



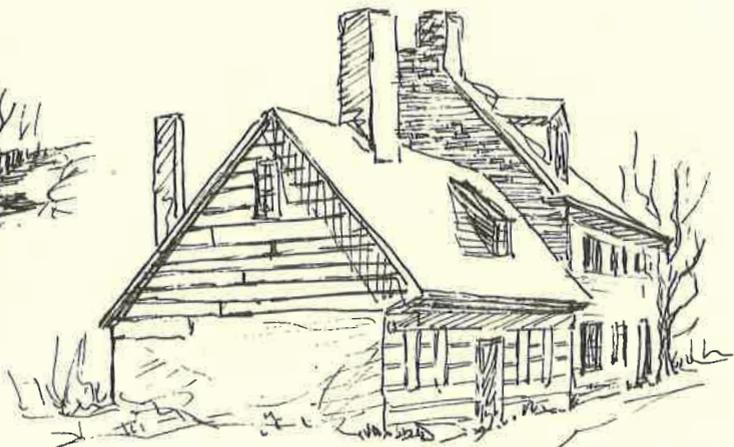
1767 1708 1667 1820

OLD COURT HOUSE AND TOWN HALL



CARRIAGE HOUSE

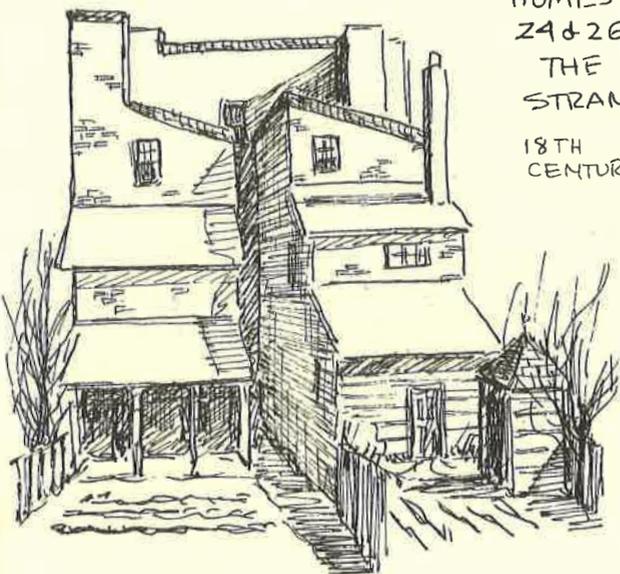
NEW CASTLE



DUTCH HOUSE BEFORE 1704

ORIGINALLY NAMED FT. CASIMIR, NEW CASTLE WAS RULED BY THE DUTCH, THE SWEDES, AND THE ENGLISH. THE FIRST LEGISLATURE MET HERE UNDER THE DIRECTIVES OF WM. PENN. (1701). THE CAPITAL OF PENNSYLVANIA'S LOWER 3 COUNTIES (DELAWARE) WAS HERE UNTIL 1771.

BACK OF THE STRAND



HOMES
24 & 26
THE
STRAND
18TH
CENTURY

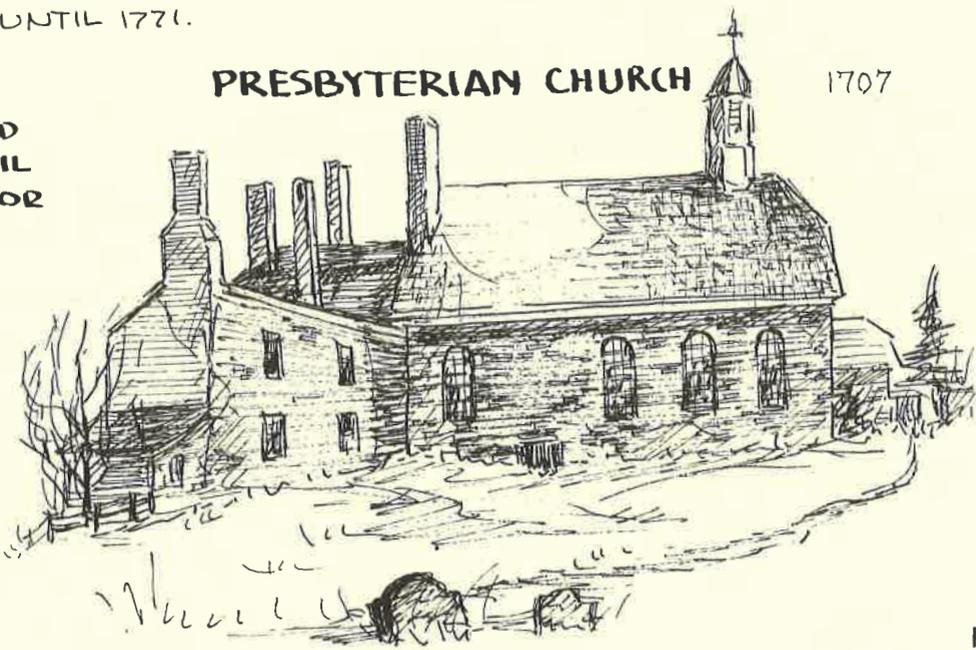


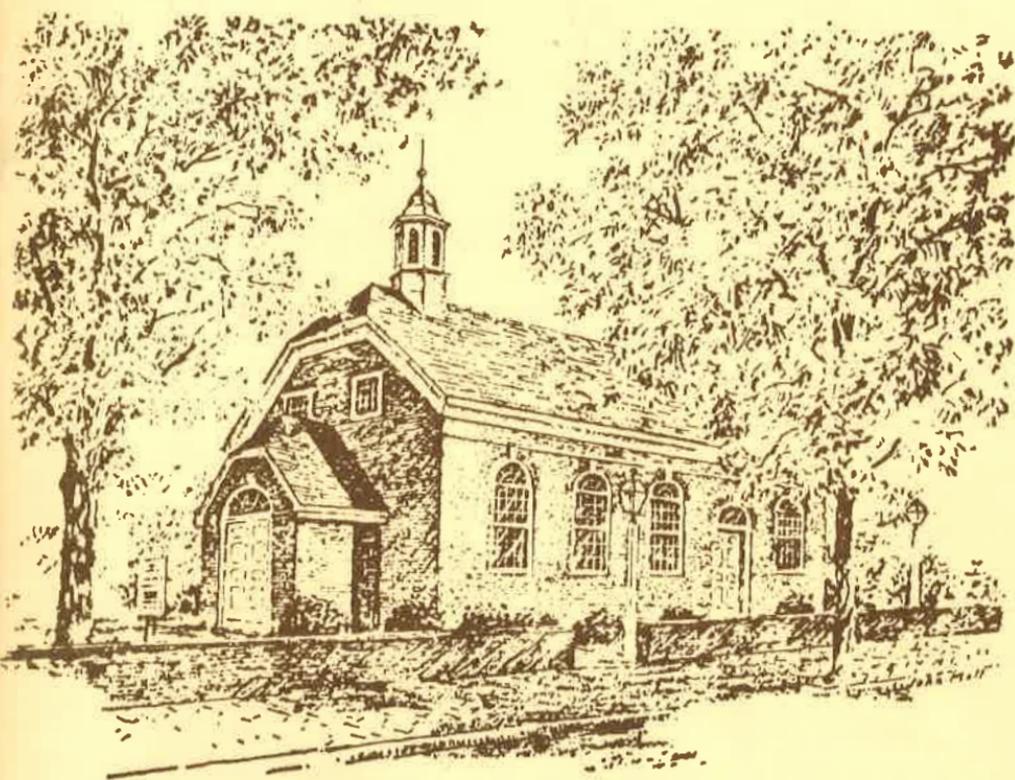
←
**OLD
JAIL
DOOR**



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1707





The Presbyterian Church

New Castle, Delaware

News - Journal
LIBRARY

Chapter I THE BEGINNING

New Castle Presbyterians as a congregation stem from the first services of the Dutch Reformed (Calvinist) founders of New Castle. A clergyman of that faith accompanied Peter Stuyvesant and his men in 1651 when they built Fort Casimir. In September 1655 when Stuyvesant recovered the fort from the Swedes, services of the Reformed Church were conducted by the Rev. Johannes Megapolensis during Stuyvesant's stay at the site. Thereafter laymen were appointed to read to the people on Sunday from the Book of Homilies.

The Dutch West India Company recognized the authority of the established Church of Holland over their colonial possessions. Specific care of transatlantic churches was entrusted to the Classis of Amsterdam by the Synod of North Holland. All the colonial clergy were approved and commissioned by that body and of course, they were all Calvinists. They were generally men of high scholarship and thorough theological training. The Dutch settlers on the Delaware, unlike their pastors, were as a rule uneducated, hard drinkers, turbulent and irreligious.

On July 12, 1656, government of the colony was transferred to the city of Amsterdam and it was given the name of New Amstel. The city agreed to send out "a proper person for a schoolmaster, who shall also read the Holy Scriptures in public and sing the Psalms." Evert Pietersen, who passed an examination before the Classis, accompanied Director Jacob Alrichs to New Amstel to serve as the schoolmaster. He had 25 pupils, young and old, and school was held in the house in which he lived rent free. The pupils attended school only in the winter when they were unable to work in the fields.

At this time Andries Hudde, the Secretary and Surveyor of New Amstel, sold his dwelling house on the Strand, site of #26 and #28 today, to Director Alrichs to be used as a church "for the benefit of the community." This house was remodelled in autumn of 1657 and enlarged by one-half in 1659.

The Classis soon commissioned the Rev. Everardus Welius to take charge of the congregation, now grown to 19 members. The Classis reported on May 25, 1657:

"He is a young man deserving of such praise in many respects. For he is such a one in life, in study, in gifts, in conversation, that we expect nothing else than to hear, in due time, that he fills his office with fruitfulness under God's blessing and grace."

The Rev. Welius arrived on the Waegh on August 21, 1657. When he died on December 9, 1659, a victim of the violent epidemic of dysentery that raged through New Amstel that fall and winter, he left a church with two elders, two deacons and a membership of 60.

The authorities of New Amstel constantly reminded the Directors in Holland of their needs and great desire for a minister. However, no one was sent until the spring of 1662 when the Rev. Warnerus Hadson was selected by the Classis and embarked for New Amstel, but he died on the voyage out. A letter from the Rev. Henry Selyns of Brooklyn dated January 9, 1664, informed the Classis of the death of Domine Hadson and stated:

"It is necessary to supply his place, partly on account of the children who have not been baptized since the death of the Rev. Welius, and partly on account of the abominable sentiments of various persons there, who speak disrespectfully of the Holy Scriptures."

In 1664 Sir Robert Carr, at the head of an English expedition, sailed up the Delaware River. He found Fort Casimir so feebly defended that it surrendered without resistance. All civil and military officers of the town were taken prisoner, but the inhabitants, on taking an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, were left "in undisturbed possession of their property." It was expressly stated that "the people be left free as to the liberty of conscience in church as formerly." In the records of this period, it is noted that "on

Sandhook stood a small wooden church" in which the Dutch continued to worship as an independent congregation. The name of the town was changed to New Castle and incorporated in 1667.

The church secured the services of the highly learned clergyman Peter Tesschenmaker in 1679 to minister to a congregation which had grown to 160. He was a graduate of the University of Utrecht with a license to preach. He had served the English Reformed Church at The Hague, and that city's Dutch and English consistories sent excellent testimonials to New York concerning his character and preaching ability. English as well as Dutch and probably Swedes and Finns in the community attended the services at which the Rev. Tesschenmaker at first preached alternately in Dutch and English. Later the Dutch quarreled with the English members who withdrew from the church for a time. The Rev. Tesschenmaker was not satisfied with the support given him for his living--it was little and always so late that he was forced to collect it himself. He therefore accepted a call to Staten Island.

Left without an ordained minister in the summer of 1682, elders John Moll and Jean Paul Jacquet and deacons Engelbert Lott and Jan Bisch wrote to the Classis of Amsterdam on September 25, requesting a pastor of their faith and giving a description of their unhappy situation:

"We live here among many Lutherans, whose teachers preach in a very unedifying manner and among a still greater number of Quakers who are given to errors. Apparently they will not cease their efforts to draw into their fold the fickle ones. Therefore preaching and catechizing in the clean, upright true Reformed religion is very necessary here, especially as a great many unreliable, dissolute people move in here among us."

The congregation was not successful in obtaining a pastor and not until 1690 did a clergyman of that faith even visit New Castle. Rudolph Varick, a Dutch clergyman, wrote to the heads of the church in Amsterdam:

"Coming at last to New Castle, I preached on three Sundays and administered communion. I had there a little church full of people, Dutchmen, Swedes and Finn."

As the persecution of non-conformists and Presbyterians continued in England, Scotland, Ireland and France, many of these devoted people found their way to New Castle and received a cordial welcome from their Calvinist brothers. With the arrival of the Rev. John Wilson, a Scotsman, accompanied by the Rev. Jedediah Andrews, in 1698, the church was welcomed into the Presbyterian fold. English had supplanted Dutch as the official language and the congregation was a mixture of Dutch, Huguenot, Scotch and Calvinist English. That year Mr. Wilson "preached in the court house because the old Dutch church had gone to decay."

Chapter II FIERY ZEALOTS

In March of 1706, the year Benjamin Franklin was born, a group of Presbyterian ministers from the middle colonies, under the leadership of the Rev. Francis Makemie, met in Philadelphia and organized the first Presbytery in the New World. The church in New Castle joined with six others to establish this body which was the beginning of the Presbyterian Church as an institution in the life of this country. The Rev. Makemie, who is called the Father of Presbyterianism, had been extremely active in organizing churches on the Delmarva Peninsula and served as the first Moderator of The Presbytery. Mr. Wilson was chosen the following year to succeed him.

The present gambrel-roofed church was built in 1707. When Thomas Janvier and John Brewster sold to the church the lot on which it was built, the deed revealed the mixture of origins of the congregation--of the three agents who signed it for the church, one was of Dutch, one of French and one of English extraction: Roeloff De Haes, Thomas Janvier and Sylvester Garland.

Col. Robert Quarry of Philadelphia reporting on conditions in New Castle wrote on January 20, 1709:

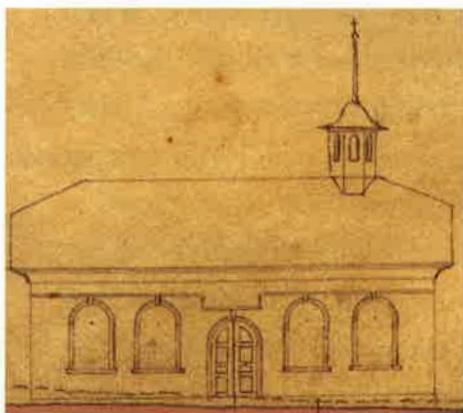
"Makemie . . . by his subscriptions from persons in England and those he hath influenced here, has built an Extraordinary good Meeting House in this Town, with a considerable allowance to their Minister."

The masons of that day laid their brick with lasting thoroughness and precision, using thin joints of lime mortar made from oyster shells to build the 18-inch thick walls. The great oak trusses which still support the roof were hewn and fitted by expert ship carpenters. The original building included that part of the present building which extends an equal distance on each side of the doorway facing the Green. Additional land was purchased in 1712 and an extension added to the building the width of the two windows toward

buildings retains an exterior that provides core visual integrity; collectively they embody most of the defining characteristics of Georgian architecture. Over time the buildings fall into a stylistic continuum of scale and ornamentation from smaller and plainer to larger and more elaborate, from restrained to elegant, and from relatively tentative in execution of design to skillful presentation.

New Castle Presbyterian Church Begin on Second Street with the New Castle Presbyterian Church. The congregation cannot claim to own the oldest surviving religious structure in town, but they do have the oldest church in its original form. The church you see today was built in two sections between 1707 and 1712, with only a seam in the exterior walls to demark the sections. As old as their church is, the congregation has always traced its roots back even further, to the beginning of the Dutch colony on the Delaware and the religious services held within Fort Casimir. After the English captured the colony, Scottish Presbyterianism slowly replaced Dutch Reformed, but since both derived from a similar Calvinistic tradition they had much in common. The church built by New Castle's Presbyterians in brick to replace an earlier wooden Dutch church exhibits many architectural features of the early Georgian period. Townspeople, and all those who admire colonial architecture, can rejoice that this building still stands, but its survival was not always assured.

Since Second Street did not exist when the Presbyterian Church was built,



New Castle Presbyterian Church, from the Latrobe Survey. (Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

except as the edge of the Market Plaine, what we see from that street today was originally the rear of the building at the rear of the property. For nearly a century congregants would have walked up a path from The Strand, an approach that remains accessible today. In time, changing tastes and needs began to catch up with the building. In 1803 a balcony was completed to accommodate a growing congregation, and in the middle of that century

the church underwent a series of interior and exterior repairs and changes for structural and aesthetic reasons. Roof, windows, floors, and pews were replaced, and venetian blinds were added inside, while outside coats of plaster covered the brick walls.

With the opening of Second Street, the entrance of the church

was moved to that side of the building, and a brick wall was added to mark the property line. Finally, though, no amount of repairs or rearrangement could make the church sufficiently large or modern for the congregation.

The nearly 150-year-old church seemed old-fashioned compared to the new Gothic styles popular in religious architecture of the mid-nine-



Watercolor of New Castle Presbyterian Church by Frank Soltész, early 1970s. (Courtesy of Robert and Joan Appleby)

teenth century. Fortunately, when the congregation built a new church of brownstone in 1854, the old brick building was not torn down; it was merely relegated to secondary status as the Sunday School.

When the neo-Gothic, brownstone church, in turn, began to show the ravages of age a cen-



This photograph captures both the close proximity and the vast differences in architectural styles of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century churches. (Courtesy of New Castle Historical Society)

tury later, aesthetic sensibilities had again changed. With the demolition of the structurally unsound brownstone building, it was time for the original church, having now achieved a venerable status, to reclaim its place as the center of Presbyterian worship in New Castle. By 1950 the old had become new again, or at least as close to the 1707–12 look as possible. The brownstone church was replaced by a colonial-style education building.

Some have called the Presbyterian Church small and simple, but for its time it was neither small nor simple. Now, as then, it might best be characterized as elegantly restrained. On the Second Street side, four round-headed windows, each with a brick keystone in the relieving arch, and a double door with fanlight manifest its early Georgian style, as does the water table at ground level and the brick stringcourse above the windows. All of those elements are decorative, but in a modest way. The gambrel roof with jerkinhead or clipped gable ends and a wide but plain cove cornice add to the church's Georgian appearance. The vestibule, with its homage to the roofline of the church, is a 1950 addition. The cupola also dates from 1950, recreated to look as it had in the Latrobe survey of 1805. Perhaps the best way to appreciate

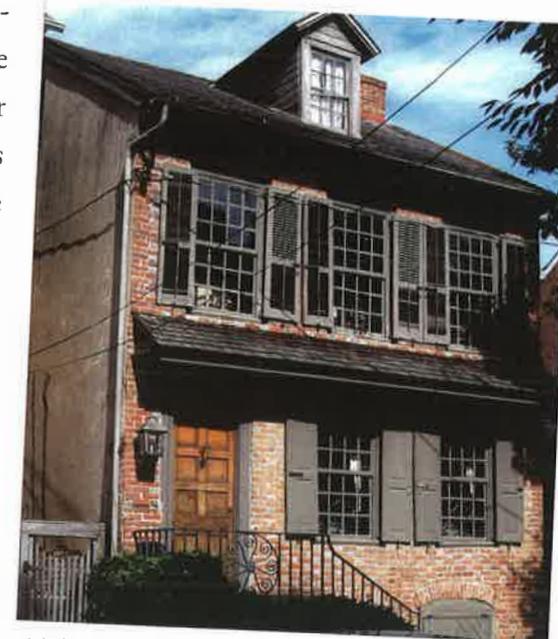


8 The Strand, from the Latrobe Survey.
(Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

the longevity of New Castle Presbyterian Church is to walk around it and look at the brick, which records all the centuries of changes. On The Strand side, note particularly the repairs that closed in the space where the original door stood.

8 The Strand A second example is found at 8 The Strand. Built between circa 1700 and 1730, this three-bay, gable-end house reflects the relatively simple, unadorned façade and imperfect proportioning typical of the early period. The front door is set within a slightly recessed frame of simple molding and is topped by a plain glass transom. The door itself is a replacement, but its sim-

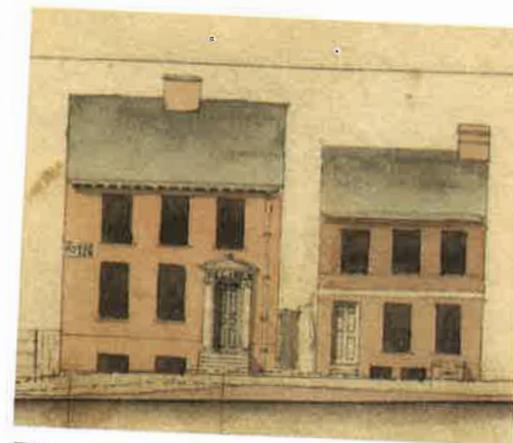
licity of eight raised panels maintains the façade's integrity, as do the two-panel shutters on the first-floor windows. The windows are perhaps the most interesting element of the façade. The style of the windows with small twelve-over-twelve panes of glass held in sash frames by pieces of wood called muntins are period appropriate for an early Georgian house, yet they appear out of scale. Their disproportionately large size may suggest the taste of the owner but more likely reflects the level of training of the builders. Such indi-



8 The Strand today.

viduality gives this house its particular charm. The chimney placement is also early Georgian. Its location at the rear of the gable wall farthest from the door was designed as a heat-saving feature. The original house had two rooms on each floor, but over time 8 The Strand has been expanded to include an addition in the rear, a side porch, and a dormer. Still the house projects its Georgian origins.

Number 8 The Strand, like its slightly later neighbor at Number 6, seems to sit high on the street. Originally both stood at ground level, but the early-nineteenth-century re-grading of New Castle's streets lowered The Strand in front of those two buildings so much that steps had to be added. That change allows visitors today to see the brick relieving arches that carried the weight of basement openings for Number 6.



Detail of the Latrobe Survey's "Section of Front Street" shows how the street level would change for 6 and 8 The Strand, which explains their needs for front steps today.
(Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

DELAWARE CHURCH ARCHIVES

Minutes, 1775--, 3 vols.; Financial, 1775--, 3 vols.; Sunday School 1775--, 3 vols.; in church safe. Register, 1756--, 3 vols.; in possession of Capt. George P. Tuneell. Transcript of Minutes of Lewes , Indian River and Cool Spring United Presbyterian Churches 1756-1848; Register, 1737-1856; in State Archives. Typed copy of deed of Thomas Fimwick, 1707, typed copy of tombstone inscriptions; in possession of Presbyterian Historical Society. Records of Lewes, Indian River and Cool Spring, United Presbyterian Churches, 1756-1855 (in Pennsylvania Historical Society) (not examined). Records of incorporation and deeds: Sussex Co. Recorder's office, Deeds Record; vol. BBX123, pp. 22 and 333; vol. DDH159, p. 579; Robert Shankland's Field Book, p. 9.

484. NEW CASTLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 1698--, 21 E. 2nd St., New Castle.

The Presbyterian congregation of New Castle seems to have been at first partly composed of Dutch, English, and other members of the Reformed Church congregation of the old Dutch Church – in the same manner as the Presbyterian congregation of Appoquinimy Church Dutch members. Rev. John Wilson, of Sorbie, Scotland arrived to stay at New Castle, by way of New England, in 1698; hence it is reasonable to suppose that some sort of congregational organization must have existed to induce Rev. Wilson to come down from New England. Rev. Wilson preached at New Castle – sometimes, at least, in the Court house – until 1702. He left there in this year, but “finding it not for the better”, he returned in 1703, or soon after, and became the first settled minister. (note: William Houstown or Houston, by his last will dated May 25, 1707, bequeathed a proposed 300-acre Houstown Glebe near New Castle to Rev. John Wilson of New Castle “and to his Successors Presbyterian ministers of New Castle for ever”; and it appears from Webster that the same bequest had been made by another will in 1686.) In August 1707 a board of trustees secured title to two lots in New Castle “for erecting and building a Presbyterian Church”, and by January 20/30, 1708, the Presbyterians had “build an Extraordinary good Meeting House in this Town with a Considerable Allowance to their Ministers”, Rev. Wilson. * This First Presbyterian Church in New Castle was built of wood – and unlike its rival at Lewes, which has long since vanished – is still (in 1939) used as a Sunday school and parish house. Incorporated March 9, 1813. Present building dedicated 1854. It is a one story brown stone structure of English Gothic style. There is a memorial tablet in the auditorium and the original fixtures are still used.

See: Rev. John Boswell Spotswood, An Historical Sketch of the Presbyterian Church in New Castle, (Philadelphia, Joseph M. Wilson, 1859). MSS. In possession of Presbyterian Historical Society; Board of Trustees, “History of New Castle Presbyterian Church” and “History of the 1707 Church” manuscripts in vault of New Castle Trust Co.; Library of Congress: S. P. G. Transcripts, Series A, vol. 1, no. LXXXVII; CXIX and vol. 4, no. XXXVI; LXIII.

* The account thus far is based on the appended notes.

of Pres

HISTORICAL NOTES

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

New Castle, Delaware

When Fort Casimir was established in 1651, it was an enterprise of the West India Company. For several reasons the colony failed to prosper and in 1656 the City of Amsterdam accepted jurisdiction in return for certain considerations on the part of the Company. The Burgomasters undertook to reverse the trend and to build the colony into a strong and profitable outpost. It offered a number of inducements to colonists; among them it was provided that with the first emigrants they would send a schoolmaster who would also be a lay religious leader and that as soon as there were two hundred persons in the colony, an ordained minister would be sent.

While the provision of religious instruction and services was a governmental policy, the principle of separation of church and state was maintained. The Burgomasters assumed the obligation to fulfill these promises, but the Classis of Amsterdam had complete jurisdiction in matters of training, ordination and supervision of ministers. The Classis was in control of the colonial churches.

FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

In December, 1656, there arrived in New Amstel -- the new name given to the settlement on the South River -- a shipload of colonists. One of these was Evert Peterson, a school teacher, a visitor to the sick and a psalm reader. The Common Council of Amsterdam received notice that some three hundred colonists had settled in New Amstel by March of 1657; the Council authorized the Classis of Amsterdam to engage a minister. Everardus Welius was selected and indicated his willingness to accept this assignment. He was ordained on April 10, 1657 and commissioned to New Amstel with instructions to institute religious meetings in which God's Word should be preached with soundness and the sacraments publicly honored.

Rev. Mr. Welius set sail on May 25, 1657 in the ship, "De Wagh"; he arrived late in August of that year and immediately entered upon the work of organizing a Reformed Church.

GROWTH OF THE DUTCH CHURCH

About the time of the arrival of Dominie Welius, Andries Hudde sold his house to Director Alrich in the presence of the magistrates and people for use as a church for the benefit of the community. This house was located on the site of the houses which now number 26 and 28 The Strand. The land extended back some three hundred feet to the Market Square. All of this remains in the possession of the present congregation except for one corner of the plot facing on The Strand. This dwelling was remodelled immediately and was enlarged by half in 1659. It continued as the church building until the end of the century.

When Dominie Welius assumed charge there was a membership of nineteen. When he died in December of 1659 it was reported to the Classis that the church had an enlarged building, two elders, two deacons and a membership of sixty. In 1678, the number had grown to one hundred and sixty. In 1682, the congregation was reported as consisting of one hundred fathers of families.

New Amstel remained under Dutch sovereignty until 1664, when the English took possession of the colony. The Church, however, continued under the jurisdiction of the Classis of Amsterdam for another thirty years. During this time it gradually passed through a transition from Dutch only to a group of cosmopolitan character. In it were Calvinists from many nationalities.

In 1678, the Rev. Peter Tesschenmaker, a bachelor divinity who had come from Guyana, was called as pastor; John Mall and Ephraim Herman were delegates from New Castle to his ordination by the consistory in New York. One difficulty of this transition period is recorded in a letter to the Classis of Amsterdam by Rev. Mr. Tesschenmaker. He reported that he had preached in Dutch and English the first four months. Then some misunderstanding arose because it was thought that the English did not contribute as generously as they might have done. The English group broke away and he preached five months in Dutch only.

Rev. Henry Selyns wrote in October of 1683: "With the arrival and government of Hon. William Penn, great changes are taking place. His Honor, who is a very eloquent man, preaches, and delivers very learned sermons." The cosmopolitan aspect of the colony is demonstrated in a letter by the same Rev. Mr. Selyns from New York in 1688. "Our French ministerial brethren in the Lord are doing well. Their congregations grow not a little because of the continual arrival of French refugees. The French minister at New Castle, Caspar Carpentier, is dead."

In 1693, Rev. Rudolphus Varick wrote the Classis describing a journey through the Pennsylvania states: "Coming at last to New Castle I preached there three Sundays and administered the communion. I had there a little church full of people, Dutchmen, Swedes and Fins." The last reference to the Dutch Church is in the will of Ambrose Bacher, dated April 19, 1695. It contains a bequest of ten pounds "to the poor of the Dutch Church in the town of New Castle."

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHURCH

In 1698, in company with Rev. Jedidiah Andrews, the Rev. John Wilson came to New Castle from New England and "preached in the court house because the old Dutch church had gone to decay." Mr. Wilson continued to serve the church in New Castle until his death in 1712, with the exception of an interval of about six months.

Rev. Francis Makemie is called the Father of Presbyterianism in America. He had been active in establishing churches, especially in the area that we know now as the lower part of the Delmarva Peninsula. He went up and down the coast exerting much influence. He was a capable organizer. In 1706, under his leadership, the first presbytery in America was formed; the church in New Castle joined with six others to establish this body which was the beginning of the Presbyterian Church as an institution in the life of this country. Rev. Mr. Makemie was the first Moderator and Mr. Wilson was chosen the following year to succeed him in this post. In this act the New Castle Church became and has continued a part of American Presbyterianism.

BUILDING THE MEETING HOUSE

In 1707, additional land was purchased by "...Roeloffe Dehaes, Sylvester Garland and Thomas Janvier, merchants and undertaker, or agents for erecting and building a Presbyterian Church or house of worship in the said town of New Castle." Col. Robert Quarry wrote in January of 1708: "(Makemie) by his subscriptions from persons in England and those he hath influenced here, has built an extraordinary good meeting house in this town." The original building included that part of the present building

which extends an equal distance on each side of the doorway facing the Green. Additional land was purchased in 1712 and an extension added to the building -- the width of two windows toward the Northeast end; the line where this addition was joined can be readily seen. The date of this extension cannot be definitely fixed.

It was the practice to hold the meetings of the early church body alternately in Philadelphia and New Castle.

ALTERATIONS TO THE BUILDING

Over the years the old Meeting House received some alterations. A gallery was added in 1801. In the church records under date of July 25, 1818, is the following entry:

"Resolved that the Burial Ground be inclosed by erecting a brick wall in front and board fence on the division lines. That the Church be completely repaired, the pews taken down and new seats erected in three ranges of single seats fronting to the pulpit, that the floor of the seats and also the aisles be raised and that the pulpit be taken down and new modelled so as to be rendered more convenient, and that the Clerk's desk be finished with railing and balustrade and so arranged as to be removable at times of Communion..."

When the Trustees reported on March 26, 1819 of the completion of the project they took satisfaction in the comment: "In new-modelling the seats the Trustees have adopted the most approved plan of modern-built churches by making single pews all fronting toward the pulpit."

Fifteen years later -- from information contained in original receipted bills in possession of the church -- the exterior was completely covered with stucco.

The greatest change occurred when the congregation erected a brownstone gothic type sanctuary in 1854 on the plot of ground immediately adjacent to the meeting house. Upon the completion of this structure, the old brick meeting house was made into a parish house for various activities in the life of the congregation.

RESTORATION OF THE MEETING HOUSE

Some years ago a building program was envisaged by the local congregation. The 1707 Meeting House was structurally sound, historically important and in architectural harmony with the town. The brownstone building had fallen into disrepair. So the final decision was made to raze the brownstone church and restore the old brick building to its early design and appearance. Greatest care was used in development of the plans. Work actually began in July of 1949 and was completed a year later.

The long and notable history of the New Castle Presbyterian Church is as one with the colonization and development of a new land, as well as with the establishment of the Reformed Faith in the life of America. Its faithful testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the centuries gives distinction to its ministry and significance to its program for the future.