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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF  
THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR  
THE YEAR ENDING MARCH 31, 1929**

The outstanding feature of the past year's activity has been the work of cataloguing the library of the Society. Gathered as the material has been from many sources through the seventy-seven years since the Presbyterian Historical Society was organized, it is estimated that the library now contains not less than 40,000, perhaps 50,000, books and pamphlets. During this period, the Historical Society, with such limited resources as it possessed, did what it could at accessioning, classifying, and listing the books and pamphlets which came to hand, but never was able to apply a complete and scientific system of cataloguing to the mass of material received. Under the compact made between the Society and the General Assembly four years ago, by which the Society was constituted as the Department of Historical Research and Conservation of the Office of the General Assembly, and adequate appropriation of funds was made for the maintenance and further development of this department, it became possible to undertake the long-delayed work of a thorough cataloguing of the library, in accordance with the system followed by the best libraries of to-day.

Upon our invitation, a librarian each from Princeton Theo-

## BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ALUMNI OF THE LOG COLLEGE

### 3. REV. WILLIAM ROBINSON<sup>1</sup>

BY REV. GEORGE H. INGRAM,

*Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of New Brunswick*

The third alumnus of the Log College whose life is to be reviewed is William Robinson. He was the third candidate to receive licensure at the hands of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. He lived to minister only six years. Yet in that short time he wrought a mighty work for the kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

He was the son of a well-to-do physician near Carlisle, England, who was a Quaker. He was born about the beginning of the eighteenth century. As a young man he went up to London and there fell into extravagant ways, so that he was ashamed to go home. He prevailed upon an aunt to furnish him a small sum of money with which to make his way to the American colonies. In order to earn a living he taught school at Hopewell (Pennington) from 1729 to 1739. Although search has been made, no trace of William Robinson can be found within the bounds of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. It is inferred that he also taught in Delaware, inasmuch as he was acquainted with Samuel Davies, whose father's home was in Delaware.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the third of a series of articles on the Log College Alumni. "The Story of the Log College" was published in the JOURNAL, volume xii, page 487 ff. The first of the biographies of the alumni of the Log College was published in the JOURNAL, vol. xiii, page 175 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The principal authorities for this article are as follows: *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, by Richard Webster; *Biographical Sketches of the Founder, and Principal Alumni of the Log College*, by Archibald Alexander; *The Annals of the American Pulpit*, by Sprague, vol. iii; *Sketches of Virginia*, by William Henry Foote; *Neshaminy Presbyterian Church*, by D. K. Turner; *The Presbytery of the Log College*, by Thomas Murphy, D.D.; *History of the Presbyterian Church*, by E. H. Gillett, D.D.; *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*, by Charles Hodge, D.D.; *Presbyterian Encyclopædia*, by Alfred Nevins; *Mss. Records of the Presbytery of New Brunswick*; *Memoir of the Rev. John Rodgers, D.D.*, by Samuel Miller, D.D.

During the early years of his stay in America he gave little if any concern to the matters of personal religion. Dr. Miller tells how he became interested:

He was riding at a late hour, one evening, when the moon and the stars shone with unusual brightness, and when everything around him was calculated to excite reflection. While he was meditating upon the beauty and grandeur of the scene which the firmament presented, and was saying to himself, "How transcendently glorious must be the Author of all this beauty and grandeur," the thought struck him with the suddenness and force of lightning: "But what do I know of this God? Have I ever sought His favor or made Him my friend?" This happy impression, which proved, by its permanence and effects, to have come from the best of all sources, never left him until he took refuge in Christ as the hope and life of his soul.\*

He soon devoted his life to the Gospel ministry, studying at the Log College, while continuing his teaching.

In the minutes of a meeting of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, held at Basking Ridge, April 1, 1740, there is the following record:

Mr. William Robinson Offering himself to the Presb: as a Candidate for the Ministry to Trials, the Presb: proceeded to examine him, as to his skill in the Languages, Philosophy, Divinity; as also concerning his Christian Experiences, and call to the Ministerial Work; and receiving very satisfactory answers to the Questions proposed, they judged it proper to give him the following Subjects to form Discourses on, viz.: For an Exegesis An Jesus Christus Mediator sit proprie Deus et patri cœqualis, and for a Sermon Rom. 3:28 to be delivered at New-B: the last of this Inst.

At a meeting of the Presbytery held at Neshaminy, May 27, 1740, there is the following entry:

Mr. W<sup>m</sup>. Robinson opened the Presb: by Delivering a Discourse upon the Subject given him, before a considerable and affected audience which was unanimously and highly approved;

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\* *Life of Rodgers*, p. 37.

Thus the Presb: having sufficient and satisfying Evidences of his acquired and gracious Accomplishments do judge him a fit and qualified person to preach the Everlasting Gospel, and do therefore license him to preach as a Probat<sup>r</sup>. Where divine Providence may direct.

Licentiates were given appointments to supply vacant pulpits. On August 4, 1740, the record is as follows:

The Presb<sup>y</sup> being Supplicated for Supplies at Middletown, Shrewsbury, Shark-River, Cranbury, Crosswicks, the forks, Green's, Pahaqually, they advised Mr. Robinson to Supply them before our next, proportioning his time among them as he shall judge most conducive to promote the interests of Christ's kingdom.

On June 24, 1741, application was made for the ordination of Mr. Robinson and Mr. McCrea, that they might be installed as pastors of particular churches. Presbytery taking under consideration "the extraordinary and 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 place but to the Work of the Ministry in general."

Accordingly, parts of trial for ordination were assigned, to be delivered in New Brunswick the Monday immediately following the first Sabbath.

The record of the meeting held in New Brunswick, August 4, 1741, declares that Mr. Robinson was ordained to the ministry of the Word.

The year 1742 was a busy one for the Presbytery of New Brunswick, and the new member, Rev. William Robinson, was in the midst of the work. He served as clerk at the four meetings held during that year. On August 2, 1742, a call was extended to him to become the successor of Mr. Tennent as pastor of Neshaminy Church, but this he declined. Then, too, he acted as supply in the following churches: Neshaminy, the forks, Greenwich, Philadelphia, Hopewell, Maidenhead. In some of these he ministered at different periods. He also

preached the sermon at the ordination of licentiate Samuel Finley. The most notable feature of the year's work was the repeated calls for the Presbytery to lend a hand in mission work within the bounds of the New Side Presbytery of New Castle, which extended down into Virginia. In 1741 "James River in Virginia" made an appeal for supplies. But at the meeting of Presbytery held at New Brunswick, November 23, 1742, the Presbytery of New Castle sent Rev. Samuel Blair to plead the cause of the shepherdless flocks. The record is as follows: "Mr. Sam<sup>l</sup> Blair at the Request of the N Castel Pr<sup>y</sup>. having given this Pr<sup>y</sup>. a Representation of the mournful Circumstances of Sundry vacant Societies within the boundaries of their Pr<sup>y</sup>. afores<sup>d</sup>. requesting & with divers moving arguments urging y<sup>t</sup>. Some of our members or Candidates might be allowed & encouraged to go down & labor among them at least for a Season in order to redress as much as may be the grievances they labor under for want of Supplies. The Pr<sup>y</sup>. took the matter under consideration." Following this appeal there came another to the same intent, as follows:

Mr. John Kirkpatrick also as a Commissioner for the Congregation of Nottingham gave the Pr<sup>y</sup>. a representation of the Melancholy Situation & Exegencies of that people & the places adjacent & earnestly Sues that Some of our Pr<sup>y</sup>. might be Sent to labor Statedly even instantly in among s<sup>d</sup> congregation & Circumjacent vacancies, which was also taken under Consideration.

These importunate appeals stirred the Presbytery to action. While they had many and pressing calls in other directions, they decided to lend a hand to their brethren to the South. The Presbytery decided "That Mr. Charles Beatty go to the help of Nottingham & the places near around & be under the care of the N.-Castle Pr<sup>y</sup>. during his residence there & that Mr. Will<sup>m</sup>. Robinson about the Middle of April Ensuing go down also into the quarters afores<sup>d</sup>."

That resolution determined the field wherein William Robinson was to do the most important work in his short ministry. He officiated as clerk at the meeting of the Presbytery

held at New Brunswick, April 6, 1743. Immediately after this it is probable that he repaired to the Presbytery of New Castle.

The Church of England was the first to begin missionary work in Virginia, but it was not able to keep pace with the incoming colonists. After the death of Makemie, the Scotch-Irish came in great numbers, and after their experiences in the Old World many of these emigrants did not take kindly to the evangelizing of the Church of England, even where it was able to provide spiritual ministrations. In numbers of instances these Presbyterians who refused to attend the Episcopal Church were haled to court and fined. But these drastic measures did not accomplish the ends sought.

Beginning with 1739, repeated calls came from these parts for the Presbytery of New Brunswick to send supplies of preaching. In the mean while in Hanover County there began a unique movement under the leadership of one Mr. Samuel Morris. He possessed a copy of *Boston's Fourfold State* and a copy of Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*. Mr. Morris gathered his neighbors to read to them from these books. And the number who came grew so large that they were constrained to build a special meeting house. The authorities had the leaders arrested, and when they were asked as to their denomination they were not able to answer, but when they produced Luther's *Commentary*, the officers of the law pronounced them Lutherans.

As William Robinson began his missionary tour up the Shenandoah Valley he was arrested at Winchester for preaching without a license and was to be taken to Williamsburg. Before proceeding far, the sheriff, finding that he was a well-disposed man, released him and allowed him to pursue his journey. Some people from Hanover "reading house" heard Mr. Robinson preach and they decided that his was their Gospel. Word was sent back and a committee started out to overtake the evangelist. But he had moved on, and it was not until another hundred miles had been added to their journey that they found Mr. Robinson. It was with some difficulty that they persuaded him to turn aside from the path

outlined. The following letter of Mr. Morris to President Davies describes this most important visit:

On the 6th day of July, 1743, Mr. Robinson preached his first sermon to us, from Luke 13:3, and continued with us, preaching four days successively. The congregation was large the first day, and vastly increased the three following. It is hard for the liveliest imagination to form an image of the condition of the assembly on these glorious days of the Son of Man. Such of us as had been hungering for the word before were lost in an agreeable surprise and astonishment, and some could not refrain from declaring their transport. We were overwhelmed with the thoughts of the unexpected goodness of God in allowing us to hear the gospel preached in a manner that surpassed our hopes. Many that came through curiosity were pricked to the heart, and but few in the numerous assemblies on these four days appeared unaffected. They returned alarmed with apprehensions of their dangerous condition, convinced of their former entire ignorance of religion, and anxiously inquiring what they should do to be saved. And there is reason to believe there was as much good done by those four sermons as by all the sermons preached in these parts before or since.<sup>4</sup>

This was the first ministry by a Presbyterian clergyman in Hanover County.

It is related by Dr. Miller that when Mr. Robinson came to the inn at Hanover, he found the innkeeper indulging in a flood of profanity, whereupon the preacher called him to account, and received the retort: "Pray, sir, who are you, to take so much authority on yourself?" "I am a minister of the Gospel," replied Mr. Robinson. (It is said that Mr. Robinson had had the smallpox very severely, which left him with a rough visage and deprived him of the sight of one eye.) "But," said Mr. Robinson, "if you wish certainly to know whether I am a minister or not, if you will accompany me, you may be convinced by hearing me preach." The innkeeper replied: "I will, if you preach from a text I will give you." "Let me hear it," responded the preacher. The reply was, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Mr. Robinson

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<sup>4</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, p. 128.

agreed, and the story is that the man went, and became a very pious and useful member of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

There is another interesting incident in connection with this visit at Hanover. They were very anxious to give Mr. Robinson a monetary expression of their appreciation of his ministry. But he told them he would have nothing. They were not to be defeated by this refusal. So they gave the money to one who had access to his saddle bags. But as he came to lift the bags he noted their excessive weight. Opening them, he found the money, and he said: "I see you are resolved I shall have your money; I will take it; but, as I have told you before, I do not need it; I have enough, nor will I appropriate it to my own use; but there is a young man of my acquaintance, of promising talents and piety, who is now studying with a view to the ministry, but his circumstances are embarrassing, he has not funds to support and carry him on without much difficulty; this money will relieve him from his pecuniary difficulties; I will take charge of it and appropriate it to his use; and as soon as he is licensed, we will send him to visit you; it may be that you may now, by your liberality, be educating a minister for yourselves."

The young man in Mr. Robinson's mind was Samuel Davies, who became the fourth president of the College of New Jersey.<sup>6</sup>

Upon leaving Hanover, Mr. Robinson returned up the Shenandoah Valley. It is not clear what order he followed in visiting the counties. Among those generally enumerated are the following: Charlotte, Prince Edward, Campbell, Albemarle. The winter of 1743-4 was spent in North Carolina, and during the journeyings that winter he was exposed to the rigors of the climate. His health, none too vigorous at the best, was permanently impaired. Still he kept on his way. All this work was under the superintendence of the Presbytery of New Castle. On his way north he visited Wimico and other points in Maryland. Next we find him "in the Government of New York," probably in the Highlands.

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<sup>5</sup> Miller, *Life of Rodgers*, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Sprague, p. 94.

After an absence of several months, while he was laboring within the bounds of the Presbytery of New Castle, he attended a meeting of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, in Philadelphia, on May 19, 1745, and was elected moderator.

On September 19, 1745, the New Side Presbyteries met in Elizabethtown and erected themselves into the Synod of New York, composed of three presbyteries—New Brunswick, New York, and New Castle (New Side). Mr. Robinson was present and was enrolled as a member of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. One of the first items of business to be considered, after organization, was the work in Virginia, which Mr. Robinson had promoted in a wonderful way. The minute on the records is as follows:

The circumstances of Virginia being brought under consideration, and the wide door that is opened for the preaching of the gospel in these parts, with a hopeful prospect of success, the Synod are unanimously of the opinion, that Mr. Robinson is the most suitable person to be sent among them, and accordingly they do earnestly recommend it to him to go down and help them as soon as his circumstances will permit him, and reside there for some months.<sup>7</sup>

Upon the adjournment of the Synod the Presbytery held a meeting at Elizabethtown on September 19, 1745, Mr. Robinson acting as moderator.

A *pro re nata* meeting was held in Philadelphia, March 19, 1745-6, Mr. Robinson acting as moderator. The following record appears:

Mr. Robinson having by indulgence for a considerable time bestowed his labors within the bounds of the Presbytery of New Castle, and the Providence of God appearing to call for a dismission from this Presbytery in order to join with the Presbytery of New Castle, that he might be under the better advantage to serve the interests of religion among them, we therefore can't but look on his desire as very reasonable, and although we can't act with the full power of the Presbytery, yet we can and do declare for ourselves that Mr. Robinson be free to joyn with the Presbytery of New Castle and receive

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<sup>7</sup> *Records of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 234.

his directions from them in all cases as fully as if he was in most formal manner dismissed from us, and we think that the matter appears more clear in that his labors in these parts have been with the consent of Presbytery, and we desire our brethren of the Presbytery of New Castle to conduct themselves toward Mr. Robinson in all respects as if we could act with the full power of Presbytery.<sup>a</sup>

When the Presbytery met at Maidenhead, May 21, 1746, Mr. Robinson was neither present nor marked absent. There is the record: "also that Mr. William Robinson was dismissed by a quorum of the Presbytery from this Presbytery and joyined the New Castle Presbytery. See the particular account of it pages 77, 78."

Webster thus describes Mr. Robinson's work within the bounds of the Presbytery of New Castle in 1745 and 1746:

In 1745, a most glorious display of grace began by his ministry in Wicomico, in Somerset County, Maryland. In Baltimore County, there was a considerable revival; in Kent County and Queen Anne's, a number of careless sinners were awakened and hopefully brought to Christ. "The work was begun and mainly carried on by that favored man, Mr. Robinson, whose success, whenever I reflect on it, astonishes me."

This last quotation is probably from Samuel Davies. Webster continues:

The last six months of his life he spent at St. George's, Delaware, and took charge of the congregation. Of his labors there we have no record. There was a revival there under his occasional visits previously and those of Whitefield. It seems to have constituted a part of Bohemin congregation, and to have enjoyed the benefits of Whitefield's visit in November, 1740. It became a separate congregation, and Robinson, in March, 1746, took his certificate from New Brunswick Presbytery to New Castle with a view of becoming their pastor. But his end was at hand. He died August 1, 1746, before installation. On his deathbed he left it as his last request to Davies to go to Hanover. To him he bequeathed most of his books, having previously aided him with money.<sup>b</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> *Mss. records in loco.*

<sup>b</sup> Webster, p. 477 f.

Samuel Blair preached the funeral sermon at St. George's.<sup>10</sup> There is a copy of this sermon in Princeton Theological Seminary Library. It was from the text, Zechariah 1:5, "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?" Referring to the beginning of Mr. Robinson's preparation for the ministry, he said: "And having for a considerable time well approved himself as a sincere and excellent Christian, at the instance of some ministers, who became acquainted with him and his qualifications, and found he had so good a foundation laid already, he betook himself to the prosecuting of his learning, and study of divinity under the direction of the late Reverend Mr. Tennent, of Neshaminy, in order to his being accomplished for the service of the Gospel Ministry. At length, after due course of trials, he was with high approbation, licensed to preach the Gospel of Christ; and shortly afterwards, was solemnly ordained to the office of the Gospel Ministry, but without a fixed relation to any particular place, as he chose, for more extensive usefulness, to be at liberty, to labor in the many destitute places that were through the land. And a singularly laborious servant has he ever since been to the work of his great Lord: to this, his abundant travels, under all the difficulties of a weak, infirm body, to preach the Gospel in the most remote and desolate places, afford sufficient testimony. Travelling in the several provinces of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Carolina; always with the consent, or at the direction of his brethren, to whose direction he was still most readily subject, he pursued the large scene of his labors, not of constraint but willingly; he thought no hardship too great

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<sup>10</sup> *A Sermon, preached at George's-Town, in Newcastle County, at the Funeral of the Reverend Mr. William Robinson, Late Minister of the Gospel there, who departed this life August 3, 1746.* By Samuel Blair, Minister of the Gospel at New-Londonerry in Pennsylvania. Psalm cxii, 6: The Righteous Shall be in Everlasting Remembrance.

There is confusion of dates. Some hold that he died in April, 1746. This could hardly have been, else it would have been reported at the meeting of the Presbytery of New Brunswick held at Maidenhead, May 21, 1746. It seems better to take the date of his death as given by Webster, August 1. And the date on the title page of the sermon as the date of the funeral, August 3, 1746. Alexander declares that it is not known where his body rests; p. 340.

that he might fully testify the Gospel of the Grace of God, and finish his course with joy."<sup>11</sup>

Some authorities claim that he came to St. George's in 1743, but this could not have been. He probably stopped here as he started on his Virginia trip about May 1, 1743, according to the appointment of the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

It is probable that St. George's was a split from Drawyers in 1742, and was made up of New Side sympathizers. This explains the interest of Whitefield in it. In his diary he mentions St. George's as one of the places where he preached.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Read, who was pastor of St. George's in 1768, is authority for the following statement: "About the year 1742 the Drawyers Church divided. The party that withdrew, being called the New Side, were formed into a society and erected a meeting house about six miles northeast of Drawyers meeting house and formed a large and respectable congregation denominated "St. George's Congregation," and very early invited Mr. Robinson to be their minister."<sup>13</sup>

The following summary of William Robinson's work in Virginia is given by Rev. William Henry Foote, D.D.:

The first minister, not of the Church of England, these people heard preach was William Robinson, of whom President Davies says: "That favored man, Mr. Robinson, whose success, whenever I reflect upon it, astonishes me. Oh, he did so much in a little time, and who would not choose such an expeditious pilgrimage through the world?" Equal to Makemie in devotion to the cause, his superior, in all probability, in ardor and power over men's passions, he stands second in the point of time on the list of those whom the Presbyterian Church in Virginia delights to honor, as an apostolic missionary, east of the Blue Ridge. Makemie's labors were on the seashore; Robinson's at the head of tide water; we see the fruits of the former in the still existing churches of Maryland and in the organization of the mother Presbytery of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church; and of the latter, in the organization of those churches in Virginia, and the introduction of that master workman that gave character to the Presbytery of Hanover and the

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<sup>11</sup> *A Sermon*, etc., p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Tyerman's *Life of George Whitefield*, vol. i.

<sup>13</sup> *History of Delaware*, by Scharf, p. 967 ff.

Synod of Virginia, and left an impress that a century of years has not done away.<sup>14</sup>

Another estimate is to the same intent:

The mission of one of these men led to unimagined results. William Robinson, who was remarkable for his sweet temper and evangelistic power, was sent in 1743 to the new settlements in Virginia and North Carolina on both sides of the Blue Ridge. In after years aged men told wonderful stories of what they witnessed in their youth where he preached. Congregations were organized by him in the Presbyterian population that was filling up the back country.<sup>15</sup>

The Presbytery of Hanover was erected by the Synod of New York in 1755. The first meeting was held in Hanover, in December of that year and the opening sermon was delivered by Rev. Samuel Davies.<sup>16</sup>

Such is the story of William Robinson, another of the Log College alumni, who received from that matchless teacher, William Tennent, the spirit of consecration and sacrifice to a degree surpassed by none of his associates. And receiving ordination as an evangelist by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, he forthwith entered with enthusiasm upon the program of the Brunswick Brethren. Although frail of body, he pushed far afield into remote and destitute regions with his flaming evangel.

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<sup>14</sup> Foote, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, by Charles H. Maxson, p. 100 f.

<sup>16</sup> *Records of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 284 f.