In Memoriam

HENRY LENTZ ELDER
and his wife
MARIA LOUISA TAYLOR ELDER
and their children
Cornelia Maria Louisa Elder
Julia Virginia Elder Maria Gertrude Elder
Henry Clay Elder George Taylor Elder
William Thomas Elder
Kate Taylor Elder Emily Lydia Elder

Erected in the year of Our Lord 1930
a grateful reminder of abounding benevolence
to perpetuate the witness and influence
of this historic Sanctuary

He that soweth sparingly Shall reap sparingly
II Cor 9:6

Mural tablet unveiled in Christ Church, Philadelphia, June 25, 1930
To speak of the architectural spirit of Christ Church is to recall the spirit of the age which it so truly represents, for if art is man's thought expressed in his handiwork, architecture is a record of the ideas, habits of the life and culture of the generations which create it.

Without dwelling upon the varied influences which moulded our colonial civilization, and the effect of cross-currents of population on its intellectual and aesthetic development, it is sufficient to say that Christ Church as an edifice belongs to the period in our annals when racially Penn's followers were largely a homogeneous people, whose customs, art and traditions were those of the mother country.

Their brick built houses were indigenous to the clay bed on which the town was founded and followed to that extent the contemporary architecture of London and the coast towns of seventeenth century England, whence came so many of the first settlers,—merchants and craftsmen. They built at the outset for their immediate needs, using materials at hand, with scant regard for sophisticated notions of design, and perhaps through the influence of environment, thus foreshadowed the characteristics which distinguish American Colonial architecture from its old world prototype.

Christ Church in its primitive form was built likewise to serve the immediate use of the congregation—to be reconstructed and embellished later in its existing form.

* An address delivered by Mr. Sellers in Christ Church, Philadelphia, June 25, 1930, at the unveiling of mural tablets.
Erected on its present site, then on the outskirts of the fringe of buildings along the river front which formed the town, the Church was one of the first if not the first sacred edifice within the English settlement.

The neighboring Meeting House, the Market, Court House and other buildings which soon followed close by on High Street formed with it an embryo civic center, although not as anticipated in Penn’s plan.

Philadelphia founded a half century after the neighboring colonies rapidly surpassed their towns in growth and mercantile importance and was soon to be proclaimed the Athens of America.

Its architecture kept pace with its cultural progress and in character reflected more definitely the Palladianism of that era of classic art of which this Church was our first notable example.

Here in the colonies the master builder, governed by rules of proportion and practice, in collaboration with the discriminating taste of his employer, determined the plan and details of building. Some knowledge of architecture was then deemed essential to a liberal education, and few private libraries were without works on the classic orders or the science of building, then widely eclectic.

Thus the early reconstruction of Christ Church in its present aspect had the guiding hand of Dr. John Kearsley deputed by the Vestry to direct the operation. As a member of the Provincial Assembly he was later one of the three superintendents, all members of this Parish, who were charged with the building of the State House. His talent as an amateur was widely recognized and to quote the Pennsylvania Gazette at the time of his decease, "he was well acquainted with the Principles of Architecture, a monument of which we have in Christ Church—a building which (in the Opinion of Strangers) in point of Elegance and Taste surpasses everything of the kind in America."
This contemporary opinion was not overdrawn nor unmerited for from the laying of the corner stone in the presence of the Governor and other provincial dignitaries, Christ Church was viewed as one of the chief ornaments of the City, long before the notable events which have made it a patriotic shrine, and in this it reflects the skill and taste of the designers.

Compared with the early architecture of the town, it led one contemporary visitor to voice what was perhaps a general impression, that upon entering the Church he was struck by its loftiness well befitting its sacred character. This is echoed by Thomas Maken, the schoolmaster poet in his simple Latin rhymes descriptive of Pennsylvania, transcribed by Robert Proud, the historian, where in referring to the City’s houses for sacred use, in 1729, he writes:

"Of these appears one in the grander style;
But yet unfinished is the lofty pile.

* * *
A lofty tower is founded on the ground
For future bells to make the distant sound."

Civic pride in the edifice found popular expression when funds were required to erect the tower and citizens unaffiliated with the parish volunteered to contribute and did assist in finishing the fabric.

It was in the same liberal spirit and somewhat as the Archbishop of Canterbury recently said of the arts of the middle ages fostered under the patronage of the ancient church and now conserved under the present establishment, that after all the family was the same although there were variations in the genealogical table.

While vicissitudes of time and chance have left their impress on Christ Church there has persisted a restraining desire to preserve the spirit of its architecture. Thus, when expediency and ever-changing taste led to innovations from time to time, they have
been followed by recurring efforts to harmonize and restore, and at no time during its history has this purpose been so marked as within the present generation.

Besides appreciative attempts to preserve the original appearance of the Church, the ground to the north of the yard has been cleared of buildings, a safeguard against fire, and conveys an idea of the more open character of the surroundings as our ancestors saw it when the Church was on the outskirts of the town.

These betterments have had the generous support of individuals and our City authorities, and it is partly in commemoration of this and to perpetuate the names of the founders that the present mural tablets are erected.

With appreciation and foresight the Vestry and Rector have aimed to make these memorials harmonize with the architectural spirit of the building, and to further this end the problem was intrusted to a committee representing the Vestry, the Architectural Commission of the Diocese and the Chapter Committee on Preservation of Historic Monuments of the Institute of Architects.

In the study of the designs, the purpose has been to adhere to traditional forms with an added significance given to the Clergy and Founders tablets by recalling the character of ancient memorials most closely contemporaneous with the founding of the parish.

Over the names of the Founders the cartouch has been carved with two swords in saltire, the hilts in base, surmounted by a miter—the escutcheon of the See of London under which the parish was governed for a century until the Revolution established it as the mother church of America.

On the opposite tablet above the names of the Colonial Clergy has been placed the insignia of the Society for the Propogation of the Gospel which extended
its nursing care to this and other churches throughout the colonies.

Such details treated in the spirit of the original architecture, and the edifice preserved as it appeared when identified with the events associated with it, Christ Church is a teacher of history by helping us to better visualize those events. We are told that we need physical objects to arouse the imagination and fix our thoughts on the ideas they represent, and when we consider the influence of tradition, precedent and example on our lives and actions, we must admit that there is practical utility in the conservation of such surviving landmarks.

The architecture of the past has been termed "fossil history." This may seem apt where fragments are preserved in museums, but an ancient landmark complete on its original site and in its original aspect imparts a truer sense of reality to the past and to the events with which it is identified. This association of ideas and feeling of reality prompted someone to say of the ancient cathedrals and churches of the old world, that they seems to be kneeling in audible worship in their mantles of stone.

In conclusion, it is the power to awaken imagination, stimulate patriotism and an appreciation of our past arts, that gives intrinsic value to our landmarks and justifies their conservation, besides the sacred uses to which this Church is dedicated.

Few cities have had such a rich heritage as Philadelphia possessed in its rapidly vanishing background of colonial architecture, and the public owes a debt of gratitude to the custodians of Christ Church in their efforts to conserve the original spirit of this shrine—as a present inspiration and a legacy to those who follow after us.