



# CENTENNIAL VOLUME

OF THE

## First Presbyterian Church

OF PITTSBURGH, PA.

1784 — 1884.

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## TUESDAY AFTERNOON.

April 15th, 1884.

The Rev. E. P. Cowan, pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, presided, and conducted the devotional services.

The Rev. Richard Lea, D. D., who has known the church from his boyhood in 1813, and has lived throughout his pastoral experience within the city, and has known much of the surrounding country by traversing it as Agent for the Theological Seminary, and been intimately acquainted with many of the worthies of the whole region, read a paper, unique and characteristic—a paper which no one else *could* have prepared. It is as follows :

CHARACTERISTICS AND INCIDENTS IN THE HISTORY OF  
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PITTSBURGH, PA.

BY R. LEA.

One hundred years ago forts and towns and large villages were safe from regular sieges of the Indians—but liable to surprises and sudden invasions. Rev. Marquis, the “silver tongued,” was lodging at the house of the late Samuel Ewalt, just above where the Arsenal now is. One night Ewalt said to his guest, “I have observed that you go out early in the morning to the large sycamore to pray. Now to-morrow morning pray at your bedside! Signs which I understand, indicate the presence of Indians at Girty’s run. They will cross the river in darkness, and at daylight to-morrow, your scalp would not be safe outside of the house.” Marquis either forgot the warning or trusted implicitly in God, and passed through the chamber of his host at early dawn to his trysting place. Even in sleep Ewalt could hear the passing step, and seizing his rifle, followed. Marquis was upon his knees unconscious of the fact that the hand of a savage was raised to

hurl the tomahawk. A ball crashed through the throat of the Indian, and the preacher was saved. In relating this, Ewalt was accustomed to say, "After that Marquis did good service in the great revivals. Ain't I entitled to *half*? I saved his life! I know I am not good—but *half* of his good deeds, added to *all* of mine, will make one pretty safe." Rev. Porter, of Congruity, used to examine his rifle before he announced his text. Father Boyd said, "Once I was going to preach without my rifle, when, to my horror, a painted warrior was behind a tree, on one side of the road. To call for aid was useless. He was twice my size, and *armed*. So I pretended not to see him, and kneeled down and prayed. Every moment I expected an arrow, or his tomahawk. At last I arose. He was gone! Several of my hearers arrived—we saw his tracks where he stood and when he turned to go, but he was neither seen nor heard of afterwards. I was saved, but never passed that tree afterwards without shuddering, or without gratitude.

Many of the country churches had *pastors*, while only supplies were appointed to a log church which stood where the First Church building now stands. Some of these supplies were not well pleased with the aristocratic bearing of the military officers, nor much better with the fashions of the day, nor the recklessness of the traders, nor with the drunkenness and profanity so greatly abounding. Yet the preaching in that log house was noted for its faithfulness. The fiery eloquence of McCurdy was oftentimes very effective. The wisdom of Barr was acknowledged. The irresistible logic of Anderson always commanded respect. The theme most dwelt upon by these early supplies was, "A certain and eternal hell for all impenitent sinners." Some of these I have heard preach. Their hell was as *local* as heaven. Their torment and flame—as *real* as the worm which never dieth, and the fire which shall never be quenched, spoken of by the Lord. They did not attempt to fill up the impassible gulph, nor strive to enclose the bottomless pit, within man's own consciousness.

Amidst so many good ministers, was any one the acknowledged leader? Undoubtedly *Dr. John McMillan*. Dr. Ralston equaled him in learning, and nearly in stature. Several were thought to excel him in piety, and nearly all were more *polite*. But he had the indomitable will—the power of influencing

others. Crossing the mountains on foot, leading a pack-horse loaded with his wife, child and few effects, he settled at Chartiers, used a sugar trough for a cradle, reared his cabin with fearlessness. As Calvinistic as Cromwell—as laborious as Wesley. With a *voice* which in open air meetings appeared to shake the forest. I heard one aver that he distinguished the words “sovereign grace of God,” a mile distant. When he died he wished that he could bequeath his lungs to serve some one another generation. *Twice* I heard him in the First Church. Dr. Herron helped him into the pulpit. He kept on his broad brim hat until he reached the altar; wore a shad belly coat and breeches, a fashion he never changed; pulled off his bandanna from his throat and began; soon he opened his waistcoat, displaying a breast dripping with perspiration; used no arts of oratory—he was old—but over an hour he held his audience breathless, closed unwearied; walked down the aisle, Mrs. McDonald taking his arm. He was the first *settled pastor* in the Synod of Pittsburgh, the founder of Jefferson College, and introduced many into the ministry. “A King of Men.”

Pittsburgh was then the grand trading point. At the foot of the Alleghenies and at the head of navigation, it allured the trader; cheap food enticed the laborer and artisan; our physicians and lawyers were eminent; our hotels models of comfort; our rivers were stocked with fish, and surrounding forests with game; sometimes clouds of wild pigeons darkened the air; wild honey and maple sugar abounded; fuel boundless.

The city grew, and soon the old log church was surrounded with a brick edifice; the congregation worshipping as usual, until they pulled the logs through the windows and doors of the new house. It is reported that the trustees resorted to a *lottery* to obtain funds. If so, forgive them, please. They were not acquainted with our *festivals, balls, chances*, and various devices, and had to use the only artifice with which they were familiar to operate upon pockets closed against giving upon principle. The brick church continued to occupy a large space of ground, including that upon which “Trinity Church” now stands. How pleasant the wide spreading trees! How green the sods which covered the graves! An oasis amidst the dust and bustle of a growing city. Old Archie, the sexton, prided himself in keeping it in perfect order; his *tyranny* was tolerated

on account of his real value. He took special pains to form the grave the exact size and shape of the coffin. One day Dr. Herron expressed to him his wonder that he could measure and fit, to an inch, so perfectly! Archie was touched in his weak spot, and replied, "Ah! Dr. you may well say it is a beauty. No man in the county could match it. But Dr. when you die I will dig a far handsomer grave for you." He was perfectly sincere in the promise, which he did not live to fulfill.

Of yore, the wealth and beauty of the town largely attended Dr. Steele's church. We have heard him described as a good *preacher*; in social life a gentleman, somewhat tolerant of worldly fashions; a good player upon the violin; indulgent toward erring members. His piety was not questioned, but in the great revivals of the time, his name comes not to the front. We have heard it advanced, that he was just the man for the Pittsburgh of that day. That a sterner disciplinarian could not have held together the free living, talented, fearless ones with whom he had to do. Be this as it may, he lived and died the pastor of this church. You can read the inscriptions upon the tombstones in your own yard which cover his remains and those of part of his family. In his days and long after, Indians displayed their skill in archery around the Point, wandered through our streets at night whooping, and when they returned from Congress, successful in their claims, would engage in a grand war dance, at the foot of Liberty street. I can remember that two brothers (white men,) could match them with the *bow*, and excel them with the *rifle*. *Hinney* could give them odds in a *foot race*. *Plenty* could *outbox* and throw them down. *Numbers* could drink more whiskey and remain standing, and many boys could outsteal and outswear them. The whites *then* and now were the superior race.

*Paupers* were let to the lowest bidders; schoolmasters were skillful in the use of the *rod*; the goods of defaulting renters were sold by Osborne, the Market constable; debtors were imprisoned, and juries starved into agreement. In the country, the house of God was more revered—witness their *names*, Bethlehem, Pisgah, Sharon, Mount Carmel, Rehoboth, Beulah, Bethany, Lebanon, etc. Are there not "sermons in *logs* as well as *stones*?" *Communion*s were the great occasions, several congregations uniting. The prayer was *long*, explanation of the psalm *longer*, sermons *longest*. McMillan would "fence the tables" until no one

dare approach ; Anderson would open a door of hope ; Patterson would invite the contrite ; McCurdy and Marquis would address the rejecters of Christ. The people would start early, sit all day, sometimes require a night service, and yet *Bronchitis* unknown!

Prof. Halsey once said in class, "Young gentlemen, cultivate your *voices*; the people followed the voices of McMillan and Marquis as an army marches to the drum and fife."

Patterson and Marquis were the first missionaries sent by the Synod of Pittsburgh to the North Western Indians. On their return, McMillan said, "How did you get on, Patterson?" "Well, we started with no provision but corn meal and bear's grease. My stomach soon revolted at this fare ; I must either return or get sick. So, as I believe in special prayer, we knelt down. I told the Lord I was willing to serve Him, but He must give me something which I could eat, or I would die." "Did He answer your prayer?" "Yes!" "What did He give you?" "Nothing better to eat." "Then how?" "Why you see I laid down in His forest, slept safely under His care, and when I awoke He had given me an appetite so voracious that corn meal and bear's grease tasted *good*, which was as much an answer to prayer as though He had sent me beef and pudding."

A colony from Dr. Steele's pastorate had built in Diamond alley, and called first Rev. Hunt, then Dr. Swift, and Dr. Herron, on the death of Dr. Steele, was called to the First Church. His personal appearance in youth was tall and slender, in mid life, full and vigorous. Rev. Graham, his classmate, used to say, "He is the only *preacher* I would fear in a personal encounter. He is all *bone*, all *muscle*; has no fear and would die before he would yield."

Just here let me state: At that time Pittsburgh had fire engines worked by hand. A line of men, women and boys, with fire buckets, would form and work heartily passing water to the engine and up ladders to quench the burning. On one of these occasions, the Doctor observed two young men calmly surveying the fire, rather promptly left the line, tapped them, not in the gentlest manner, upon the shoulder, exclaiming, "Young men! why don't you help save property, perhaps life?" They were two young officers of the army, and next day sent a challenge to the Doctor to fight a duel. While he was considering the situation, they,

having learned his profession, entered his house in person to withdraw the challenge and tender an apology.

The Doctor was generally too busy to study. In debate, prompt to lead, most skillful in retreat. Would disarm opponents by frank concession; fond of Presbyterian order; ardently desired the glory of God and the good of the church. Never quarrelsome. A perfect gentleman. He assumed the place in Synod which Dr. McMillan held in Presbytery, *i. e.*, he bossed—as nearly as Presbyterians will allow themselves to be governed—for having neither Archbishop nor King, Jesus of Nazareth is the only one they will implicitly obey. His hospitality was boundless. Whatever jealousy might have existed between the First and Second Churches, was speedily extinguished. His large heart rejoiced in the prosperity of everything good, and Dr. Swift loved everything like the Master. These two noble brethren used to shorten their own exercises upon communion days, that one could aid the other, with as many of the people as chose to follow.

One day, perhaps in 1823, the speaker called upon Father Patterson. "Do you know," said Patterson, "that next Sabbath is communion at the First Church?" "Yes." "Do you intend to join the church?" "No!" "Why?" "I am too young, only thirteen." "Too young to sin—too young to die?" "I am not fit to join!" "How long would it take you to become fit, if you staid away from the Lord Jesus Christ?" Silence, while he wrote a paper, handing it to me. It read nearly like this: "I, on this date, deliberately reject the Lord Jesus Christ." "Sign this," he said solemnly. "I cannot!" "Why, this paper would be a true record on next Monday, with this change: 'I *did* yesterday reject Jesus, openly'—the very thing you mean now to do." "Then I will not reject Him." I see the Session now, present on Saturday. *Father Cooper*, the eldest; pale, consumptive *Blair*, faithful unto death; Judge *Snowden*, whom all loved; good old *John Hannen*, an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile. The examination was short. I received a *token*, and on Sabbath a long table was spread down the middle aisle, shorter ones in the front aisle, forming a cross—Drs. *Herron* and *Swift* within the railing, *Patterson* sitting at the table, the elements before him. Noiselessly the elders collect the leaden tokens. *Patterson* begins with prayer: "We thank Thee for *light, water, the air*, these elements

of Christ's body and blood. Thy church is one fold, one shepherd. Some of the under shepherds have built fences across the fold, hindering communion. *Crooked* man made fences. Come, Jesus, and destroy these fences which hinder inter-communion, and make Thy people *one* with *Thee*." Dr. Herron served another table, Dr. Swift a third—each one making a short address at the last. Patterson calling upon non-communicants to rejoice in the rejection of Jesus, if they could. Dr. Herron often preached thrice a day; also strove to fill his pulpit with every variety of talent. Henry Bascom poured forth his eloquence, so long continued that *Archie* had to replenish the chandelier with candles. He would invite the *Bar* to hear Robert Brackenridge, the converted lawyer. Dr. Reuter had preached a sermon in the Smithfield Street Methodist Church, on Jacob and Esau, from an Arminian standpoint. The Doctor invited him to preach it for him, and urged his people to come and listen. Dr. Brown and the professors of the Seminary were often called upon; and Professor J. W. Nevin gave a course of lectures in the afternoons of Sabbaths, upon the "Analogy of Nature and the Bible." But at ecclesiastical meetings he prepared a choice treat for his people. Rev. Lewis, a Welshman, in his broken English would say, "God will not graciously adopt a child, and then permit him to be finally lost to His family. A lord in Ireland had everything in his castle but a *child*. A poor tenant had his cabin full of children, whom he could hardly feed. The noble offered the peasant a thousand pounds for one of his children, whom he would adopt. The offer was cheerfully accepted. On the set day the lord and his lady came to make their choice. The children, with washed faces, stood in a row. 'This one,' said the lord, pointing to the eldest boy. 'Oh, no, sir, he is just coming to be useful.' 'Then,' said the lady, 'this girl!' 'Oh, no! she is my companion,' pleaded the mother. One carried the father's dinner; another always ran to meet his return; another was sickly and needed nursing. Not one could be spared. 'Well, then,' said the visitors, 'we'll take the baby!' 'Oh, no! no! no!' shouted all in a breath, 'we cannot spare the baby!' Thus spake parental love, even when the change appeared so beneficial to the child. And will God lose one of His children, when He can so easily support them all? No! Never! Never! Not even the *baby!*"



I am a boy again, and going to church on Sabbath morning. We are late and the Doctor is praying. The doors open and shut with a creak and a bang, without care, and the Doctor does not meekly endure interruption. A number of us are waiting until prayer is ended. "How far is he on," asks a new arrival, "has he got to the *dry bones* yet?" The yes, or no, determined how long we had to wait, for he hardly ever changes his morning prayer. We enter on the right hand, and find Mrs. Oliver, with her young ladies—a seat full. Mr. Cameron, a devout Highlander, and family—Addison, Sidney, Tannehill, Mountain, the eloquent lawyer; Dr. Speer and family; Brackenridge, a son of the well-known judge; McKee and Graham, business men; Davis, father-in-law to Dr. Crumpton; Mr. Thaw, the banker, and family; Watson, the host of General Wayne; quiet Mr. Boggs, and Wrenshaw; James Willson, my school teacher; Brown; fashionable Simpsons; wise Lorenz; the Woods, Robinsons, Crossan, and Ramsey, "mine hosts;" unassuming Mr. Brown; Michael Allen, with his eyes shut during singing, making every *sound* but the *right* one; McKnight, the Market street merchant; McClellan, oftentimes the liner and singer. The Blairs, and their relative, Gen. Patchell; Judges Riddle, McCandless, Darrah, Porter, and Snowden; Hays; Judge Addison, from whose legal decision an appeal was never taken. But this church is more indebted to him for his three daughters, Mrs. Mowry, Ann Addison, and Jane Darlington; and the church of Lawrenceville was perhaps more indebted to them for their labors. Lawyer Ross, Dalzells, Benjamin Darlington, who escorted Jackson, Adams, and all other distinguished guests who lodged with him, to hear the Doctor preach. The dignified Harmar Denny, who twice represented us in Congress, and in company with Walter Lowry and Theodore Frelinghuysen, founded the Congressional Prayer Meeting, which existed until the various churches attracted the devout Congressmen within their pale. He was one of the finest looking men on horseback, charitable to the poor, and possessed a wife every way qualified to adorn him. Thomas Fairman, brave, sincere, rash. When Dr. Herron was won by the young folk to sanction the formation of a choir, Fairman yielded: but "they should never play an instrument—no, never!" His nephew took up a bass viol, and only playing when the choir sang, Fairman for several Sabbaths was none the wiser, but alas! for a *voluntary*.

Blair began to *tune*. Fairman jumped from his seat into the aisle. "Where are you going?" exclaimed a peace maker. "To the gallery, to smash that fiddle!" "Sit down, Tom—it's been playing there a *month*, and never hurt us." He sat down to consider the question, and never formally reported.

Dr. McMillan once asked a Seceder pastor, "What would you do if your Session would appoint one of their own number to play the viol in church?" "The moment he touched the string, I would leave!" "Just like Saul's devil," bluntly replied the Doctor; "he never could stand David's harp."

I am not infallible, but I do not believe that Dr. McMillan, Dr. Herron,\* Mr. Allen, and Samuel Bailey, singly or in chorus, could sing any tune through correctly, with or without notes. Lewis used to say that the only difference he knew in tunes, was fast or slow, soft or loud. I really cannot speak for brother Paxton, but Dr. Steele and brother Scovel belonged to the musical fraternity. Oh, how grandly five of them are singing now!

Time would fail me to tell of faithful John Wright, Robt. Campbell, Treasurer, the Misses Manns, without whom a prayer meeting would seem incomplete. A noble band of younger men, like pillars round a palace set, and daughters like polished stones, of Mrs. Irish, Mrs. Blair, and almost sainted Mrs. McWilliams, purified by suffering; of McCord, Beer, the Laughlins; but I must stop with the tall, slender, gentlemanly, fearless, crusty, keen editor of the "*Gazette*," Neville B. Craig. In truth, the congregation was a *grand one*; from it sprung directly the Second and Third Churches, with East Liberty and the Sixth Churches. What church in the cities has not a representative from this? Of yore, a church could hardly be erected within one hundred miles, without the nails, the glass, the cash of its firms and members.

It is safe to say, that for the first twenty years of its life the Western Theological Seminary would have gone down without the aid of Dr. Herron and his church. His modes of collection were peculiar. He would set down sums opposite to names, call upon those whom he supposed might refuse another, obtain their offerings and start them after the remainder. Once he sent for a number of his rich members to meet Dr. John Breckenridge. This wonderful man explained to them his "education scheme," and asked them if they could not begin the subscription with \$10,000? They were silent. Allen's eyes closed devoutly.

Breckenridge said to him, with great fervor, "My dear sir, set them the example! You can spare \$1,000 and have enough left to damn *every* child you have got." Dr. Herron bit his lips. Allen had but one child. The situation was becoming comical. Quickly, however, the Doctor remarked, "Yes, Michael, begin!" That voice was potent and the point gained.

The Doctor called the prayer meeting the *thermometer* of the church. He enlisted at different times Job Halsey, Dr. Campbell, Watson Hughes, the students of the Seminary, his own laymen, while his daughter Mary and Mrs. Wilkins were always present and could *sing*. At Presbyteries and Synods, which then generally met in the First Church, he could induce them to adjourn on Wednesday evenings and feast his people. All through the year he lodged traveling ministers, and compelled them, if necessary, to speak. The lecture room was the birthplace of many souls. There was a little room back of the church. Here the Session met on Sabbath mornings for prayer; here they examined applicants for membership; here, I *think*, the Third Church began, with Bushnell, and Gray, and Dawson, and Edwards, and Breed, and Higby, and others; here began the Western Foreign Missionary Society, with dear old Father Andrews as Secretary; here Dr. Swift taught the first class of the Western Theological Seminary, amidst the library, while the seminary building was in erection; here the ladies' circles met and Sabbath School teachers planned; it was the holy of holies in this sanctuary. When age enfeebled him, and another pastor was called, he adopted brother Paxton as a son—rejoicing in his success.

The First Church has had within one hundred years four pastors—a grand quartette. The church has been *strong, harmonious, active, useful*, blessed in every way, and worthy of its pastors. One hundred years old and in the prime of life, rejoicing in a numerous progeny. Churches cluster around it lovingly. Thousands pray for its welfare. Its sainted dead almost innumerable. The French and Indians have gone. The power of England passed away. Yet with undiminished energy the grand old organization says, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Dr. Paxton ably succeeded Dr. Herron, and lovingly laid him to rest. The church grew in power under Dr. Scovel. Both of these beloved brethren will pray for the success of the fifth pastor

in the field which they know and love so well. Dr. Paxton appropriated to himself, fairly, one of the church's *brightest gems*. Dr. Scovel was adorned by one every way *worthy of him*. *Dear, stately* Mrs. Herron yet lives in the memory of many: Mrs. Steele I never saw. Rev. Aaron Williams married Jane Herron, Rev. Smith married Mary Herron, both daughters of the Doctor. Rev. Thos. Beer married Margaret Cameron and celebrated with her his golden wedding. Rev. R. Lea married Mary Cameron. Isabella Craig, Eleanor and Sarah Hannen, Mrs. Hannah Barnett and Cornelia Brackenridge married clergymen. All these taught in your Sabbath School. Rev. David Waggoner and Dr. Wm. Marshall worked well; also, Revs. McCandlish and Pollock. Dr. Wm. Speer remained with you until licensed, and last Sabbath told your Sabbath Schools how God had blessed them in olden times. Many students prayed and sang with you, as Ralston, Coe, Orr, the latter marrying Miss Craig, and leaving his brother in your choir.

What changes you have seen. Your chapel is worth more than the log and brick churches combined. The front of your church patterns after York Minster. The pitch pipe of Evans has given place to a grand organ. Instead of O'Hara's chandelier, beautiful by the way, numerous gas lights blaze through every part of the buildings. The old tin plate stoves displaced by modern furnaces, destroying Archie's trade in hot bricks. The assemblage now here cries : Grand old century, Farewell : and hails the commencement of another century with joy, and gratitude, and faith, for God governs, and never makes mistakes. His, the *past, present and future*.