



ON THE OCCASION OF THE

150th BUILDING ANNIVERSARY

Pencader Presbyterian Church Building & Surroundings

A Brief Biography



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In 1684, William Penn granted 40,000 acres in Pennsylvania for a Welsh Tract. It later became the home of the Great Valley Church. Possibly because of the ore in Iron Hill, a number of Welsh from the Pennsylvania tract moved to Delaware.

In 1701, William Penn granted an additional 30,000 acres in northern Delaware and Maryland to the Welsh. David Evans Esq., William Davies and William Willis, all of Radnor, Pennsylvania, were named as grantees. David Evans Esq., as a child, came with the rest of his family, from Glamorganshire, Wales, to Radnor in 1684. The Welsh had two Churches in this Delaware tract: Welsh Tract Baptist, on Welsh Tract Road in Newark, and this Welsh Tract Presbyterian. The Welsh Tract Baptist Church was organized in 1701, in Wales, and whose members emigrated to America, reaching Iron Hill in 1703.

This Delaware Welsh Tract Presbyterian Church was founded somewhere between 1683 (first Welsh settlers in the area) and 1710 (first written record). It was one church with two locations, until the Great Valley Church of Chester County, Pennsylvania was formed in 1714. The Presbyterians soon changed their name to "Pencader in the Welsh Tract". In 1719, the Presbytery and the Synod gave official sanction to use the name of Pencader, denoting authority. David Evans Jr., son of the grantee, David Evans Esq., was the first Pastor. David Evans Jr., a lay person was forced by the Presbytery to achieve further education. He graduated from Yale College in 1713, in a class of three. He is buried in the Pencader Cemetery. His cousin, Thomas Evans, a graduate from Carmarthen, Wales was the second pastor and is also buried in the cemetery, under one of the large, horizontal, tablets.

The term Pencader is a Welsh term (Pen cadder – short a) meaning head or chief chair, or the highest seat. It is also the name of a town in Wales where the second pastor, Thomas Evans, was born and raised. This Presbytery was one of three to be organized in 1717 and to which all churches of that faith in America were assigned. Assignment was made as follows: Long Island Presbytery includes the Colony of New York; Philadelphia Presbytery included the Colony of New Jersey and part of Pennsylvania lying north of the Great Valley; and all other churches belonged to the New Castle Presbytery.

The first church building was built between 1701 and 1710. It was a small frame building about 20 x 36 feet, low-pitched, one-story with a sharp peaked roof. It was referred to as the Meeting House. It was located at the eastern rear of the cemetery. In 1782, it was sold and moved to the southern part of the village. There it was used as a private residence until it burned down in 1913. The first resident, Margaret Black, had attended church in the structure while growing up. There still exists at least one photograph of this first building (on display).

George Whitefield split the church in 1741. The twenty seven year old English minister was the true catalyst of the "Great Awakening" in the English Colonies. He was a spell-binding evangelist whose objective was to restore the fires of religious fervor. He enthralled audiences with his unparalleled eloquence. He urged his listeners to experience a "new birth" – a sudden emotional moment of conversion and salvation and warned of the dangers of a ministry that had not experienced rebirth. Church members who did secede were called the New Side. Two new Churches were formed after Pastor Whitefield's local appearance.

The first was Head of Elk (Elkton, Maryland) and the other Pigeon Run near Red Lion, Delaware (only the cemetery remains). The second and then Pastor of Pencader Church, Thomas Evans, remained with the Old Side. He died the following year at age 46.

Preaching in the Welsh language at Pencader Church ended in 1776, with the Reverend Samuel Eakin. He passed away in 1783 and is buried under a horizontal marble slab in the above-mentioned Pigeon Run Cemetery. The Welsh language ceased being used at the Welsh Tract Baptist Church in 1801.

In August of 1777, over 18,000 British and Hessian soldiers arrived in the Chesapeake Bay aboard troopships. The British looted Elkton and the surrounding area, while many Germans came ashore at Bohemia Manor and trekked north on the Delmarva Peninsula. The soldiers formed a front line from Aiken's Tavern to Iron Hill. British General Howe used Aiken's tavern (300 feet north of this present church) as his field headquarters during the "Battle of Cooch's Bridge." Following the battle, General Howe gave orders that a detachment should meet the following morning at the Meeting House at 5 A.M. and then to escort the sick and wounded part way to Head of Elk (near Elkton) where there was a British hospital ship. Mathew Aiken Esq., the tavern owner, and who laid out "Aikentown," is buried in Pencader Cemetery and his stone is also one of the large, flat, horizontal tablets.

The second church building was erected 1782–83. It was built at this present site. "Among its builders were Jacob Faris, Peter Williams, William Whann and Joseph Thomas. The bricks were burned on the farm of Jacob Faris. It was a low brick building with brick floor and had high pews. The pulpit was in the east; perched well up towards the ceiling, with sounding board over head. Each pew had a heavy oak plank laid on the floor, to prevent the feet from coming in contact with the bricks. It had no chimneys or any arrangements for warming it. For many years the people, some of them coming from long distances upon horseback, through cold and snow, would sit through a long sermon without heat. When the subject of warming the Church was broached, it met with such opposition that it well nigh caused a schism in the Church." The second church building is found on a map drawn in 1802 for the purpose of selecting the best route for the then proposed New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike. A tollbooth was located just south of the church. The Brooks House across the street was built that year as well and yes, that is the original outhouse behind it.

The sycamore trees, which currently line the entrance to the Church, were planted in 1782-1783. Jacob Faris and Peter Williams, his brother-in-law, planted the trees. One reference refers to the trees as buttonwood trees. This may be a local name for sycamore since the fruit of the sycamore trees are called "buttonballs". Mature trees may have a height of 110 feet and trunk circumference of 11 feet. The last tree in the line to the south had been the "venerable white oak," only 68 years old at that time.

In 1789, the Church was incorporated and took the name "the Trustees of Pencader Presbyterian Church, in Pencader Hundred." The church seal (on the invitation) was procured in 1899.

In 1813, the Women's Missionary Society was organized. Their work continued for over 170 years attending to missionary needs worldwide. The society is now inactive; however, three current congregation members, Florence Moore, for many years the church organist, Sara Wagner and Ruth Campbell were all members of that Society.

In 1852, the present Church Building was erected. It is a 60 x 100 foot brick structure, which cost about \$5,000. The cost included removal of the second building. The church is an "upper room church" as the sanctuary is on the second floor.

In 1856, a manse was built 500 feet north of this site. The manse was sold as a private residence in 1984. The structure stands today. Photographs taken predating 1899 and in 2002 show little change (on display).

In 1871, a bell was installed in the steeple. The Dindigul Band bought and paid for the installation of the bell. The Dindigul Band was the name of one of many missionary societies of the Church. Dindigul is a name of a town located in southern India.

In 1899, upon the occasion of the Women's Missionary Society's 70th anniversary, "...the Trustees expended \$1,200 in repairs upon the Church edifice. The audience room was stripped, lathered and plastered, making the walls double, and are finished with a coat of tinted mortar. The building was roofed with I.C. tin and painted, inside and out, the pews and doors and wainscoting grained and new carpets on the floor." One of the Trustees, Dr. Skinner, who lived across the street in what is now called the "Brooks House," researched and recorded all the known history of the church and presented it to the Women's Missionary Society. Small aluminum trays with a picture of the Church and Reverend T. Chalmers Potter, then pastor, were produced as souvenirs for the occasion. The pictures on the trays were of a remarkable quality, but few remain in existence today (on display).

In 1904 the U.S. Geological Service determined that the sill at the church front door was 68.982 feet above mean sea level. They placed a brass disk on the sill to mark the spot, which was the starting point for all topographical measurements in the Glasgow area. This spot was chosen because it is both sheltered, yet accessible and for permanence, almost 100 years now.

In 1917, the Pencader Cemetery Association organized and incorporated. At the time of incorporation, the officers were Charles B. Evans, President; Francis A. Cooch, Vice-President; Mary M. Janvier, Secretary; and Levi H. Cooch, Treasurer. The current president is Alice Brock. She is related to the Brown and Leasure families who are a part of the association and have many family plots in the cemetery. The earliest known gravesite is John Thomas 1712. It is marked with a fieldstone, as are the stones of 1717, and 1724. These, and several other headstones are inscribed in Welsh. The fieldstones look as sharp as the day they were chiseled, while many of the later marble (limestone) markers are washed-out and illegible. The roadway through the cemetery is the original Elk River Road and the creek is called Muddy Run, which flows into Schoolhouse Creek, down the road.

In 1936, the Pencader Congregation unanimously voted to sever its relationship with the Presbytery of New Castle and the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (because of "Modernism") and joined the Presbyterian Church of America through the Presbytery of Philadelphia. It has since rejoined Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

In the early 1950's, the one room schoolhouse, Glasgow Elementary School, (at the northern end of "Aikentown" on the "Elk River Road", by the Schoolhouse Creek and now owned by a local motorcycle club), was no longer used as a school. The handheld school bell is in the possession of the church (on display). Congregation member, Sally Jordan, remembers attending school there as does Mr. Brooks across the street. His mother also taught there.

In 1955 Hurricane Connie took down the 240 year old "venerable white oak" mentioned in church records and property deeds. According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, "venerable" means "made sacred by historical recognition." The whereabouts of the preserved five foot slab of the tree and a gavel fashioned from the wood, are unknown.

About 1974, the Glasgow Methodist Church building was no longer used. The wooden structure, which sat on the Aiken's Tavern site, was finally torn down about 1991. Only its cemetery, with 9 gravesites, remains.

In 1991, DeIDOT moved Route 896 to a newly created bypass to the east of the church building, behind the cemetery. The road in front of the church building, originally called Route 896 and South College Avenue has been renamed Business 896 and Glasgow Avenue.

In 1991-92, the congregation, with the aid of the Presbytery and Reverend Patricia Singleton, refurbished the church building and grounds. The building and steeple were painted inside and out, a new roof installed, windows and plaster repaired, and new lighting fixtures were hung. For the first time, a driveway and paved parking lot were installed, which necessitated the removing of two old wooden dwellings. A cement walkway was framed and poured from the paved parking lot to the church front door and the cemetery gate. The front of the church was landscaped, which included the seeding of a lawn and planting shrubs. Gone was the frontal approach of bare dirt replete with ruts and tire tracks. However, no longer could one pull a horse drawn carriage directly up to the building.

In 2000-01, the original exterior shutters for the lower level windows were refurbished exactly as they were made in 1852. Brad Blackburn made the shutters of cedar and used original hardware. With memorial gifts and generous donations, the congregation paid the total \$2,600 cost. A century and a half ago, the whole church building only cost \$5,000.

The year 2002 brings a new State Historical Marker to the church to replace the one that was erected in 1932 and has since disappeared.

This brief biography was written to update in the second millennium, the known body of information relating to Pencader Presbyterian Church. It relies heavily on the 1899 scholarly work of DR. W.T. Skinner, Pencader Church. Also upon the 1936 scholarly work of Reverend Henry G. Welbon, Pastor Pencader Church, A HISTORY OF PENCADER CHURCH (Welsh in Origin) of GLASGOW, DELAWARE. To a lesser extent, it draws upon the 1972 book by James H. Lappen, PRESBYTERIANS ON DELMARVA The History of the New Castle Presbytery, Edward W. Cooch's 1940 book titled THE BATTLE OF COOCH'S BRIDGE Delaware September 3, 1777. All the above were published privately. Also consulted was the book AMERICA A Narrative History, written in 1984 by George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, published by W.W. Norton Co., New York and London.

Many in the congregation including: Bob & Sandy Averitt, Roy & Ruth Campbell, James & Lynn Dickey, Myrna Fair, Sally Jordan, Marilyn Ransom, Linda Shockley, Charlie & Beverly Thompson, Bob & Dana Wetter lent their hearts, their heads, and their memories to this occasion.