

F 144
.P5 P5
Copy 1

Old
Church of
St. George's
in Penn's Neck



Paper Read Before Salem County
Historical Society, September 8th,
1908, by Mrs. Augusta Austin Pettit

**Old
Church of
St. George's
in Penn's Neck**



Paper Read Before Salem County
Historical Society, September 8th,
1908, by Mrs. Augusta Austin Pettit

F144

P5P5

Gift
The Society

FEB 5 1912



Old Church of St. George's in Penn's Neck

Pastor Isreal Acrelius in his history of New Sweden narrates that "it was near forty years after the building of the little Dutch fort Nassau, [now Gloucester, N. J.] before any one felt disposed to settle and establish his home there." It seems to have been regarded as "a wild land, where nothing could thrive." The possibilities there of early tomato and sweet potato growing had evidently not been dreamed of. Mat Matsson, the father-in-law of Pastor Rudman at Wicacoa, was the first to venture at Raccoon, now Swedesboro, N. J. Others soon followed, and as the population increased there grew a desire for a church on their side of the Delaware river. They had grown very tired of having to cross over to Wicacoa—to which parish their little settlement had hitherto been considered as belonging—when in need of spiritual instruction and support.

Under considerable opposition from the "other side" where they doubtless needed the aid of this little dissatisfied colony on the eastern shore, the Raccoon, or Narratican creek people in the year 1704 persevered in successfully building for themselves a church, under the leadership of a Mr. Tolstadius, who did not stand in the best of lights with the regular Swedish Lutheran Clergy of this country at that time. Poor man! He was drowned soon afterward, and his story is one, of which the details are too long to be told here.

The property on which this primitive church was erected is the same plot on which the present fine old "Trinity," the Episcopal Church at Swedesboro now stands, erected between 1778 and 1786, during the pastorate of Dr. Nich-

olas Collin. In this church are still preserved the Swedish records, which began in the year 1713 and during the charge of Mr. Abraham Lidenins. Like all such registers they are extremely interesting, especially so to those who may have Dutch or Swedish ancestry for these two nationalities predominated; although the early Swedish churches extended a welcome to the English who as the records show must have been glad to avail themselves of the opportunities thus afforded them for divine worship at a time when English churches were also few and far between; and the Swedes were ever solicitous of the spiritual welfare of the Indian. Mr. Campanins records an appeal to his most Gracious King Charles for the gift of a musical instrument—an organ—for the church at Philadelphia, "because it might prove not only seductive to the Indians who will come long distances to hear sweet music, but also to the young of the Quaker congregations, whose form of religious worship is so bare of all attractions to the young." These may not be the exact words, but the meaning is identical.

To go back to the records: They are at first written in the Swedish language, but in 1733 a request was granted to have them "made in the English tongue." The paper of the registry book contains the water-mark of the Swedish crown; and on the right hand pages are recorded the births, marriages and deaths of the Penn's Neck congregation and on the left are those of the Raccoon church.

The proper names and the dates readily translate themselves, but the

explanatory headings, are as Greek to the lay-student, and 'tis only by the registry of a birth and baptism being followed by two or three names—those of the sponsors—that it can be distinguished from that of a death.

Mr. Acrelius seems to have become well acquainted with the district between these two parishes which covers a distance of about fifteen miles. His description is not over-enthusiastic, for he states that "the land of Penn's Neck lies low, and consists in great part of moors and marshes; that it has good soil in the lower part, but is quite sandy and poor in the upper. It is as yet little cleared or inhabited; [1750-60] the air being unhealthy and producing chills and fevers. Good springs are rarely found and the people generally have a pale and sickly appearance."

These good but "sickly" people of Penn's Neck, had mostly come over to the "eastern shoare" from the west side of the South river, or from what was early known as New Sweden, now Delaware and southeastern Pennsylvania. For many years after the coming of Fenwick's colony in New Jersey, they were considered yet "tydable" or taxable by the Dutch government over at New Amstel, (New Castle after the English possession) and previous to 1714 were included in Holy Trinity or Old Swede's parish at Christianaham, (afterward Willing's Town, now Wilmington, Del.)

They too, like the neighboring congregation at Raccoon, found it oftentimes impossible and always arduous to cross the wide river to attend church; and not less so for them to go by the long sandy and wilderness road to the first founded Swedish Luthern Church at Raccoon creek. So they now began to think of erecting a church of their own, near this settlement. Unlike the congregation at Swedesboro these

Penn's Neck people, could proceed in the regular way, for they had the support and encouragement of that amiable countenanced (portrait at Old Swedes, Wil.) and most popular of pastors the Provost Bjork who procured permission from the Bishop of Skara Sweden, dated November 24, 1714, for the erection of such a building for such a purpose; and with the assurance that the Trinity congregation on the western shore would aid, as the eastern shore people had aided them to build their church in 1689—"according to their ability."

This first Penn's Neck Swedish Lutheran Church, was begun immediately, but although of logs and only twenty-four feet square, it was not completed until 1717, when according to the much quoted authority Acrelius, on March 31st it was consecrated and called St. Georges. Whether the influence of the English, who had by this time become quite populous in the neighborhood, contributed to the choice of name, we have not been able to ascertain but it seems quite probable that it did.

Jean or John Jaquett is said to have been of French Huguenot extraction, and it is claimed that he was a descendant of Vice-governor Jean Paul Jaquett, who held that office for one year, at New Amstel, under the Dutch. Whoever, and however, it is recorded at Swedesborough in the old church book that the former, made grant of two acres of land on which to build the Penn's Neck Church, and for a burial ground and it "adjoins the land of Jonas Slogan." The deed is dated January 8, 1714-15; the witnesses are Abraham Lindenius, (pastor at Raccoon) Henrie Janes, and Nicholas Moore.

The early pew holders were: Jacob Vondevair, Henry Peterson, Lucas Peterson, Lara Peterson, Andrew Peterson, Bertha Peterson, Cornelius Cor-

neliusson, Olof V. Neman, Simon Easton, Jacob Hendrickson, Hans Sherein, Jean V. Neman, Jean Minek, Eric Franssom, Martha Guillianon, Jonas Slogan, Wm. Mecum, Jacob Savoy, Henrie Geens, Sennick Seneckson, Joh Shagen, Johan Savoy, Henrie V. Neman, Thos. Wiggory, David Savoy, John Seneckson, Tim Darnley, Jacob Danielson, Andrew Peterson, Andrew Boone, Peter Boone, John Jaquett, Olof Stahlkopp, Sarah Sineck, John Philpot, Anica Fransson, Anneca Sineck, Helena Boone and Fransenky Boone. This is the first list found.

The Bishop also appointed Mr. Lindenius pastor of the two parishes—the Raccoon and the Penn's Neck, over which he continued to preside until the year 1724. He was succeeded for a year by Rev. Samuel Hessellins whose brother Gustavus Hessellins came to this country with him in 1711, and is claimed to be the earliest "painter of faces" or portrait painter in America.

This earliest Register at Swedesboro was begun and faithfully kept by Lindenius during his pastorate and neatly too, do they appear today. This same book is continued by the successive ministers until 1785. In it, and the two at Salem (which were irregularly kept) are to be found much of the details of purchase of church properties and of the rebuilding and the repairs of the churches; in the itemized accounts, it is somewhat startling to see "for rum for the workmen" fearlessly set down.

Not until 1750 is there any extant records of Penn's Neck that were kept there. At this date it was decided that "a regular account of membership being very useful, the following is begun." These books (and in fact the churches) are now under the care of the Rector of St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church at Salem, N. J. and in the custody of Thomas Jaquett.

In seeming atonement for past neg-

lect when the birth and baptism of a child is registered, very often the ancestry is carried back as far as possible, with the additional information, whether of Swedish, Dutch, English or Finnish parentage.

In 1755 this explanation is set forth: "The Penn's Neck church being so far from Swedesboro the minister could not attend all the funerals, and no careful person to record them was at hand. Therefore it was left to place the most important in the register at Swedesborough church."

One of those early Swedish Divines after having registered one by the name of "Holston" volunteers this remark, viz: "N. B. The proper Swedish name is Hollsten, but some call it Holston, others Holson as the English maim all all foreign names, and many here cannot write their own."

Mr. Acrelius also tells us that it took eight years for the two congregations to agree as to the location of a suitable "Glebe Farm" or parsonage. It was finally decided that Goran (Joran) Kyn's plantation would be convenient to both parishes. It is recorded to have consisted of 117 acres and to have cost £145 on March 21, 1720. This property near Woodstown is now owned by John Quirk, and the "Old Manse" is still habitable. In the stronger and vellum-covered book of the two Penn's Neck, on its Swedish-crown water-marked pages, the sale of this midway home of the pastors is chronicled, viz: "1795, March 24. The plantation in Pilesgrove known by the name of Parsonage Farm was exposed to publick sale and the same was cryed off to Edward Hall, he being the highest bidder for the sum of £1600 which half sum belongs to the church of Lower Neck."

The Lower Neck Church oftentimes suffered vacancies, and the Swedesboro too; but as stated before, the records were quite faithfully kept when possi-

ble; however during the incumbency of the Rev. John Wicksell such lamentations as these occur: 1768 February 26, Francis Miles died of a decay, or consumption 41 years old. Many more died and were buried (at Penn's Neck) but they did not apply to me for to attend, as is the bad custom of this congregation." Francis Miles was buried in the Old Presbyterian yard at Pennsville and not at St. George's. As are some others bearing the names of the earliest pew holders.

At another date following same entry is. "N. B. If ever there be any observed faults in any of these my records it is not my neglect or any my own. But entirely the neglect and ignorance belonging to some of my hearers, who are not mindful of themselves, or of any good order, or any other good thing belonging to their salvation."

In another place he reiterates his complaint: "Many more were buried here in Penn's Neck without my knowledge, as is customary among them for many years back. Lord! Enlighten and strengthen better the coming generations!"

Doubtless the cause of this seeming waywardness in Mr. Wicksell's Penn's Neck parishioners was from force of existing circumstance—no daily mails, no phones, no steam cars, but very bad roads; and there was probably a Presbyterian minister closer at hand, where a church of that denomination was established at Pennsville by 1748 and perhaps considerable earlier; besides there were no appliances at hand, whereby the interment of their dead might be delayed. All of these conditions tended to lend an appearance of neglect of duties toward their own minister at Raccoon, or Swedesborough. Several names of early pew-holders (surnames) are noticeable in the old Presbyterian yard, and Acrelius states that a certain man of note was buried

in that ground, many years before, "for lack of a better place."

From the founding of the Swedish colonies on the Delaware (which by the way was not then called by that name but the South river, just as the Hudson was called the North) to the removal of the Rev. Dr. Collin to Philadelphia in 1786, these people of Swedesborough and Penn's Neck Lutheran Churches had been supplied with native ministers by the munificence of Queen Christiana and her Royal Successors; the latter without any hope of remuneration, other than that love and interest, which these northern countrymen seem to have borne one another as a nation.

Of course the congregations here were expected to contribute toward the worldly comfort of their pastors, and they no doubt did—according to their circumstances.

Mr. Collin (pronounced as if spelled "Colleen") has left written in the Ny Kyrkio Bok (New Church Book) a rather pitiful account of the temporal existence of these two churches and their pastors, especially during the period of the Revolution, during a part of which time he served them.

About 1748-50 Peter Kalm, the Swedish botanist located himself at Swedesborough, and as the regular pastor had recently died, he was qualified to hold religious services in these two churches. It would be most interesting to know, if it were he, who pressed the blossoms of the blood-root between the pages of the old church-book of Penn's Neck, where the stains indelibly remain. One of our handsomest shrubs bears his name—the Kalmia or Mountain laurel.

As early as 1744 the English colonists had engaged to hold service of the Franssom, Tehan Berthillyson, Martha Church of England at St. George's once a month; and finally after the removal of Dr. Collin to Philadelphia (1789) these two Swedish Lutheran Churches

were wholly transferred to that of the Protestant Episcopal fold, by the Rev. John Wade, and the first vestry was then chosen.

Many have asked how this change of faith came about. Mr. Julius Sachse in his memorial, on The First Ordination in America, states that Dr. Collin restrained the movement as long as possible, that the change was gradual and one of successive steps, in which the language question was the chief factor—the decay of the Swedish and the universal adoption of the English tongue. For lack of Liturgical book in the Swedish language the Book of Common Prayer in English had long been resorted to, even by Pastor Collin.

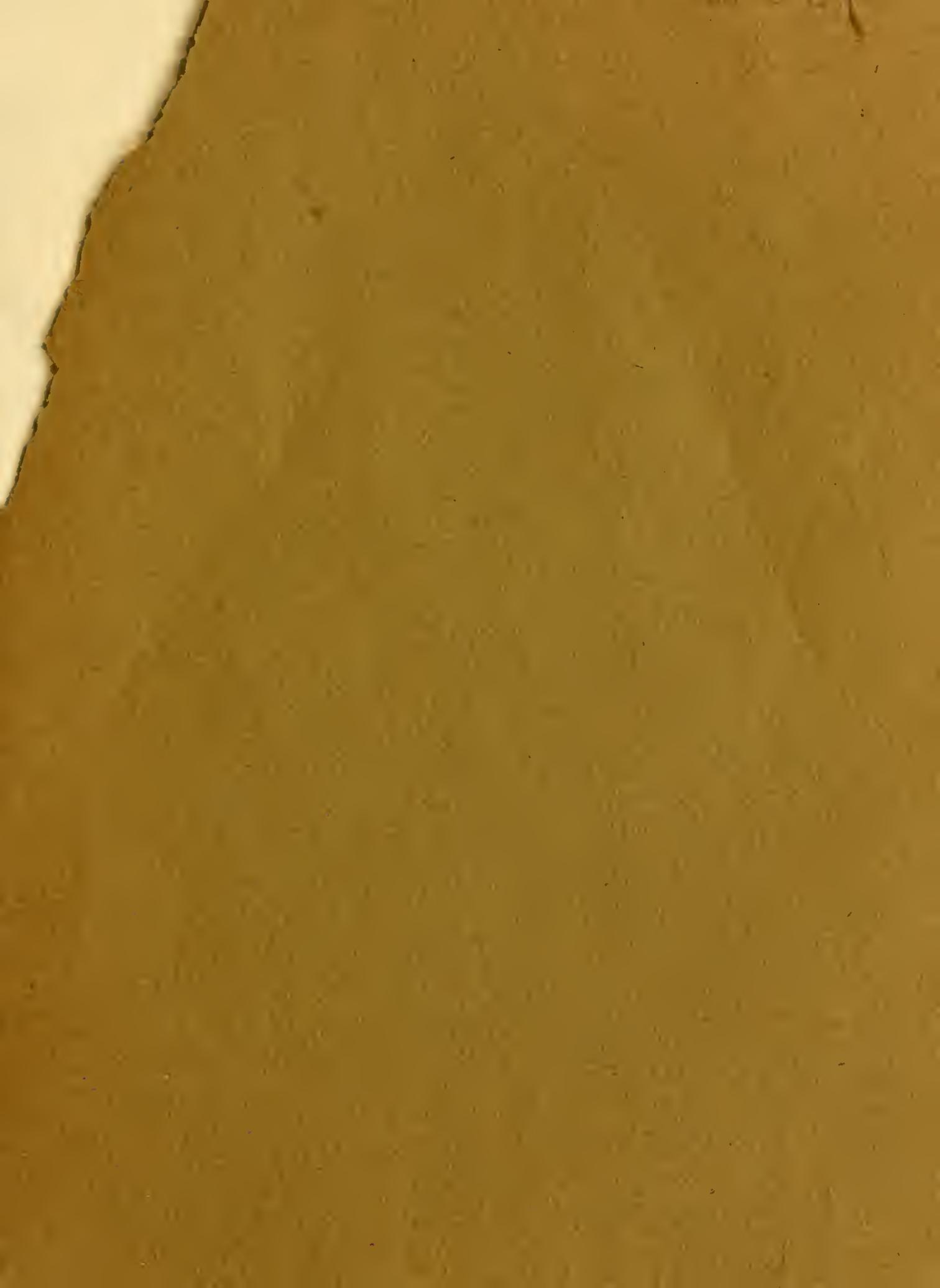
The log church in 1808 was replaced by one of bricks and this in course of time and but quite recently (1880) was remodelled into the present attractive little memorial windowed church at Church Landing, about one mile above

Pennsville on the river. It is said that this landing received its name from the fact that it was where the early inhabitants congregated to take the boats for Old Swedes across the river on a Sundays of ye olden time, and landed here on their return from church.

In the old churchyard lie those who may not have exactly blazed a trail, but rather made dykes and ditches to drain the land, and embankments to restrain the tides. The old stones bear the names of many prominent families not only in the history of the township but names that now may be found in every State of the Union, where their descendants have carried them. Some few, however, have become extinct. Such names as Carney, Helms, Jeans, Rose, Bettle, Mardin and Philpot, are no longer familiar ones here in Salem county.

M. AUGUSTA PETTIT.

September 8th, 1908.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 003 357 733 3

