

TWO AND ONE QUARTER CENTURIES
ON OLD MINE ROAD

THE HISTORY OF MINISINK REFORMED CHURCH

1737 - 1962

Montague, New Jersey

By Mr. Robert William Blasberg

and

Mrs. Jean-Albee Everitt

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 1:3

Therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

2 Corinthians 4:1

FIRST CONSISTORY

Jan Kortrecht

Hannes West Broeck

Hendrick Janse Cortrecht

Jan Van Vliet

William Cool

PRESENT CONSISTORY

John Ardler

William Fischer

Arnold Cole

Carl Schneider

Harold Everitt

Robert Roberts

Robert Blasberg

Carl DeGroat

"The Dutch brought to America a high type of culture, passion for religion and education, a genius for organized and representative government and a determination that made them superior to obstacles."

The congregation of Minisink Reformed Church is the oldest congregation in the county. We may trace our congregation's history back to 1737 when Montague was Minisink and Sussex County had not yet been set aside from Morris, the mother county. In 1737 no more than six hundred people lived in what would be our present county boundaries. The only gristmill was at Flatbrookville. Minisink Village was the most important settlement for miles around, a bustling little center where trading could be done and necessities bought at the craft shops. Wagons were a common sight here, but back in the hills travel was by foot or horseback. The Mine Road had been cut through eighty years before, but there were still no important crossroads. It was hard to get into these long valleys and hard to get out again. This was frontier territory and most of the settlers lived in cabins.

Men plowing with oxen would wave a greeting to friendly Indians, but like as not the braves would end up hanging around the dooryard. The housewife would be obliged to leave her candle dipping to hunt them up a gaudy sash or pour them a glass of rum before they would go away. All these women knew how to spin and weave, and if the ratchet broke on their looms they went to the blacksmith and he made one. The men depended on this all-important artisan for axes and hammers and plowshares and for the sturdy bolts and hinges that made their buildings secure. Every smithy had a special frame into which oxen were led when they came to be shod because an ox cannot stand unless all four feet are on the ground.

Newspapers of recent date were unheard of; the real news was brought by travelers who came by. Anything uncommon created a stir, like the sight of a logger poling his raft down the Delaware, the longest timbers to become towering masts for the sloops of Trenton and Philadelphia. The yawning fireplaces were all fitted with beehive ovens and every cabin had some pewter to gleam in the firelight along the smoky shelves. No kind of worldly goods was really plentiful, with the one exception of fur clothes. They were pressed so tightly together in the black kas cupboards that the door flew open as soon as you released the catch. A man could make a good living trapping and hunting, for the otter and the beaver and the mink abounded and the wild turkey and the eagle wheeled above the lonely cliffs.

King George II was undoubted sovereign of England and her lands beyond the sea. His royal officers administered the sprawling territory of West Jersey and the settlers there owed their allegiance to the crown as surely as the dwellers in Wessex or Sussex or the Cotswold. Under the English, New York City was fast losing its Dutch characteristics, but here behind the mountains the Dutchmen preserved their identity in all its original flower. Englishmen who wished to converse with them had to resort to the Indian tongue, which was the most common language after Dutch. Inevitably, the first church, when it came, would be Dutch Reformed. There was no question of denomination. The question was whether a congregation could be organized among settlers scattered as far apart through the wilderness as a flock of ducks after a cannon shot.

THE CONGREGATION IS ESTABLISHED

In the early 1700's a wedding celebration in Minisink meant that the pastor had finally made the week-long journey from Kingston. At first it was Dominie Petrus Vas, later Dominie Mancius. Many months would pass before the pastor would come again to perform the new group of marriages and to hold services at which the pioneer

infants would be baptized Annetje, and Jacobus and Severyne. For many years religious observance was of necessity a private matter, conducted under the low roofs with the family gathered about the hearth.

The pastor's visits were thus great events. Through the dignity of ritual he brought the Word and the Sacrament and the settlers felt once again the living link with Dort and Amsterdam. For a short time, too, they felt close to the proud city of Kingston, where Dominie Vas preached in a steepled church built entirely of stone and celebrated communion with a silver beaker bestowed by Queen Anne herself. The women would press the dominie for news of his wife who had moved in the leading circles of Amsterdam and who owned rich rugs and carved furniture, silks and laces. What the dominie didn't tell the straight-laced women of Minisink was the matter of the embroidered scarlet petticoat. In all innocence Joanna had displayed it once too often. The jealous ladies petitioned Consistory, who in turn requested the minister to see to it "that his wife do let her frock hang at full length."

By 1737 the Reverend George Mancius believed the settlers he had so often visited were ready for religious organization. His plan was simple enough, a standard arrangement in those times. Four localities should each build a church in their area and share its own minister between the four.

The area Mancius united points up the lack of lateral roads. The localities did not lie in a rough circle, which would have been the efficient grouping, but were strung out instead along a fifty-mile vertical. Smithfield (Shawnee) across the river was the southern base, with Walpack next, then Minisink (Montague), and finally Maghaghkamack, the ancestor of Port Jervis, then a hamlet of scarcely a hundred souls. This historic confederation comprised nothing less than a substantial segment of the Old Mine Road. Very fittingly then, the oldest congregation in Sussex County happened to be formed upon the oldest road of its length in America.

DOMINIE FRYENMOET AND OUR FIRST CHURCH

When Johannes Casparus Fryenmoet first came to Montague he lived out among the families as the later schoolteachers did. Four years later he moved into the first parsonage. Montague was chosen for this honor by virtue of its central location in the fifty-mile line from Shawnee to Port Jervis. Located near the Fort at Nominack that the French and Indian War soon made necessary, the parsonage burned after a few years and was rebuilt elsewhere. Its stones were used for the Eli Fuller house. Again because of its central location the Elders and Deacons often met at the parsonage. When they did, the minutes were inscribed, "Done in Consistory at Nominack."

The four churches shared equally in the parsonage expense just as they shared the minister's salary. After Dominie Fryenmoet had completed his first year, the four congregations agreed to increase the share each paid for his salary. Each church would pay him thirty five pounds a year in money, forty if he married. This was an improvement over the previous stipend which, all in all, had been rounded out with seventy six bushels of oats for feeding his horse and making oat cakes. He shortly claimed the larger offer when he married Magdalena Van Etten in July of 1742. Her family had come from Kingston and settled in Nominack in 1730.

The first churches were rude enough affairs. We learn that the Port Jervis church at Carpenter's Point (Tri-States) was built of logs and there is no reason to believe that ours was otherwise. Our church stood on what we call the Mine Road. For an outlay of twenty eight dollars, a not inconsiderable sum in those days of scarce money, a building thirty feet square was accomplished. The pews were hard benches and there was no stove. But in this wilderness only recently wrested from the primeval forest the bare church represented progress. It was scarcely less mean than the cabins many of the worshipers left when they came to Sabbath worship, and

its very existence proclaimed the triumph of Light over dim chaos and inertia. It was the social center, the fount of learning, the abiding dwelling place of all that was noblest in the community spirit. There was virtue in the bareness of these log churches. At no other time, perhaps, were the Reformed churches more akin to the spirit of that ancient time when the sanctuaries were whitewashed to signify their renunciation of the symbols of idolatry.

Dominie Fryenmoet must have felt a deep satisfaction in guiding his flock in those pioneer buildings. With what reluctance must he have left the people whose generosity had made it possible for him to enter the ministry. The fact that he was preaching in Montague at all is the best part of his story. Mrs. Angell tells it in masterly fashion in her history of the Deerpark congregation. After pointing out that the people here were typical frontiersmen, bold and undisciplined, she goes on to say:

"They were of the sort, however, to be won by the magic of a boy scarcely out of his teens who was able to read and write, which few of them were able to do, who was eloquent and versed in Latin and the scriptures beyond those who were many years his elders. A man of their own mettle would have been a challenge. This young Fryenmoet they would listen to with wonder and respect.

"When first they had faced the necessity of providing a resident preacher for their rapidly growing population, there were not enough preachers of the Reformed faith in America to supply the demand. Where could they hope to find a dominie willing to serve in this remote corner behind the mountains?

"Then this boy among them, like an answer to prayer. He was only sixteen, but already he had the beginning of a theological education which he had acquired in his native Switzerland. He was devout. He spoke their language. He was friendly. They liked him. Short of cash as they were—and money was always scarce on the frontier—they managed somehow to raise between them what was to them the enormous sum of \$314, so that he might be free to complete his education.

"Accordingly, in 1737, Fryenmoet went to Kingston to study with Domonic Mancius who had been administering the sacraments in the Minisinks once a year since 1733. He spent four years there. At the end of that period, church regulations required that he go to Holland to be examined and ordained. But that meant two long and dangerous voyages. Each would require from four to six months. There was danger from pirates. There was danger from cholera and smallpox, which frequently developed in the crowded sailing vessels. They could not afford to lose him. They had, as they told another church which tried to engage him, invested their livelihood in him." Nevertheless, to Holland the young man went, and was there duly ordained.

The attempt to snatch our treasure away from us, to which Mrs. Angell alludes, came about in this manner. During some free Sundays the dominie had preached at the churches in the Rochester unit, another group like ours comprising Rochester (Accord), New Paltz, Marbletown and Shawangunk. Within six months of his coming here they issued a call to him. Our consistory came together in solemn conclave and drew up a letter that to this day is celebrated for its Christian forbearance in the face of a request that offended justice and piety alike.

December 6th, 1741

"To the Reverend Consistories of Rochester, Greetings:

We, your servants, having been informed and concluded therefrom that you have had correspondence with our Preacher, and have insofar seduced him as to send him a call and think that by the amount of money to take him away from us; but that Lord who has hitherto hindered your underhand game, shall further direct it to a good result. Therefore we find ourselves in duty bound, in accordance with the words of

the Saviour, 'Do good to those who do evil to you', etc. so will we in time to come do good to you as we have in the past, for which you do not thank us that he hath served you.

And then you dare say that he hath eight free Sundays in each year, which is as true as the words of the Devil to Eve, 'Ye shall not surely die'. But if you desire to have our preacher four or six times in the year we shall by no means refuse you but will leave it to our Preacher to bargain as to the compensation for his services. And if this cannot prevent the execution of your unjust intention, and the Lord sees fit to use you as a rod to chasten us, we shall accept it as coming from the hand of the Lord and comfort ourselves with the blessed saying of Paul, Hebrews 12, 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.'

And if the Lord hath foreseen that you shall have our Preacher, then nevertheless we do not hope that your consciences will be so seared as to take away with him a part of our livelihood, being the sum of 125 pounds, 12 shillings and 6 pence. Otherwise we shall feel bound to leave the matter to the Civil Court. We expect an answer to this and conclude our reasons with 'The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost remain with you until a blessed eternity,' Amen. We remain your servants.

Signed,

Jan Kortrecht
Jan Van Vliedt
Abraham Van Camp
William Cool

This fine man, to whom our church owes its auspicious beginning, preached along the Old Mine Road for fifteen years. The massacres of the French and Indian War drove him from us in 1756—"fleeing before the public enemy", as General Synod put it. He was soon welcomed by a group of churches that included Kinderhook and Livingston Manor. They kept him there for the rest of his life and buried him beneath the Kinderhook church.

THE BOUNDARY DISPUTE

The church at Maghagamack had always been a Jersey church. Moreover, when military dispatches called Cole's Fort (at East Main St. School) "the fort in West Jersey", they were not confused in their geography. The Port Jervis area originally belonged to New Jersey as completely at Newton does.

The area was settled by Dutchmen from Ulster County. But in the eighteenth century a wave of Jerseymen swarmed north over the mountains and treated the original settlers as though they were squatters. In retaliation New York re-read the charter and claimed territory deep into Sussex County and enforced her claim with the authority of the law and with guns. At one point in this second phase our parishioners were paying tax to support the very jail in Goshen in which Davis and Van Auken, the Jersey Justices, had been imprisoned. To make matters worse, the men in our congregation were fined for refusing to leave the Jersey militia and join York state regiments.

The gloriously vague charter that each side chose to misinterpret specified a line drawn "as far as the northwardmost branch of said bay or river, which is in latitude 41 degrees, 40 minutes". So just where was the northwardmost branch? The situation bears a peculiar relation to church history which is well recounted in Mrs. Angell's colorful style:

"Few ministers have faced a situation as full of dynamite as that which confronted Dominie Fryenmoet. His congregation was literally at swords' point over the question of the boundry between New York and New Jersey—New Jersey claiming the land almost Godeffroy...; New York claiming three miles below the Brick House... Throughout this seventeen miles neighbor was set against neighbor and the Golden Rule was nothing but so many words. There were kidnappings, evictions, assaults and riots over a period of seventy-five years.

"At first, no doubt, it was easy for the young domine to keep clear of the dispute. But when the churches were built in 1742, two of them within the disputed area, he must have had a ticklish problem on his hands.

"In those churches there was a special bench for the Justices of the Peace. These were the most important of the civil officials, and to emphasize the dignity of their office, their bench was surmounted by a roof or canopy set on two posts. But there were duplicate Justices—two in this neighborhood representing New York, namely William Cole and Peter Kuykendall; and two representing New Jersey, namely Solomon Davis and Abraham Van Auken.

"What did Dominie Fryenmoet do about it? Was the bench made long enough to accommodate all four? It would need to be an extra long bench. The Justices did not love each other. Squire Davis and Squire Van Auken had already been imprisoned at Goshen for daring to function as Jersey officials. And even if Squire Cole and Squire Kuykendall were sufficiently imbued with Christian grace to share the bench, you can be sure that Capt. Jacobus Swartwout of the Orange County militia would never be content to sit through with a service where he had to view a Jersey Justice sitting on equal terms with a justice appointed by New York.

"Neither can we imagine Squire Davis and Squire Auken accepting a lesser seat; Squire Van Auken particularly insisted on exercising his authority and was not a man to be intimidated. It would be interesting to know how Dominie Fryenmoet handled the situation. Certainly it required a high order of diplomatic talent. In later years, he was often sought for his ability to deal with delicate situations. Perhaps his skill was acquired while he was ministering to his turbulent congregation in the Maghaghkamick church".

To explain why the magistrates had seats in our churches, Rev. Mills cites the twenty-eighth article in the Synod of Dort:

"As it is the duty of Christian Magistrates to countenance the worship of God, to recommend religion by their example, and protect the members of the community in the full and regular exercise of religious liberty, so it is the business of Ministers, Elders and Decons zealously and faithfully to inculcate upon all their congregations that obedience, love and homage which they owe to Magistrates..."

He notes also that before the Revolution it seems to have been necessary to secure magisterial approval in calling ministers, and that as late as 1820, Consistory members took an oath of civil loyalty. Should we not interpret the church's bench of honor for the Magistrates as an expression of gratitude for their maintenance of religious freedom?

The situation in Pike County, Pennsylvania, was stranger still. Connecticut Yankees were moving in below Calicoon and buying land, not from Pennsylvanians, but from Connecticut "proprietors". This gnarled situation confronted daughters of our parishioners who became fascinated with the clever boys from the nutmeg state and followed them across the river as blushing brides. The strife over clouded property titles persisted for some forty years and continued into the new century. Speaking of the Connecticut Yankees, Mrs. Angell remarks, "Before she got through with it, Pennsylvania had almost as much trouble with them as she had with the Lenni Lenape. We might add in conclusion that the Jersey border was finally settled by a Commis-

sion whose members were drawn from both New York and New Jersey. The long diagonal they drew—Jersey's entire northern border—remains to this day a mockery of logic and a triumphant defiance of every geographical feature in the terrain.

This narrative must reluctantly pass by the stirring events of the French and Indian War, the Revolution, and the War of 1812, for they are not church history. The fact remains, however, that the church felt the effects of these conflicts. They killed many of our parisoners. They drew off money and time that could have been spent in the service of the Lord. They were responsible for the poor start in life that was the lot for many infants who spent too much of their tender years in the crowded forts, so that they grew into a sickly maturity. And each of the wars was followed by a period of spiritual poverty when the years of brutality left the finer sensibilities numb.

These wars are not church history, and yet they impinge closely on our narrative at times. In the French and Indian War, for example, the second year opened with a mother being forced by Indians to witness the murder and scalping of her four children. This took place near the parsonage—it could so easily have been the Fryenmoets! When the children petted the dogs that were kept in the forts to track down lurking Indians, did they think of the Peaceable Kingdom that the dominie talked about?

By a sad coincidence our church was founded in the same year that William Penn's son engineered the infamous Walking Purchase. It was this treachery that made it a simple matter for the French to turn the Indians against the settlers. The time was long past when red men had adopted William Penn into their tribe as Brother Onas, and the Quakers had felt a genuine social responsibility toward the savages, believing them to be descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

During all three wars the congregations were without a minister. Had we been able to induce one to come here we could not have been able to support him. The men were busy fighting and daily life was reduced to one state of emergency succeeded by another. Still, we were not without religious services. When the church could be used, lay leaders took charge, one to guide the singing and one to read from the Bible or from books of sermons and religious commentary.

THE COETUS - CONFERENTIE CONTROVERSY

After about 1725 every new Dutch Reformed church in the land found the Coetus problem came ready-made with the laying up of the foundation. The struggle, like our Revolution, was inevitable; the pity of it is that it could not have been settled expeditiously without the protracted history of spite work and outright violence that characterized it. It cost us our minister, and in other quarters its effects were disastrous.

The Rev. S. W. Mills, writing for the Deerpark Congregation in 1878 explains the situation as clearly and vividly as anyone could:

"The Dutch churches here were all under the care of the Classis of Amsterdam. Calls made here were sent to that Classis for approval. When a church needed a minister, they sent to them for one. There was no ecclesiastical judicatory in the Church here higher than a Consistory—none with power of licensure or ordination. They depended upon the Classis of Amsterdam for these. Many thought that a minister could not preach properly unless ordained by them.

"Holland was at that time the great seat of theological learning. The most learned ministers came from her institutions. If a young man desired to preach he must go to Holland and study theology there or else be excluded from the ministry. As will be readily perceived, great delay and inconvenience resulted from this state of things. Two, three or sometimes four or more years would elapse before a vacant church could be supplied. This led many here to desire institutions here for training young

men for the ministry, and ecclesiastical judicatories with full power of ordination. These were called Coetus and those opposed to it the Conferentie. The younger ministers generally attached themselves to the Coetus, while the older ones and such as were educated in Holland belonged to the Conferentie. Manicus, who organized the Churches here, and the first two Pastors, Fryenmoet and Romeyn, all belonged to the Conferentie party, and favored retaining connection with the Classis of Amsterdam.

"At first the Coetus was simply a body for advice and conference, with no ecclesiastical powers, acting in subordination to the Classis at Amsterdam... While it retained this character, Fryenmoet was connected with it... having been chosen President of the body on one occasion and at another time its Clerk. Subsequently when it was proposed (in 1754) to change the Coetus into a regular Classis with full ecclesiastical powers, and to separate from the Classis at Amsterdam, he and several others withdrew and formed the Conferentie party...

"From this time forward the strife raged bitterly for fifteen years. The peace of the churches was sorely disturbed, congregations were divided. In a few cases congregations had two ministers officiating at the same time, one for the Coetus and the other for the Conferentie party. Neighboring ministers were arrayed against each other. In some instances churches were locked against Ministers, and in others, preachers were assaulted while in the pulpit and religious services were terminated by violence."

An aggravating factor in Montague was undoubtedly the presence of the non-Dutch settlers. If they wished to worship publicly they had to sit through a sermon in Dutch in a church dominated by Dutchmen. Those who did come to church could not be expected to wax enthusiastic over subsidizing journeys to Holland.

Dominie Fryenmoet saw to it in 1745 that his churches here adopted the Act of Subordination whereby they were bound permanently and irrevocably to remain subordinate to the Reverend Classis of Amsterdam. So strongly did he feel about the chain of command that he drew a line through his record of baptisms he had performed before the adoption and wrote beneath, "Baptized by me unlawfully, J.C.F."

Amsterdam finally legalized the American secession in 1771, largely through the efforts of Dr. John H. Livingston, who was there studying theology. The independents in the Montague congregation became so flushed with victory that they threw Dominie Romeyn out. The result was a pastorless community, not only through all the years of the Revolution, but for a total of thirteen years until the fabled Elias Van Benschoten took custody of our souls in 1785.

All in all, the controversy flawed the years when the Reformed Church in America was sending down her roots. It was the Reformation in small compass, but it was marked by more bitterness than glory. In its best aspect it may be seen as a forshadowing of the Revolution, for both struggles stemmed from the indomitable spirit of American independence.

RECORDS OF THE COETUS OF THE LOW DUTCH
REFORMED PREACHERS AND ELDERS
IN THE PROVINCES OF
NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY
SUBORDINATE TO THE REVEREND CLASSIS
OF AMSTERDAM

After a tedious and roundabout journey through the spring ruts, Dominie Fryenmoet reached the Coetus (see-tus) session in New York City. He was proud to be counted among this group that represented the most responsible and progressive men

in the denomination. His own ability was soon recognized and he later held office in the organization. At this time it was an advisory body, not unlike our present-day professional groups, a place to exchange views and discuss common problems. He could not foresee that its purpose would change so radically that he would one day be obliged to repudiate it and help to lead a group in direct opposition to it. At this session he was only pleased at the orderly progress of business and nodded approval at the strict rules that were being adopted.

The minutes from that early session have been preserved, and some of the rules adopted then are of real interest:

3. Every member shall preserve silence that the Coetus may the better deliberate.
4. In the meeting each shall keep his own seat in circle and not speak except in his turn; or else pay twopence.
5. Whoever, without the permission of the President, comes in after the opening prayer, shall pay a shilling; if from the Coetus entirely, six shillings; and in the case of officers, these fines shall be doubled. Everyone shall abstain from invective and injurious words under penalty of not less than twopence, and not more than six shillings.

Some of the stormy sessions held later must have exhausted the delegates ready change!

In company with Elders like Rynier Van Giesen of Hackensack, and Jeremiah Van der Bilt of Kings County, Dominie Fryenmoet found that the business of that August body was not uniformly edifying. Some ministers wrangled with their successors, and other were disturbed at "being compelled to go to the Manor of Cortland to render service". Dominie Haaghart complained that his congregation was neglecting to repair his house and was withholding his firewood. Coetus earnestly rebuked them as it did on a previous occasion. But there was a distinctly modern flavor to the discussion these progressive men held on the advisability of joining with the Presbyterians and the German Reformed denomination.

DOMINIE ROMEYN AND THE NEW SCHOOLS

Montague was without a pastor until 1760 when Dominie Thomas Romeyn was engaged. Meanwhile, the exhilaration and pride in the chain of new churches had worn off and in its place was a negative spirit. The jails were fuller now and the hard pews emptier. Dominie Fryenmoet had welcomed one hundred and ten new communicants during his pastorate, while Dominie Romeyn could gather in no more than twenty-three, or about two each year.

Associating with the soldiers and being crowded into the forts for months at a time had turned the settlers toward strong drink. Liquor was the accompaniment to most community activities and the people missed it if none were to be had. The insolent attitude it bred led to brawling and brutality and juvenile delinquency with a godless spirit as the end result. It was easy to stay away from church, too, if you didn't agree with the minister's stand in the Coetus controversy. It was every man for himself. The briars stood thick about the Lily among Thorns.

The settlers had not grown so careless, however, that they refused to admit the value of education. On the contrary, they opened a school at Godeffroy and another near Sussex. Montague had been operating a school for years—the present tablet on the site down the Mine Road commemorates one-armed William Ennis, the first schoolmaster. And Walpack had a school for a while, taught by a Moravian missionary. But the two aforementioned were the first additional schools in the area. Many of our parishioners, children were not telling tales for the benefit of the young in later years when they boasted of slogging eight or ten miles to school through spring water or hip-deep snow.

Ironically enough, this thriving school system was under the authority of the church. If church affairs were often at a standstill, Consistory had its hands full recruiting teachers, checking up on rumors of lax or harsh discipline, and wrangling over whether to reshingle the roof or direct the schoolmaster to experiment with thatch—thatched roofs had been plenty good for parsonages not so long ago. School was being dismissed too early; the schoolmaster reminisced too much about the War; supplies were being squandered; or perhaps little Gerardus came home with a lump on his forehead and the schoolmaster was summoned next evening before a special meeting of Elders and Deacons to explain it.

THE REVEREND ELIAS VAN BENSCHOTEN

Once again the Lord sent Montague an exceptional man. The pastor who came here in 1785 was a six-footer with a commanding presence. Dr. Gosman described Dominie Van Benschoten as having "an erect and stately carriage with something about him that reminded you of an Indian chief". The appearance bespoke the man, for the thundering scorn he felt for moral laxity was legendary. His parishioners must have stood in awe of him as of some scourge from the Old Testament. They needed a man of his spiritual power during these licentious post-war years and they had no trouble understanding him because he was as rudely outspoken as they were. A life-long bachelor, he was contemptuous of the little luxuries and comforts of life. His one thought was of God, and his every action was directed toward glorifying His ministry on earth.

His sermons all but blinded his flock with the white light of evangelical fervor. Each Sabbath was the occasion for pitting his own deep force against the grossness of the human spirit. His final charge to his flock, usually censored from the more polite histories, will bear a reappraisal from the standpoint of his integrity. What he said was this, "Pigs I found ye, and pigs I leave ye, and the devil may have the roasting of ye!" Rather than venting petty spite on a group that had somehow displeased him, is it not more likely—more in character—that he chose to wreak on them such a resounding denunciation that it would be a long, long time before they could be complacent about their inner selves? He was leaving them and he well knew the vicissitudes of a church without a regular pastor. In one dreadful moment he told his flock that he washed his hands of them, so gross were their souls. They looked aghast. Was it really true that they were so black? Then there was more work ahead than they had thought. Where should they begin?

Unfortunately, the qualities that set him above the ordinary run of men led also to some ludicrous extremes. He seldom drank anything but water, and the table he set was a parody on frugality. He wore his patched clothes until they all but fell off his back. He hated to spend money, particularly on replacements. Some of his parsimonious innovations startled even the thrifty Dutchmen who were not above walking to Sabbath worship with their shoes under their arms.

Yet all the while he was intent on making money—a tract of land to be resold at a profit, a mortgage, a note at interest, a few more parcels of land, a prudent investment in one of the enterprises of the day. Scrupulously honest, his integrity was never questioned, but the community knew that he drove a hard bargain and would exact the last penny due him in any transaction.

One of the concrete achievements of his ministry was the establishment of a church over the mountains at Wantage. There had been a Presbyterian Church at Beemerville for some forty years, but the Dutchmen wanted no part of it. When Dominie Van Benschoten left us in 1792 to live in the Clove valley, he did maintain his pastoral connections with our three churches until 1799. He bought his own farm in the Clove and a mill from which, needless to say, he made money. In time

his holdings of land in the Clove encompassed seven hundred acres. People shook their heads. "He is a wonderful preacher, but what will the old skinflint do with all his money? Leave it to his nephew?" And they made the other irreverent remarks that the world always makes about those who are both parsimonious and wealthy.

THE VAN BENSCHOTEN BEQUEST

Now we must pause a moment to note that the Reformed Seminary at Rutgers still existed more on paper than in actuality. The seminary was composed purely and simply of Dr. Livingston, and there were times when he did not receive his salary. Ministers were being trained by this exceedingly able man, in conjunction with the resources of the college, but there was no foreseeable opportunity for the seminary to grow, because there was no money anywhere for it to grow on.

The Van Benschoten Bequest changed the picture completely. By providing capital for plant expansion and tuition loans it enabled the seminary to achieve the status worthy of the first Reformed Church training institution in the New World. Our Dr. Mills called the Bequest "the first gift of its kind to the first seminary of its kind." Students there still study it in Hageman's history text, and the annual public reading of its terms has become a fond tradition. But we must return to the story.

On a warm June day in 1814 General Synod was in session at New York City. The dignitaries assembled in the dim chamber were gravely disposing of those matters on the order of business that it has even been their privilege to pass upon. Their judicious deliberations were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Dominie Van Benschoten. His entry into the chamber was entirely out of order, but the effect he produced was made worse by his grotesque appearance. He looked as though he had passed the night in a cave. The delegates had the feeling that, given half a chance, he would spend the rest of the afternoon exhorting them about Judgment Day.

Dominie Van Benschoten was in his late seventies. Now he bore the marks of the struggle with the painful illness that was to carry him off in a few months. His once stately bearing was stooped and shuffling, his face ravaged. He had felt the Lord's hand on his shoulder and he knew what he had to do. The Rev. Dr. B. C. Taylor recounted the story in a speech delivered in 1859.

"A venerable man appeared, dressed in antique costume, and on entering the Synod chamber, holding his round-crowned and broad-brimmed hat in his hand, walked calmly up the aisle to within a few feet of the President's seat, politely bowing, and said, 'Mr. President, I want to talk.' The President asked him, 'Are you a member of this Synod?' 'No sir,' was the reply, 'but I want to talk, sir.' The President said to him, 'None but members of this body can be permitted to speak here, sir.' It seemed that no one recognized the good old man, when just at that moment the Rev. Peter Labagh entered the house, and hearing the President's refusal to suffer the venerable man to speak, and having previously been invited to sit as an advisory member of the Synod, immediately said, 'Mr. President, I move that the Rev. Elias Van Benschoten have leave to talk.' The question was put and carried. Forthwith the generous old man went up to the President's desk and drew from his pocket a package containing bank bills and began to count them. He continued until he said, 'Mr. President, there are eight hundred dollars.' He then took from his pocket another package containing certain obligations which he had prepared to the amount of \$13,840. The Synod listened attentively as he followed up his powerful, practical talk, and stated the purposes of his gift to the Synod, and desired a committee of conference to be appointed to adjust appropriately the arrangements for carrying out his views in regard to the matter. Such was the ever-to-be-remembered Van Benschoten Bequest. This was in that day a great 'talk' indeed; a noble act which laid broad foundations, on which have been reared our College and Theological Seminary. The reverence with which the act was performed, the simplicity and dignity of it, and the joy consequent upon it were not soon forgotten by the members of that General Synod."

THE UNEVENTFUL YEARS OF 1800-1817

For three years after Dominie Van Benschoten's departure, the pastorate was empty, but in 1802 Reverend John Demarest accepted the call to the Deerpark-Minisink churches. A revolutionary change had begun in Rev. Van Benschoten's ministry by the introduction and use of the English language as well as Dutch to proclaim the gospel. This was more than carried out in Rev. Demarest's time by the abandoning of Dutch altogether. There was evidently none of the intense feteling over the change from the traditional language here, no doubt due to the influx of non-Dutch immigrants from New England. In neighboring churches a great deal of strife accompanied the change.

With Demarest's departure in 1806, the pulpit was to be empty for ten years. Occasional supplies journeyed here to administer the sacraments and it was noted that forty-one baptisms were held; but for the most part, services were conducted by lay readers and the music led by "voorsangers" (fore-singers). Evidently not enough monies were dropping into the little black bag that dangled on the end of a stick as it was passed among worshipers. We read that in 1813 financial aid was requested from General Synod. Ten years without a pastor and things were in a destitute state.

CORNELIUS C. ELTING AND THE GREAT REVIVAL

During a war there occurs a laxness in morals and a degeneration in spiritual values. The War of 1812 was no exception, and as a reaction to this state of affairs a powerful revival was taking place over the United States. The Minisink Valley churches were to feel its influence when Phineas Camp's campaign descended upon them. One hundred and seventeen persons were gathered into the churches.

On the heels of this revival came the Reverend Cornelius C. Elting to shepherd the lost sheep of the Delaware Valley. It was a momentous occasion for the two churches because of the singular accomplishments of this man. Taking its impetus from the revival, the church was to see during his ministry the largest number of new members ever added. At his first communion service in Minisink Rev. Elting received twenty new members and the total was eventually to reach two hundred and eighty. Secondly, he set high standards of morality for the community and offenders were hailed before the consistory. His twenty-one years of service, 1817-1838 were the longest of any pastor before or since. A truly remarkable man of God!

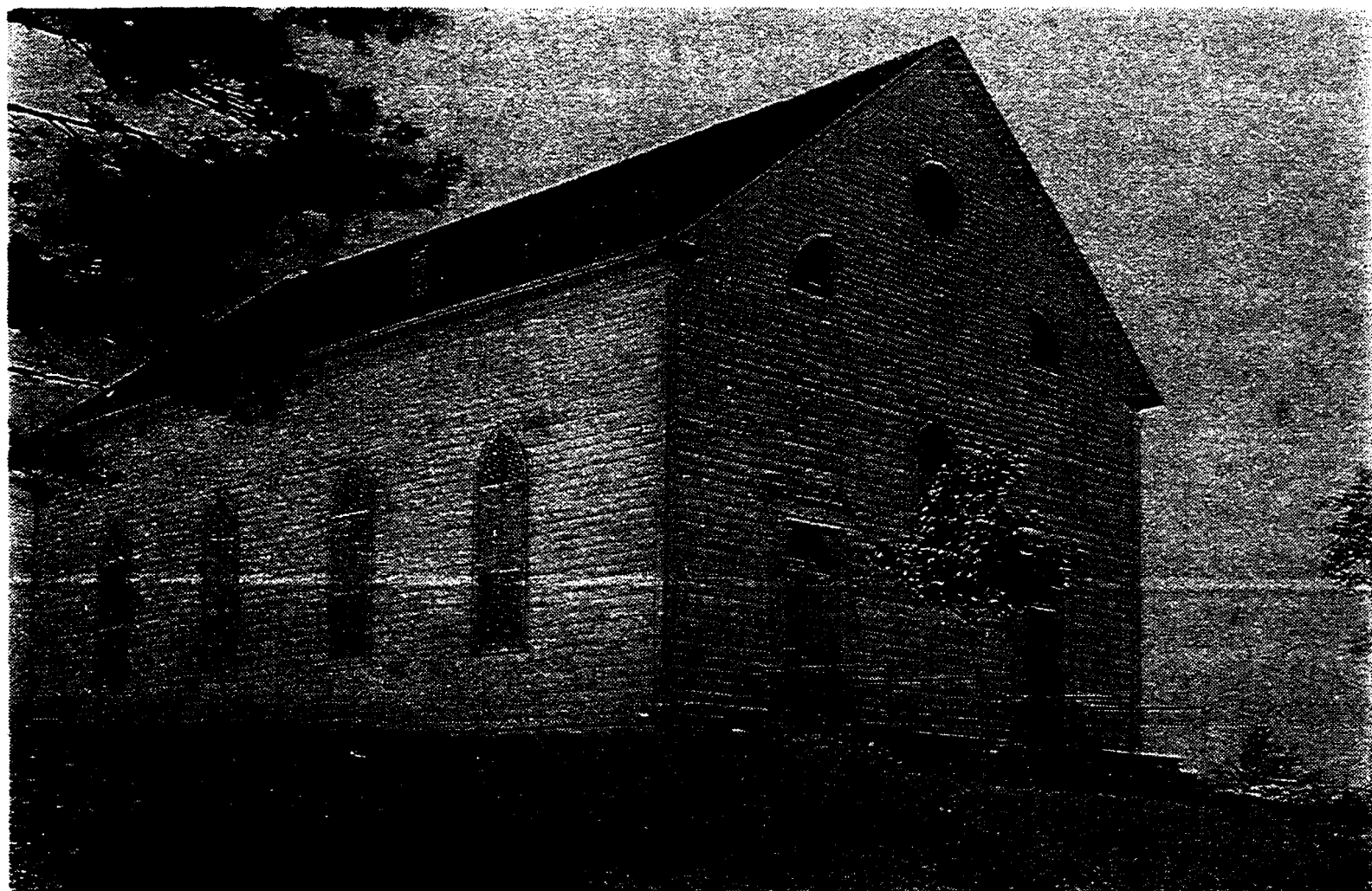
In addition to these personal triumphs many other important events were to take place that would effect the history of the church. In 1835 the two churches of Montague and Deerpark which had been under the jurisdiction of the Classis of New Brunswick passed to that of the Classis of Orange, and in 1838, just one hundred years after its organization, the dissolution of pastoral connections between Maghaghkamack and Minisink took place. Mr. Elting confined his services to Deerpark. Prior to these changes though, Mr. Elting was to see the introduction of the Sabbath Schools in his parish and the erection of a new church building in Montague Township.

ESTABLISHMENT OF SABBATH SCHOOLS

Before 1829, religious instruction of children was the responsibility of parents who gathered the children together on Sunday evenings and catechized them. Or sometimes the pastor would undertake to teach them in Bible or catechism classes usually held weekdays in the schoolhouse. However, God-fearing people throughout England and America had noticed that children were running wild on the Sabbath and growing up in ignorance of the scriptures. So, beginning in England, and later spreading to America, the children were settled in classes of religious instruction.

Credit must go to the American Sunday School Union, whose agents traveled about the country. When a church requested its services, an agent would spend time with it and set up the school framework and provide materials. Such an agent was Mr. Wood, who in 1829 organized the first Sabbath school here with Mr. Elting as

THE NEW CHURCH BUILDING



The increased membership in the church and the spiritual revival led to plans to build a new edifice that would adequately house the children of God in Montague. In May, 1827, the minister and Consistory of the Reformed Dutch Church of Minisink received from John Rutherford, in consideration of one dollar, and because of his desire to encourage religion and morality in the community, an acre of ground about a half mile above the famous Brick House Hostel. On the hill directly behind the present church they erected a large frame building. There were two entrances from the full-length porch into the vestibule of this structure, which in turn, had two entrances into the sanctuary and a stairway to the gallery, which extended across the back of the church over the vestibule.

Here in the early days, the slaves were allowed to worship standing up, as there were no pews for them. Although an act had been passed by the N.J. Legislature in 1820 freeing all the children born of slaves subsequent to July 4, 1804, males when 25 and females when 21, as well as the future generations, slavery was not abolished completely until 1846 and several prominent families in Montague owned slaves at the time the church was built. In later years, the balcony was furnished with a cook stove and a long table where the congregation could gather for suppers.

Inside the sanctuary there were parallel aisles separating the three rows of pews. In a commanding place in the center at the front stood the pulpit which was from six to eight feet high, standing on a single post, enclosed, hexagon in form, and over it a large "sounding-board." At either side were the organ and the choir benches. In the rear corners were the means of warmth, stoves.

The church afforded little in the way of beauty architecturally, not having any style or even a steeple, but a suggestion of the Gothic influence might have been noticed in the arched windows on either side. It was no doubt much more comfortable than any place of worship here before it and certainly commodious enough to serve the increasing congregation.

The population of all of Sussex County flourished during this period because of the attractive agricultural resources. In 1809 it was the second largest county in New Jersey. Soon after the industrialization of the country began, however, emigration to the eastern counties started where better opportunities beckoned and Sussex again became as she had sartered out, the smallest area population wise.

ROUNDING THE BEND OF PROGRESS

The period during which this church was built heralded a great new era for America. Often we felt its effects only indirectly in this "remote corner behind the mountains," but the evidence was concrete enough. True, no steamboats disputed the right of way on the Delaware with Dingman's or Armstrong's ferry, and no pounding factories altered our rural character. But newspapers were common in town now, the Deckertown Turnpike brought better mail service, and the D. and H. Canal resulted in some of us learning to burn coal.

The community wore a different aspect now than it had in the old days. There were fewer dark woods along the roads, the stockades from the time of the Indian menace were as remote as the old stories about local witches. Horses and mules were supplanting oxen, and the new homes made the ancient Dutch homes and the Revolutionary homes—not yet burned to the ground—look old-fashioned.

The log church would have made the congregation acutely uncomfortable. Not seven miles away was the basin of the D. and H. Canal, an inland port, the eighth wonder of the world, a symbol of nineteenth century progress. With its mechanical locks and its bustle, with the noisy excitement of arrivals and departures, with the double row of lumber wagons parked like a fleet of schooners down a main street as wide as a lake, the canal drew people like a big fire. Every visitor was taken to see it and every youngster dreamed of a ride on the gliding boats.

The canal was responsible for dissolving our union with Deerpark, the old Maghaghkamack congregation. Rev. Elting foresaw what the canal would do for the village of Carpenter's Point. It drew the center of activity from the Point to the canal basin at Orange and Main, and it turned a hamlet into a full-grown town almost overnight. Before any of this took place, Rev. Elting had already made plans for an imposing Greek Revival church to be built on a plot donated by the D. and H. Canal Company. When his dream became a reality, the tie with Minisink constituted a complicating factor and his arrangement with the farmers was terminated once and for all. The year was 1838. The Port Jervis church took its place as a prominent feature in the cluster of Greek Revival buildings near the canal basin. Port Jervis had swung boldly around the bend of progress, and Montague was left drowsing in its fertile valleys.

YEARS OF SILENCE

From the time the Reformed Dutch Church at Minisink became independent of Deerpark until the time within memory of its older members, the records are fairly incomplete and details meager. The minutes of the Consistories record little more than the reception of new members and the appointments of Elders to Classis Meetings. They do note, however, a continuing appeal to the Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Church in America for financial aid so they could pay their ministers.

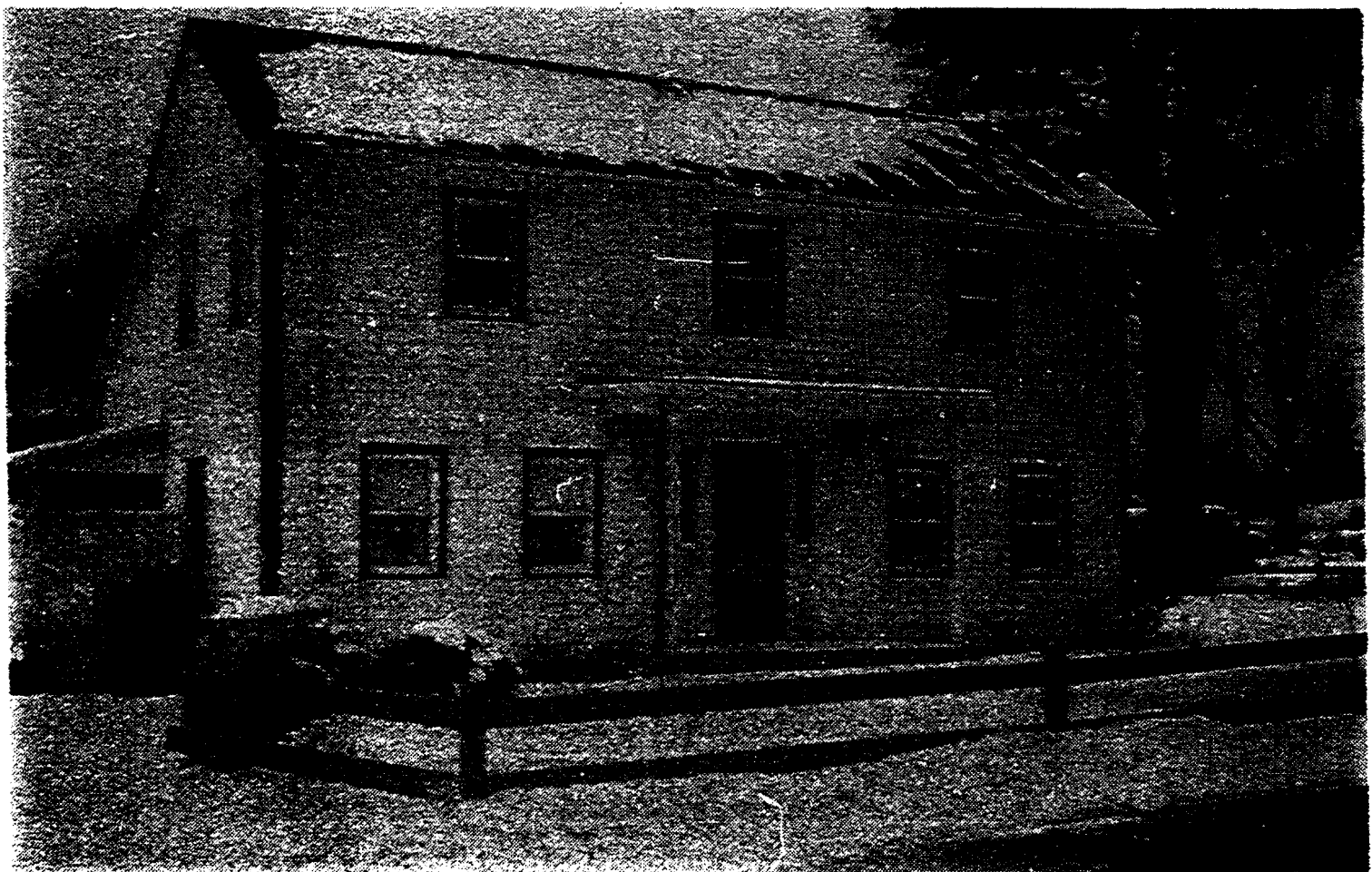
At times it was merely \$50 per year, while at others it was \$150. Despite this aid it was often hard to raise enough money for the minister's salary. At one time, the Consistory decided to rent the seats in church for additional funds. Even at that several ministers left because they were not paid what had been promised!

A very significant event occurred in 1855. In spite of its penury, the Minisink congregation felt it was necessary to help establish a church in the neighboring township of Sandyston. Accordingly they purchased property from Abraham Bennett across from the present Methodist Church where the firehouse now is and there erected a House of God for \$1,000. It was dedicated with joyful hearts on December 11, 1855, and named the North Dutch Church of Hainesville. Thus began a long association between Montague and Sandyston whereby they shared consistory members and ministers; one that continued until the 1920's.

Facts about the ministers of this period except for their names and that they were underpaid are sketchy. (For their names listed in sequence see another section of this booklet). We know nothing of them personally or even where they lived. Some of them left because the church did not provide a place for them to live. The question of a parsonage was not an issue until the separation of Minisink and Deerpark because after Benschoten removed to the Clove in 1792 and the parsonage in Montague was sold, the minister lived in Port Jervis. From 1838 it was a problem to be faced. As early as 1852 the Consistory tried to raise enough money to buy a house and lot in Sandyston, but that fell through due to negligence. Again in 1862, records of subscriptions being sought for a parsonage fund are found in the minutes. When the actual acquisition took place is uncertain, but a deed for the purchase of property from Isaac Bonnell for \$225 of lawful money is recorded in Newton to the Reformed Dutch Church of Minisink on April 6, 1864. Whether they bought a house or built one is also uncertain, but by March of 1865 the Consistory was meeting "at the Parsonage."

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN MONTAGUE

One hundred years ago was 1862, when Americans faced Americans across a battleground of hate and fear, and there was blood on the clover. As in the Revolution, the traditional names could be counted among those who fought—Bonnell, Hornbeck, Cole—and our parishioners distinguished themselves at such battles as Gaines' Mill and Manassas Junction.



Speaking for the Reformed Church in America that year, the 76th Annual General Synod issued this statement:

"Whereas our beloved country is distracted by an unjustifiable and atrocious rebellion . . . (this) demands of us an earnest and unqualified support of our government in its efforts to suppress this disastrous and most wicked rebellion. Our prayers shall continually be that He will bless our armies; He will prosper the right; He will bring rich spiritual blessings to all parts of our nation out of these temporal sorrows."

The Montague that soldiers left was becoming a thriving place. Farms were being operated far into the hills above the Clove road and there were enough children from the large families to fill six schools. There were three churches and several mills of various kinds. A tannery and a distillery were not far away. The big church on the hill had been serving us for thirty-five years. Three ministers preached in it during the war years, but of them we know almost nothing. It is recorded, however, that church membership stood at forty-six, with about fifty children attending Sabbath School. Total expenses for that financial age of innocence came to \$350; \$12 was allotted for Missionary Work.

The dwindling population here in subsequent decades resulted in a fairly dormant period in our church history.

JOHN LETSON STILLWELL

In 1882 a young man fresh from seminary came to fill the pulpit of the Minisink Church—John L. Stillwell. Two years later, when this ambitious fellow accepted a call to a larger parish, his final act was to give the Cortright family the draft of his farewell sermon. This affectionate gesture has assumed a value far beyond anything he could possibly have imagined, for it is one of the few pictures we have of those lost years in our church's history. As we read his firm script the veil lifts and for a brief moment we are in church in 1884 and the young minister is taking his leave. He speaks eloquently of his sadness at leaving and he praises us for our evidence of Christian spirit, but that is not all he has to say.

"Unity and order have prevailed among us. Civil strife and dissension have been healed. Heart has been united to heart by love . . . There have been many persons in this neighborhood who have been constant and regular in their attendance at this place and some who have even gone so far as to endanger their health in order that they might listen to preaching of God's word . . . The church has never been in better shape than it is today. Your salary, instead of being raised by mites and suppers and festivals, has been raised by the liberal subscription of the people. The rich have given of their wealth and the poor have cast in their mite.

"However, there has not been the spiritual interest that there should have been. The additions to the church have been small. The numbers of those who have come forward and confessed Christ before the world have been very few. Those of you who are already professors of religion have not done your duty as you should have done, neither have you taken that interest in the cause of Christ that it became you to do as Christians."

Pages from the past throwing light on the blessings and failures of our church ancestors!

An interesting footnote to Rev. Stillwell's pastorate is his returning to Montague in 1899 to participate in the dedication of the new church. Again in 1937 both he and Rev. Phifer returned to participate in our two-hundredth anniversary, which also coincided with Rev. Stillwell's fifty-fifth year in the ministry.

Three years after Stillwell left, another young man, Joseph Millett filled the pastorate. He was single and boarded with May Shimer at the present parsonage.

As Rev. Stillwell had before him, Rev. Millett divided his time between Montague and Hainesville, being one Sunday here in the morning and at Hainesville, in the evening. Alternate Sundays he rotated the time of service. Upon his departure, the pulpit was again vacant for three years when the Consistory secured the services of an elderly man, Mr. Gilbert Lane, from Wurtsboro. Mr. Lane lived in the present parsonage and preached in the big church on the hill until his death in 1896. Mrs. Lane then moved to the house presently occupied by Mr. Marsh Conklin, where she abode with a daughter until she died.

OUR PRESENT CHURCH IS BUILT

The big church on the hill was no longer serving the needs of its congregation as the nineteenth century drew to a close. In the face of a dwindling congregation, the barnlike structure was uncomfortably large and was, moreover, difficult to heat and badly in need of repairs. Despite the absence of a minister, one of the elders, Mr. Randall Sayre, began to circulate a subscription paper for a building fund. Soon a building committee was formed, and the Ladies Aid Society energetically set about raising money. The Classis of Orange lent its support to the point that it was possible to contract with A. B. Brown and Son of Milford to erect a new church to be located directly in front of the old one.

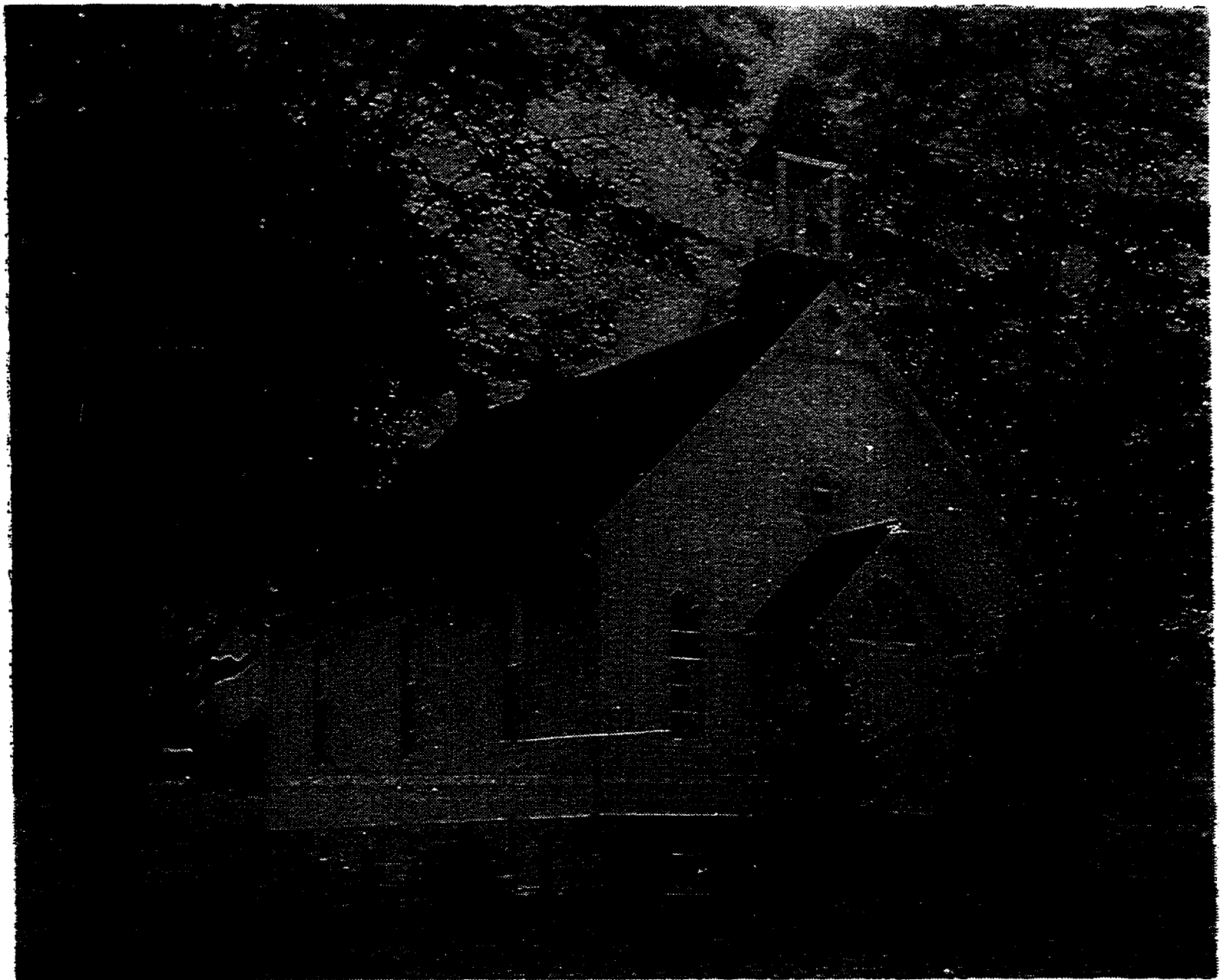
Suitably enough, the old church was sold to Mr. Crone for use as a barn, and moved to Hainesville, where it later burned down. Even as Mr. Crone's crew was moving it, the men of the congregation were digging the new cellar. It is remembered by some that the following men gave their time and used their own tools to dig the foundation by hand: L. A. Marthis, George Armstrong I, George and James Hornbeck, Jacob McCarty, John O'Grady, James Rundle, Dayton Westbrook, John A. Everitt, George and Harry Cortright, Electus Shimer, and George and James Wainwright.

The Building Committee, which consisted of Messrs. L. A. Marthis, Elder; Jacob McCarty, John A. Everitt, George Cortright, George Armstrong I, Charles Grau, Daniel Predmore, James A. Rundle, and Obadiah Bevans, as well as the Ladies Aid, whose officers were: Mrs. Virginia McCarty, President; Mrs. Gilbert Lane, Vice-President; Mrs. Thomas Cole, Secretary; Mrs. Francis Wieland, Treasurer; deserved a great deal of credit. That this little band undertook a building program without the help and encouragement of a minister demonstrates a determination to keep God's word alive in the community in the best tradition of the Reformed faith.

Building programs never move of their own momentum. In this case there seemed to be more than the usual quota of obstacles and attendant discouragements. Nonetheless the tireless members pressed forward with the result that in July, 1899, they were able to dedicate to the Lord "a handsome, well-appointed, cozily furnished church edifice."

Those of us whose first memories of the church were from the days when it had become somewhat less than "up-to-date" may take comfort in the effect it made when it was first opened. It was painted white outside with peaked roof belfry, and its forty-five by twenty-eight feet dimensions provided a more than ample sanctuary. The reporter from the "Union Gazette" described the building with real enthusiasm when he wrote up his visit to the dedicatory services in Wednesday's paper, July 19, 1899:

"There were three tall Gothic windows on each side, a large round window of blue and yellow, symbolic of the fourfold growth of Christ high up on either end, and two Gothic windows in the front." One approached the interior up wide stone steps and through a small vestibuled porch. "Inside there were two rows of high-backed ash pews capable of seating 150 persons. There was a handsome pulpit of quartered oak, and two large pulpit chairs upholstered in dark red plush. A neat



gilt chandelier supported 24 pretty lamps and fine bracket lamps furnished light for choir and pulpit. The floors and platform were nicely carpeted, and the walls and ceiling were of matched pine, well varnished.

The basement was amply fitted for prayer meetings, socials and suppers. "The building was altogether a model of comfort and convenience as well as beauty of appearance, one of which the congregation may well be proud."

The contract price was \$1100, but the total, with the furnishings, amounted to \$1500. The Ladies Aid contributed \$400 to the sum. On the afternoon of the Day of Dedication, T. H. Mackenzie, pastor of Deerpark, and the deliverer of the dedicatory sermon, read a financial statement. The church was still in debt, it appeared, in the matter of \$167.49. Could this nagging sum not be raised now, upon the spot? Forthwith the assembled worshipers subscribed \$150. The offering and subsequent subscriptions pushed the figure well over the \$200 mark. The account concludes by stating, "With the church thus free of debt, all entered joyfully in the service of dedication as conducted by Rev. S. W. Mills, D.D."

With increased enthusiasm the reawakened congregation pushed rapidly toward the end of securing a pastor for their new church. By the next year Andrew John Meyer, a graduate of New Brunswick Seminary brought his bride and came to minister at Montague. He was a popular preacher, and during his four-year stay he succeeded in building up the church to a heartening extent. One evidence of the new spirit was the building in 1901 of the long carriage shed that lent such a quaint appearance to the churchyard. It sounds like an ungainly building, but it was quite the apposite. The repeated uprights along the front had slanted boards on each side where they met the roof, so that the effect was like a rudimentary colonnade. In recent years when the few horses and buggies gave way to a large number of cars, this handsome building was reluctantly torn down.

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Other changes besides the new church were to be noted round about. Our steeple made a brave show against the skyline of Lower Montague, but silos were beginning to change the agricultural skyline too. A few conspicuous herds of Holsteins and Guernseys were replacing the Short Horns that had been staples for decades. With horses and mules at an all-time high, the summer hills were lyrical with field upon field of grey-green oats, the prettiest summer crop. Every farmer had his own orchard and his wife had her poultry flocks. A man who wanted to open a hen-dairy was looked on with tolerant amusement.

There was no Grange until 1904 and no agricultural associations as we know them today—the first county agent was engaged in 1912. Many folks had never been to Newton, to say nothing of Morristown or Middletown. Middletown was an all day trip, coming and going by horse and buggy. People were beginning to shop from mail order catalogues, and Sears offered a cologne called "New-Mown Hay". Girls still made scrapbooks of colored advertising and greeting cards and prized especially the ones with frosted pictures and silk-fringed edges. Everyday dresses were gingham and the dark calicoes that lent such character to the quilts the women pieced. "Sports" rented fancy rigs from the livery stables uptown and drove around dressed like Fifth Avenue. Sport shirts had not been developed, so on unbearably hot days the men stripped off their coats and displayed the latest in fancy galluses and sleeve garters.

TWENTY YEARS WITHOUT A MINISTER

The spirit of hope with which the people built their new church was to be turned into discouragement as their efforts to secure a regular minister met with no success. After Rev. Meyer left, we were without a regular pastor for nearly twenty years. The hopeless attitude that finally took possession of the Consistory is well expressed in this excerpt from the minutes of April 13th, 1907:

"No candidate would consent to consider a call. We have become very discouraged, so much so that we can only seek a supply for the summer months. We pray that a way may be opened without delay for a faithful pastor. We have done all that is possible toward the present and future good of our church."

For a while during World War I Capt. Patterson, head of the Salvation Army in Port Jervis, came to us on the recommendation of Rev. Conger. Without a regular pastor, services were very irregular except in the summer when seminary students filled the pulpit. The church fell upon dark days. The fine new building seemed a mockery of all that a church should be. The Hainesville Reformed Church, too, with which Montague had been associated for over fifty years, all but closed up. That congregation was reduced to holding token services once a year to maintain the church status. Much of the difficulty in Montague may be explained by the flourishing Methodist Church on the Clove Road. The loyal Dutch flock, a pitiful remnant of the once-dominant element, was powerless in the face of well-organized Methodism.

But the picture was not entirely dismal. The Sunday School staunchly continued to teach the gospel from April to December of every year. Another evidence of the church's determination not to die was the organization in 1903 of the Willing Workers. These were young people and family groups who met together for social reasons—and to help the church in any way they could. This very popular group met twice a month in the church basement. Through their efforts an Estey organ was purchased in 1903. In this bright listing we must also place a happy inspiration of the Ladies Aid whose tangible benefits we are still enjoying.

THE HARVEST HOME SUPPER

The Ladies Aid put on the first Harvest Home in 1916. They selected the church lawn as the site, but soon found this to be a tactical error. The heavens opened up just before time to serve the meal and the project ended in disaster. Nothing daunted, they laid plans for the next year, and this time prudently selected the carriage shed and had the men set up the stoves there. The rows of tables ringed with happy eaters spoke of a success which has continued without interruption to the present day.

The traditional dinner was hot stewed chicken and biscuits, gravy, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, tomatoes, relishes, pot cheese, vegetables, and home-made pie. For a short time in recent years the suppers were served at the Grange Hall. After 1960 the scene has been the all-purpose room of the Educational Building at the church. The menu has been modernized to barbecued chicken.

UNITING WITH WEST END

It was decided that since Minisink could not attract a minister on her own, she must enter into a union with another church and share pastoral services. After an agreement with the Second Reformed Church of Port Jervis at West End, they were able to share with them William E. Phifer for the period from 1923 to 1931. Although this system placed a preacher in the Minisink pulpit, its benefits were limited by the absence of a pastoral relationship. Mr. Phifer and the subsequent shared ministers inevitably devoted most of their efforts to the other and better-paying parish.

In 1928 the Ladies Aid Society was dissolved and the Ladies Guild was formed. From the minutes of the first meeting we find that the ladies were already setting about raising money for repairing the roof on the north side of the church. Later reports tell of the roof being put on as a result of their food sale. The Guild continues as an important segment of the church, helping to finance new projects, refurbishing existing facilities, providing refreshments and decorations at the social gatherings, packing missionary boxes and lending the feminine touch generally in church matters.



After Rev. Phifer, the two churches shared Donald L. Warmouth for four years, but as he was a Drew Seminary student and not yet ordained he could not administer the sacraments. The last shared minister was the Reverend Herbert C. Schmalzriedt,

who is fondly remembered by many in the congregation. Nonetheless, pastoral work is perforce neglected in joint situations, and interest in the church began to lag. A normal church service in the 1940's found scarcely twenty people sprinkled among the pews designed for one hundred and fifty.

In 1939 Rev. Schmalzriedt, showed his distress in the matter of church attendance in his annual report to General Synod. However, he states, "The one bright spot of the work is the Willing Workers Society, which carries on in a definite way the spiritual and social life of the church."

In 1947 after Mr. Schmalzriedt left, the consistory deemed it exceedingly important to secure the services of a minister as soon as possible. A canvas was made of the community to see if it would be possible to pay a minister \$1800. Steps were taken to resecure the parsonage which had been rented for many years. Some efforts were made to modernize it by installing running water but as yet there was no bathroom.

In February of 1948 Rev. David Freer and his wife and family took on the full time pastorate of the Minisink Church. Both Mr. and Mrs. Freer were devoted Christian people and an inspiration to young and old alike. Although Mr. Freer was here only one year, he organized a very active Youth Fellowship and a two-week daily Vacation Bible School. The realization of spiritual blessings that a full time pastor could impart became a great influence on the future attitude toward selecting a minister. Unfortunately for the church, he became very ill during his first year and was forced to take a leave of absence in another town where he met with a tragic death in a farmyard fire.

In less than six month the consistory had hired a young unmarried preacher, Mr. John Lackey. He was an excellent speaker and enhanced the services with a splendid singing voice. During his two-year stay, he brought to light property, belonging to the church, which was being sold for burial plots. This he foresightedly saw the church might need some day. In 1950 a men's club was organized. It was very active in improving and repairing the church and parsonage, especially by getting running water in the church basement and putting a new floor there.

Since the consistory would not renew Mr. Lackey's contract for 1951-1952, he resigned in October 1951. The pulpit was supplied for the next months by young men of the Nyack Missionary Training Institute. July 1952 a call was made to Rev. William Striker.

Rev. Striker was an elderly man, striking in appearance with his beautiful pink complexion and shock of white hair. His sermons were scholarly and poetic as he was extremely well read and of an intellectual nature. Mrs. Striker was an indefatigable worker for missions and contributed much toward an attitude of outreach among the parishioners. She also ably taught two Bible classes a week to a sizeable group of young women which later provided well-trained teachers for the Sunday School. Rev. Striker was taken ill and died in the parsonage in November 1956.

The next two years without a regular minister were not without blessings, however, because Rev. Harold Green, a retired Reformed minister living in Sandyston supplied the pulpit regularly and was revered by all. He encouraged the group in the church who had begun to see a need for another building program.

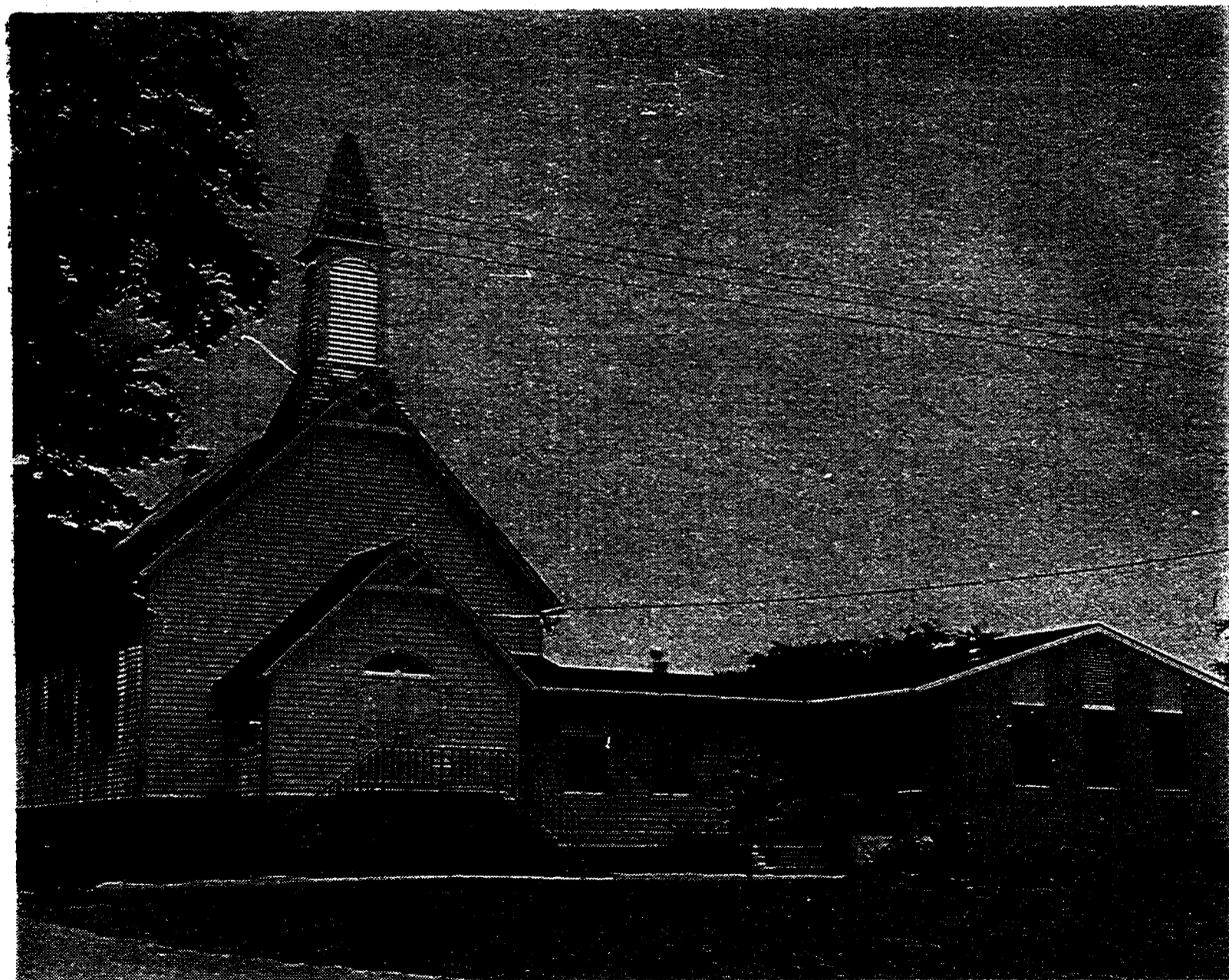
"LET US ARISE AND BUILD" — Nehemiah 2:18

Again after almost 60 years, the members felt the need to arise and build. In the fall of 1955 a few interested church members asked Mr. Striker if he would support setting up a fund to be set aside for providing additional room for Sunday School facilities. The Sunday School enrollment which had stayed around 35-40 for as many years was beginning to swell. When there were few pupils, classes could be held in

various corners of the Sanctuary, but with increased enrollment it was necessary to place the primary groups in the basement. This proved to be damp and unhealthful for the younger children, while the noise and confusion of the hour before church upstairs did not offer proper respect for the house of God. In addition to the Sunday School's needs, were needs for adequate space to serve suppers and have social gatherings and for a place for young people to meet.

Mr. Striker agreed to bring the proposal before the Congregational meeting in January 1956. Here it was approved and a building committee appointed consisting of two persons each from Consistory, Sunday School and Women's Guild. There was a special meeting later with a building contractor to set out various possibilities for providing extra room still with the idea of a future date. A momentous event occurred in the summer of 1958 that changed the complexion of things and brought the hopes and purposes of those feeling the urgent need into immediate focus. A friend and neighbor of the church offered to help to a great extent financially, if the people could work together peaceably to bring about a solution to the problem.

There were various possibilities open. Some felt that the town building across the street could be secured, or an extension could be made outward from the front of the building, both upstairs and down. Another plan submitted would have placed a new section across the front forming a T-shape to the old building. Still another plan was to build directly adjacent to the present church on the northern side, the only side where the church owned property. The obstacle here was that the Cemetery Association had sold lots and buried people in this space and these would have to be moved if a building were to be erected.

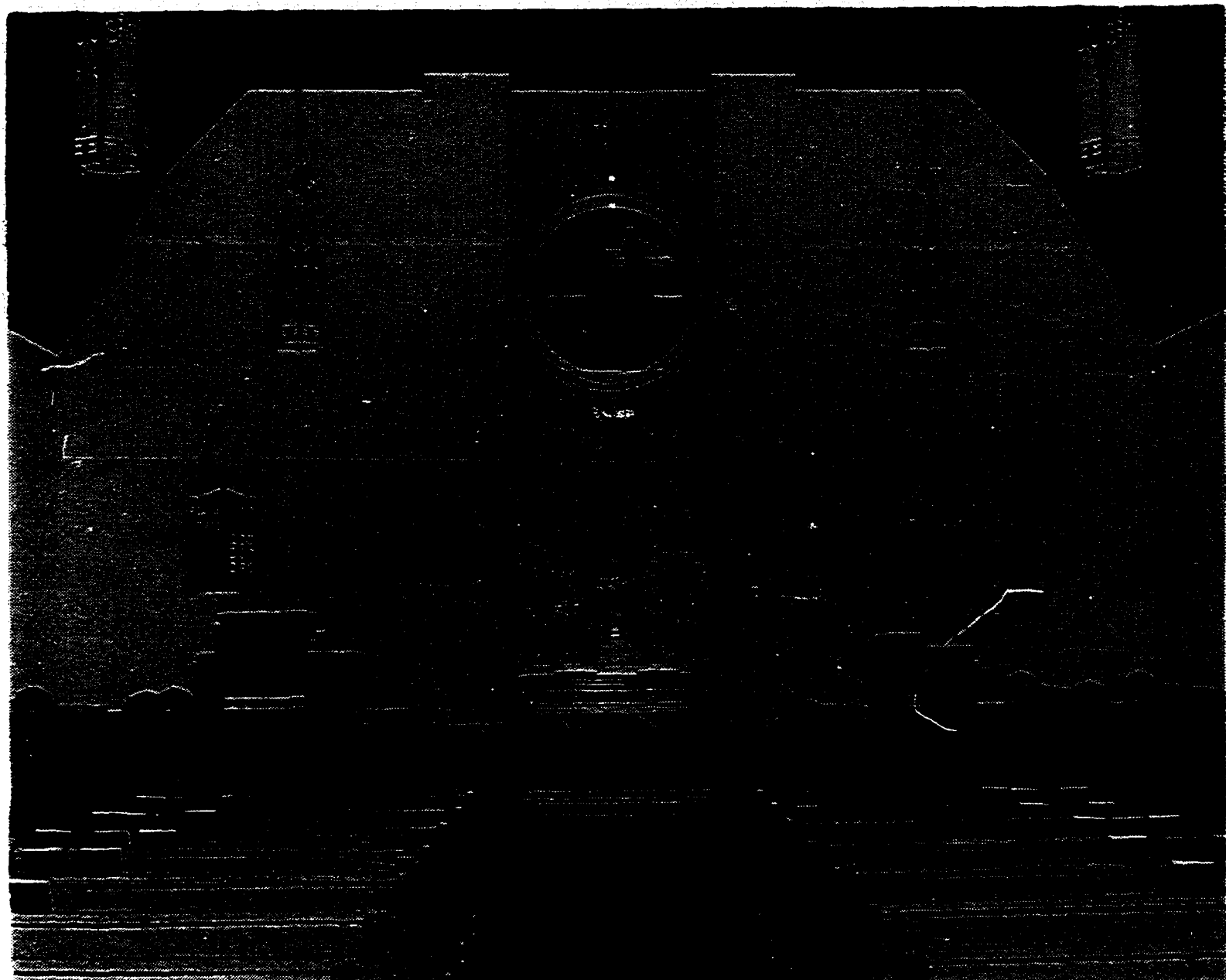


At this time, the Committee was lucky enough to hire a church architect who was studying to be a minister and therefore not too prohibitive in price. His sketched plan was so superior to any suggested before that the committee unanimously adopted

it. When our benefactor saw the water color picture of the plan, he enthusiastically said he would match \$2.00 for every dollar the church raised for the new addition. After that a meeting was held with the congregation to approve accepting the offer and setting up a campaign to raise the money.

The contract was also placed out for bids and was awarded to Joseph Zitone for \$27,000.

In October, 1958 teams of two went out from a prayer service at the church to solicit the necessary \$7,000—\$2,000 had already been pledged. In November, ground was broken and the vestibule torn off. However a heavy frost settled in the ground, not to lift until the following spring, making further construction impossible. In May of 1959 the cornerstone was laid with appropriate ceremony and by September, the rooms were ready for occupancy. The Harvest Home supper was held there that year, and in November it was duly dedicated to enrich the Christian faith and life for the present and future.



Through the offices of the architect for the church addition, Richard Critz, the consistory was apprised of the possibility of securing as a part time minister, a student of Drew Seminary. He and his family would live in the parsonage and he would commute between Montague and Madison, N. J. It was duly agreed and Mr. Lyle Anderson became the twenty-sixth pastor of the Minisink Reformed Church. He was a vigorous and ambitious young man who entered into church and community life enthusiastically. He especially threw his support behind the building committee's work and devoted a great deal of time toward the completion of the present educational building and furnishings. He encouraged the attempt to hold a Daily Vacation Bible School, provided instruction classes for Sunday School Teachers, put new life in the Youth Fellowship, urged the formation of an Educational Council and organized a Community Couple's Club. His warm and sincere personality won him many friends

and drew many into the fellowship of the church. While here, he graduated from Drew and was ordained as Methodist minister so that he was finally able to officiate at Communion and Baptisms. In 1961 he felt compelled to answer a call from a Methodist Church in Illinois.

Many changes could now be seen in the centuries old church along the Delaware. There was new life; people entered into their obligations of stewardship enthusiastically; many young and older men were regular worshipers at the services; congregation attendance had risen greatly; and there was a strong interest and morale in the church family. It was as if Christ had breathed his spirit upon this place. Rev. Anderson realized this and felt it imperative that the church should not be without a minister. He worked diligently to secure one before he left, with the result that Rev. James Ainsworth was called and took over the pastorate two months after Mr. Anderson's departure. In a very impressive ceremony on a hot night in July, Rev. Ainsworth was ordained a minister of the Reformed Church at Minisink, the first ordination since Rev. A. J. Meyer, 61 years before.

Rev. Ainsworth continues as the present pastor. He immediately set to work strengthening the foundation of improved organization and revival started by previous ministers. His efforts have been rewarded by a large increase in membership and sharp rise in attendance at the worship services. His interest in the importance of celebrating the 225th anniversary of this congregation has led to the redecoration and beautification of the sanctuary, to the special services to commemorate it and to the compilation of this history.

"Two hundred and twenty-five years ago this church began as a tangible evidence of faith in Jesus Christ and a readiness to serve in His name. By its presence along Old Mine Road, the church testifies to our conviction that the faith given by our Lord, Jesus Christ is at the heart of life. With this inspiring heritage of faith behind us "we commemorate the past and dedicate ourselves to continue in His Train."

CHRONOLOGY OF MINISINK CHURCH HISTORY

- 1690-1737 Itinerant ministers from Kingston, N.Y.—held religious services and baptized babies about twice a year.
 1660—Herman Blom
 1673—Peter Taselmaker
 1712—Peter Vas
 1737—George Mancius
- 1737 Organization of 4 churches along Mine Road by G. Mancius
 North to South—Machachemeck (Deerpark)
 Minisink (Montague), or Nominack
 Walpack—Upper—Dingmans, Pa. and
 Peter's Valley, N. J.
 Lower—Bushkill, Pa. and
 Walpack, N. J.
 Smithfield, Pa. (Shawnee)
- 1741-1756 First Minister—Johannes C. Fryenmoet (Fryenmuth)
 1740-1743 First Church of Logs on Mine Road near Fort Nominack
 1745 First Parsonage—Minisink Village near Fort Nominack
 1753 Smithfield Withdrew
 1756 French and Indian War
 Indian Raids—Pastor left
- 1756-1760 No pastor (Supplies and Readers)
 1760-1772 Thomas Romeyn
 Conferentie Party
- 1772-1785 Revolutionary War—Stated Supplies

1785-1799	Elias Van Bunschooten
1792	Church Incorporated (Sussex County Records)
1800	Sold parsonage Walpack withdrew
1799-1803	Vacant pastorate
1803-1806	John Demarest—(Services in English only)
1806-1816	Vacant pastorate—War of 1812
1817-1838	Cornelius C. Elting—(Great Revival)
1827	Second Church built—behind present one
1829	Sabbath School established
1835	Transference of churches from Classis of New Brunswick to Classis of Orange
1838	Machachemeck withdrew—Elting went with them
1838-1841	Samuel B. Ayers
1838-1904	Supported in part by Domestic Missions
1855	North Dutch Church of Hainesville dedicated—Sister church of Minisink Deed recorded from Abraham Bennett to Reformed Dutch Church of Minisink
1864	Deed recorded from Isaac Bonnell to church for \$225—1.75 acres parsonage property
1882-1884	John Letson Stillwell
1887	Joseph Millett 44 Communicants, 65 Scholars, \$6.00 Benevolence
1898	Church building sold to Mr. Crone and removed to Sandyston
1899	New church building dedicated
1900-1904	Andrew J. Meyer
1901	Carriage sheds erected
1903	Estey organ purchased by Willing Workers
1903	Willing Workers organized
1906	Cemetery Association founded
1916	First Harvest Home Supper
1916-1919 (?)	Captain Patterson, Salvation Army
1923	Union with Hainesville dissolved—new union with West End Ref. Ch.
1923	William E. Phifer
1928	Ladies' Guild organized from Ladies Aid
1930-1935	Donald L. Warmouth—Drew Seminary Student
1933	Electric lights used for first time on Children's Day
1935-1947	Herbert C. Schmalzriedt
1936	First Old Home Day
1937	200th Anniversary
1947	Dissolved union with West End
1948	David Freer—First Daily Vacation Bible School
1950	John Lackey—Men's Club
1956	William Striker—Building Fund
1959	Lyle W. Anderson—Educational Building dedicated
1962	James H. Ainsworth—Redecoration of Sanctuary

MINISTERS SERVING THE MINISINK REFORMED CHURCH 1737 — 1962

George Wilhelmus Mancius	1737-1741
Johannes Casparus Fryenmoet	1741-1756
Thomas Romeyn	1760-1772
Jacob R. Hardenburgh—Stated Supply	1784
Benjamin DuBois—Stated Supply	1784
Elias Van Bunschooten	1785-1799

John Demarest	1803-1808
Charles Hardenburgh—Stated Supply	1816
Cornelius C. Elting	1817-1838
Samuel Brittain Ayers	1838-1841
Jacob Bookstaver	1841-1847
John Terhune Demarest	1850-1852
David Adkins Jones	1852-1858
Cornelius Gates	1860-1862
William Cornell	1862-1863
William Shotwell Moore	1864-1869
William Eaton Turner	1872-1875
Thomas Fitzgerald	1879-1881
John Letson Stillwell	1882-1884
Joseph Millett	1887-1890
Gilbert Lane	1893-1896
Andrew John Meyer	1900-1904
Captain Patterson—Salvation Army	1916-1919 (?)
William E. Phifer	1923-1931
Donald L. Warmouth	1931-1935
Herbert Schmalzriedt	1935-1947
David Freer	1948-1949
John H. Lackey	1949-1951
William Striker	1952-1956
Harold Green, Sr.—Stated Supply	1957-1958
Lyle W. Anderson	1958-1961
James H. Ainsworth	1961

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