

A COLLECTION OF PAPERS
READ BEFORE THE
BUCKS COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PUBLISHED FOR THE SOCIETY

BY

B. F. FACKENTHAL, JR.

RIEGELSVILLE, PA.

VOLUME I.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

HON. HARMAN YERKES
HENRY C. MERCER
WARREN S. ELY

MISS AGNES B. WILLIAMS
CLARENCE D. HOTCHKISS
B. F. FACKENTHAL, JR.

PRESS OF
THE CHEMICAL PUBLISHING CO.
EASTON, PA.

997

The Neshaminy Church.

BY REV. D. K. TURNER, HARTSVILLE, PA.

(Hartsville Meeting, April 24, 1883).

The history of an ancient church is often the history of the community in which it is located. It is intimately connected with the prosperity or adversity of the people, and shares in the varied fortunes with which they are visited. In many instances, in the early settlement of the country, those who came into a particular locality were of the same religious persuasion, and soon after their arrival associated themselves together for the establishment and maintenance of the worship of the Supreme Being according to their own views. They prized the institutions of religion and education, and the church and the school-house rose together in the wilderness almost before they had made their own homes comfortable. Only a short time elapsed after the first settlers came into the neighborhood of Neshaminy, before the Presbyterian church was organized. So far as is known there are no sessional-records of the Neshaminy church, previous to 1735, and no records of the board of trustees, or of baptisms, births and marriages previous to 1788. A small blank-book, bound in parchment, has receipts for salary by pastors, beginning with 1743, and some dates of their ordination and installation.

Rev. Robert B. Belville did not share in the opinion of many others that the church was first represented in Presbytery in 1710 as the records in his own hand, in the book to which I have referred, will show; he says it "Is all that can be procured with certainty." His words on this point are the following: "The congregation of Neshaminy was composed of immigrants from Ireland, and was collected and organized by Rev. William Tennent, Sr., the founder and principal of Log College. The first church-building was erected in the year 1727." That this remark in respect to the erection of the church-building in 1727 is true, finds confirmation from the fact that a square stone is now in the wall in front of the graveyard with the date 1727 cut upon it, and the initials "W. M." and "W. G." This stone was in the old church

situated in the graveyard, and when the building was taken down, it was used with other material for the wall enclosing the cemetery. When the cemetery wall was removed, in 1852, this stone was put as a relic of antiquity, in the new wall. There is no evidence that any house of worship was erected in that neighborhood previous to 1727.

Rev. William Tennent, Sr., came from Ireland in the year 1716. He had received a thorough classical education in his native country, and entered the ministry of the Episcopal church, being for some years the chaplain of a nobleman. Not long after arriving he severed his connection with the established church of Ireland, and united with the Presbyterian Synod in 1718. Some have thought that he was pastor at Bensalem, and some individuals point out the identical spot where he taught the Log College, and the hole in the ground where the cellar of his house was located; by the records of the church in Bedford, N. Y. it appears that he was pastor in that place from 1719 to 1726, almost all the period from the time he joined the Synod till he came to Neshaminy. He was present at the meetings of the Synod, which were held in Philadelphia, but once during that time. If he was at Bensalem, why was he absent from Synod every year but one in seven years, when that place is within twenty miles of the city, in which its sessions were uniformly held? In 1719 a collection was made in Glasgow and Ayr in Scotland for the missionary fund of America. Part or all of this donation was expected to be in goods, and it was not known whether the goods would arrive in New York or Philadelphia, whereupon Synod appointed a committee of three clergymen near New York, one of whom was Mr. Tennent, to receive and sell the goods, if they came to New York; and three other clergymen near Philadelphia, to do the same thing if they came to Philadelphia. Why should Mr. Tennent be appointed on a New York committee, unless he were near New York? He was never pastor at Bensalem, though he may have preached there. In 1721 he was at the Synod in Philadelphia, and it is possible he may have supplied the Bensalem pulpit when he was on his way to or from that meeting. In 1726 he came to Neshaminy, and the year after in all probability the original meeting-house was reared. Rev. Paulus Van Vleck, who, it has been supposed,

was the minister of our Neshaminy church for a time in 1710 and 1711, was really with the Reformed Dutch Neshaminy church in what is now the village of Feasterville, and at the same time at Bensalem, the two churches being both then in the same ecclesiastical denomination, and under the same ministerial charge. Bensalem was afterward taken within the Presbyterian fold. Mr. Van Vleck applied in 1710 to the Presbytery of Philadelphia to be received as a member, and when persons in subsequent years noticed on the records of the Presbytery, that he was from the Neshaminy church, they took it for granted that it referred to the Warwick church, whereas it was the Southampton church, not Warwick, which was meant, which bore the same name. The same mistake in the name, acting conversely may have located Mr. Tennent at Bensalem. We have no information in respect to any pastor of the church previous to Mr. Tennent, and it is highly probable that he gathered or organized the congregation, or that he came here very soon after it was organized. The original members were of Scotch descent, from the north of Ireland. But the first owners of the land in this vicinity, who obtained their titles from William Penn, were English and most of them residents of London. Deeds now in possession of J. Lewis Widdifield, R. H. Darrah, John J. Spencer, Cornelius Carrell, and others extending back to 1703 or 1704, refer to patents for land obtained from Penn in 1684, and mention persons with English names and some in London as the original patentees. None of these however were actual settlers, the latter were nearly all from Ireland and of the Presbyterian faith. They invited Mr. Tennent to come among them and preach the gospel. That there was no church organization when he arrived, finds additional support in the fact, that he was never installed as pastor.

Mr. Tennent was in limited circumstances pecuniarily, as we learn in the minutes of the Synod that he borrowed money from the fund raised to support feeble churches, and the widows and orphans of deceased ministers, and that in 1728 the interest due on this borrowed money was remitted to him. The Synod had such confidence in him that they released a mortgage they held for it on some other person, and took Mr. Tennent's own bond for the payment of it. Partly to educate his younger sons he

established a school for the training of young men, with particular reference to the gospel ministry. He had four sons, Gilbert, William, John and Charles, all of whom were instructed at Neshaminy except Gilbert, the oldest, who was licensed to preach in 1726. He assisted his father for a time at Log College, as the institution was called from the fact that its exercises were held in a log school-house, about 18 by 20 feet, which stood on the property now occupied by Mr. Warner, about a mile below Hartsville. Gilbert was invited to assume charge of the church at New Brunswick, N. J., where he remained sixteen years. In 1743 he was elected pastor of the Second church, Philadelphia, and continued there until his death, in 1764. He was an able, earnest and powerful preacher, and rose to a high rank among the clergymen of the Presbyterian church.

William Tennent, Jr., was about twenty-one years of age when the family reached this neighborhood. For a year or two he assisted at the "College," and then repaired to his brother Gilbert's home at New Brunswick, to perfect himself more fully in theology. It was there that he passed through the trance, of which you have all often doubtless heard, when he supposed he was taken to Heaven. From this state of suspended animation he was with difficulty restored, all his friends believing him to be dead except a young physician, who attended him and who succeeded in recalling the vital spark at the very juncture when he was about to be conveyed to the grave. He was ever after disinclined to speak of his experience during those days of unconsciousness, but once when urged to give an account of what he saw in the spirit world, he stated that he seemed to himself to be transported to the presence of God in the mansions of light, and for a brief season to have enjoyed the ineffable bliss of that glorious state, and that it was with great reluctance he complied with the command to return to earth. This event produced such an effect upon his mind that he lost all the knowledge he had acquired in his childhood and youth, and was obliged to learn again how to read English and Latin. Some months later however, his memory recovered its power, and his forgotten knowledge gradually returned to him. When his health was sufficiently restored he was examined and licensed by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, and ordained as pastor

of the church of Freehold, N. J., where his younger brother, John, had been pastor before him. He continued in this charge, greatly beloved and useful at home and in other congregations in which he frequently preached, till his death in 1777, a period of nearly forty-four years. His decease occurred during the American Revolution; he was an earnest patriot, and one of the last expressions that came from his lips was a desire that his country might come forth from that arduous struggle with Great Britain free and independent.

The third son of Mr. Tennent, Sr., John, as has already been mentioned, was minister at Freehold, before his older brother, William. But his pastorate was only about a year and a half, when he died of consumption, leaving a reputation for talents, eloquence and piety, which, if life had been spared, would have raised him to a high position in the church.

The fourth son, Charles, entered the same profession, and was stationed successively in two churches in Delaware and Maryland, being called away by death in 1770, when he was about 60 years of age. These sons of old Mr. Tennent were all connected with Log College, either as pupils or instructors, and probably were all members of Neshaminy church, which has the honor of sending forth into the world some of the most able and successful ministers that honored the early history of our beloved land. Other eminent men were educated at this school, as Rev. John Blair, and Samuel Blair, Samuel Finley, William Robinson and John Rowland, who shone as bright lights in the church and the state during the last century. But a particular account of them does not fall within the range of this paper.

The location of Log College during the first nine years of Mr. Tennent's residence at Neshaminy, from 1726 to 1735, is shadowed by a cloud of uncertainty. In the latter year, 1735, he bought the farm on which Mr. Cornelius Carrell now lives, called 100 acres, of John White, of Philadelphia, for £140, which at \$5 a pound, was \$700. In the deed from White, Mr. Tennent is spoken of as a resident "of Northampton," and therefore did not own nor rent what is called the "Log College lot" previous to 1735. In 1739 the Presbytery appointed Rev. Francis McHenry as Mr. Tennent's assistant on account of his

feeble health, and in 1742 Mr. Tennent resigned his charge through growing infirmities. This was seven years after he came to reside on the Log College grounds. In an old deed now in possession of Mr. Cornelius Carrell, it is said that Mr. Tennent's will was made Feb. 16, 1745, and that he died shortly afterwards. The slab over his grave stating that he died in 1746 is therefore probably an error. Rev. Gilbert Tennent was named as executor of the real estate, and Mrs. Catharine Tennent as executrix of the personal property. Gilbert Tennent in February, 1746, conveyed the farm for £361 to John Baldwin. Of course Mr. Tennent could not have died after the executor of the will had disposed of the property by a deed, in which he affirms that he had died before. In 1746, the college of New Jersey was established first at Elizabethtown; removed in 1748 to Newark and in 1756 again removed to Princeton, where it has remained a blessing to Christianity and sound learning till the present time. Log College was the germ of Princeton College. The need of an institution such as Log College was felt, and when its doors were closed by the advanced age and death of its founder, but a short time elapsed before the friends of education took measures for the permanent establishment of an institution in which young men could obtain a liberal education without incurring the expense of crossing the ocean.

As already stated Mr. Tennent was assisted during the last years of his ministry by Rev. Francis McHenry. One part of the field was the church at Deep Run, six miles northwest of Doylestown, and there the venerable man stately preached till declining years prevented. Mr. McHenry relieved his senior colleague from this duty, and the upper-congregation as it was sometimes called, desired to have him devote his whole time to them, but by advice of Presbytery he continued to labor part of the time at Neshaminy. In 1741 a division occurred in the Synod of Philadelphia between the "Old Lights" and the "New Lights" by reason of differences, not in doctrine, but in measures proper to be used for the promotion of religion. About the same time a division seems to have taken place in the church at Neshaminy. The part that favored the "new measures," which were approved also by Mr. Tennent, chose Rev. Charles

Beatty, a pupil of Log College, as their pastor, and built a house of worship where the present church in Warwick stands; and the other party, favoring the "old measures," remained in the old house which stood in the present graveyard, under the administrations of Mr. McHenry, who also preached at Deep Run until 1757, when he departed this life. As a union of the New Light Synod, of New York, and the Old Light Synod, of Philadelphia, occurred in the following year, it is probable that services were given up in the old church, and the two parts of the congregation were after a time reunited. But the old edifice still remained standing till 1792, when it was taken down and the material used in the construction of a wall around the graveyard. Mr. McHenry was an able and learned man, and had a warm place in the affections of his congregations.

Upon Mr. Tennent's resignation, in 1742, Rev. Charles Beatty was chosen as his successor. He had been a pupil of Log College. One day a young man with a peddler's pack came to the door of that institution and knocked. Mr. Tennent upon opening it was addressed by the young stranger in correct Latin. This excited his surprise, and engaging in conversation with him discovered that he possessed talents and seemed imbued with piety and energy. He then said to him, "Go sell the contents of your pack, and return and study with me." This opened the way for the continuance of the studies Beatty had begun in Ireland. In due time he finished his preparation, and was ordained pastor at Neshaminy, December 1, 1743, and as noted in the old receipt book I have spoken of, "he is to have for a yearly support in his ministry amongst us the sum of sixty pounds." If that was in Pennsylvania currency, seven shilling and six pence to the dollar, it would be but \$160. But if it was reckoned by sterling money it would be nearly \$300. Mr. Beatty resided during a considerable part of his life on the farm which is now owned by John M. Darrah and occupied by Hiram Carr, but towards the last part of his life he purchased 57 acres of land at the cross roads, (now Hartsville) and built a substantial stone house, which is now the home of Miss Marietta Long.

The same year in which Mr. Beatty began his labors at Neshaminy, 1743, but before he was ordained, his people, who

sympathized with the "New Lights," purchased a lot of ground, containing "two acres and twelve square perches," of Thomas Howell, who deeded it July 1, and 2, 1743, to James Craven, John Grey, Alexander Jemyson, Robert Walker, John McCulloch, George Hare, Henry Jemyson, Jr., and John Scott, trustees for the congregation. It was provided in the deed, that no minister should ever be allowed to preach in the proposed edifice without the consent of the communicant members of the congregation, and that no person should hold the office of trustee who was not in sympathy with the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith and with the work of grace that had recently appeared in "this land, New England and Scotland in calling sinners to repentance." It was designed and expressly provided that the pastors should be Presbyterians, and that they should cordially approve of the views of the "New Lights."

Mr. Beatty was often employed by the Synod of the Presbyterian church to go among the congregations of this country and Great Britain and solicit contributions in aid of the fund for aged ministers and the destitute families of deceased ministers and for missionary purposes. Between 1760 and 1762, and again between 1767 and 1769, he visited Great Britain, being absent from home on each visit about two years. The first time his main object was to secure donations to the fund of the Synod and to interest the people of the mother country in the situation and wants of the Presbyterian congregations in the infant colonies. He witnessed the coronation of George III, was presented to the king, and received from him a handsome donation to the fund. His second voyage across the Atlantic was caused partly by the state of his wife's health who was suffering from cancer. She was taken to Edinburg, Scotland, where she died, March 22, 1768. Mr. Beatty returned to America in 1769. He was appointed in 1763 with Rev. John Brainard to visit the frontier settlements, and endeavor to open the way for preaching the word of God, but they were prevented from going at that time. Three years later, however, the Synod renewed the appointment of Mr. Beatty, and associated with him Rev. George Duffield, of Carlisle, to go to the western part of Pennsylvania, among the Indian tribes, inquire into their

moral condition and induce them to welcome Christian teachers. Accompanied by Joseph Peepy, an Indian interpreter, they proceeded to Fort Pitt, now Pittsburg, and 130 miles beyond, into what is now the state of Ohio. They preached at Fort Pitt to the soldiers and to the people of the town, and visited the Delaware Indians, who gave them a friendly reception. At the end of six weeks, after suffering many hardships, they returned home, and made their report to the Synod the following year. It was hoped that this first step might be speedily followed up, and that preachers might be sent in a short time to labor among the savages; but the Revolutionary war soon occupied the minds of the people and many years passed before anything effectual was undertaken.

In 1756 England was engaged in war with France, which involved the colonies on this continent. The Indians in the western part of New York and of this state were allies of the French and often attacked the English settlements. For their defence a corps of 560 men was enlisted in Pennsylvania and placed under the command of Benjamin Franklin, and Mr. Beatty was appointed chaplain. He marched with the troops in January and was absent some weeks in the winter. While with Franklin in the interior of the state an amusing incident occurred, which is thus related by the colonel himself:

"We had for our chaplain a zealous Presbyterian minister, Mr. Beatty, who complained to me that the men did not generally attend his prayers and exhortations. When they enlisted they were promised, besides pay and provisions, a gill of rum a day, which was punctually served out to them, half in the morning and half in the evening, and I observed they were punctual in attending to receive it, upon which I said to Mr. Beatty: 'It is perhaps below the dignity of your profession to act as the steward of the rum, but if you were to distribute it out, only just after prayers, you would have them all about you.' He liked the thought, undertook the task, and with the help of a few hands to measure out the liquor executed it to satisfaction, and never were prayers more generally and more punctually attended. So that I think this method preferable to the punishment inflicted by some military laws for non-attendance on divine service."

Having returned home he was engaged in his work as pastor when another alarm by Indians caused a call for more troops, and a recruiting officer spent some days at Neshaminy in the effort to enlist soldiers, but with indifferent success. On the following Sabbath Mr. Beatty made an appeal to the men before him in the church to take up arms for the protection of the poor people in danger on the frontier, and told them that he intended to enlist as chaplain and that he should be glad to have as many of his friends as possible go with him. In part at least as the result of his appeal a hundred men were enrolled in the vicinity during the subsequent week. Mr. Beatty was commissioned as chaplain by the governor of the State and set out from home May 4th to meet the regiment at Harris' Ferry, now Harrisburg. The elders of the church accompanied him as far as the Schuylkill. He remained with the regiment near the Susquehanna until August, when the condition of affairs on the border permitted his return home. Two years later, in 1758, he was chaplain of the 1st battalion of Pennsylvania troops, which went to Pittsburg, and was no doubt part of the army of 900 men under Gen. Forbes, which took Fort Du Quesne from the French, when its name was changed to Fort Pitt. There he preached in the last part of November before the whole army, after their triumphant entrance into the enemies' fortifications, the first thanksgiving discourse and probably the first protestant sermon ever preached in the valley of the Mississippi. The following year he declined an invitation to become a chaplain in the army. Mr. Beatty always evinced a warm interest in the welfare of Princeton College, of which he was a trustee nine years. In 1772 he was sent as a commissioner to the Island of Barbadoes, in the West Indies, where were many English residents of wealth, who it was supposed might be induced to contribute pecuniary aid and perhaps send their sons to the institution for training. The president, Dr. John Witherspoon, was first requested to take upon himself this important duty; but as he could not leave, his son, James Witherspoon, was appointed for the service, and Mr. Beatty was selected to accompany him. Governor Penn, of this state, and Governor Franklin, of New Jersey, each gave him a passport or letter of commendation. He was well re-

ceived by the governor and citizens of the Island, but before the object of his visit was fully accomplished he died of yellow-fever on that distant island, August 13, 1772, and was committed to the grave among strangers.

Mr. Beatty married the daughter of John Reading, of Amwell, N. J., who was sometimes called Governor Reading, from the fact that he was vice-president of his Majesty's council for the province of New Jersey, and at the death of Governor Hamilton the administration of provincial affairs rested upon him till the arrival of another governor from England. Mr. and Mrs. Beatty had eleven children, two of whom died very young. Four of his sons were at one time officers in the Revolutionary army, one of whom, John, was commissary general of prisoners with the rank of colonel. Previous to the war he practiced medicine for a time at Hartsville, but subsequently removed to Trenton, N. J. He was speaker of the house of representatives of that state, and filled various other important offices. He was president of the Trenton Delaware Bridge Company, and projected the first bridge over the river at that place, which still stands firm after the lapse of seventy-five years. Another son, Charles Clinton, was killed, when he was captain in the Revolutionary army, by the accidental discharge of a rifle. Another son, Reading was a physician at Hartsville, ("Hart's Cross Roads," as it was then called), at a later period he removed to Erwinna, then to Fallsington, Bucks county, where he resided forty years. He was the father of John Beatty, of Doylestown, of Mrs. Dr. Robert Steele and Dr. C. C. Beatty, of Abington, and of the first wife of Rev. Henry R. Wilson, D. D., now secretary of Church Erection of the Presbyterian church. Another son was Erkurios, which name his father coined from two Greek words "E," from, and "Kurios," the Lord. The family names having been given to the other sons, Mr. Beatty desired to express his gratitude to God for this new object of paternal love. The boy grew up to be a useful and distinguished man; a brave soldier and officer in the war of the Revolution, and in the United States army after its close. In 1793 he resigned his office of major in the regular army, and located in Princeton, N. J., where he became colonel in the state militia, and held

divers offices of trust and honor. He was the father of Rev. C. C. Beatty, late of Steubenville, Ohio. Another son was named William Pitt, after the distinguished British statesman who opposed the oppression of the colonies by the English government. Though Rev. Mr. Beatty died before all his children had passed the period of youth, yet several of his sons reached most honorable positions in the service of their country and eminence in society. Few men have been ancestors of a posterity whose record has been more commendable.

After his death the congregation was without a pastor about two years. In May, 1774, a call was extended to Rev. Nathaniel Irwin, a native of Fagg's Manor, Chester county. He was educated at Princeton College, and was in that institution at the same time with James Madison, President of the United States; Samuel Stanhope Smith, afterwards president of the College of New Jersey; William Bradford, who became one of the justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; Gen. John Beatty, son of Rev. Charles Beatty, and others, who subsequently occupied distinguished places at the bar and on the bench, who joined with him in forming the American Whig Society. He was licensed to preach in 1772, or early in 1773, and was employed for a time in preaching in the central portions of Pennsylvania and Virginia, which were then almost wholly missionary fields. For this service the Synod of Philadelphia voted him the compensation of £9 9s. 3d., or about \$25.17. He was ordained and installed at Neshaminy, November 3, 1774. In a record of the church it is stated that he is to have for yearly support the sum of £130 (in Pennsylvania currency nearly \$350), "until said congregation provide a parsonage for Mr. Irwin, and, when it is provided, ye sum of 100 pounds." The parsonage was never procured, and Mr. Irwin purchased a farm on the road from Doylestown to Philadelphia, now owned by John McKinstry, where he resided till 1810, when he built a large stone house on the west side of the turnpike, somewhat more pretentious, which still stands with much the same appearance it had when first erected; he was removed by death only two years after his new home was completed.

In 1775 shortly after his ordination the Neshaminy church

was improved and enlarged. The war of the Revolution was just commencing, and Mr. Irwin often urged the men of his congregation to advocate the federal cause and enlist in the Continental army. By his activity and zeal in the cause of liberty, he rendered himself an object of hostility to such as sympathized with the oppressive enactments of Parliament; and it is said that his life was sometimes in imminent danger. On one occasion, tradition tells us, it was announced to the people at the church that "the British were coming," and Mr. Irwin had only time to give them a patriotic exhortation, commend them to the Lord of Hosts, mount his horse and flee. The Synod of Philadelphia and New York was heartily in favor of resisting the Crown till the demands of the colonies were complied with.

The honor of inventing the application of steam to navigation has generally been given to Robert Fulton, of New York, who was the first to make steamboats completely successful. But the priority in this invention really belongs to John Fitch, a native of Connecticut. When young he served an apprenticeship with a watch-maker and became skilled as a silversmith. He came to Pennsylvania in 1777, when he was 34 years of age, and resided in the lower part of Warminster, where he established himself in his calling in a wheelwright-shop, belonging to Jacobus Scout, or "Cobe Scout" as he was familiarly styled. Fitch often attended public worship at Neshaminy church, and had a high respect for Mr. Irwin whom he deemed superior to the position in which Providence had placed him. As he was returning from meeting one Sabbath morning, and was walking with a companion along the "Street road," he became abstracted and paid no attention to his friend's remarks. A carriage had passed swiftly by them with a fleet horse, and he afterwards said that the idea struck him with great force that perhaps a carriage might be propelled along a common road by some power other than that of animals. He began at once to revolve contrivances in his mind by which a wheeled vehicle might move by steam on an ordinary highway. This was his aim at first, but finding unexpected obstacles he set about constructing a steamboat to sail on the water. In two or three weeks he carried his plans to Rev. Mr. Irwin for consultation.

Mr. Irwin showed him some diagrams representing a steam-engine, and Fitch was surprised and chagrined that his idea was not altogether new, as he had never seen nor heard of a steam-engine before, yet he was strengthened in the belief that if steam had been used for other purposes he might be successful in his scheme. Daniel Longstreth, in an article published in the Bucks County Intelligencer, says, "It was in this log shop (Cobe Scout's) that Fitch made his model steam-boat with paddle-wheels as they are now used. This model was tried on a small stream on Joseph Longstreth's meadow, about half a mile from Davisville, in Southampton township, and it realized every expectation. The machinery was made of brass, with the exception of the paddle-wheels which were made of wood by Nathaniel B. Boileau, whilst on a visit during a vacation from Princeton College." After spending much time in perfecting his engine he applied to Congress, which met at that time in New York, for pecuniary assistance in building a vessel. But no definite action was taken, except to appoint a committee to consider it. He then applied to the legislatures of Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but the bills presented before these bodies failed. He visited General Washington and Benjamin Franklin, and a second time presented to the Legislature of this State a petition, supported by certificates from Rev. Irwin, Abraham Lukens, Seneca Lukens, Daniel Longstreth, James Scout and John Folwell, of Bucks county, "that as early as June 1785, he had told them he had invented a machine for working a boat by steam, and had shown them drafts of it." Decisive action by the Legislature was postponed till another year. Meanwhile a small vessel was built, which ran successfully upon the Delaware river. The legislatures of New York and Delaware now gave him on his petition the exclusive right for fourteen years to use steam in the navigation of boats. A larger boat was built, which made several successful trips from Philadelphia to Burlington and return, one trip was made with thirty passengers on board, against wind and tide, to the great astonishment and admiration of crowds of spectators. Fitch met with great difficulties in the way of applying his invention, arising from want of funds, the incredulity of legislators, and the jealous hostility of owners

of sail vessels. But he was the first one to discover how the power of steam might be used in navigation, and more honor should have been given to his memory by posterity than it has received. He not only made the attempt, but he really succeeded in navigating by steam. To a member of the congregation of Neshaminy is this credit due; and we may say, without violence or impropriety, that the pastor of this church, Rev. Nathaniel Irwin, had a share in bringing before the world one of those inventions which have had the widest and most beneficent bearing upon the welfare of mankind.

Rev. Irwin was shrewd and far-seeing, and possessed great influence in the councils of the Presbyterian church. Previous to the formation of the General Assembly he was four years clerk of the Synod, and after the General Assembly was constituted he was its moderator once and its permanent and stated clerk repeatedly. When new buildings became necessary for the courts and jail, which were formerly in Newtown, he urged the erection of new buildings in a more central location; and though his plan was bitterly opposed, yet he succeeded in company with others in securing the removal of the county seat to Doylestown. He also contributed not a little influence in favor of purchasing the tract of three hundred acres of land on which the almshouse was erected, three miles south of Doylestown. He was appointed by the Governor of Pennsylvania register and recorder of deeds, when the offices were in Newtown, but discharged the duties by a deputy, his son-in-law, Dr. William Hart. Physicians were not as numerous in those days as they are now, and he often prescribed for the sick and furnished them medicine, in weighing out which he used these scales, which are now before you. He wrote wills, deeds, mortgages and other legal papers for members of his congregation. He was fond of music—used to play the violin, and would often amuse young people, whose society he much enjoyed, with lively pieces upon that instrument, when they gathered at his house, and even dancing was occasionally a feature of the entertainment. Yet he was welcomed in houses of mourning and conducted funeral services with much solemnity, comforting the sorrowful, and directing them with moving eloquence to the source of all consolation. He seldom wrote. He usually

preached extempore and often prepared his sermons while jogging along to church on the back of his gentle steed "Dobbin."

An event, in which Mr. Irwin must have been deeply interested, was the encampment of Gen. Washington with the American army in this vicinity in '1777. Some of the British troops had left New York and gone to sea in their fleet, and it was more than three weeks after their departure before Washington could learn whither they had sailed. But supposing they had a design against Philadelphia he came southward from Middlebrook, N. J., and halted on the side of Kerr's hill, about a mile north of Hartsville, and had his headquarters for nearly two weeks in the house where Mrs. William Bothwell now resides half a mile north of this place. The house, particularly the main part next the York road, is standing much as it was when the "Father of his Country" took counsel with his officers one hundred and six years ago. Whether Washington attended the divine service in Neshaminy church on the Sabbath we are not informed, but it is quite likely that he did, as that was his custom whenever it was possible. As soon as the general received news that the British had sailed up the Chesapeake bay, he broke camp and hastened with all speed toward the head of the bay to intercept them, and in a few days after his departure from this neighborhood the battle of the Brandywine was fought. While he was at this place Lafayette, who had just arrived from France and offered his services to the American cause, joined our army and took his place as an honored officer on Washington's staff.

Mr. Irwin died March 3, 1812, aged 65 years and 4 months, and was followed to his grave by a vast concourse of people in carriages and on horseback, which formed a procession more than a mile long. He was laid away just where the pulpit of the old church formerly stood.

In May, 1813, after a vacancy in the pastorate of more than a year, the congregation chose Rev. Robert B. Belville, a native of Delaware, pastor, who was not formally ordained and installed till October of that year. In 1822 and 1823, 101 persons were received as members in the space of eight months, the fruits of a remarkable work of grace; and in 1833, 140

more were admitted. He established a classical school at his own house, where many boys and young men from Philadelphia and elsewhere were educated, and in this enterprise he was much aided by the favorable influence of Rev. James P. Wilson, Sr., D. D., pastor of the First Presbyterian church, of Philadelphia.

In 1818 a new roof was put on the church, which was paid for by a legacy of Henry Jamison, to the amount of \$500. Mr. Belville in 1824 gave to the congregation for burial purposes a half acre of ground adjoining the cemetery, which was subsequently enclosed with the old yard by a substantial stone wall. In 1837 his health became impaired by nervous prostration, which manifested itself in his vocal organs, and for more than a year he was unable to fill his pulpit. Finding little relief from rest or medicine, he resigned his charge, and the pastoral relation was dissolved November 1, 1838. He removed to St. George's, Delaware, where he lived several years. In 1845 he was chosen commissioner to the General Assembly from the Presbytery of New Castle, and went to Cincinnati, attended the meeting, and was visiting friends in Dayton, Ohio, where he died after a brief illness, aged 55 years. His remains were committed to the grave in Dayton.

After the resignation of Mr. Belville the people could not agree upon his successor. A part favored the election of James P. Wilson, Jr., and a part were strongly opposed to it. This difference of views and feelings resulted in an organic division of the church. The part favoring Mr. Wilson remained in the house of worship, and the part opposed to him withdrew and worshiped for a time in the old school-house in the grave-yard and afterwards for three years in a board and frame tabernacle in the grove on the Bristol road, near the present home of Mr. Andrew Long. By recommendation of the court, before whom suit for the possession of the property was brought, the meeting-house and all its appurtenances were put up at public auction. The Wilson party bought it for six thousand dollars, and paid half that amount to the other party, who applied it in 1842 toward the erection of the present building, which was renovated in 1882. Mr. Wilson's congregation in 1845 remodeled the old church and made it appear like a new structure

and far more beautiful than it had ever been before. It remains now for the most part as it was then, except that a new slate roof was placed upon it in 1860. In 1871 a piazza was erected at its front, and in 1867 about \$1,000 expended in repairing and refurnishing it. During the pastorate of Mr. Wilson the church prospered and was greatly strengthened. At the end of eight years, in 1847, he resigned the charge, having been called to the presidency of Delaware College, Newark, Delaware.

My pastorate extended from 1848 to 1873, and that of Rev. W. E. Jones, D. D., the present incumbent, from the fall of 1873 to the present time.

The pastors of the Warminster branch were Rev. Thomas B. Bradford, Rev. Henry R. Wilson, D. D., Sr., Rev. Jacob Belville, D. D., Rev. Alexander M. Woods and Rev. G. H. Nimmo, the present pastor; Rev. John McCluskey, D. D., supplied the pulpit statedly for about a year and a half.

The Neshaminy church has been the mother of several churches. Besides the Warwick and Warminster branches, into which it was severed, the congregation at Forestville and that at Pleasantville may properly be called its off-spring. The Doylestown Presbyterian congregation likewise has many elements in it that were once regularly gathered on the Sabbath within the walls of the venerable Neshaminy church, one hundred and forty years ago.