

PART II.

FROM ORGANIZATION OF CLASS TO DEDICATION OF THE FIRST CHURCH, 1807-1809.

The first lot of ground; date of deed; trustees; ground rent assumed; extinguished by payment of \$50.54; the first church; size; location; description; began in August; dedicated in December; notice in Lancaster Journal; preachers on the circuit; presiding elder; the Rev. Henry Boehm; the Revs. Thomas F. Sargent, Michael Coate and Ezekiel Cooper; population of Lancaster borough; names of members unknown; worthy of everlasting remembrance.

THE first lot or piece of ground owned by the Methodists in Lancaster was purchased from Thomas Bright, plasterer, and Elizabeth, his wife, for the sum of \$150.00. It was described as "all that certain lot or piece of ground situate and being in the borough of Lancaster, in the county of Lancaster. Containing in front on Walnut street one hundred and twenty-two feet six inches, and in depth, to a lot now of Philip Eberman, one hundred and twenty-eight feet nine inches. Bounded on the East by a lot now of the said Thomas Bright, on the South by the said lot now of Philip Eberman, on the West by a fourteen feet wide alley, and on the North by Walnut street aforesaid."

The date of this deed and of its acknowledgment was February 12th, 1810, though the deed bears the certificate of the Recorder dated February 8th, 1810.

The trustees to whom the conveyance was made were Christian Yordy,* Jacob Beam,† John Beam,† Phillip Benedict, John Spence, Benjamin Wright, Robert McGill, or Magill as shown by his signature, William Todd and Andrew Ellicott.

This lot was conveyed to Thomas Bright on the 25th day of August, 1809, by John Moore, who received it from William Hamilton by indenture bearing date June 24th, 1791.

In the sale and conveyance of this piece of ground Thomas Bright was acting for the infant society of Lancaster Methodists, for prejudice against them was so strong that the purpose for which the purchase was made had to be concealed.

The books in the office of the Recorder of Deeds show that a "yearly ground rent of sixteen shillings and three pence sterling money of Great Britain, or the value thereof in coin current" was chargeable against this lot. Thomas Bright sought to extinguish this annual rental by a conveyance free from all encumbrance, but under date of March 19th, 1813, three years after the purchase, the trustees named in the deed, for themselves and their successors, by endorsement upon the deed and personal acknowledgment, assumed the responsibility of the ground rent, and they continued to pay it until May 14th, 1839, when, by the payment of one sum of \$50.54, it was.

* Junior, as shown by his signature.

† Relatives of Henry Boehm, though spelling the name differently.

extinguished, and a proper deed of release was executed by John B. Newman, surviving trustee of William Hamilton and wife. The deed for this extinction of ground rent was not recorded until April 7th, 1865.

On this lot was erected the first Methodist church in Lancaster. It was an unpretentious, one story, brick edifice, thirty-eight feet front by forty-five feet deep. The front was towards Walnut street, but some distance back from the side-walk. The pulpit was elevated about six feet above the floor. The ceiling was arched, and the pews were plain. The building was warmed by an old fashioned "ten plate stove" in which wood was burned. This was placed on the side of the church occupied by the women. The lights were furnished by tallow candles placed in sconces and needing to be snuffed about every five minutes.

When the work of building began cannot now be determined. It certainly was not commenced before the lot was in control of a Methodist, or a person friendly to Methodism, hence it could not have been before August 25th, 1809, the date of the conveyance from John Moore to Thomas Bright, but it was so far completed as to be ready for dedication on the 17th day of December, 1809.

In the LANCASTER JOURNAL, a weekly paper in the ancestral line of the present LANCASTER INTELLIGENCER, under date of Monday, December 11th, 1809, the following notice was given :

“The lovers of religious worship are hereby respectfully informed that on Sunday, the 17th inst., the new church built for the Methodist Society in this borough will be opened for divine service. The Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, Rev. Thomas F. Sargent and Rev. Michael Coote,* all from the city of Philadelphia, together with the preachers of the circuit, are expected to be present.”

This notice was repeated in the JOURNAL of the following Monday, December 18th, 1809, the paper doubtless being issued on Friday or Saturday in advance of its date.

Local items did not form such an important part of the weekly paper in A. D. 1809 as they do in A. D. 1892. The “local editor” was not yet born, and reporters had not developed, hence there is no record of the opening service of the first church save what is contained in the foregoing notice; but what an opening service it must have been! The circuit preachers were doubtless present, for had it not been published that they would be there, but who were they?

The General Minutes of the Conferences mentioned Lancaster in 1795, but not again until 1809. For the latter year they name James Smith and Thomas Burch as the preachers. The circuit was a part of the Schuylkill District, which embraced all the territory between Dauphin in Pennsylvania and Wil-

* Should be *Coate*.

mington in Delaware, and between the Susquehanna river and the Schuylkill, besides reaching over to Bristol on the Delaware river. William Hunter was the Presiding Elder. He had been a missionary on this territory in 1807, and was associated with Henry Boehm when the Society in Lancaster was organized. In 1808 he was also a missionary on the same territory, associated with Henry Boehm and William Colbert.

He knew all about the history of the struggling band organized by his colleague and friend, and, while he may not have been present, he certainly consented and arranged that the best men on his district should for one day give their presence and labors to promote the cause of Methodism in Lancaster.

Henry Boehm could not be present. He had been selected, in the spring of 1809, to travel with Bishop Asbury, and was with him in South Carolina the very day on which the new church was opened.

The Revs. Thomas F. Sargent and Michael Coate were the two most prominent preachers of the Methodist Society in Philadelphia. One of the most intimate associates of the former has left this record concerning him: "His stature was about six feet, his figure portly and imposing, his features were handsome, and the whole contour of his countenance indicated a natural nobility and generosity. He appeared like one born to command."* It was under

*Stevens' History of the M. E. Church, Vol. 8, p. 140.

his ministry in 1804 that Beverly Waugh, afterwards Bishop, became a Methodist.

Of the Rev. Michael Coate it is said: "An early Quaker training had given him prudence and stability; he possessed a strong mind and sound judgment; was much devoted to God, serious, weighty and solemn in all his carriage." Bishop Hedding wrote concerning him: "He was a man of great talents, a solid, amiable, fine looking man."*

The Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, though published as from Philadelphia, was really from Wilmington, Delaware, to which place he had been appointed in the spring of 1809. From 1799 to 1805 he had charge of the book business of the Church as "editor and general book steward." Doctor Abel Stevens says: "He gave to the 'Book Concern' that impulse and organization which has rendered it the largest publishing establishment in the New World." During the six years of his management of its interests its capital stock rose from "almost nothing to forty-five thousand dollars." "He was considered by his ministerial associates a living encyclopedia in respect not only to theology, but most other departments of knowledge, and his large and accurate information was only surpassed by the range and soundness of his judgment. He sustained a preëminent position in the Church."†

*Stevens' History of the M. E. Church, Vol. 3, p. 470.

†Stevens' History of the M. E. Church, Vol. 3, pp. 181, 192.

These were the preachers who exercised their gifts on that historic day when "the new church built for the Methodist Society" in the Borough of Lancaster was opened for divine service. They were good men, strong men among the giants in the Methodist Israel, men whose influence is felt in the Church of our own day. Ezekiel Cooper, Thomas F. Sargent, Michael Coate and Thomas Burch were members of the first Delegated Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1812.

Concerning many things associated with the opening of the first Methodist Church in Lancaster it would be gratifying to have some knowledge. The population of the borough was 5,405, and of the entire county 53,927. It would be interesting to know how many people attended the services that day; how much the little church cost; whether all the cost was provided for, or a debt allowed to remain; what were the financial results of the day, and what was the influence of the services upon the community; alas! if any record of these things was made it cannot now be found. Even the names of the members of the Society and the number of them cannot now be ascertained, but, unknown as they are, they are worthy of being held in everlasting remembrance for the faith which characterized them, and for the enterprising, persevering zeal which led them, within less than two years after their organization, "to build a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel."



THE REV. THOMAS WARE.