WELSH TRACT CHURCH and ELDER JOHN GREEN EUBANKS

by
Percy Roberts

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CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF WELSH TRACT CHURCH

Welsh Tract Church, the oldest Primitive Baptist Church in the United States, is located about two miles south of Newark, Del., about ½ mile off highway #896 toward Iron Hill, which can be seen in the background.

The original entry in the church record says: "In the Spring of 1701 some of us who were members of the churches of Jesus Christ in the counties of Pembroke and Carmarthan in south Wales of Great Britain professing believers in baptism, laying on of hands, elections and final perseverance in grace were moved and encouraged in our own minds to come to these parts of Pennsylvania and after obtaining leave of the churches it seemed good to the Lord and to us that we should be formed into a church order, as we were a sufficient number and one of us was a minister; that was accomplished and withal letters commendatory were given us that if we should meet with any congregation of Christian people who held the same faith with us we might be received by them as brethren in Christ."

In June of 1701, Thomas Griffith, their pastor, Griffith Nicholas, Evon Edmond, John Edward, Elisha Thomas, Enoch Morgan, Richard David, James David, Lewis Edmond, Elizabeth Griffith, Mary John, Margaret Mathias, Mary Thomas, Jennet David, Jennet Morris and Elizabeth Griffith bade farewell to their brethren in Wales and sailed from Milford Haven in the ship JAMES AND MARY and landed in Philadelphia on September 8th.

They were courteously received by the few Baptists then in Philadelphia and were advised to settle about Pennepack, a few miles north of the city on a creek of that name, which they did. They remained there about a year and a half, during which time their church membership increased from 16 to 37 and they lived much scattered during that time but kept up their weekly and monthly meetings among themselves.

They, with many other Welsh people, purchased a tract of land from William Penn, known as Welsh Tract, which was 30,000 acres of land south and west of Newark, Delaware, on October 15, 1701. Two of the agents who procured this grant of land were David Evans and William Davis. They were probably Presbyterians for, soon after the grant was made, Evans became a Presbyterian minister and was the first minister of the Pencader Presbyterian Church at what is now Glasgow.

The first church at Welsh Tract was built from logs cut in the surrounding woods in 1703. It was commonly known by the name of "The Baptist Meeting House by the Iron Hill." The present building, still in a good state of preservation, has a quaint, picturesque appearance. Built in 1746, the bricks used in its construction came to New Castle, Delaware, by boat from England as ballast. The women of the church transported the bricks in panniers upon mules, so that the men would be free to build the church.

The lot comprises six acres of ground, four of which were given by James James, one of the first members, by conveyance dated January 20, 1709. The rest was purchased from Abraham Emmet on April 20, 1868, the conveyance signed by Andrew Fisher. Joining this lot is a plantation, the bequest of Hugh Morris, with a dwelling house suitable as a residence for the pastor. David Benedict (1779-1874), the historian, said that in 1803 the Welsh Tract Church was very handsomely endowed. This endowment, according to Morgan Edwards (1722-1795), yielded an annual income of about $500.00.

From 1701 to 1926 there were 18 pastors in order: Thomas Griffith, Elisha Thomas, M. E. Thomas, Enoch Morgan, Owen Thomas, David Davis, John Sutton (received in full communion by letter from Scotch Plains), John Boggs, Gideon Farrell, Stephen M. Woolford, Samuel Trott, William K. Robinson, Thomas Barton, George W. Staton, John G. Sawin, Joseph L. Staton, William Grafton and John Green Eubanks.

Nine former pastors are buried in Welsh Tract Cemetery: M. E. Thomas, David Davis, John Boggs, Gideon Farrell, Enoch Morgan, William K. Robinson, George W. Staton, Joseph Staton and John G. Eubanks. Elder B. F. Coulter did not serve Welsh Tract Church but he was a minister and is buried in the cemetery.

The mother of Jefferson Davis is buried in Welsh Tract Cemetery, as is Reese Ryddarcks. Tradition says that he was an officer in Cromwell's army during the troublesome times that preceded the trial and execution of Charles I. Ryddarcks seems to have been a man of some distinction, for his tombstone is the only one in the cemetery with a Latin inscription. It reads: "Riceus Rythroughnatus, apud ffanwenogg in, comitahe Cardigan et hic sepulcus fuit anno domini 1707 aetatis fuse 87." Translated, it says: "Reese Ryddarcks, born at Hanwenog, in Cardigan county and here was buried in 1707 A. D. being 87 years of age."

Revolutionary Soldiers and Patriots buried in Welsh Tract Church Cemetery are: John Boggs, Ebenezer Booth, Thomas Cooch, Thomas Cooch, Jr., William Cooch, Patrick Coulter, Samuel Eccles, Francis Gottier, John Goudy, John Griffith, Benjamin Hugg, John James, Morgon

Jones, Solomon Maxwell, Samuel Mc Mullen, Isaac Menough, Robert Middleton, James Miles, Hance Miller, David Price, David Shakespeare, Robert Shields, John Simonton, Uriah Slack, Thomas Thomas, Mathias Tyson, Solomon Underwood, John Wattson, Joseph Wattson, Lewis Wattson and Thomas Wattson.

On August 4, 1725, John Evans conveyed a few acres of the 400 acres of land he had purchased from the son of William Penn to be used for the erection and use of a Baptist Meeting House, known as London Tract Church, just over the Delaware state line in Chester County, Pennsylvania near Strickersville.

On November 22, 1780, about 18 members of Welsh Tract Church were constituted a church at London Tract Baptist Meeting House.

In 1781, Duck Creek and Cow Marsh Churches were constituted. Mispillion was started in 1783, Wilmington was started in 1785 and Bethel was started in 1786.

Bethel Primitive Baptist Church was organized as an arm of Welsh Tract Church in 1786. It was located along the north side of the Christiana-Hare's Corner road, just a mile west of the Dupont Highway. This was just one year before Delaware became the first state to ratify the Federal Constitution, four years before the dreaded yellow fever epidemic swept through Wilmington and John Fitch's steamboat made its first scheduled trip from Philadelphia, via Wilmington, up the Christina River to Christiana Bridge.

Bethel Primitive Baptist Church was constituted a separate charge in 1839 and four additional acres of land were purchased from Mary Mc Cullough in 1849. The early log and frame church is long since gone, but the stone foundations were still traceable in 1956, according to an article in the Wilmington EVENING JOURNAL for August 28, 1956.

In a separate section of the Bethel Cemetery lie the remains of bodies originally buried in the Wilmington Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery, formerly between 10th and 11th and King and French Streets. In 1913, the bodies were dug up and re-interred at Bethel Cemetery because the property had been sold to the Wilmington Housing Authority for the purpose of constructing a City-County Building, known as the Public Building and dedicated officially on May 25, 1916.

In this group is the marker for Abigail Ainger, wife of Elder Thomas Ainger, who died on February 23, 1793. Ephraim Rittenhouse, 19th century minister at Welsh Tract Church and the father of Alanson E. Rittenhouse, was among the bodies buried in Wilmington and moved to Bethel Cemetery. Revoluntionary Soldiers and Patriots buried in Bethel Cemetery include: Theodore Ainger, Richard Britton, James Hixharvey,

Richard Mitchell, Augustus Scott, John Vaughn, William Welch and, in the original section, is a marker for Francis Lowen Cooch, who died August 27, 1791.

The Delaware Association of Primitive Baptists was organized in 1795 and its members included Welsh Tract Church, Cow Marsh Church, Duck Creek Church and Wilmington Church. The first meeting was held in 1796. The association was composed of five churches and 293 members in 1801. There were seven churches and 197 members in 1879. The falling off was due to the division that took place at Black Rock, Maryland, on September 28, 1832, when they and many others were designated "Old School Baptists" or "Primitive Baptists". The Old School Baptists were hated and persecuted because they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine.

The International Encyclopedia in 1903 listed 1800 churches, 900 ministers and 45,000 members under the name of Primitive Baptists.