

HISTORY

— OF THE —

FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

— OF THE —

CITY OF LANCASTER, PA.,

— FROM —

1807 to 1893.

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF EARLIER EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH
METHODISM IN LANCASTER.

— ALSO AN —

APPENDIX

CONTAINING A SKETCH OF ST. PAUL'S M. E. CHURCH, BY THE
PASTOR, AND "CONESTOGA'S" NOTES ON THE
CONFERENCE OF 1855.

— BY —

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PART VII.

FROM SEPTEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER 13, 1891. THE
LATEST NEW CHURCH MOVEMENT.

Memorial from Sunday-school Board to Trustees ; change of pastors ; needs of the church again considered ; leadership of J. R. T. Gray ; \$15,000 pledged ; authority from male members to make purchase of ground ; lot bought ; Thomas P. Lonsdale selected as architect ; breaking ground ; work on the new church progressed slowly ; change of plans ; a tower ; the corner stone laid ; a change of pastors ; a feeling of resentment aroused ; the new pastor appointed chairman of the building committee ; report made in July, 1891 ; the chapel completed in December, 1891 ; announcement of dedication ; farewell services in the old church on Duke street ; four Sunday-schools assembled ; a laymen's meeting ; synopsis of addresses ; church crowded ; a memorable occasion.

ON the 27th of September, 1885, the Sunday-school Board adopted a memorial for presentation to the Board of Trustees setting forth the disadvantages under which the officers and teachers of the school labored and the inconvenience experienced by the scholars who attended the Sunday-school. The memorial was signed by the pastor, J. T. Satchell ; by five officers of the school and seventeen other persons, representing teachers and members of the bible class.

On the 30th of October, 1885, the memorial was presented to the Board of Trustees, who gave it re-

spectful attention. "After a lengthy discussion participated in by all the members present, the following resolution was adopted, viz:

"Resolved, That the Board of Trustees fully concur in the views expressed in the memorial presented from the Sunday-school Board, but do not deem it expedient at the present time to make any additions or alterations to the church building, as in the near future the entire church will have to be rebuilt or remodelled so as to give the desired accommodations."*

The Sunday-school Board reluctantly acquiesced in the decision of the trustees, but the agitation of the needs of the school was continued until it was found expedient to bring the subject of a new church before a meeting of the male members, in accordance with the provisions of the charter prohibiting the creation of a debt, or the incumbrance of the property, except by and with the concurrence of a majority of the male members present and voting, at a meeting regularly called, etc.

Meanwhile a change of pastors occurred. The time of J. T. Satchell, who had served the church most efficiently and successfully for three years, expired with the Conference session in 1886, and J. R. T. Gray was appointed to the charge of the First Church, Lancaster.

On the 21st of June, 1887, the needs of the church.

* Modified from the minutes.

were presented to the consideration of the male members in meeting assembled. The pastor was chosen to preside. With characteristic clearness and force he presented the claims of the Sunday-school and the needs of the congregation, which, frequently during his pastorate, tested the capacity of the church. The action of the meeting was favorable to a new church enterprise. The leadership of the pastor was given to the movement, and during the remainder of that year and much of the next (for in 1888 he was again appointed to the charge of the First Church and Missions, with one to be supplied) he labored to create sentiment and secure subscriptions contingent upon the prosecution of the work. Before the close of his pastorate, in the spring of 1889, J. R. T. Gray was enabled to report subscriptions to the amount of about \$15,000, and, on the strength of the promised coöperation of the members and friends of the church, an agreement was made for the purchase of a lot of ground that has been justly styled "one of the finest sites in the city of Lancaster."

On the 1st of January, 1889, the male members authorized the trustees to purchase a suitable lot of ground for the new church. On the 18th of February, 1889, they authorized the trustees to ratify and confirm an agreement made by S. M. Myers, as one of the New Church Committee appointed by the Quarterly Conference, and the executors of the estate of Jacob Griel, deceased, for the purchase of the

lot and house on the northwest corner of Duke and Walnut streets for \$15,000. Two days after the trustees assumed the responsibility thus imposed upon them and directed the proper officers to ratify and confirm the agreement.

This lot contains 108 feet on Duke street, and on its northern side for a distance of 23 feet of its width extends about 240 feet to Christian street, while for 85 feet of its width it extends 152 feet on Walnut street. On the part 85 feet by 152 feet the new church is erected. The purchase was completed on the first day of April, 1889, at which time the conveyance was made. The price paid was \$3,000, subject to a mortgage of \$12,000, bearing interest at the rate of five per cent. per annum.

On the 14th of June, 1889, Thomas P. Lonsdale, of Philadelphia, was selected as the architect for the new building. Plans were prepared, modified and adopted in due time, but the contract was not entered into until the 19th of November, 1889.

On Thursday afternoon, November 28th, 1889, Thanksgiving Day, special services were held under the direction of the pastor, S. M. Vernon, in the "old Griel building" on the new church site. The most prominent and joyful feature of the occasion was the breaking of the ground for the foundation of the new church. The pastor took out the first spadeful of earth. He was followed by Mrs. Florella Sampson, the oldest member of the society. After her the trustees, the Ladies' Aid Society and the members of the church

took part in the simple ceremony which was calculated to bind more closely to each other those who were engaged in its performance. Addresses were delivered on this occasion by the pastor, by R. M. Morrow, President of the Trustees, and Samuel M. Myers.

Work on the new church progressed, but slowly during the winter of 1889 and the spring of 1890. Some delay was caused by changing the plans so as to provide for a tower at the corner of Duke and Walnut street, and arranging the foundations so that the corner stone should form a part of this tower.

At half-past five o'clock on Sunday afternoon, July 5th, 1890, the corner stone was laid with appropriate services which were in charge of the pastor. He was assisted by the pastor of St. Paul's M. E. Church, the Rev. E. C. Yerkes; the pastor of St. Paul's Reformed Church, the Rev. J. W. Meminger; the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, the Rev. J. Y. Mitchell, D. D.; the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, the Rev. C. L. Fry, and by the Rev. J. R. T. Gray.

The change of pastors which took place in the spring of 1891, referred to elsewhere, for a time threatened serious consequences. The reason for any change was not apparent to large numbers of the members of the church, and various imaginings were indulged until a feeling of resentment was engendered against Bishop C. H. Fowler, who presided at the Conference, the Presiding Elder of the District

and the newly appointed pastor. This feeling was widespread and gave rise to all sorts of rumors calculated to hinder the work, but after a time the loyalty of the people began to assert itself. Better judgments prevailed, and the Quarterly Conference at its session on the 27th day of March, 1891, elected the newly appointed pastor chairman of the Building Committee.

From a report made by him in July, 1891, the following paragraph is transferred to these pages:

Since Conference there have been a few interruptions to the work in consequence of the rains of April and May, which interfered with the quarrying of stone and slate, and some delay was caused by the death of the superintendent of the ornamental stone work. The blue stone work had reached but little above the sill of the large central window when Conference came; now all the blue stone is in place on both chapel and main edifice. The trimming and ornamental stone is also in place. Work on the tower is advancing, though necessarily slowly. The chapel roof is slated, and before these lines reach the reader the slating of the main building will doubtless be completed. In the interior the walls of the church are stripped and ready for lathing. The floors are laid in the chapel, and the walls have received the first coat of plaster. The mill work, such as the sash for the chapel, is receiving attention. The contract for the glass has been awarded, as has also the contract for the seats for the first and the second story of the chapel.

The grading of the sidewalk has been begun, but cannot be completed until the lime boxes and stone sheds can be taken away, so as to allow of the removal of the present unsightly and undesirable trees.*

Despite apparently adverse circumstances, the pastor and Building Committee put what force they could control back of the different contractors, and the work on the new church went forward without the loss of a single day being caused by the action of the officary or the church.

Early in December, 1891, the pastor made the following announcement: The chapel is completed with the exception of a few comparatively minor details of work, which will receive attention without unnecessary delay. We can pronounce the chapel ready for occupancy. Appropriate religious services will be held in it on Sunday, December 20th, commencing at 10 o'clock in the morning; 1:45 in the afternoon, and 7:15 in the evening.

The Rev. Cyrus D. Foss, D. D., LL. D., one of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, will preach at the morning service. The Rev. George Edward Reed, D. D., LL. D., President of Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa., will preach in the evening. The Rev. J. H. Hargis, D. D., Presiding Elder of the West Philadelphia District, will be present and participate in the services of the day. All the services will be held in the second story of the Chapel,

*The Methodist Messenger, July, 1891.

a spacious room about 70 feet long by 40 feet wide, intended to constitute the apartment for the main division of the Sunday-school.

At the afternoon service the Sunday-school, under the direction of the superintendent, J. L. Withrow, D. D. S., will render an appropriate programme of Christmas music.

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In view of the hallowed associations and memories connected with the building that for nearly fifty years had been the home of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Lancaster, it was deemed appropriate to hold farewell services before going to the new chapel on Walnut street. Accordingly, on Sunday, December 18th, 1891, an interesting and profitable love feast was held, commencing at 9 o'clock a. m. At 10:30 o'clock a. m. the pastor preached on "The Fellowship of Believers," basing his remarks on I. John 1:5-7.

In the afternoon the four Methodist Sunday-schools of the city held a union service. All persons not connected with one or other of the schools were invited to remain at home. This was well, for the members of the schools, embracing the school of the First Church, St. Paul's school, Western school and East King street school, crowded the house. The musical part of the programme was in charge of J. L. Withrow, D. D. S., superintendent of the school of the First Church. The intention was to have James Black, Esq., preside, because of

his relations to the early history of the schools, but a severe cold prevented his attendance. The presidency devolved upon Dr. McConnell, pastor of the First Church. C. Lee Gaul, pastor of St. Paul's Church, offered prayer. Brief addresses were delivered by Dr. McConnell and H. Varian Miller of the First Church, Rea Reed of St. Paul's Church, Jacob Werntz of the Western Church and Moses Hollinger of the East King street school. The hymns sung were familiar to all the schools and contributed in no small degree to make the occasion a glad jubilee. The benediction was pronounced by Charles C. Clark, pastor of the Western Church. This was the first time in the history of the schools that they were brought together for a service, and the gladness which they experienced will not soon be forgotten.

In the evening a laymen's meeting was held. Robert M. Morrow, President of the Board of Trustees, occupied the chair and directed the services. The choir led the congregation in the well-known hymn, "Come, thou fount of every blessing." Prayer was offered by the pastor. Addresses were then delivered which were well reported in the papers on the following day. From the *Lancaster Intelligencer* a modified epitome of the addresses is transferred to these pages:

The first address was by Mr. Morrow. He said the congregation has assembled for the last time in regular Sabbath church services within these sacred walls. He would leave the old building with pleas-

ant recollections of it, and hoped all would leave behind all in their hearts that was of a sinful nature and take with them to the new church only what was good. His first entrance into this church was in 1849, when he visited this city. In 1858, when he came to live here, he deposited his certificate, and had been identified with the church and its people ever since. The old building was endeared to him by many sweet recollections. His intercourse with the brethren and sisters had been most pleasant. Twice he had remodelled this building, and much of the work was done with his own hands. All the work about the altar he had personally done. He rejoiced to see the handsome edifice on the other corner ready for occupancy, and prayed that God would be with the congregation there.

Wm. H. Bateman was next called upon. He said he realized a feeling of sadness as he looked back, and the recollection of events in the history of the church crowded about him. The best days of his life were spent within the walls of this church. Here he raised his family, and he was glad to say that one of his sons was in the Gospel ministry in the great Northwest. He joined the church in 1847, and now as he looked about he saw but few who were in it when he became a member. He referred to the death of the venerable Mrs. Samson, which occurred only a few days ago,* who was connected

*Mrs. Florella Samson died on December 4th, 1891, aged nearly 90 years.

with the church almost from its organization in this city, and spoke of the uncertainty of life, and urged all to be ready before the summons of death came.

Samuel M. Myers told of his conversion in 1848, of his connection with the First Church in this city since 1861. He went over the list of pastors since 1861, and spoke of the changes of the past thirty years. He was glad that he was one that urged the building of the new church, and hoped when it was occupied that all would be harmony between the brethren, and with harmony there would be success.

Joseph H. Selvert was called upon to speak. He referred briefly to his recollection of the early members of the church. He spoke of the pleasant associations formed in the old church which would never be forgotten, and believed with the preceding speaker that, before they went to the new church, all should consecrate themselves anew to the service of the Lord, determined to work harder than ever in his cause.

After the singing of a hymn, the exercises were closed with the benediction by the pastor. The attendance was sufficient to crowd the main floor and the galleries, and the interesting character of the services was calculated to make the occasion a memorable one to all who were present.