severe censure and the loss of his clerkship. Jealousy, on the part of the clerk, at Law's success and popularity evidently caused this ungentlemanly conduct. Possibly Law had been training a choir to replace the clerk, therefore he arranged a hostile demonstration.

XI.

JACOB DUCHÉ AND THE REVOLUTION.

Upon the resignation of Richard Peters, Jacob Duché, the senior assistant minister, was unanimously elected Rector of the United Churches, which office he accepted on October 30th. In the meantime, the controversy between the mother country and the Colonies had gotten well under way. The ministers of the Anglican Church in America were put in a very difficult position. They were, in a very real sense, officers of the crown and by their oath of ordination had sworn allegiance to England. If a break occurred, they would have to choose between breaking their ordination oaths, or remaining loyal to Great Britain. In the case of the three ministers at St. Peter's, Duché, White and

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215 Minutes 23 Apr., 1783.
216 Ibid., 28 Apr., 1763.
217 Andrew Law of Connecticut was engaging in a campaign for "the improvement of Psalmody," and opposing the "new tunes" introduced by William Billings. It is known he also operated in the Philadelphia Presbyterian and Baptist Churches.
218 Minutes 25 Sept., 1775.
Coombe, all were born and brought up in Philadelphia and naturally sympathized strongly with the merchants there. Apparently until the Declaration of Independence, it never occurred to them that a final break would be made. Consequently, Duché and Coombe, at least, heartily took the colonial side in all their actions.

Duché had a great reputation as a talker and devout man. When the Continental Congress met at Carpenter’s Hall, September 6th, 1774, the method of voting was first settled and then upon a motion that the session should be opened with prayer, Duché was chosen to do it. John Adams in a letter to his wife in Boston gives an interesting and vivid picture of the scene.

“When the Congress first met, Mr. Cushing made a motion that it should be opened with prayer. It was opposed by Mr. Jay of New York and Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina, because we were so divided in religious sentiments, some Episcopalians, some Quakers, some Anabaptists, some Presbyterians, and some Congregationalists, that we could not join in the same act of worship. Mr. Samuel Adams arose and said, he was no bigot, and could hear a prayer from a gentleman of piety and virtue, who was at that time a friend to his country. He was a Stranger in Philadelphia but had heard that Mr. Duche (Duchay they pronounce it) deserved that character and therefore he moved that Mr. Duché an Episcopal Clergyman, might be desired to read prayers to the Congress tomorrow morning. The motion was seconded and passed in the affirmative. Mr. Randolph, our President, waited on Mr. Duche and received for an answer that, if his health would permit, he certainly would. Accordingly next morning, he appeared with his clerk in his pontificals and read several prayers in the established form, and then read the Collect for the seventh day of September which was the Thirty-fifth Psalm. You must remember that this was the next morning after we heard the horrible rumor of the cannonade of Boston. I never saw a greater effect upon an audience. It seemed as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that morning.

“After this Mr. Duche unexpectedly to everybody struck out into an

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220 “Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me.

“Lay hand upon the shield and buckler, and stand up to help me.

“Bring forth the spear and stop the way against them that persecute my: say unto my soul—I am thy salvation,” etc., 35th Psalm.
extemporary prayer, which filled the bosom of every man present. I must confess I never heard a better prayer or one so well pronounced. Episcopal as he is, Dr. Cooper himself never prayed with such fervor, such ardor, such earnestness and pathos, and in language so elegant and sublime, for America, for the Congress, for the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and especially the town of Boston. It has had an excellent effect upon everybody here. I must beg you to read that Psalm. If there was any faith in the sortes Virgilianae or sortes Homericae or especially in the sortes Biblicae, it would be thought providential.

"It will amuse your friends to read this letter and the thirty-fifth Psalm to them. Read it to your father and Mr. Willard. I wonder what our Braintree churchmen think of this. Mr. Duche is one of the most ingenious men and best characters and greatest orators in the episcopal order upon this continent; yet a zealous friend of liberty and country."

The fact that Duche was chosen for this, and made such a deep impression, gave the patriots much more confidence in the Churchmen, whom they thought would naturally side with the mother country. Samuel Adams gives as his reason for nominating a "clergymen of that denomination," that "many of our warmest friends are members of the Church of England"; therefore he thought it "prudent" to do so. Joseph Warren to whom this reason and an account of the event was written published the letter in the Boston Gazette because, he wrote, "I have been informed that the conduct of some few persons of the Episcopal denomination, in maintaining principles inconsistent with the rights and liberties of mankind, has given offense to some of the zealous friends of this country."

Congress was very much impressed and voted that

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221 The prayer Duche later used as Chaplain of Congress has repeatedly and incorrectly been quoted as this extemporary prayer, notably in National Cyclopedia of American Biography and Butler: Washington at Valley Forge," etc. This is the only record of the contents of this prayer.
224 J. Warren to Messrs Printers, ibid.
the "Thanks of the Congress be given to Mr. Duché . . . for performing Devine Service and for the excellent Prayer which he composed and delivered on the Occasion."

Joseph Reed told John Adams that "we were never guilty of a more masterly stroke of polity than in moving that Mr. Duché might read prayers."

At the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia a century later a Bible was laid open at the thirty-fifth Psalm in Carpenter's Hall. Visitors thinking it was the Bible Duché used tore out not only the Psalm, but almost every page in it to keep as souvenirs. The remnant is now one of the relics of the centennial year. It was published by the American Bible Society at a comparatively recent date.

At St. Peter's, however, no change in the service was made. The prayers for King George and the royal family continued to be read every Sunday.

On May 10th, 1775, Duché was requested to open the Second Session of the Continental Congress with prayer, and was given another hearty vote of thanks. July 20th was set aside by Congress for a day of fasting and prayer and Duché was appointed to preach before it, assembled at Christ Church. Upon the death of Peyton Randolph, President of the Congress, he was again asked to preach at the funeral. In consequence of these definite acts on behalf of the rebellious Colonies, he was walking on very thin ice in respect to his superiors in England. The sermon which he preached before Congress on July 20th was called "The American Vine" and was far from "neutral." Even worse than this he made a very patriotic address

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225 Journals, I, 27.
227 Journals, II, 12.
228 Ibid., II, 22.
229 Ibid., III, 303.
before the First Battalion of the City of Philadelphia on the 7th of July called “The Duty of Standing Fast in our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties.” This was dedicated to General Washington. Coombe was not more careful in his utterances and the sermon which he preached at St. Peter’s on the Day of Fast was very fiery and approbatory of war.230

The other clergy in Philadelphia felt that they should be frank with the Bishop of London and tell him the circumstances under which they were placed. A joint letter was therefore written saying they were afflicted in mind at the “controversy between the Parent country and these colonies.” They had thought it their duty to keep their pulpits “wholly clear from anything bordering on this contest” but at the same time trying to “avoid whatever might irritate the tempers of the people” or create a suspicion that they were opposed to the interest of the country in which they lived. The time had come when this neutrality was being misconstrued and they were forced to take an active part. “Our Congregations,” they wrote “of all ranks have associated themselves determined never to submit to the Parliamentary claim of taxing them at pleasure; and the Blood already spilt in maintaining this claim is unhappily alienating the affections of many from the Parent Country, and cementing them closer in the most fixed purpose of a Resistance dreadful even in contemplation.” Their people, they went on to say, continually called upon them to take one side or the other, and think they should have advice from the pulpit. These requests could not be refused without losing all their influence and could not be complied with without being interpreted as traitorous to Great Britain. Since they were at such a distance from their superiors

230 All three sermons were published in pamphlet form at Philadelphia in 1775.
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and unable to ask advice they had followed their own consciences in their actions. Duché’s sermon before the First Battalion was admitted and his part taken in opening the Congresses explained. Duché’s signature appears with the others at the foot of this confession or excuse whichever way it may be taken.231

When Independence was declared, Duché was very much troubled, but forced himself to believe, as he later declared, that it was a mere temporary measure adopted to terrorize the Crown and thus procure favorable terms for the Colonies.232 On the very day of the Declaration, 4th July, 1776, Duché heard of it and called a special meeting of the Vestry at his own house. They passed the following resolution:

“Whereas the Honorable Continental Congress have resolved to declare the American colonies to be free and independent states; in consequence of which it will be proper to omit those petitions in the liturgy wherein the King of Great Britain is prayed for, as inconsistent with the said declaration. Therefore, resolved, that it appears to this vestry to be necessary, for the peace and wellbeing of the churches to omit the said petitions; and the Rector and Assistant Ministers of the United Churches are requested in the name of the vestry and their constituents, to omit such petitions as are above mentioned.”

The Rector, Jacob Duché, was present at this meeting. The Vestry present were Thomas Cuthbert, Jacob Duché sr., Robert Whyte, Charles Stedman, Edmund Physick, James Biddle, Peter DeHaven, James Reynolds, and Gerardus Clarkson.233

This was on Thursday, and on Sunday, the 7th, prayers for the King were omitted in St. Peter’s and Christ Church. As these were the first of the Anglican Churches in the New American States to make this omission, it gave a strong precedent for the others to follow. St. Peter’s had now definitely set herself on

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232 Duché to Washington, 8 Oct., 1777.
233 Minutes 4 July 1776.
192  *St. Peter’s Church, Philadelphia, 1753–1783.*

record, on the side of the States, and her patriotic congregation was satisfied. The next day, July 8th, her Rector was appointed first Chaplain to Congress and ‘desired to attend every morning at nine o’clock.’ President Hancock’s letter to him was as follows:

"Philadelphia, July 8 1776

Sir: It is with the greatest pleasure I inform you that the Congress have been induced, from a consideration of your piety, as well as your uniform and zealous attachment to the rights of America to appoint you their Chaplain. It is their request, which I am commanded to signify to you, that you will attend on them, every morning at nine o’clock.

I have the honour to be sir, with respect your most obedient and very humble servant.

John Hancock

President."

This put Duché in a very difficult position as, in order to accept, he had to swear allegiance to the United States and break his ordination oath, which he had hitherto technically preserved. Whether from fear of the consequences of declining such an important office or as he later said “he thought the churches were in danger and hoped by this means to prevent any harm to them” (which latter reason seems very improbable) he accepted.

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234 *Journals* V, 520.
235 Duché to Washington, 8 Oct., 1777.

(To be continued.)