

BROADSIDE

Winter 1990-91

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 II

The Tavern Joins the Church

During the intervening years, the neighboring tavern had seen a number of owners. On April 1, 1873, Noah Reed of West Windsor Township negotiated with Susan D. Pierson of Lawrence Township to sell his inn. The interesting thing was that he owned the inn on Princeton Pike, the Trenton and Kingston Branch Turnpike as specified in the deed, and Susan Pierson owned the Red Lion Inn. What occurred, after all the legal matters were settled, was simply a trading of the properties. Long-time residents of the area will recognize the inn on the Princeton Pike as the Princessville Inn which was destroyed in a fire just a few years ago.

Noah Reed may not have been in very good health and may have been his reason for wanting the Inn at Penns Neck. He was a resident of West Windsor and the Red Lion would have been closer to his home. However, we do know that Noah Reed made a will dated February 8, 1875. He directed his executor, among other things, to sell the Inn either at a public or private sale. His son, Charles Reed, was the executor and after his father's death, he began the liquidation of the estate. We know that this was prior to September 30, 1878 because on that date Charles Reed died. As a result of his death, a man named Isaac G. Waters became the administrator of the estate.

Waters negotiated the sale with the trustees of the Baptist Church. The amount paid by them was \$1600, far less than the going price only a few years before. Certainly in its early years, those times when it may well have been the social and political center of the community and when good cheer was



Parsonage of Penns Neck Church on Route 1. Note clapboard siding (Photo courtesy of Historical Society of Princeton.)

probably stimulated by a dram or two from the bar, few would have thought the tavern would become a Baptist parsonage. But it did and luckily so. Maybe an old church and a slightly older tavern make strange bedfellows, so to speak. However, turned into a home and, for many years a kind of social center for the Baptist Congregation, the building was preserved and cared for. William and Mary Kovenhoven gave the land for the Church, but never could they have dreamed that their tavern would someday be preserved by that Baptist Congregation which they fostered. But that is the case, and since 1879 these two buildings, both of which trace their

origins to the very beginnings of the community, have been treasured by the successors to the Kovenhovens and Schencks and the other early families that settled in the village.

We also have some records in the Ulyat collection that further illustrate the Church's position in the acquisition of the tavern property. The minister at the time was the Rev. L. O. Grenelle, who was also at one time the "Superintendent of Peddie Institute." He wrote: "The old hotel property on the corner had long been an eyesore to the Church. I had a big fight on hand and in the start stood alone, but soon had others to aid in the struggle. I distinctly

remember that I said in one discourse one of these institutions will go down, either the dram shop or the Church, but the temperance move was on the gain. Some who had been indifferent took a bold stand."

"The tavern property was not occupied, was under mortgage and was to be sold. To put it short, the trustees bought it at public sale for a parsonage, and you ought to have seen the sacrifice of labor of some half dozen men for weeks in papering, cleaning and fitting the property for church use. I moved into it with my family and we lived happily for years in it. A grand good and true sister of the Church let them have means to make the first payments. The old entrance to the bar...was made a bay window and good...made a grand manse." Some people, most of them now older residents of Penns Neck, were married in the parsonage and that bay window was the place where they stood to exchange their vows.

Certificate of Marriage

THIS CERTIFIES THAT

According to the ordinance of God
and the laws of the State of New Jersey
at Baptist Parsonage Princeton the 20th
day of February In the year of
Our Lord 1911

Mr. Barclay D. Schenck
of Princeton State of New Jersey
AND
Miss Sarah L. Updyke
of Princeton State of New Jersey

WERE BY ME UNITED

In Holy Matrimony.
William M. Nelson

S. A. Wilson
Barclay Updyke

WITNESSES.

Certificate of Marriage of Barclay D. Schenck to Sarah L. Updyke on February 20, 1910 at the Parsonage of the Penns Neck Baptist Church. (Donated by Alice Schenck Parker.)

With a little imagination we can gain some limited but still vivid impressions of life in the village and how the Church and tavern satisfied some of the needs of the local populace. Life was a little more rigorous than most of us might care to experience.

Did you ever think about the rites of baptism--particularly for the Baptists of this era when immersion was commonly required? Records of the Church reveal that baptisms were held at the Aqueduct. Possibly this was not a bad spot at all on a warm spring or summer day, but if conversion came in the winter months, it might have been more than a little unpleasant. The Church did get a baptistry in 1885 at a cost reported to be about \$75.

Of interest too, in that same year 1885, the Penns Neck Church received an invitation to attend a "council" in Princeton: "The pastor with Deacons Robison and Snook were upon invitation appointed delegates to sit in council at Princeton November 17 to consider the propriety of recognizing the Bright Hope Baptist Million (colored) of Princeton as a regular Baptist Church."

Attending church at this time meant going by horse and carriage (or wagon) and many older people can remember from their youth the rows of sheds that stood by rural churches and chapels. The letter to the Baptist Association in May 1886 mentions the erection of a row of fifteen horse and carriage sheds during the previous twelve months. Listed in the Church records under August 9, 1894, is the report of a fire that destroyed these sheds and the "parsonage barn." Presumably the barn was the one that stabled the horses of people who traveled along the Turnpike at the time the inn was in operation. It was reported later that sheds and new buildings were erected to replace those destroyed.



The building showing at the extreme right of this photograph is likely the only existing photo of the Parsonage barn. (Photo courtesy of the Penns Neck Baptist Church.)

In June 1892, the yearly letter to the Association reported that there had been a severe outbreak of "grip" during the previous winter and spring. All Church activities except the Sunday morning service were discontinued because it "laid hold the Pastor and people." The letter reports that one member had died, but it is not entirely clear that it was due to the "grip." In 1901, there was an outbreak of diphtheria in the community resulting in the death of one of the Sunday School students. This was reported in the letter to the Association.

Most of the records are concerned with routine matters of numbers of members in the Church and Sunday School and the always present problems of meeting financial commitments. Now and then little items excite attention. One such in the later 1880s spoke of one couple in the Church who were excluded because they were "repeatedly reported as walking disorderly." That is just different enough to stir one's curiosity. How, pray tell, do you walk disorderly?

Another glimpse into everyday life in the village around the turn of the century concerns the Rev. S. L. Harter who began his pastoral duties January 1, 1905. Rev. Harter had a horse. Probably this was true of some of his predecessors but, for the first time, the Church voted to provide "food and fodder" for the horse. Something like a car allowance if we were to translate it into modern practice.

By this time, the beginning of this century, both the Red Lion Inn/Parsonage and the Church were fast closing in on their first hundred years. Penns Neck had grown but it was still a crossroads community pretty much surrounded by extensive farms. Princeton, its nearest neighbor, certainly was larger, richer and much better known. The Baptist Congregation celebrated the centennial year of its Sanctuary in 1912. And, except for the fact that the parsonage had to be moved in 1929 to accommodate the initial widening of Route 1 and the Church had extensive renovations in 1877, both would still be very easily recognized by the Schencks and Kovenhovens who lived here in the early 1800s.

As for the village itself, it was founded at a spot where a crossroads provided the likelihood of some traffic and the dazzling promise of a chance to make some money. The promise of traffic has materialized beyond even the wildest dreams. Farms have given way to all kinds of research and commercial

enterprises and even Princeton now stands amazed, and perhaps alarmed, at the growth in the environs of Penns Neck. The crossroads that was once the catalyst for the development of a small village verily has grown to a monster which threatens destruction.

This is the crossroads where William and Mary Kovenhoven cast their lot in the late 1700s and it is still the site of the Church and the old tavern. Now, as their second century is drawing to a close, they remain, more than ever, the only real links with that small village known as Williams bourrough.

FRANK UPDIKE

EDITED BY: Carol Silvester



Princeton Baptist Church at Penn's Neck

150th ANNIVERSARY

The Princeton Baptist Church at Penns Neck at its 150th Anniversary in 1962.
(Booklet donated by Alice Capels.)

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

Our collections of West Windsor photographs, documents, memorabilia and vintage clothing continue to grow. Many thanks to the following:

- Rhea Bell for 12 dresses from the 1960s.
- William Wilson, Ronald Rogers and Bernt Midland for the trolley line spike they found near Rabbit Hill and Cranbury Roads.
- Annabelle Hawke Jantz for a kitchen grinder.
- Ruth Finkelstein for an electric iron from the Coward House; a 1919 manual on paints and varnishes, and automobile manuals for the 1947 and 1961 Chevrolet.
- Phyllis Church for preparing and donating a slide presentation on the History of West Windsor.

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

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

Calendar 1991

The Historical Society of West Windsor will meet at 7:30 p.m., on the following Mondays:

January 14

March 4

May 6

September 9

November 4

Check your local newspaper for meeting place and information about programs and topics to be covered.



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