

BROADSIDE

Fall 1990

*The following article was written by Frank M. Updike,
author of two volumes on the
Princeton Baptist Church at Penns Neck.*

PENNS NECK, THE BAPTIST CHURCH & THE RED LION INN - Part I

New Jersey was originally two colonies - East & West Jersey - but by May 14, 1692, William Penn of Pennsylvania had acquired all the land not yet sold by the original Land Grant Holders. When Penn died in 1718 his sons took control of his properties.

Garrett Schenck and his cousin John Kovenhoven purchased 6500 acres of this land on May 14, 1737. In a deed dated November 28, 1737 Schenck gave land to his son Roelof. This was the first recorded use of the name Penns Neck. It referred to the area in which the land being transferred was located.

The deed describes Penns Neck as having the following boundaries: The Stony Brook (now also Carnegie Lake), from its intersection with the Millstone River (Aqueduct at the West Windsor-Plainsboro border), down the Millstone to Bear Brook (this is Big Bear Brook on which is Grover's Mill Pond), over to the Assunpink Creek (which feeds Mercer Lake in the county park), west to the East/West Jersey border (Quakerbridge Rd-Province Line Rd), and back to the Stony Brook. A look at a map shows that this takes in most of what is now West Windsor. Quite a bit more than what is now considered Penns Neck.

Schenck and Kovenhoven (anglicized to Conover) were prosperous farmers from Monmouth County and descendants of Dutch immigrants who had settled on Long Island around 1650.

Schenck, apparently, never lived on his Penns Neck property. He died in Pleasant Valley, Monmouth County on September 5, 1745. In his will he left his remaining 986 acres of Penns Neck to his five daughters.



The Church is Founded

Near the northwestern boundary of the Schenck/Kovenhoven property was the intersection of two old trails. One led from Princeton to Hightstown and Allentown, the other from New Brunswick to Trenton.

The Schencks and Kovenhovens who settled around this crossroads were Baptists. In 1787 they joined with neighbors from the surrounding communities to start a church.

A very brief summary of the earliest years is headed:

History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptist Church at Williams bourrough, Penns Neck, West Windsor, County of Middlesex and State of New Jersey

This title tells us several interesting facts: 1) that the area we now call Penns Neck was named "Williams bourrough" by its founders, 2) that West Windsor was originally part of Middlesex County, and 3) that this history was started after the Township of Windsor split into the two entities that still exist, East and West Windsor, in 1797. The small congregation met at members' homes under the guidance of Peter Wilson of the Hightstown Church. He was a well-known evangelist of the time who was active in establishing a number of Baptist congregations. The history records that in 1790 "... preaching commenced at John Hights, in Penns Neck, and continued in different private houses in Princeton."



Route One at Washington Rd. showing Penns Neck Baptist Church (with steeple intact); adjoining Stout Family house; and Red Lion Inn/Parsonage (before it was moved back and turned to face Washington Road). c1930 (Photo courtesy Historical Society of Princeton, The Princeton Recollector)

The Secular Life

Sometime around 1807 William and Mary Kovenhoven, who owned the land on the southeast corner of the previously mentioned crossroads, had taken advantage of the 1804 commissioning of the Trenton-New Brunswick Turnpike along the old free road and the 1806 improvement to the Princeton-Hightstown road, by building an inn.

Records show that a John Joline applied for an innkeeper's license to the "...court of general quarter sessions of the peace at New Brunswick, in and for the County of Middlesex, December term 1808."

The application stated that he had kept the tavern "for one year past" and that he lived there. Also that he "is known to have at least two good feather beds more than are necessary for his family's use--and is well provided with houseroom, stabling and provender--." "Freeholders and inhabitants of West Windsor": Joseph Stout, William Kovenhoven (the inn's owner), Richard Thomas, and Joseph Grover, and others attested to Joline's reputation and character. Joline was granted his license to continue to put up travellers and their mounts in his inn and barn at the corner of the crossroads. The inn (which was probably just known as Joline's inn) quickly became a center for everyday life in West Windsor. In 1808 the Township's government started holding its meetings there.

The Church Building Goes Up

On January 10, 1812 the Kovenhovens, for the sum of one dollar, sold an acre of land that abutted the inn lot and faced the Turnpike, to the Baptist congregation. Named as trustees in the deed were Joseph Stout, Ezekiel R. Wilson, William Vaughn, and Joseph Grover. These men were charged with building a Church for divine worship "according to

the forms and modes used and established by the Baptist Church." The deed also provided that a part of the premises be set aside for a "burial ground or place of interment."

The trustees hired a builder named Elias Bailey from Middletown in Monmouth County. This may have been as a result of ties that the Kovenhovens maintained with their original family home and church.

On December 5, 1812, the new Baptist Church a Williamsborough, West Windsor Township was dedicated at the same place where the current building stands but parallel to the Turnpike instead of perpendicular.

Life Goes On

On December 8, 1808 a Thomas Combs filed a tavern license application that stated:

"That your petitioner has leased the New Brick building belonging to Doctor Israel Clarke situate on the Trenton and New Brunswick Turnpike Road in the Township of West Windsor"

There is nothing in the petition to pinpoint the location of the new building but it most likely was not too far from the crossroads. (Editor's disagreement: Remember, Penns Neck was much larger then. This inn was possibly a couple of miles south of the crossroads in the area now known as Clarksville.) Interestingly enough, John Joline signed the petition attesting to Combs's character and providing the usual assurance of extra feather beds.

Dr. Israel Clarke was listed on the tax rolls for 1809. This is an interesting document which reads:

A list of the rateables in the Township of West windsor in the County of Middlesex and State of New Jersey with the assessment made theiron between the twentieth of June and the twentieth of Aug. 1809

By Mr. John Schenck

State tax	205.51
County dito	165.24
Township dito	1000.00

To be Collected for the year Eighteen hundred and Nine after Deducting the Certainties at the different rates Householders first class \$0.75 class 2 90 cents 3 class \$1.50 4 class \$2.50 Single Men \$1.15 Horses 25 cents cattle 8 cents dogs 30 cents coaches \$1.25 couvered waggons 30 cents Riding Chaise 30 cents Grist mills \$2.50 Sawmill \$1.50 Male slaves 75 cents tanyards (an indistinguishable word) 4 cents The Remainder is levied at Nine Cents on the Dollar.

John A. Schenck Asses

Dr. Clarke is listed under "Number of Ackers of Land" as possessing 209. In addition he is shown as having 8 horses, 15 cattle, 2 riding chairs and one "mail" slave. Slaves were not common in West Windsor at this time but the tax lists do show that a small number were a part of the township population in the early part of the nineteenth century. We can look with envy at the small amount of tax revenue that had to be raised.

Most of the people who lived within the general area were farmers and from the names on the Church rolls, it is apparent that many must have attended church. And, since inns were usually the social centers of these early communities, it is not unlikely that the men at least occasionally stopped by the taverns, just to see what was happening with their neighbors and maybe get some news from a traveler passing through.

There are some insights into the very early days of the community from the records of the township preserved in the Township Clerk's office. William Vaughn was one of the trustees of the Baptist Church mentioned in the Kovenhoven deed. He was also at various times a constable in the township. At a meeting on September 8, 1797, Vaughn was referred to in this way in the clerk's minutes:

Ordered: that Peter McCoy be put out apprentice to William Vaughn by Judge Beatty & the overseer of the Poor for the sum of twenty five pounds to be paid into four equal instalments the first to commence six months after the date of the indenture-- the sd. William Vaughn engaging to find him the necessary clothing--to learn him to read Write & the first principles Arithmetic & also the art or mistery of the coopers trade.

We don't know whether Peter ever became a cooper. We're pretty sure that he never became a Baptist; at least, his name never shows up on the Church rolls.

Old Princeton's Neighbors, a small volume prepared by the Federal Writers Project and published in 1939, mentions another interesting citizen of Penns Neck. Asher Temple served for many years as the innkeeper at the Red Lion and was even, for a few years, the owner. Moreover, this book states that a notice in the Trenton State Gazette in September 1835 advertised horse racing at Penns Neck and further states the notice was signed by Asher Temple.

We also know a few other things about Mr. Asher Temple. In 1817 his name appeared on the township tax roll as the owner of 150 acres of land, 3 horses, 5 "neat cattle," 1 dog, 1 riding chair, and 2 stills; certainly property that would seem to qualify him as a fairly substantial citizen. About the same time his name appeared with some regularity in the township records. He is referred to on several occasions as being a "Constable."

Temple was either imprudent or he was no match for William Kovenhoven. On March 23, 1819, a deed was executed transferring the ownership of the Red Lion Inn to Asher Temple. The price was \$4,000. This must have been a large price because in subsequent sales it seldom commanded such a sum. Also, later events make it appear that it was more than Temple could afford. On May 25, 1826, he and an associate named Kenneth Dye (Dey) entered into an agreement to borrow \$200 from one James Green.

They gave a promissory note for that amount returnable in 60 days. In the May term, 1827, of the Supreme Court meeting in Middlesex County, Green brought action against his two debtors charging that: "This said Asher Temple and Kenneth Dye (altho often requested so to do) have not as yet paid the said sum of money."

As a result, the Court issued a judgment against Temple and Dye. The order was placed in the hands of Andrew Snowhill, the High Sheriff of the County of Middlesex, for collection. It provided that real estate in the hands of the debtors should be sold to satisfy the judgment. The entire amount was \$243.94. This represented \$211.50 due Green and \$32.44 in court costs, a paltry sum when compared with the original \$4,000 investment. However, Temple and Dye could not raise it. Maybe this makes the horse racing yarn a little more plausible. As a result, the inn was sold at public auction and was purchased by a man named Gooden Hall for \$200. Hall seems to have been a resident of New York City and it appears that Asher Temple remained at the inn as the innkeeper.

Penns Neck was probably, at least in terms of being the location of the Church and taverns, a kind of center for the farming area which surrounded it. At about the time that Asher Temple was turning to horse racing, it is stated in Old Princeton's Neighbors that Gordon's Gazeteer, published in 1834, lists 12 dwellings, one store, two taverns and a Baptist Church.

In the early 1830s there must also have been considerable excitement among the people in the area occasioned by the digging of the Delaware and Raritan Canal. Probably some must have gathered along its right of way to watch the excavation and marvel at such an undertaking. It was opened in 1834. More than one worker likely made his way up the hill to the taverns for a quart of "strong beer" at 12 cents. At least that was the price in 1807 as fixed for all taverns in Middlesex County.

Some of the farmers of the area had a more direct interest in the Canal. For instance, John S. VanDyke, for many years the clerk of West Windsor, sold ninety-eight hundredths of an acre of his land to the Canal Company "situate on the route of the said Canal" as stated in the deed. He received \$105 for that. William Kovenhoven did a bit better it seems. He received \$100 for five hundredths of an acre. These deeds were dated February 2, 1836 and March 12, 1835, respectively. That appears a bit odd since

Tavern Rates,

AS FIXED by the Court of General Quarter Sessions, at New Brunswick, in and for the County of Middlesex, March term, one thousand, eight hundred and seven, 1807

	Cents.
A GOOD Breakfast,	36
Do. Dinner,	45
Do. Supper,	36
A Common Breakfast,	25
Do. Dinner,	36
Do. Supper,	25
Lodging,	10
Madeira Wine, per bottle,	1.25
Lisbon, per do.	} 50
Malaga, per do.	
Teneriffe, per do.	
Sherry, per do.	} 75
Port or Claret wine, per do.	
Best Imported Spirits, per gill,	} 10
Common do. per do.	
Brandy, per do.	
Gin, per do.	10
Whisky, per do.	6
Cyder, per quart,	12
Do. per bottle,	25
Methiglin per quart,	40
London Ale or Porter, per bottle	20
American, do.	12
Strong Beer, per quart,	37
Lime Juice Punch, per do.	25
Toddy per do.	25
Cyder-Royal, per do.	1
Sangaree, per do.	1
Small Beer per do.	30
Horse to Hay 24 hours,	20
Do to Pasture , <i>per night</i> ,	20
Oats per quart,	3

the Canal was opened in 1834. Apparently, legal matters involving small transfers of land were left until the Canal was completed. However, a larger transaction which appears to have involved two tracts owned by the Kovenhovens and totalling over 13 acres was dated September 7, 1832. The Kovenhovens received \$1038.75 in this deal. The Canal and the changes it was bringing to the area certainly were debated, we can be sure, over many a "pint" at the Red Lion.

The Church Suffers Growing Pains

While all of these things were happening in Penns Neck, the new Baptist Church was trying to get established. The first minister was John Cooper who "Commenced Preaching at Williams Burrough Baptist Church the fourth of March, 1813." He preached one fourth of the time at Penns Neck. On March 15, 1815, a call to preach at the Church was extended to "Brother" Alex. Hastings. The offer made to him by the Church is interesting and sheds a little light on the conditions under which ministers labored at that time. The Church promised to make up a salary of \$100 "at a certainty." Further they promised that there would be a "shool" of twenty-five "shollars" at \$1 a quarter for each scholar. This offer extended from the first of April 1815 to the following April. It might be added that sometimes it takes a little imagination to decipher some of the original handwriting and spelling.

In a report to the New Jersey Baptist Association dated August 31, 1819, there was a decided note of optimism about the affairs of the Church. A debt of \$500 had been liquidated and \$60 spent on improvements about the Church. The congregation was reported as "remarkably attentive" and mention was made of a "flourishing Sabbath School." There were 56 "scholars," a superintendant and seven teachers. The memorization of scripture and catechisms was the aim of their study. Likely this was the closest thing to any formal education that some of these students ever received.

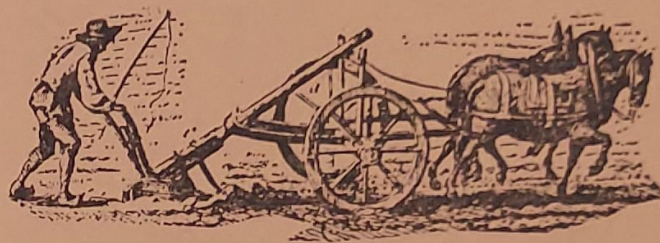
In this same year (1819), it was unanimously resolved that: "as, Mrs. Stout, a member of the congregation had collected the sum of \$41 for the purpose of purchasing a Stove for the Church, the Treasurer be ordered to add to that sum as much as shall be necessary to procure one of a suitable kind." There are still indentations in the plaster on the chimneys on either side of the Church marking the openings for stove pipes.

On a somewhat different note that is remarkably contemporary in spirit, there was another resolution passed on August 9, 1821: "It was resolved that female members of the church have the privilege of voting in all church business." This was a rather unusual joining of hands and abilities a hundred years before women were accorded political rights.

Matters did not always go well for the Church. Over the years it was plagued with debts and with resignations and with more than the normal number of searches for new pastors. Records were carefully

kept for some years and completely ignored in others so it is a little hard to develop a continuing account of the history. Somewhat significantly, because it probably coincided with general practice, the name Williams Borough, was dropped from use in the Church records about 1830 and the name Penns Neck was adopted.

Meanwhile the cemetery, which was mandated in the deed when William and Mary Kovenhoven gave the land to the Church, was becoming the resting place for members of many of the early Penns Neck families. The first grave that I have been able to discover is that of a Kovenhoven child who died on August 24, 1815. Mary Kovenhoven died on January 4, 1817, aged 38 years, 9 months and 6 days. Her husband lived until September 24, 1838 and he was 70 years, 9 months and 6 days old. There is a stone presumably marking Mary's grave but the inscription is scaled off. William's stone is still legible. (For those interested in genealogy, all the grave sites up to 1955 are listed with inscriptions in the Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, Vol. 30, July/October 1955, Nos. 3/4.)



Life in a small farming community around the mid nineteenth century demanded a closely knit family life. And so it must have been at Penns Neck. For those who were devout members of the Church, there can be no question but that their major concerns were living according to the precepts of their religion. In many cases the constraints that they imposed upon themselves were very severe. Baptists at Penns Neck on June 15, 1850 passed a resolution appointing Sister Stout and Sister Mount as a committee to wait on "Certain individuals for the Crime of dancing." No frivolous activity in 1850; dancing was a serious matter that deserved the strongest censure of the Church. Likely enough not everyone, even then subscribed to such a rigid code.

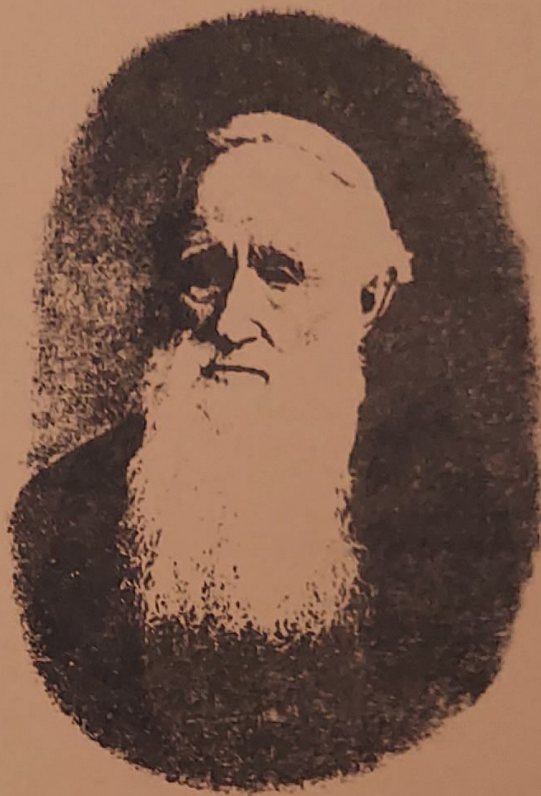
The year 1850 is very important in the life of the Church. From evidence in the records it appears that there had been a movement since about 1846 to close the Penns Neck Sanctuary and establish a church in Princeton. No particular reason for making this move is ever revealed, but it seems likely that Princeton was viewed as a more likely place for the Church to grow. Without question Princeton was more populous than Penns Neck, and it was also the seat of the University. A resolution was adopted on August 3, 1850 and a significant part of it provided: "Resolved that in the providence of God we Do Believe the time has come when this Church Should Build A house of Worship in the Borough of princeton and there have the center of our laboure."

Obviously this resolution had been considered for some time because at the same meeting two members, "Brothers Jewel and Lee," were appointed to talk to Mr. R. C. Stockton of Princeton about a lot of land upon which to build the new church. Also a couple of other members were appointed to "get a Plan for Said house" and two more were made a committee to report on what could best be done "with our house at pensneck as May best tend to the interest of the Church."

They moved quickly. Mr. Stockton gave them a lot of land on Canal Street upon which to build a new church. Canal Street is now Alexander Street and the lot of land was located apparently on property now owned by Princeton Seminary. By the spring of 1851 they were ready to start building and on March 15, 1851 a "general invitation" was extended to everyone in the Church to help in digging a cellar for the new edifice. This was probably a very normal request to a congregation composed largely of farmers who, of necessity, often joined together to get their work done.

As the time drew near to make the move to Princeton, it became clear that there was not 100 per cent agreement among the members. At a meeting on October 30, 1851, it was "resolved in the contemplated removal of the Church to the New House in Princeton Some of our Brethren desire to remain & maintain Worship at Penns Neck." There must have been some bad feeling among the "Brethren." The larger group, which appears to have included many of the leaders of the Church and which, presumably, numbered its strongest financial supporters, was the one that wanted to move. They also, at least from my interpretation of the records, were desirous of keeping control of what happened at the Penns Neck building.

As a direct result of all this, the Church split into two parts. The new building on Canal Street in Princeton was dedicated on December 1, 1852. By the beginning of the next month, on January 6, 1853 to be exact, the group that was left at Penns Neck formed the West Windsor Particular Baptist Church. The records show that twenty-three "Brethren and Sisters" who had taken letters of dismissal from the old Penns Neck Church applied to form the new church. Probably because of this initial small congregation, the West Windsor Church was never very successful. It lasted only until 1859. The records of this church are now in the hands of the Baptist Church at Penns Neck.



Rev. L. O. GRENELLE, PASTOR 1873-1882.

On May 16, 1874, the congregation at Princeton voted unanimously to return to the old Church at Penns Neck. The Rev. William Ulyat, who was associated with the Church both at Penns Neck and Princeton, left among his personal papers accounts of the return to Penns Neck. (These papers are now in the possession of the Historical Society of Princeton.) Quoting from those papers: "In September 1877, the trustees sold the Meeting House in Princeton, and with the proceeds, after paying the mortgage, interest

and expenses, commenced the work of remodeling and enlarging the house at Penns Neck. This house had stood as erected in 1812, a period of 65 years. It had become uncomfortable in winter as the roof began to leak, the plastering to fall off and the wind to intrude so the venerable building was turned front to the road, the entire covering of the frame inside

and out taken off, twelve feet added to the length for a vestibule, and also a belfry and spire added. The work was carried to a successful completion within the year 1877." Visitors to the Church will notice this date and the building date, 1812, inscribed in a stone over the entrance.

FRANK UPDIKE

EDITED BY: Carol Silvester

PART TWO IN WINTER 1990 ISSUE



Join Us Today!

Historical Society of West Windsor
P.O. Box 38
Princeton Junction, NJ 08550
Attention: Kay Reed, Treasurer

Please check the appropriate box:

- FAMILY MEMBERSHIP—\$12. per year
- SINGLE MEMBERSHIP—\$8. per year
- FULL-TIME STUDENT MEMBERSHIP—\$5. per year
- SENIOR CITIZEN MEMBERSHIP—\$5. per year
- SENIOR CITIZEN MEMBERSHIP/80 Years Plus— Free Lifetime Membership
- ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP (One Vote/One Representative)—\$25 per year

NAME (INCLUDE ALL NAMES IF FAMILY MEMBERSHIP)

MAILING ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NUMBER

Amount Enclosed

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

- Set of "War of the Worlds" celebration mementos of October, 1988 contributed by WOW Committee via Luci DiPolvere.
- Drawnwork apron and rose-link bracelet from the estate of Katherine E. Schaefer given by Kay T. Reed.
- Videotape of his talk on the D&R Canal given before the Retirees Club by Gordon Keith.
- Receipt dated June 19, 1882 from Joseph H. Grover, "manufacturer and dealer in all kinds of Flour, Feed and Grain," donated by J. M. Reynolds.
- Snap-rule advertising Princeton Junction Liquor Store and set of "Hi-Jacs" coaster-covers - both c1940 - donated by Ruth Finkelstein.
- Two quilt tops c1960 donated by Gladys Lange.
- Two embroidered aprons from the 1940s given by Virginia Rich.
- Japanese silk lounging pajamas and Japanese silk length brought back after World War II by Earl W. Smith, Jr., for his wife, Jean Smith, to make into a dress. Both pajamas and completed dress have been donated.
- Set of The Princeton Recollector, Vol. I - IX, given us by Helen Nickerson.

Our grateful thanks to all these donors for these interesting items which will enhance our exhibits and assist us with our research.

PHOTO CREDITS: Courtesy of the Penns Neck Baptist Church unless otherwise noted.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE: Christine Medora, Christiana Parry, Joan Parry, Carol Silvester and Frank M. Updike.

Broadside is the publication of the Historical Society of West Windsor.

The Historical Society of West Windsor
P.O. Box 38, Princeton Junction, NJ 08550

Postage Paid
Princeton Jct., NJ
08550
3RD CL. BLK #70