

The Jersey Church Through The Years

By Mrs. A G. BOUGHNER

The Turkeyfoot Baptist Church (or as it is more commonly called "The Jersey") was founded when America was merely a group of scattered colonies under the dominion of King George III of England, the third of the German kings of the house of Hanover. Although considered the "Best of the Georges," he was dull, prejudiced and obstinate. As he was uneducated himself, he was jealous of great men and therefore chose incompetent men for advisers such as Greenville and North for mouth-pieces of his stupid will. The latter part of his life, he was insane. Therefore one can easily find the causes that cost England her American Colonies.

Europe was engaged in one war after another. The French and English were settling their difficulties in the seven Years War across the water, while on this side, the colonies were allied with the English against the French and Indians, in what is known as the French and Indian War, which ended in 1763.

The selfishness of the king, and the greed of British capitalists, soon brought the colonies to a state of revolt. Agriculture was their chief industry, and their surplus of wheat, potatoes, etc. was sent to the West Indies in exchange for sugar, but with the ever increasing taxes, little was left after the transaction. But, to raise wheat, potatoes, pork and beef, at least fairly good land is necessary, and that, the colonists in New Jersey did not have. They looked at the shifting sand and the thin soil and longed for a country where they could raise what they needed for their families, and enough to feed their stock through the winter. They felt that if they could only find such a spot, they would be content.

It was then that they heard glowing reports of the fine country beyond the mountains, a country of rich soil and pure water. It was said there was much timber, but that after the land was cleared it would grow anything. Penn had written to England of this delightful country and among other things he claimed that the "Winters rarely lasted over ten weeks." (And here we think Penn stretched a point.)

This was a pleasing picture to these discouraged men of Essex and Morris Counties, New Jersey. After much talk and discussion through the winter, around the firesides, they took council together, their plans were formed, and a number of families determined to emigrate as soon as weather permitted in the spring. Away to this new country of plenty and peace,

where the obnoxious "Stamp Act" (1765), and the narrow religious beliefs, and all other ills of like nature would cease from troubling, for they would be in the wilderness.

In the spring of 1770. the same spring in which occurred the Boston Massacre (March 5, 1770) when the British officers fired into a crowd of Americans at Boston, because they denounced General Gage and his British soldiers at the port of Boston, this same spring. These hardy pioneers took their families and what few belongings they had and carried by patient oxen they started their long, slow trek over the mountains to their new home.

It was a long, lonely journey. Untold dangers lurked by the wayside. Roving bands of Indians, heavy storms, and swollen rivers. None but the brave and venturesome, none but the energetic and courageous would have undertaken such a journey. Few descriptions have been given of the route they took, but it is thought that these 18 or 20 families headed for Fort Cumberland, and from there over the road which Braddock and his ill-fated army of British, and the Colonial troops had traveled 15 years before (Part of it the present Route 40). It is thought they left it somewhere between Negro Mountain and Winding Ridge, cutting a road for themselves through the timber and brush toward the Turkeyfoot. (Authority for this---Ä History of Bedford and Somerset Counties ---Vol.III).

It is claimed they crossed the Casselman River (then spelled Castleman) near the present site of Harnedsville, and passing over the Hogback mountain came to rest in the valley of Laurel Hill Creek. One wonders sometimes, why people from level New Jersey selected homes in the mountains. But they evidently knew what they wanted, for most of them remained the rest of their lives. Here in the snug little valley, they rested with their families, so tradition says, and after an understanding among them that each man could settle and claim as much land as he could walk

around in a single day, blazing the trees as he went, to mark his boundaries, they started out to locate their future homes. Of course. this was rather bad for the men who possessed short legs, if there were any among the number. But there is no account of any complaint.

The men who were the heads of families. as far as can be ascertained, were Robert Colborn, David King, Oliver Drake, William Rush, Andrew Ream, Reuben Skinner, John Mitchell, John Hyatt, William Tannehill, James Moon, Edward Harned, David Woodmancy. John Copp, John McNair, Joseph Lanning, William Brooke, Jacob Strawn (or Strahn), Obadiah Reed and William Lanning. The Mountains, Morrisons and the Tissues were here at a very early period. but there is no proof available that they came with the caravan, although they may have come from New Jersey.

This story of the way the settlers chose their homes is rather discredited by the actual recorded facts. By Royal Edict of King George (1763), the land west of the Allegheny mountains was not open for settlement and would not be until title could be procured from the Indians. The Governors of Pennsylvania and Virginia had paid little attention to the edict until they were sharply called upon in 1768 to enforce it, and to drive out any settlers they found upon the land.

To find out how many 'squatters' really were there. and to prevail upon them to move, Governor Penn sent Reverend John Steele as head of a commission of four to investigate. Steele found eight or nine families in: the Lower Turkeyfoot region who had been there for a long time. Some say as early as 1755. Among them were Henry Abrahams. Ezekiel DeWitt, James Spencer, Benjamin Jenners, John Cooper, Ezekiel Hickman, John Enslow, Henry Enslow and Benjamin Pursley. Steele did his duty in notifying theme to vacate, and presented the report of the commission to Governor Penn.

But the settlers knew that there was going-to be a great Indian Council at Fort Pitt soon, and they hoped that the outcome would be that they would be left where they were. The Indians gave little trouble unless aroused by speculators who wanted the settlers out of the way so they could get the choice land when the region was thrown open for settlement.

Two thousand Indians of the Six Nations, the recognized owners of the land, were at the council. It ended by the signing of the treaty of Fort Stanwix, in which the Indian title was made over to the Penns for all the land of what is now 24 counties. The Indians received \$50,000. This was in 1768, two years before the pioneers from New Jersey arrived.

The Penns immediately opened the way for legal settlement and the sale of the land. They advertised for settlers desiring to take up land. Terms, \$25.00 for 100 acres. This was the next year, or 1769. There was such a rush the day the land office was opened, that the sale was conducted in the form of a lottery, the settlers having no voice in the matter.

As this was a year before the Jersey settlers came, the story of the way they got their land by the "walk around" method sounds very much like a legend.

At any rate Andrew Ream settled upon what is now the site of Ursina. David King went up Laurel Hill Creek and years later built a mill. Oliver Drake settled where Draketown now is, and Robert Colborn a little beyond. Joseph Lanning located where the Jersey Church stands, while William Lanning died from the bite of a rattle-snake. John McNair's place was between Harnedsville and the Hogback. William Tannehill's s land was located in the vicinity of Draketown. The story as told in the History of Somerset County is that Tannehill found a "squatter" already on his land, but that he consented to leave for a gallon or two of whiskey and a grubbing hoe. William Rush settled above Ursina, and the Hyatts above Confluence, in the direction of Draketown. Jacob Strawn, not far from Ursina. Obadiah Reed, John Copp and Reuben Skinner, all settled far north of Draketown.

They arrived in the month of May, and the first thing they all needed was shelter. Cabin after cabin wee built, near a spring if possible, of rough logs notched at the ends, and usually raised by neighbor getting together and helping. As there were no sawmills. they had either dirt floors, or puncheon floors (boards split out of a log with ax and

wedges) and windows, if any, were of greased paper. There was always a stone chimney outside of the cabin, logs cut out to make way for the fire. The furnishings were of the roughest, at first. Split logs with holes bored in them at each end for the legs served as benches and blocks of wood for seats. The first years must have been extremely hard for everybody. Few cooking utensils could have been brought from New Jersey by the housewives. Tools were scarce and crude. The farmer made his own plows and harrows. His grain was cut with a sickle and flailed out or trodden out by horses. In the early years they had no wagons except clumsy home-made affairs. But it was not many years before better homes replaced these rough cabins and better tools, the crude implements with which they had started. Deer and other animals of the forest provided much of their meat.

There has been some controversy as to where John McNair settled. Some say that he settled near what is now Humbert. At any rate he is buried in the Poplars Cemetery at Harnedsville.

Feeling the need of a closer religious life, five years after their arrival, they met on Wednesday, June 14th, 1775 at the home of Moses Hall in Turkeyfoot, and under the supervision of Reverend Isaac Sutton and Reverend John Corby. As related in the records of the church (page 7): "After a sermon on the creation they solemnly constituted a church in these places, jointly, a community consisting of the following members as subscribed to the succeeding covenant. Robert Colborn, Jacob Rush, David Rush, John Rush, John King, Benjamin Leonard, James Mitchell, Willets Skinner, Reuben Skinner, Nicholas Hartzell, Richard Skinner, Jacob Ketchum. Abram Wortman, David Roderick, Mary Rush, Mary Coventon, Mary Rush, Margaret Rush, Lucia Jones, Elizabeth Mountain, Sarah Skinner, Frankie Ketchum, Rebecca King. Abigail Wortman, Eleanor Colborn, Jane Williams, Jacob H. Rutzler, Abram Colborn, Rachel Harned Sally Drake, Lucetta Drake. Almer Mitchell."

In this way the Turkeyfoot Baptist Church, or "Jersey Church," was founded under the laws of King George of England, one year and twenty days before the Declaration of Independence was signed and fifty-six days after the first battle of the Revolutionary War was fought. (Lexington, April 19, 1775).

These Baptists were of the strictly religious type. To have your name in the church book meant something. It was a real recommendation, as no trifles were allowed. Absence from meeting meant that a committee would call and see why. If from church services the same. Grievances between neighbors were settled at church-meeting. Taken from the old church record is the following:

"Resolved that brethren Robert Colborn and Jacob Rush be a committee to site brother Jacob King to attend the next church meeting to be held on Saturday preceding the 3d. Sabbath in March next, to answer for neglect in filling his seat in our church meetings and for the sin of intemperance."

Brother Phineas Skinner was also cited for not filling his seat at church meeting. and brethren King and Roderick we" to cite another erring brother to attend church meeting and answer for certain reports in circulation respecting his moral condition

So you see that to be a member of this church at this time meant something even to unbelievers. They were a God fearing people and these were the kind who formed the first Baptist church west of the Allegheny Mountains, and also the oldest of any denomination in Somerset County. and believed to be the oldest of any in southwestern Pennsylvania. Many of its charter members sleep in the old Jersey Cemetery by the side of the church, as attested by the names on the tomb stones.

For thirteen years after organizing, the church members met at various homes. Then, in January 1788, they built a two story log structure with a gallery or porch. It was used as a school house through the winter months, and tradition says as a block house. Settlers brought their rifles to church and stood guard at the corners of the building during services as a precaution against Indian attacks. But after 1790, the Indians gave very little trouble in this locality. One can still see where the little log church once stood, as one side of the foundation was at the foot of the graves of Mr. and Mrs. Jehu Rush.

Perhaps some may wonder why so long a time elapses Between the founding of the church and the building of the meeting house. But it must be remembered that it was founded at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, and the

church was not built until six years after the treaty of peace was signed. Many of the men had marched to war. A company had been recruited in Somerset County (then a part of Bedford) and it went into service during the spring of 1776. They were a part of the First Battalion of the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment and were commanded by Colonel Samuel Miles. Among the names we find two from Turkeyfoot. Jacob Rush and Samuel Skinner. Others rendering service were James Mitchell. Thomas Mitchell, John Moon. Obediah Reed, Capt. William Tissue and Capt. Oliver Drake. All of the above names lie buries in the Jersey church yard. Robert Colborn, when the war came on, went back to New Jersey where he enlisted, served four years, and returned to Somerset county. He lived to be an old man, and his body lies in the Jersey-grave-yard. John McNair served through almost the entire war, it is said. (Names and time of service obtained from History of Bedford and Somerset Counties by Welfley.)

The second church at the the Settlement" was a frame structure built in 1838. In the old church records of Aug. 25, 1838, it states: "Resolved that the building committees are authorized to take in possession the old meeting house and its contents and contribute the same to building a new house."

In December 1838, the record states: "Since our last meeting we have made all possible exertions to raise more funds to enable us to prosecute and complete the object of our appointment, and by the last effort have raised \$115.00 more, making the whole amount of subscription \$820. We have in accordance with a resolution passed by the church on the 21st of July last, contracted with brother John Rush for building the house for the amount of \$820, he being the only one proposing to build the house for the amount subscribed. He has in two months and two days completed the work according to contract, with extra work without charge to the amount of twenty dollars.

Thirty nine years after it was built. it is said that it was destroyed by fire. In 1877, the third or present meeting house was built. Its original cost war. \$2500. Over half of this was paid by Mrs. Jane Brook and her daughter, Mrs. Mary A. Forquer.

In 1862, the will of Rebecca King reads: "In the name of God, amen. I Rebecca King. widow of David King. Esq., late of Turkeyfoot Township. Somerset County. Pennsylvania, deceased. living far advanced in years but of sound mind, memory and undestanding at this time, blessed be God for the same, considering the uncertainty of this transitory life. do hereby make and publish this my last will and testament, evoking all former wills by me heretofore made."

After various requests to her executors. she states: "I give and bequeath to the Pennsylvania Baptist Convention One Thousand Dollars to be held by said convention in trust perpetually and forever, the annual interest there of to be expended by said convention for the preaching of the gospel in Somerset County, and State of Pennsylvania.

And secondly, I give and bequeath the Baptist Church of Turkeyfoot Township, county and state aforesaid, one thousand dollars for the use of said church perpetually and forever to be kept secure at all times by said church. the annual interest to be expended to the use and Benefit of said Baptist Church, while it continues to remain a regular Baptist church of the denomination or which I belong."

This church received another gift. also, that of Mrs. Jane Brook. who in 1881 donated \$ 1000 to be a perpetual fund. interest to be applied annually in paying minister's salary.

Returning to the church of an early day we find that the officers were pastor, elders, deacons, clerk treasurer, trustees and singing clerk or chorister. Two of the first elders were Robert Colborn and Isaac Dwire. The duty of the singing clerk was to Raise the tune" (as they termed it). The pastor selected his hymns and the singing clerk, who sat near the pastor, arose and read and sang two lines. the congregation singing them after him. as they had no hymn books. Lewis Sanner, E. Jackson and James H. Rush were among the early singing clerks. Having served as deacons are Reuben Skinner. Jacob Rush, John Rush, David King, John Hyatt, Lewis Sanner, John Brooks, Otho Ream, Jackson Colborn, Jacob H. Rush, Michael Bailey, John McMillan, Z. T. Tannehill and Balaam Younkin.

The following have served as Pastors. altho this may not be a complete list: the organizers Isaac Sutton and Jobn Corbley, 1795: Nathaniel Skinner, Jr., 1799: John Cox,. 1817- 19: James Fry. 1820-32: William French. 1826; John Thomas. 1832-39: Isaac Wynn, 1839-42;

Garret R. Patton, 1842-45: William Hickman. 1845-47: Cleon Kees, C. Gilbert, Isaac Wynn, 1848: William Hickman 1849: John A. Pool, ordained 1849: G. Lanham, 1852-54: John Williams, 1854; William Ellis, 1854-57: J. Williams, 1857: B. F. Brown, 1860: J. Williams, 1861: J. R. Brown, 1866: J. R. Brown. 1868-72: Williams Barnes, 1872-73: J. E. Walter, 1874-77: Frank Cunningham. 1878: W. P. Fortney, 1879-80: J. R. Brown, 1880-86: N. Hart, J. Z. McEndo. ordained 1894-98: James Miller. 1898-1900: N. B. Critchfield, Thomas Boord F. S. Wortman, W. A. Wissinger W. H. Barnes. Sigman Dunmire, Glass. H. R. Kriebel, and N. E. Schlinder. 1938.

Old records say that a John Rockefeller preached a trial sermon in the Jersey church in 1837. This is said to have been the grandfather of the present John D. Rockefeller,, Jr. of New York City.

For the past fifteen years the Turkeyfoot Baptist Church had almost, or quite, ceased to function. Many of the older members had died. Some had joined other denominations, while others had lost interest. Revival services were held in the church in the early spring of this year (1938), in charge of the pastor, Rev. N. E. Schindler. It was indeed a revival. and the "Jersey" church arose from its long sleep. Old members returned. New ones were added (twenty-two were baptised at one time, and there are more to follow their good example soon. The old church may sleep, but it will never die.

Members of this church have performed their patriotic duties in every war that this nation has ever fought. It has also sent its pastors to other parts, resulting in the establishing of Baptist churches at Indian Creek (1798), Little Kentucky (1834) and Cross Roads (1849).

Today 163 years after the founding of the church. its members are mostly direct descendents of the original members, their names being the same as those found on the mossy stones in the old grave-yard. There are quaint inscriptions on the stones, and dear old fashioned names like Prudence. Thankful, Clarissa, Rosina---names rarely heard these days.

The Turkeyfoot Baptist church of today is carrying the torch lighted by its forefathers so many years ago, I may fittingly close with the words of Jacob H. Rush in his resignation as deacon because of his removal to another locality in 1860. as recorded in the old church records. He said: "May the old Turkeyfoot church become as a city set on a hill which can not be hid."

A SUMMARY OF THE BAPTISTARTICLES OF FAITH OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST AT TURKEYFOOT.

We believe that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God. We believe that there is but one living and true God. We believe the important doctrines of the three equal persons The Father. The Son. and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

(1) Therefore in the fear of God, we do solemnly engage and covenant with each other that through the assistance of Divine Grace, we will walk together in the love and fear of the Lord. observing all His ordinances and commandments in simplicity and purity of truth.

(2) We do agree to receive the Word of God as is contained in the Old and New Testaments as the only rite of our faith and practice.

(3) We do promise to watch over each others life and conversation and not suffer sin upon our brother without reproof as the Lord shall discover it unto us to show up one another to love and good works, to warn, rebuke. and admonish each other in meekness and love according to the rule of God's word.

(4) We do promise in especial manner to pray for each other and for the interest and prosperity of Zion in general, and for this church in particular that the Lord would pour out his spirit upon it and grant His presence within it, and His protection Over it to the Glory of His great name.

(5) We do engage to cleave to each other in love. to hold fellowship and communion together in all circumstances while we live in prosperity Or adversity.

(6) We do promise to love each others weakness and infirmities not discovering them to any out of the church except according to God's word and the order of the Gospel in that case.

(7) We do promise to strive together for the truth and purity of God's word and ordinances to avoid all cases of differences and offenses endeavoring to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace.

(8) We do agree to receive and adopt the regular Baptist Confession of Faith as a general expression of our belief of the Scriptures, allowing liberty of conscience, to receive members into the church by the laying on of hands with prayer. and the right hand of fellowship as a mode of reception of Baptist persons into the church: that either way shall not be a bar of communion.

(9) We do promise to keep the secrets of the church and not to divulge them to any, for in this respect we are a garden enclosed. A fountain sealed. (Rule 9 was struck from the records as it savored of secret organizations.)

(10) We do promise to meet together on the Lord's Day or the first day of the week and other days as shall be appointed by the church for the purpose of public worship to the Glory of God and the edification of this body which is the church.

(11) We do covenant together that according to our several abilities and circumstances as the Lord shall prosper us with the good things of this life, to communicate to our pastor or teacher according to the appointment of Heaven. the Lord having ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

This with all other duties. we submit ourselves unto promising and proposing to perform not in our own strength, being conscious of our own weakness, but in the strength of our Lord. Jesus Christ whose we are. and whom we desire to serve. To Him be Glory and dominion on through eternal ages.

Amen and Amen.

RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH CALLED TURKEYFOOT.

Rule 1. "That all meetings of business be held in the meeting house or any other place as the church from time to time shall appoint one Saturday in each month.

Rule 2. That all members shall consider themselves under obligation to attend, any person being delinquent in this respect shall be interrogated by the Church and without a satisfactory reason be given shall be subject to such censure as the Church thinks necessary.

Rule 3. That in case of necessity any of the officers may call a special meeting of business providing he notify all the members who usually attend and whatsoever determination may be made shall be final as done at a stated meeting of business.

Rule 4. That all meetings of debate shall be determined by role which shall be performed by rising up or lifting the right hand and a majority shall be a final decision provided they deviate not from the foregoing covenant.

Rule 5. That in all meeting of business there shall be a Moderator and Clerk. the Moderator shall have liberty to call to order as often as he shall think proper and any member refusing to comply shall be termed disorderly and shall be subject to such censure at the church shall think necessary

Rule 6. That any member speaking to anything shall stand up and speak aloud addressing either the Moderator or body of the church and shall speak on the subject or matter in hand.

Rule 7. That there shall be no whispering or private conversation carried on amongst any of the members during the time of session and every member shall keep their seat or place in the house except special necessity call, them out.

Rule 8. That communion shall be held quarterly.

THE MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CHURCH BELONG TO TURKEYFOOT AND SANDY CREEK GLADES.

Wednesday, the fourteenth anno Domini 1775, the Rev. Mr. Isaac Sutton and John Corbly met this church at the home of Moses Hall in Turkeyfoot and after a sermon on the creation, they solemnly constituted in these places jointly consisting of the following members as subscribed to the succeeding covenant.

Robert Colborn, Jacob Rush, David Rush, John Rush, John King, Benjamin Leonard, James Mitchell Willets Skiner (Skinner), Reuben Skiner (Skinner), Nicles Hartzel, Richard Skiner (Skinner), Jacob Ketchum. Abram Wortman, David Rodrick, Almer Mitchell. Mary Rush. Mary Coventon. Mary Rush. Lucia Jones. Elizabeth Mountain. Sarah Skiner, Frankey Ketchum, Rebecah King, Abigal Wortman. Elaner Colborn. Jane Williams, Mary Hyatt. Jacob H. Rutzler, Abram Colborn. Rachel Harned. Sally Drake, Lucetta Drake, Marget Rush.

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