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### HISTORY AND REMINISCENCES OF THE PRESBY- TERIAN MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA

BY THE LATE REV. W. P. WHITE, D.D.\*

The Presbyterian Ministerial Association of Philadelphia had an existence as far back as 1830. It was known as the Presbyterian Pastoral Association and was founded by those sympathizing with the movement which later led to the organization of the New School branch of the Church. Among its prominent members were Drs. Ezra Styles, E. James Patterson, Thomas H. Skinner, and Rev. Albert Barnes. Its meetings were for a time held in Mr. Barnes' study in the First Presbyterian Church; later, in a room over a store at Fourth and Chestnut Streets, and still later, in a third story room on Eighth Street near Chestnut. The building in which it last met was destroyed by fire, and its records and minutes perished.

All the information concerning the Association dates from 1854. The Association after the fire met for a time in the Lecture Room of the Clinton Street Presbyterian Church, which some years since was dissolved. The meetings came to be held later in the Presbyterian Board Rooms, 1334 Chestnut Street, then held by the New School.

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\* Dr. White died on Feb. 22, 1929.

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ALUMNI OF THE LOG  
COLLEGE \*

2. JAMES MCCREA<sup>1</sup>

BY REV. GEORGE H. INGRAM

*Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of New Brunswick*

There is authority for tracing the family of James McCrea back to the Clan MacRae of Ross-shire, Scotland. According to a pamphlet published by James McCrea, at one time president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Walter McCrea went from Scotland to Ireland in 1610. Early in the eighteenth century William McCrea of this family left Ireland and settled near Newark, Delaware. He went to White Clay Creek Church, some two miles north of the present Newark, and was chosen a ruling elder. Charles Tennent, the youngest son of William Tennent, Sr., was pastor of that church. James was the eldest son and was born about 1711. Some authorities say he was born in Ireland and others hold that he was born in Delaware. Through the influence, no doubt, of Charles Tennent, James McRea was led to go up to Neshaminy to study with his pastor's father. There is no information as to when he took up his studies in the Log College. All that is known is that on April 4, 1739, he applied to the Presbytery of New Brunswick to be taken on trials as a candidate for the gospel ministry. The minute is as follows:

Mr. James McCray offered himself to Trials as a candidate for the holy Ministry, and after he was examined in points of Learning the Presb: gave him the following Subjects to form discourses upon to be delivered the next Time of our Meeting viz. for an Exegesis—*An datur Decretum Dei absolutum de omnibus futuris*, and for a sermon Luke 13:5.<sup>2</sup>

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\* See this JOURNAL, Dec., 1928, for the first of this series of biographies.—Ed.

<sup>1</sup> Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 493 f.; *Somerset County Historical Quarterly*, vol. vii, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> This JOURNAL, vol. vi, p. 342.

At the next meeting, which was held at Shrewsbury, September 5, 1739, there is the following minute with reference to candidate McCrea:

The affair of Mr. McCray's Trials being reassumed his Discourses and Answers to Extempore Questions were approved, and the following Subject for a sermon was given him, viz. Rom. 5:19, to be delivered the 1st Tuesday in November [1739] at Brunswick.<sup>3</sup>

Presbytery met at New Brunswick on November 6, 1739, and continued in session the next day, when Mr. McCrea's trials were taken up, and issued, as shown by the following minute:

The Presb: having heard & Considered Mr. McCray's sermon do well approve thereof, and being satisfied as to his Soundness in principles, Piety in Practice, and competent Qualifications for the Ministerial Work, he having gone thro' the usual and needful Parts of Trial, and declared the Westminster Confession of Faith to be his Confession of Faith, the Presb: do cordially grant him License and Liberty to preach the gracious Gospel of the dear Redeemer, wherever he may be regularly called thereto.<sup>4</sup>

This was the second licensure granted by this Presbytery. Both of the candidates—Mr. Rowland and Mr. McCrea—were Log College alumni. Both of them came without a certificate from the committee of Synod appointed to examine candidates coming to their presbyteries without a diploma from an Old World university or from Harvard or Yale. This action of the Presbytery of New Brunswick was taken, because they held that the Presbytery was to be the sole judge of the fitness of the candidates coming before them. A controversy was begun, as the Synod refused to recognize these licensures. It resulted in the great schism which began at the meeting of the Synod in 1741 and lasted until the reunion in 1758.

At the same meeting which licensed James McCrea, Presbytery assigned him the following itinerary for the winter:

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

Application having been made to this Presb: by the Inhabitants of Allens-Town-Cranberry, Pepack, Lebanon, and Muskinicunck for Supplies. They ordered Mr. McCray to supply the afs<sup>d</sup> Places (dividing the Time among them as he shall judge meet) to our next meeting. . . .<sup>5</sup>

That circuit carried him over a route of two hundred miles. There were bridgeless rivers, oftentimes at flood. There were trackless forests and swamps, sending him far around. Sometimes he lost his way as darkness came on, when he would be forced to spend the night with his horse out under the open sky. Never did the Presbytery assign a harder task to one of its members than it gave to this untried licentiate. Log College men in those trying days spent more time in the saddle than they did in their studies. It was more than likely that Mr. McCrea ministered that winter to other "inhabitants" than those here mentioned. For his road led him by Bedminster, Bethlehem, Greenwich, Kingwood, and possibly Amwell. At the meeting on April 1, 1740, Mr. McCrea reported that "he had complied with the order of our last in Supplying Vacancies." At this meeting, a call was presented for Mr. McCrea from "the people of Lametunck, Lebanon, Pepack, Readingtown, and Bethlehem, which he accepted."<sup>6</sup> This call was not from organized churches, but from the people of these communities. For the most part these were the names of the townships. There were church buildings at Lamington and Bethlehem. Where there were no church buildings, the services were held in homes or barns, and not infrequently out under the open sky. For a time after his licensure, he made his home, it is thought, in the Freehold parish, perhaps with the idea of receiving from the pastor, William Tennent, Jr., additional instruction in theology. Meanwhile, he became acquainted with a young lady, Mary Graham, a member of that church, with whom he fell in love, and whom he married in April, 1740.

After the schism of 1741, the demands on the Presbytery to supply preachers for occasional service increased greatly.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>6</sup> This JOURNAL, vol. vii, p. 142.

Churches naturally desired to have pastors installed over them, but if this policy had been adopted, many communities would have been left without any preaching at all. In order to forestall requests for licentiates to be settled over particular parishes, Presbytery took the following action, when requests came for the speedy ordination of licentiates William Robinson and James McCrea:

The Presbytery taking into their serious consideration the extraordinary & necessitous Situation of the affairs of this Branch of the Visible Church in respect of the numerous Vacancies under our Care, did not judge it proper at this Juncture to ordain the afs<sup>d</sup>. persons to any particular places, but to the Work of the Ministry in general and in order thereto the following pieces of Trial were proposed . . . to William Robinson . . . and James McCrea. [Then follow the assignments.]<sup>7</sup>

At New Brunswick, on August 4, 1741, the two licentiates were ordained "to the ministry of the Word in general," they "having first assented unto and adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith as the Confession of their Faith."<sup>8</sup>

While Mr. McCrea was not installed at Bedminster (Lamington), yet this seems to have been under his care all through his ministry. In after years he was counted "the father of Lamington Church." Yet all the while he was taking his turn in supplying pastorless congregations as the Presbytery appointed. On Aug. 2, 1742, he was directed to supply Amwell one-fourth of his time, "as formerly."<sup>9</sup> On May 31, 1742, Presbytery had appointed him to supply Greenwich, "as often as he can";<sup>10</sup> and at the same meeting of Presbytery a call came to him from the congregation of Pidgeon Run and New Castle in the Presbytery of New Castle. Later in the session there is the following minute regarding this call:

Mr. James McCray for Sundry Reasons & amongst others the Presbytery's declining & reluctance to part with him out of their body, declines embracing the above mentioned Call.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

He was often directed to supply Bethlehem, up until 1749. On October 3, 1749, he was directed to supply Basking Ridge "one-sixth of his time." In the early part of his ministry he had his study in a small one-room house on the west side of Lamington River, in Readingtown Township.

On May 19, 1745, Mr. McCrea "represented to Presbytery the difficulties of the places in which he labored, asking to be relieved, which was granted."<sup>13</sup> His parishes extended over several townships—Bedminster, Readingtown, Lebanon, Bethlehem, etc. Bethlehem Township then extended clear down to the Delaware River. At the present time the territory of this township is divided into several townships—Bethlehem, Clinton, Kingwood, Alexandria, Holland, Franklin, and Raritan. And besides he had to go to Amwell and Basking Ridge. No wonder this poor man cried out for relief from the burden.

At a meeting of Presbytery held at Bedminster, November 11, 1755, a reference was brought in from the session of Bedminster Church regarding a case of discipline about which there was dissatisfaction in the congregation. Presbytery heard both sides in the matter and then decided to sustain the position of the pastor. Presbytery, however, voted that he be removed from the pastorate, but recommended that he should supply Bedminster congregation "as often as he could."<sup>14</sup> The majority of the congregation rallied to the support of the pastor and wished to call him back. Synod was appealed to, and it decided that the way was clear for Mr. McCrea to be returned.<sup>14</sup> After some more dissent on the part of the minority, Presbytery proceeded with the re-installment, which took place December 1, 1756.

On October 21, 1766, at the meeting of Presbytery at Bedminster, "Mr. McCray having for some considerable time labored under great bodily indisposition that had hindered him in the discharge of his duties, requested release from his pastoral charge."<sup>15</sup> In taking action upon this request Pres-

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<sup>13</sup> Ms. minutes in loco.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.*, p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> Ms. minutes in loco.

bytery took into consideration the fact that Mr. McCrea had spent much of his energies in this parish throughout his ministry, and it was felt only just that the congregation should contribute something annually to him through his remaining years. The congregation was ready with an expression of their appreciation of his long service—it was twenty-seven years since he began preaching to them as a licentiate—and with the assurance that they wished to contribute to his support as he gave up his active ministry. This expression of the congregation was delivered at some length, and is entered upon the records of the Presbytery. This was the first movement in the Presbytery on behalf of ministerial relief. The first movement in the Synod had been made in 1755, when the "Widows' Fund" was established, although Synod, in 1717, established "a Fund for Pious Uses," which had been partly devoted to the relief of widows of ministers.

Mr. McCrea retired to his farm, and lived two and one-half years, dying May 10, 1769, in his fifty-ninth year. He was buried in the Bedminster churchyard. The following is the inscription upon his tomb:

HERE LIES THE BODY OF THE  
REV. JAMES McCREA,  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE  
MAY 10, 1769,  
IN THE 59<sup>th</sup> YEAR OF HIS AGE<sup>16</sup>

James McCrea had twelve children. Seven of these were by his first wife, Mary Graham, who died September 15, 1753. There were five sons and two daughters. In 1755 he married Catherine Rosbrugh, a member of his congregation, and a probable relative of John Rosbrugh, who was massacred at the battle of Trenton, January, 1777, and for whom the Presbytery of New Brunswick erected a monument in the First Presbyterian Churchyard of Trenton. By his second wife he had four sons and one daughter. Of the nine sons of James McCrea seven served in the American army, while two were royalists. Colonel John McCrea graduated in the class of

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<sup>16</sup> *Somerset County Historical Quarterly*, vol. vii, p. 81.

1762 of the College of New Jersey, and served in the American army. Samuel served as a private. Stephen was a surgeon. Phillip became a lieutenant. Robert and Creighton threw in their lot with the British army. Mary, the eldest daughter, married John Hanna, for many years the pastor of Bethlehem and Kingwood Churches in the Presbytery of New Brunswick. Jane, the sixth child, and the second daughter, was massacred by the Indians, July 27, 1777, in the vicinity of Fort Edward. "It was the cruel massacre of Jane McCrea, in 1777, that did more to nerve the army of American soldiers than any one happening following the events of Lexington and Concord two years before." Not only did this massacre make a great impression in the colonies, but it also stirred Britain as well."

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250. Cf. Henry Race, M.D., "The True Story of Jane McCrea," in *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, vol. ix, Second Series, p. 93 ff.