

The Story of Saint John's PART IV, Pages 37 to 40

THE CEMETERY

"Blessed are the Dead which die in the Lord". Rev. 14:13.



WE, ye minister, Church Wardens and Vestry, now met, do unanimous agree that in order to ye keeping of ye burying ground of St. John's Church afore-said in more decent order and repair and for keeping ye graves of ye Dead from being trodden down by any kind of Beast whatever, do find it necessary to make ye following regulations".

This extract from the minutes of June 27th, 1774, which include a schedule of fees for interment in the graveyard, is the first record we find of burial charges, which were to be paid "into ye hands of ye gravedigger". We may assume that, prior to that time, bona fida members of the Church of England in the County of Chester, as provided in the deed for the "acre of ground", were free to bury their dead in the Churchyard, presumably making their own arrangements.

One of the measures adopted for keeping the churchyard in "more decent order" was to erect a fence around it, and the minutes contain frequent references from time to time to such operations. Also, the cemetery fees were revised, (usually upward), as conditions required. It would be tedious to recount all these details, and would scarcely serve any useful purpose. Suffice it to say that the modern methods of cemetery care, -- removing fences and other enclosures, leveling graves, etc., came into being gradually. In many instances in the last century, provisions were made in bequests, according to which lots were to be enclosed "forever." Alas, they had to yield to progress. Often there was no discernible provision for any maintenance at all. Here, one makes an annual payment (which terminates with the life of the donor). There another sets up a trust fund, enough at the start, but suffering dollar shrinkage along with many other such funds. This has resulted in much of the old cemetery being carried as a burden on the Church. A cemetery company, to stay out of the "red", must charge for lots and care which often seem excessive, and with which a Church might hesitate to burden its members.

In the center of the churchyard stood the Church, the foundations of which can still be traced by unevenness in the ground. The location was just north of the Fawcett lot, and the dimensions are said to be 24 by 36 feet. Vestiges of British uniforms and buttons have been exhumed in the northeast corner of the cemetery, proving the interment of British soldiers, members of the Church of England, who were slain in the Battle of the Brandywine. The remains of William Weston, reputed to have been color bearer of the first "Stars and Stripes" in the same battle, are, according to an old family tradition, buried in the northwest corner. Two former Rectors, Rev. Joshua Cowpland, and Rev. Thomas Josephs, are also buried in the old cemetery.*

During the first century-and-a-half, the Parish lands were twice augmented. In 1833, about a quarter-acre was purchased from Joseph and Anne Hannum, at the time the 20-foot addition was made to the church. Another acre was bought from them in 1844, on which the present Church stands. Finally, in 1874, nearly two acres, bought of Robert M. Smith and wife, were added on the southeast and southwest sides, to provide a location for the Rectory, decided upon that year, and also to provide a "glebe", (an old English word, applied to Parish lands). The Rectory was built on the southeastern tract, facing on Chester Road. On the southwesterly portion, space was afforded for a horsestable, built in 1883, and a garden for the Rector. The stable originally stood at the rear of the church near where the bell tower is located. This building, with some alterations, now stands at the rear of the parking lot, south of the Parish house. The remainder of the tract was for the Rector's

use in providing vegetables for his family and forage for his beast. The last Rector to use it as a garden was the Rev. David Sanford, who produced some bumper crops.

With, the exit of the horse, the "glebe" outlived its function, and fell into disuse, as had the horse sheds which once stood along its border. In 1945, it was appropriated as a much needed extension to the cemetery.

A complete and fairly up-to-date listing of all interments in the old cemetery of St. John's Church is on file at the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society, 13th and Locust Streets, Philadelphia, Pa., with the inscriptions taken from the tombstones, some of which have weathered so badly in the meantime as to be no longer legible.

The Church may well take pride in the tidy and attractive appearance of the grounds and cemetery (which in former times occasionally brought forth complaints from lot-holders). This improvement has resulted from the faithful and conscientious work of the Sexton of St. John's, Mr. Alex Westman, and the Cemetery Committee.



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Mr. Alex. Westman
Sexton
St John's Concord