

SKETCH  
OF  
THE EARLY HISTORY  
OF THE  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
BY THE  
REV. DR. SAMUEL MILLER  
about the year  
1796

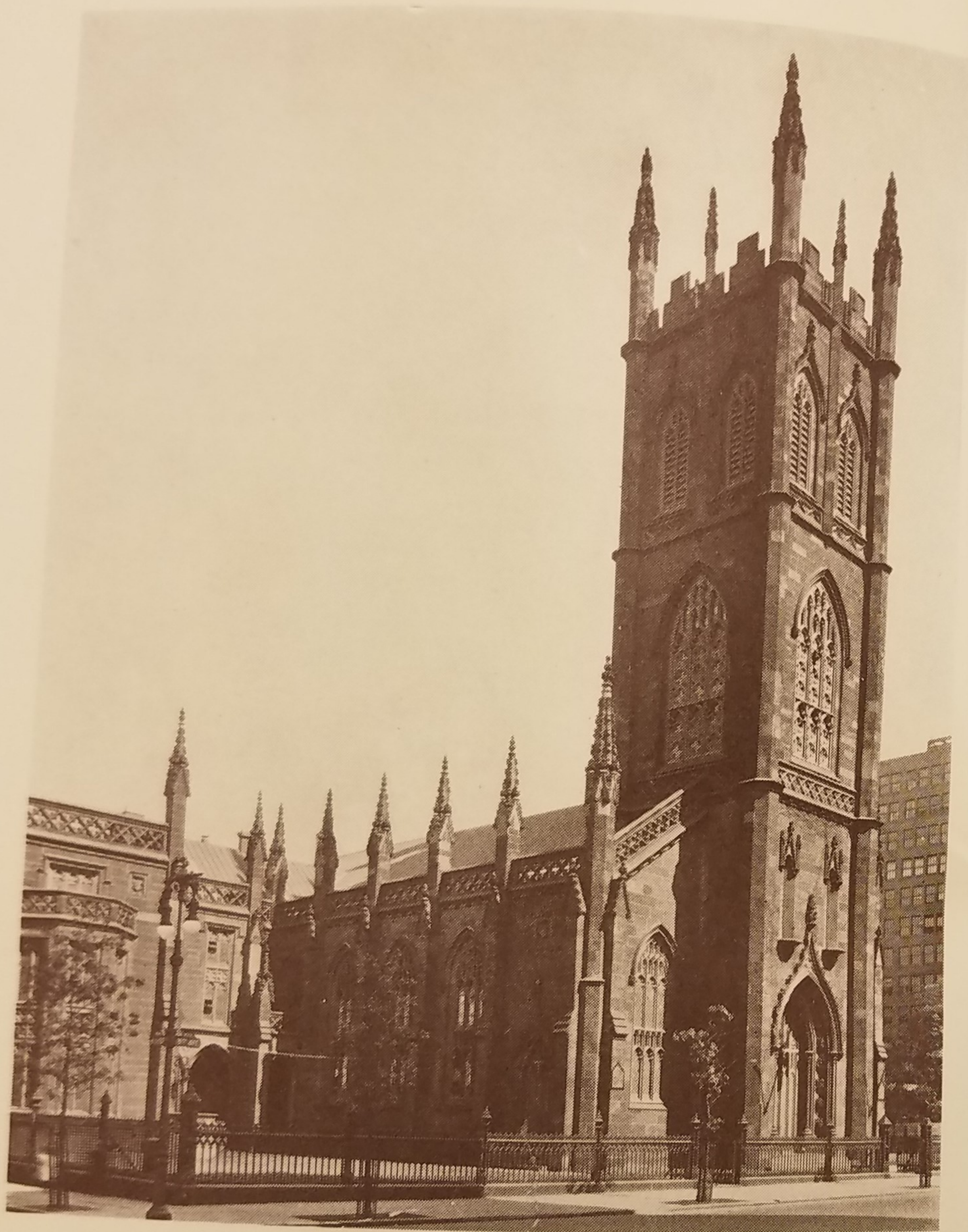
A RE-PRINT  
1937.



*(Pictures, foot notes, and supplement  
have been added. Also modern spell-  
ing has been used and not that of  
1796.)*

1707  
A  
BRIEF NARRATIVE  
of the  
ORIGIN AND PROGRESS  
of  
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
in the  
CITY OF NEW YORK





*Present First Presbyterian Church  
Built in 1845—Enlarged in 1920*

The first account we have of any Presbyterians in the City of New York, was in the year 1707: they had principally emigrated from Great Britain and Ireland; but they were so few, that they had neither church to worship in nor Minister to lead their worship.

The inhabitants of the city consisted at that time of Dutch Calvinists, upon the plan of the Church of Holland; French refugees, on the Geneva Model, and Episcopalians, —with these few Presbyterians who were wont to meet for worship on the Sabbath, in a private house.

In the month of January this year, (1707), Mr. Francis McKemie and Mr. John Hampton, two Presbyterian ministers from the Eastern shore of Maryland, visited the city on their way to Boston. Mr. McKemie preached to the Presbyterians in a private house\* in Pearle Street: having been forbid by Lord Cornbury the Governor of the Province to preach to them in the Dutch Church; though leave had been granted for this purpose by the Minister and Consistory. Mr. McKemie was prosecuted by his Lordship for preaching this sermon, without his license. He was indeed acquitted by the Jury; but was obliged to pay the costs of suit which amounted to eighty three pounds, seven shillings and sixpence. The trial was afterward published by Mr. McKemie and you have a sketch of it in Smith's history of the Province of New York.

These few Presbyterians continued without Church or Minister till the year 1717—when John Nichols, Patrick McKnight, Gilbert Livingston and Thomas Smith with a

\* Home of William Jackson.



few others formed the design of erecting themselves into a Congregation and establishing the public worship of God among them according to the plan of the Presbyterian Churches.

In pursuance of this design they called Mr. James Anderson to be their minister. He was a native of Scotland where it would appear he was ordained. He became a member of the Presbytery of Philadelphia in the month of September 1710 and settled in the town of New Castle in the Delaware Government—from thence he was removed to this city in the month of September 1717 by a committee of the Synod of Philadelphia to whom the call of this infant congregation was referred by the Presbytery and repaired to his new charge without delay. Mr. Anderson was a graceful, popular preacher and justly esteemed for his orthodoxy and piety.

The Corporation of the City gave him and his people the use of the City Hall to worship in. In the year 1718 they purchased the lot in Wall Street\* on which their old church now stands and the next year they built their first church upon it.

In these they were assisted by the private contributions of their fellow citizens and by a public collection in the Colony of Connecticut, by order of that Government and by a still larger collection in Scotland, by order of the General Assembly of that Church. This last was effected by the

\* The lot on Wall Street (now nos. 14 to 20) 88 feet x 124 feet was purchased from the heirs of Gabriel Thompson for £350. This was originally part of the "DePeyster Garden."



*A Rare View of Wall Street from Broad Street, 1825. The Church in the center is Old Trinity. Directly opposite Trinity on the right is where the First National Bank now stands. The tall building with steeple is the First Presbyterian Church, used as a barracks during the Revolution.*





*North side of Wall Street from Broadway to Nassau Street about 1816, showing the First Presbyterian Church in the centre.*



zeal of Dr. John Nichols who took a voyage to Britain for that purpose.

In the month of March 1720, Mr. Anderson and five other persons, who appear to have been officers of the church, presented a petition to Mr. Schuyler, President of His Majesty's Council, praying for a charter of incorporation in which, though the Council reported in favor of it, and the President himself appears to have been friendly to the measure, they were defeated by the officious interference and opposition of the Vestry of the Episcopal Church.

Governor Burnet arriving shortly after and taking command of the Province, Mr. Anderson and his people renewed their application to him in the month of September of that same year; but were again defeated, by the same influence, though the Governor himself thought favorably of the design.

About this time an unhappy difference took place between Mr. Anderson and some of his people who had been bred in the less rigid habits of the Churches in South Britain from which they had originated. They charged him with a spirit of domination in conducting the affairs of the congregation, and with interfering improperly in the management of their temporalities. The consequence was, a party drew off and formed themselves into a distinct society, and applied to Mr. Jonathan Edwards, then a young man, to come and preach to them.

Mr. Edwards accordingly came and stayed with them some months and left them in the month of April 1723. (They returned to the parent church.)



In the summer of 1726 Mr. Anderson received a call from Donagal in Pennsylvania, which he accepted and removed there in the month of October that year.

In the month of April 1727 Mr. Ebenezer Pemberton from Boston paid them a visit and preached to such acceptance that all parties united in him and gave him a call, which he accepted;—on this he returned to Boston and was ordained by the Association in that Town with a view in special relation to this Church in the month of August that year.

Mr. Pemberton was a faithful and diligent minister of Christ and the congregation grew under his administration.

The congregation losing all hopes of obtaining a charter of incorporation by which they might enjoy as a body a right to their Church and cemetery; and deeming them not secure in private hands, especially considering the invidious treatment they received, upon all occasions, from the Episcopalians, they determined to vest the fee of them in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; to secure them against any attempts to alienate them from the pious uses for which they were intended. This they did by a proper instrument, dated on the 16th day of May 1730. The General Assembly accepted the Conveyance; and by an Instrument bearing date the 15th day of August 1732 attested by their seal, and signed by the gentlemen whom they appointed as their committee to receive it, they set forth the purposes for which said church and burying ground were vested in them: and securing the use of them

in all future time, to the People of the Presbyterian Denomination in the City of New York, and its vicinity.

Such was the singular attention paid by Dr. Nichols to the affairs of the congregation, that the management of its temporalities was by common consent committed to his care from a very early period after its erection to his death; which took place in the month of October 1743—and his assiduity, fidelity and perseverance in this business were fully vindicated by the fruits of his labours. The Presbyterian interest in the City is more indebted to him than any individual that ever belonged to it. He was a man eminent for his piety as well as his skill in his profession as a physician.

Upon his death the congregation agreed to put the management of their temporalities into the hands of Trustees. A plan was drawn up for this purpose, specifying the nature of the Trust, and the extent of their powers; and eight persons were fixed upon, at a parish meeting, for its execution: of whom two were to go out every year and two new ones to be chosen in their room by the Trustees themselves; saving however to the congregation at large a Right to interfere in the mode of appointing Trustees, when it should be thought necessary.

The congregation continued very small, though gradually increasing till the year 1739; when, and the two years following God was pleased to visit it, with many other parts of our land with a remarkable effusion of the influences of His Spirit. Mr. Pemberton was greatly enlivened. The preaching of the Word was attended with uncommon suc-



cess, in the awakening, and hopeful conversion of many persons.

During this time, the late Mr. Whitefield paid more than one visit to the City, and preached repeatedly in it with uncommon success.

Mr. Pemberton was the only clergyman in the City who opened his church doors to him; and he was amply rewarded therefore by the great increase his congregation received by the addition of many respectable families and individuals. Mr. Pemberton was now abundant in his labours, and happy in his success. His small church soon filled, and they shortly after found it necessary to build galleries in it,—and with the addition of these, it soon became too small. This induced them to undertake the enlarging it,\* to its present size; which was done, at a considerable expense in the year 1748.

The congregation still continued increasing and in the year 1750 they called Mr. Alexander Cummings a licentiate of the Presbytery of New Castle to be a colleague with Mr. Pemberton and he was ordained in this character in the month of October that year. Mr. Cummings was a man of piety and distinguished talent.

It appears that notwithstanding the prosperous circumstances in which the congregation now was and had been

\* The enlarged Church, with steeple and bell, was completed in 1749. The Trustees record "10 September 1749, the bell was rung from a Presbyterian steeple for the first time in the city of New York." Other churches were imposing, beautiful,—theirs had been a dilapidated, forlorn little meeting house. Now they felt their "Reproach was removed."

for some years that there was a considerable dissatisfaction among them, arising from their not being governed more strictly, upon the plan of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the North of Ireland; from whence many of its present members had emigrated. They had Deacons but no Elders regularly set apart to that office.

Such of the Trustees as were Communicants, together with the Deacons assisted the Minister or Ministers in the exercise of discipline. The complaint was not so much of the want of discipline as the manner in which it was exercised.

The Trustees had the care of the temporalities of the Church; but they were charged by these dissatisfied brethren with interfering too much in the management of its spiritual concerns: a charge that appears to have been but too well founded. What greatly increased this uneasiness, was an attempt in the year 1752 to introduce a new version of Psalms into the public worship. The version that had been in use till this time was Rouse's or the old Scot's Version—some few of the leading people wished for the introduction of Tate and Brady's; but by far the majority of the people, who were for a change, preferred Dr. Watts. The Trustees took the lead in this business, and were not sufficiently tender in the management of it;—both parties indeed appear to have too much indulged a spirit of jealousy and contention. The Presbytery was applied to on these subjects in the month of September that year; and they referred them to the Synod, that was to meet in a few days in Newark in New Jersey. The Synod took them up, and with great de-

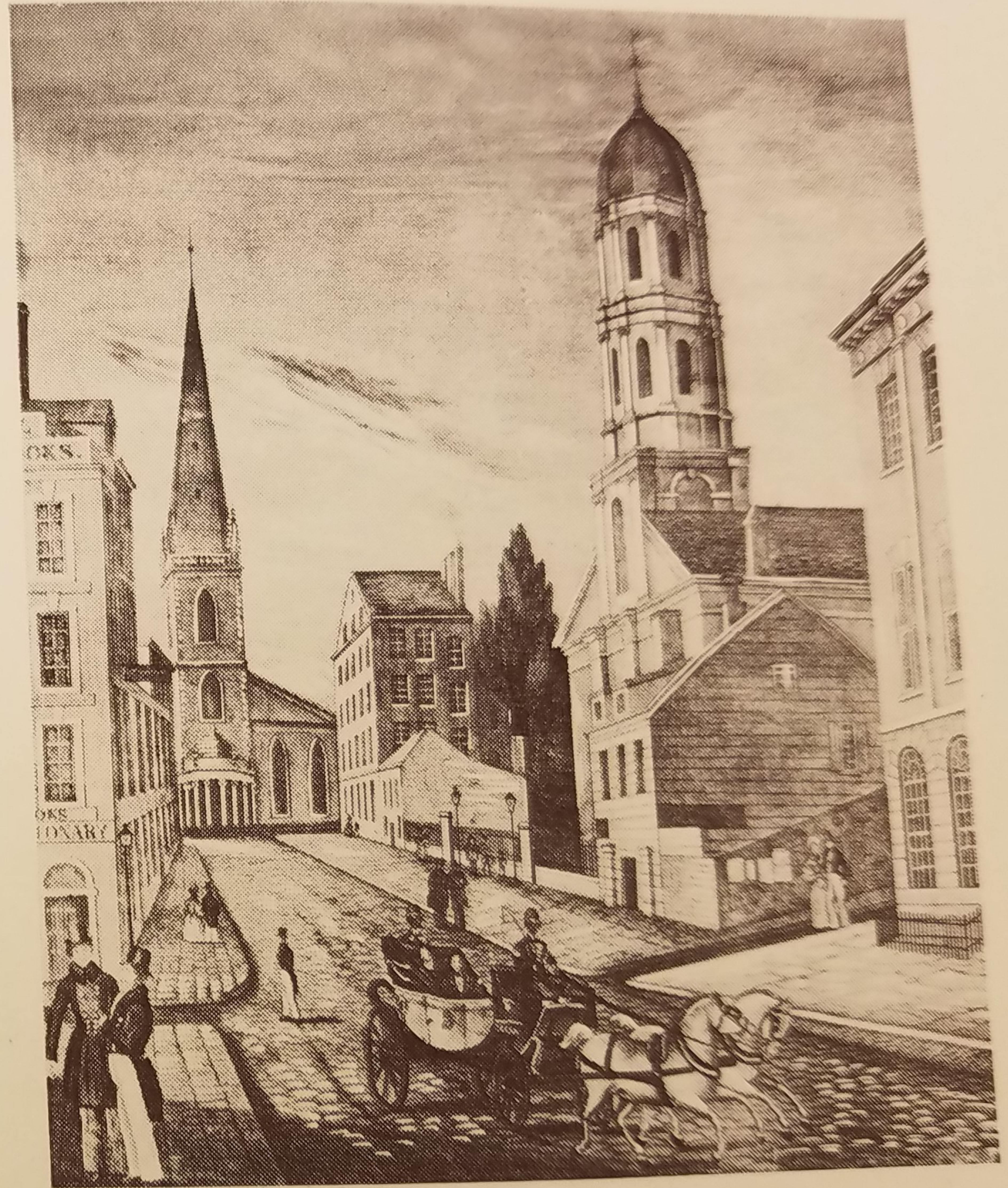


liberation and judgment decided on the several articles of complaint. They particularly gave directions for the immediate choice of Ruling Elders: and gave the congregation leave to continue the use of Dr. Watts' *Imitation* as orthodox and evangelical seeing it was the choice of the majority; though they could not but disapprove of the manner in which it had been introduced by a vote of the Trustees and a few other persons without consulting the body of the people.

A Committee of Synod was sent to the City the next week to assist the congregation in carrying these decisions into effect. Their attendance and advice were of singular use, and in part remedied the evil, especially respecting the complaint about Ruling Elders. They saw the order of Synod on this head carried into effect. But the spirit of contention was too deeply rooted to be speedily and effectually eradicated.

Animosities still continued, and were occasionally increased, as circumstances turned up, by the want of that prudence and spirit of forbearance towards each other that the Gospel of Our Lord prescribes.

Hitherto these contentions had been principally confined to the people; but in the beginning of the year 1753 they began to extend to their ministers who were greatly discouraged thereby in going on with their work. They were not charged with heterodoxy in principle or immorality in practice; but exceptions were taken at certain parts of their ministerial conduct; which probably would never have been thought of had it not been for that spirit of animosity which



*Wall Street about 1815  
First Presbyterian Church to the right.*



prevailed in the congregation,—such as their giving an exhortation at the grave when requested by the friends of the deceased,—their not paying formal ministerial visits according to the usage of the Church of Scotland,—to which were added suspicions on the part of the dissatisfied brethren that their ministers favored the change of the version of the Psalms, which however were but suspicions;—to these we may add as another ground of uneasiness, the Minister's going into the Clerk's seat and there making the short prayer with which public service is begun, reading the Chapter and giving out the first Psalm before he went up into the pulpit to perform the rest of the service—this was justly considered as an offense symbolizing with the Episcopal Church who read their prayers in the desk before the Minister ascends the pulpit—but this custom was not the choice of the Ministers and has been long since laid aside.

These were laid before the Presbytery, with some new grounds of uneasiness that had taken place among the people themselves, and were by the Presbytery referred to the Synod, that met the first week of October that year in Philadelphia.

The Synod after hearing the reference, appointed a large and respectable Committee of their body, to meet in New York on the 24th day of the same month, to hear and decide upon all these matters.

The Committee accordingly met, and after a full and patient hearing of all parties, exculpated the Ministers from any just ground of charge against them, and decided with



*North Side of Wall Street about 1815.  
This shows the First Presbyterian Church  
as Rebuilt in 1810.*



great judgment upon the several other articles of mutual complaint, between the contending parties; and having exhorted them with solemnity and tenderness to lay aside all animosity, and study the things that make for peace, adjourned to the next morning. Mr. Pemberton and Mr. Cummings appeared before them the next morning and requested to be dismissed from their pastoral relation to the congregation.

Mr. Pemberton plead as the reasons of his request, the unhappy divisions subsisting among the people; the appearance of dissatisfaction with him; and the little prospect of success in his ministry among them, in future.

Mr. Cummings plead as the ground of his request, in addition to those mentioned by Mr. Pemberton, the low and declining state of his health, which at present incapacitated him for the duties of his office.

The Committee on these grounds granted Mr. Cummings his request, and dissolved the pastoral relation between him and his people, and gave him ample testimonies of his good standing.

Mr. Pemberton's long residence in the congregation (now 26 years) and his eminent usefulness among them occasioned a warm remonstrance against his dismissal; upon which the Committee agreed, they would not dissolve his pastoral relation to the people at present; but at the same time agreed that if, after a month's stay with them, and faithful endeavors to heal their differences, he could see no prospect of his serving the interest of Christ among

them in future; and he still chose to go, he should then be at liberty to leave them, and in that case the relation between him and them, as minister and people, should be dissolved.

Mr. Pemberton complied with this judgment of the Committee of the Synod; but left the City at the end of the month to the no small grief of the majority of the congregation; who thought his reasons for leaving them by no means sufficient—a striking example of the instability of popularity, and the insufficiency of even eminent services and usefulness, and that for years, securing the continuance of the respect they had merited and obtained.

The Congregation were deeply affected with the melancholy Providence of losing both their Ministers at once, and the unhappy contentions that had occasioned this event.

They therefore agreed to humble themselves as a People before God on the account of them; and for this end to set apart a day for humiliation, fasting and prayer to God; particularly to implore His direction in the choice of another minister.

In pursuance of this they applied to the Presbytery to appoint one of their number to come and preach to them on the occasion, and to conduct the solemnities of the day.

Mr. Azariah Horton was accordingly appointed to this Service; and the 31st day of the next month (December) was observed with great solemnity in this religious manner.

After sermon and the other public services of the day were over, the congregation proceeded to consider the pro-



priety of calling another minister. This was unanimously agreed upon, and Mr. Joseph Bellamy of Woodbury, in Connecticut was chosen.

In pursuance of this, a call was drawn up for Mr. Bellamy and regularly prosecuted with the concurrence of the Presbytery,—but he declined accepting it; in which he had the concurrence of the Council convened on the occasion, agreeably to the Discipline of the Churches in Connecticut.

At the instance of a number of the congregation, especially of those who were charged with having given rise to the disturbances, a second call was prepared and sent to Mr. Bellamy. This was pressed with great zeal; but Mr. Bellamy finding there was not that unanimity in the business that he wished, gave them an answer in the negative the second time, by letter, dated July 18th, 1754.

In the month of November 1754 they applied to Mr. John Rodgers of St. George's, in the Delaware Government, a member of the Presbytery of New Castle; earnestly pressing his paying them a visit, in hopes he might be the happy means of healing their differences; and the way be prepared for his settlement among them as their minister. Mr. Rodgers however declined accepting the invitation.

In the month of January 1755 by the advice of the Presbytery they gave a call to Mr. David McGregore of Londonderry in Massachusetts a member of the Presbytery of Boston. This call was regularly prosecuted before his Presbytery that met at Pelham, in the month of April that

year, and afterwards in Boston, May 14th. But Mr. McGregore did not see his way clear to accept it.

In the month of July following they gave a call to Mr. David Bostwick of Jamaica on Long Island; a member of their own Presbytery.

The people of Jamaica being much opposed to Mr. Bostwick's removal, and the uneasiness that had so long subsisted in the congregation respecting the Psalms, still continuing, and having an unfriendly aspect upon the success of their application,—

The Presbytery upon the call's being laid before them referred it to the then next meeting of Synod, which was held at Newark, in September that year. The Synod appointed a Committee to meet at Jamaica, on the 29th day of October (the next month) to decide upon the call.

The Committee being met agreeable to appointment; the Elders, Deacons and Trustees presented a memorial to them, praying in the most pressing, yet respectful terms, that they would not only put their call into Mr. Bostwick's hands and favor his acceptance of it, but that they would come to some decision respecting the Psalms, that they might be no longer a bone of contention among them. They urged that the dispute occasioned by them was a great discouragement to any minister settling among them and in many views highly injurious to the interest of Christ in the society; but at the same time they prayed that the use of Dr. Watts' version might be continued with them, as the wish of the great body of the People.



The Committee was divided with respect to the call, and therefore agreed to refer the decision of it to the Commission of the Synod; which they requested the Moderator of the Synod, who happened to be one of their number, to call as soon as convenient—and as to the affair of the Psalms, they did not choose to do anything in it; as they were divided on that subject too, and especially as it had not been committed to them by the Synod.

The Commission of the Synod was accordingly called and met at Princeton the 14th day of April 1756; when Mr. Bostwick requested that in case they put the call into his hands the Commission would please to give him their judgment on this important subject; signifying, that unable to determine himself, he would abide by their decision, as to his duty respecting his stay at Jamaica or removal to New York.

The Commission put the call into his hands and having fully heard the gentleman who represented the Congregation of New York and what the people of Jamaica had to say against his removal, decided in favor of his removal to New York; in which Mr. Bostwick acquiesced and his pastoral relation to the people of Jamaica was thereupon dissolved.

Mr. Bostwick shortly after removed to the city and entered upon his new charge. He possessed pulpit talents superior to most of his brethren. He was very popular as a preacher; and his piety and prudence, in which he excelled rendered him very acceptable to his people and the city in general.

The dissatisfied brethren made their last application to the Synod, that met in the month of September this year, on the subject of the Psalms and the other less considerable grounds of uneasiness, that had so long agitated the congregation. This they did in terms far from being delicate. The Synod remarked with propriety on their manner and referred them to their past decisions on the subjects which they saw no reason to alter.

On this a number of the dissatisfied brethren withdrew from the congregation, and formed themselves into a distinct society\*—and applied for supplies to two Seceding Ministers, who had not long before arrived from Scotland. This new formed Society, after some time called Mr. John Mason, a member of the Anti Burger Associate Presbytery of Edinburgh in Scotland to be their Minister. He came out to them in the month of June 1761 and took upon him the charge of this small People; and under the smiles of heaven upon the judicious and faithful discharge of his ministry among them, they have risen to a degree of respectability and importance that do honor to the abilities and zeal of their minister. He supported the dignity of his character till his death, which took place in the month of April 1792. He died justly and greatly lamented not only by his own people but by the City at large and the churches in general. His son succeeds him with equal reputation.

This secession restored peace to the congregation, though it was much smaller than might have been expected

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\* Organized the "Scotch Church" now the Second Presbyterian Church.



considering the unhappy fermented state in which they had been for several years.

The dissatisfied brethren who remained sat down contented under Mr. Bostwick's Ministry and the congregation grew under his administrations.

In the year 1759 they made a third application for a charter of incorporation; to this they were encouraged by some circumstances they thought favorable to the design; particularly the declarations of Mr. DeLancy the Lieut. Governor then in office, who had frequently declared his abhorrence of the former opposition they had met with, as illiberal and unreasonable, but they were again defeated by the same interest that had twice defeated them before.

In the month of May 1762 they purchased a parsonage\* house at a considerable expense, and gave the use of it to Mr. Bostwick over and above his stated salary, which they had considerably increased from the time of his first coming among them. This property for the want of a charter of incorporation they were obliged to vest in Trustees chosen by them for the purpose.

In the month of October the same year they gave a call to Mr. Joseph Treat, a young gentleman a member of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, to be a colleague with Mr. Bostwick. Mr. Treat accepted their call, and having no particular charge, immediately entered upon his Ministry with them. Mr. Treat was a popular, useful preacher.

\* Deed reads: Bounded—s/w Thames Street. n/e Little Queen Street. (now Cedar) s/e House of Walter Dubois. n/w Lumbar Street (now Trinity Place) Cost £125.

In the month of November 1763 it pleased God to take Mr. Bostwick to himself, after a few days' illness and the congregation buried him with great decency at their own expense. He was much esteemed while he lived by his people and by the City and by the Churches at large and his death was sincerely and justly lamented.

Mr. Bostwick having left a numerous family in destitute circumstances, the congregation in testimony of their respect for him raised nearly eight hundred pounds for their support—this was done by subscription; a considerable part of it was assigned to the widow to enable her to put herself in a way of business for the support of her family, and a part of it was appropriated as a fund for the use of the children.

In the spring of the year 1764 they gave a call to Mr. John Murray a preacher from the North of Ireland; a man of popular talents, to be a colleague with Mr. Treat; but it was not unanimous. Mr. Murray declined accepting this call.

In the month of January 1765 they drew up an unanimous call for Mr. John Rodgers of St. George's to whom they had before applied in the month of November 1754. The Presbytery not only concurred with the congregation in prosecuting this call, when applied to for the purpose agreeably to the rules of our discipline, but appointed one of their number to accompany the messenger, who was sent with it to the Presbytery of New Castle. This Presbytery met in the month of February and put the call into Mr. Rodgers' hands; and appointed to meet at St. George's on



the 16th day of April to consider the subject and receive his answer.

They accordingly met; but such was the solicitude of his people on the occasion, and such the attachment they manifested to him; and on the other hand, such was the important and pressing nature of the call, that he could not determine what was his duty; and was induced to leave the decision of the matter with the Presbytery. The opposition to his removal before the Presbytery was so determined, that after having heard the Commissioners from New York in favor of their call, and the People of St. George's against it, at great length, they referred the matter to the Synod which was to meet in Philadelphia on the third Wednesday of the next month.

The Synod however when the matter came before them, after hearing the Commissioners from both congregations very fully, almost unanimously decided it was Mr. Rodgers' duty to remove to New York; and accordingly dissolved his pastoral relation to his people at St. George's—this took place on the 18th day of May 1765.

Mr. Rodgers removed to New York in the month of July; entered upon his new charge, and was installed as one of the ministers of the said congregation on the 4th day of September 1765.

It pleased God about this time to accompany the preaching of the Word with more than usual success; the attention of people was called up, to the great interest of their

precious souls and many were hopefully brought to the saving knowledge of Christ.

\*The congregation, in consequence of this increased; and it was soon found necessary to build a new church. Measures were accordingly taken for this purpose the beginning of the year following; a lot of ground was procured from the Corporation of the City upon ground rent forever—liberal subscriptions for the purpose were raised—the foundation of the church was laid in the fall of the year 1766 and the building completed at a great expense in the course of the next year.

The first sermon was preached in it on New Year's Day 1768, by Mr. Rodgers from Haggai second Chapter seventh verse. This new Church was considered as an annexation to the old under the care of the same ministers, who preached alternately in them both, every Sabbath from this time; and the Evening Service was alternately in the two churches on Sabbath evenings. The two congregations had the same Elders and the same Deacons, and the same Trustees had charge of the temporalities of both—but it was thought expedient inasmuch as the congregation was now considerably enlarged, to increase the number of Elders and Deacons—this was accordingly done in the year 1769, and the Trustees agreed to propose to the congregation, an enlargement of their number. This was done at a parish meeting January 1st, 1771; when four gentlemen were chosen by the congregation in addition to the eight already in office; and it was agreed that the Board should in future

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\* This refers to the building of the Brick Church, Beekman Street.



consist of twelve, the members to be chosen from time to time, upon the plan upon which vacancies were filled up in the old board of eight.

In the beginning of the year 1766 when it was judged necessary to build another Church, it was thought expedient to make another trial for a charter of Incorporation as the want of it was found to subject the congregation to many inconveniences. Sir Henry Moore, then Governor of the Province, was friendly to the design; but a doubt was started, whether his commission vested him with incorporating powers; this and a want of confidence in the Council, determined them to apply immediately to the Throne. Accordingly a petition to the King was forwarded in the month of March 1766, signed by the Ministers, Elders, Deacons and Trustees, praying for a Charter of Incorporation; and a copy of the Charter prayed for accompanied the petition. This petition was presented to His Majesty by the gentlemen whom they employed as their agents in London to prosecute the business.

The King laid it before his Privy Council, and they referred it in the usual routine of business to the Board of Trade. Lord Dartmouth then presided at this Board and was a sincere friend to the measure. The Board of Trade wrote to Sir Henry Moore, to know "whether the facts stated in the Petition were true," and sent him a copy of the Petition and Charter. This brought the matter before the Council here, who, after every possible delay, were obliged to report that "the facts stated in the Petition were all true." This answer was forwarded by the Governor

without loss of time; but when the matter came before the Board of Trade again, the Bishop of London appeared twice in opposition to it; and their report to the King being unfavorable the petition was rejected August 26th, 1767.

This obliged them to vest their new church and cemetery in private Trustees, as they had before been obliged to do respecting their parsonage house; but notwithstanding these discouragements the congregation continued to grow under the smiles of the Great Head of the Church.

Their attempts for a charter however did not end here—Mr. Tryon, Governor of the Province being about to go to Britain in the year 1774 was made fully acquainted with all the steps that had been taken in pursuit of this boon and the repeated disappointments they had met with; and being fully impressed with the justice and policy of granting the request, promised his best offices in effecting it. Upon this a petition was formally preferred to him upon the subject, that he might have something to lay before His Majesty and the Privy Council on it; like petitions for charters were presented to him from several Presbyterian Congregations in different parts of the Province; and also from several low Dutch Reformed Congregations. All these Mr. Tryon took with him and actually obtained an order from the King and Privy Council to grant all these Charters. On his return in the beginning of the summer 1775 Mr. Tryon imparted this intelligence to the petitioners—on which the Ministers, Elders, Deacons and Trustees of these congregations preferred another petition, with a draft of the charter they prayed for; this passed the Council and



was put into the hands of Mr. Kemp the King's Attorney as the only law officer of the Crown, then in the Province, for his report upon it. This was made necessary by the "Tenour of the Royal Order"; but was at the same time considered merely as a thing of course. There however it was lost—it could never be got out of Mr. Attorney's hands and the congregations were less solicitous about it, as matters were now hastening fast to extremities between the two countries.

The members of these congregations, being with but few exceptions zealously attached to the American cause, in their late struggle with Britain for their liberties, they were entirely broken up in the summer of 1776. Their Ministers and most of the people went into a voluntary exile rather than join the British Troops against their country. In this dispersed situation they continued, many of them employed in different departments in defense of their country till the end of the war.

As soon as it was known that preliminary articles of peace between Great Britain and America were signed in the spring of the year 1783, an intercourse took place between the country and the city, that had been now near seven years in the hands of the British Troops. On the commencement of this intercourse many of the old inhabitants returned from their exile, and among these some of the members of these congregations. In the course of the summer a few more returned, and on the evacuation of the city by the British Troops which took place on the 25th day of November that year, Dr. Rodgers one of their Minis-

ters and a still greater number returned. But they had no place to worship in; the British Troops had occupied their old church as barracks, and their new church as a hospital; and had left them both in a most ruinous condition. Their parsonage house had been also burnt, in the first fire that laid so great a part of the city in ruins, a few weeks after the British Troops took possession of it in the fall of the year 1776.

The Vestry of Trinity Church unsolicited offered them the use of St. George's Chapel and St. Paul's Church alternately; till they could repair one of their own churches; this was accepted. Mr. Treat did not return to the City after the war.

The returned exiles immediately set themselves about repairing their new church as the one that had suffered least, by the ravages of the war, and therefore could be repaired at the least expense; and effected it so as to be fit to worship in, early the next summer. Dr. Rodgers preached the first sermon in it on June 27th, 1784 from Psalm 122 first Verse.

Such was the ruinous situation in which they found it, and such the price of materials and workmanship, that it cost them thirteen hundred pounds to put it into the same state of repair in which they had left it, in the year 1776. It could not be known with any degree of certainty till the finishing the repairs of this church, what number of their people were in the city. It was found however then that there were more than this church could accommodate.



There were not near pews enough to answer the calls for them.

In the month of March 1784 Dr. Rodgers and such of the Elders and Deacons as were in town presented a petition to the Corporation of the City, praying that they would forgive the rent; that had become due on the lot on which their new Church stands, during their exile,—and that they would be pleased to make an abatement in the annual rent of said lot,—both these requests were granted—the Corporation forgave the back rents, which amounted to about three hundred and three pounds and reduced the annual rent from forty pounds a year to twenty one pounds, five shillings.

The Legislature of the State in their first session after the Peace, passed an act entitled "An Act to enable all the Religious Denominations in this State to appoint Trustees; who shall be a Body Corporate, for the purpose of taking care of the Temporalities of their respective congregations, and for other purposes therein mentioned." This Act is dated April 6th, 1784.

In the course of the next month the congregation met and incorporated themselves agreeably to this act; and chose nine gentlemen to be their first Trustees which was the highest number the law allowed, and took the style of "The Corporation of the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York" looking forward to the time when they hoped to be two congregations as they once were; and when a second incorporation might in that case be necessary. This law allows each corporation to hold an estate of twelve

hundred pounds per annum gross revenue. Thus they obtained from the wisdom and liberality of their new government, what they had long with great trouble sought in vain from the old.

Dr. Rodgers and the other surviving Trustees in whom the title of the new Church and lot was vested, conveyed it to this corporation shortly after their erection.

The numerous applications for pews, determined the newly elected Trustees, with the advice of the officers of the Church, and other members, to undertake the repair of the old Church; notwithstanding the great expense they had been at, in repairing the one they had just finished. This was accordingly entered upon and subscriptions taken for defraying the expense. But such was the state of complete ruin in which it was, (the whole interior being destroyed and nothing but the walls and roof remaining, or rather the timbers of the roof), that it cost them twenty five hundred pounds to put it in a state of decent repair. This sum was increased three hundred and fifty pounds by the purchase of two small lots adjoining, for the enlarging their cemetery.

The first sermon was preached in this Church, after its repair, June 19th, 1785 by Dr. Rodgers from Psalm 84 first and second Verses. The pews in the lower floor were all immediately taken and many in the galleries.

In the spring of the year 1785 these united congregations gave a call to Mr. James Wilson, a gentleman who had arrived the fall before from Scotland, and who had



preached some time to them during the winter to good acceptance. Mr. Wilson accepted their call, and was ordained as a colleague with Dr. Rodgers, on the 10th day of August 1785.

In the month of June 1787 the Corporation of Trinity Church, unsolicited, gave the Corporation of the Presbyterian Church a lot of ground in Robinson Street,\* for the use of their Senior Minister.

Mr. Wilson continued to exercise his Ministry with great industry and faithfulness, till the beginning of the year 1788 when being afflicted with a pulmonary complaint, and receiving a call from Charlestown in South Carolina, he thought it his duty to accept it; as the climate was more favorable to his weak lungs, and promised him greater health and longer usefulness. He was accordingly dismissed from his pastoral relation to these people at his own request on the 22nd day of January 1788 and left the city in the course of a few days sincerely and deservedly esteemed.

Some difficulty rose respecting the supplying Mr. Wilson's place. A respectable number were for Mr. James Muir, a Scotch gentleman, who had lately arrived from Bermuda where he had been a settled minister some years; but the majority were for Mr. Jedediah Morse, author of the *American Geography*; both of whom had preached some months with them. But when Mr. Morse found that a division was taking place in the congregation, he declined being considered as a candidate for settlement—requested

\* Now Park Place.

his friends to give him up, and withdrew from the city, that he might not minister occasion to a spirit of contention.

Mr. Morse's friends approved his conduct while they sincerely regretted their losing him. This loss they attributed to Mr. Muir, who did not act the part Mr. Morse had done. His stay in the City after Mr. Morse had left it, and the zeal with which his friends continued to push his settlement, rendered the opposition to him the more firm and determined; after some months Mr. Muir received a call from Alexandria in Virginia, which he accepted and left the City in the spring of the year 1789.

In the summer of that same year, they gave a call to Mr. John McKnight of Marsh Creek, Pennsylvania, a member of the Presbytery of Carlisle. The Presbytery not only cheerfully concurred in prosecuting this call, but wrote a letter to the Presbytery of Carlisle, requesting, in affectionate terms, their giving it all the aid in their power. Dr. Rodgers was requested to undertake the prosecuting it before the Presbytery of Carlisle, as a measure that was most likely to insure success. This he did, and the Presbytery being convened at Marsh Creek on the 8th day of September 1789, and having heard what could be said in favor of the call, and what the people of Mr. McKnight's charge had to say against his removal put the call into his hands, which he accepted. And the Presbytery thereupon dissolved his pastoral relation to his people.

Mr. McKnight arrived in the city in the month of November and entered upon his new charge to the entire and high satisfaction of all parties; and was installed as a



co-pastor with Dr. Rodgers of these united congregations on the second day of the next month.

In the year 1790 the Trustees purchased a lot in Nassau Street and erected a decent two story brick building on it, for the use of a Charity School for the education of the children of such of their poor people as were not able to pay for their schooling. The foundation of this important charity was laid by Mr. Jeremiah Owen, who was many years a worthy member of the church and who died in the year 1756. He left a legacy to the congregation for the purpose of teaching poor children to read, write, and the use of figures, which netted about three hundred pounds; but which was nearly lost to them for want of a capacity by charter to receive legacies, and to give legal discharges to the executors of such persons as might make them bequests. It was more than seven years in a state of suspense, but through divine goodness was finally secured. Nor was this the only instance in which they suffered by the want of a Charter of Incorporation.

In the year 1762, Captain John Neilson bequeathed the sum of one hundred pounds by will, to "The Presbyterian Congregation in New York"—but when the Trustees called for their legacy they were told by the executors the law knew no such body as "The Presbyterian Congregation in New York" and that therefore they would not pay it. And the Trustees, conscious they had no legal capacity to compel payment, were obliged to submit to the insult and injustice of a refusal. It is true, after the Revolution, when the congregation had incorporated agreeably to law, more

than twenty years after Captain Neilson's death, a gentleman who had been connected in trade with his executors offered to pay the principal provided the Trustees would give up the interest that had become due upon it; which was accepted, and the money was paid.

The interest of Mr. Owen's legacy was faithfully appropriated by the Church Session to the purpose designed by the donor, from the time it was recovered till the commencement of the late war. A number of poor children were kept at school by it.

This legacy suffered a considerable diminution by the depreciation of the currency of the country during the war.

In the year 1787 a subscription was opened for the same benevolent purpose, which amounted to upwards of five hundred pounds and in the year 1788 Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson left the Corporation a legacy for the same use which netted about three hundred and forty pounds. All these enabled them to begin their school, which they did the first of May 1789 by employing a Master to teach their poor children, and hiring a private room for him till a house could be built.

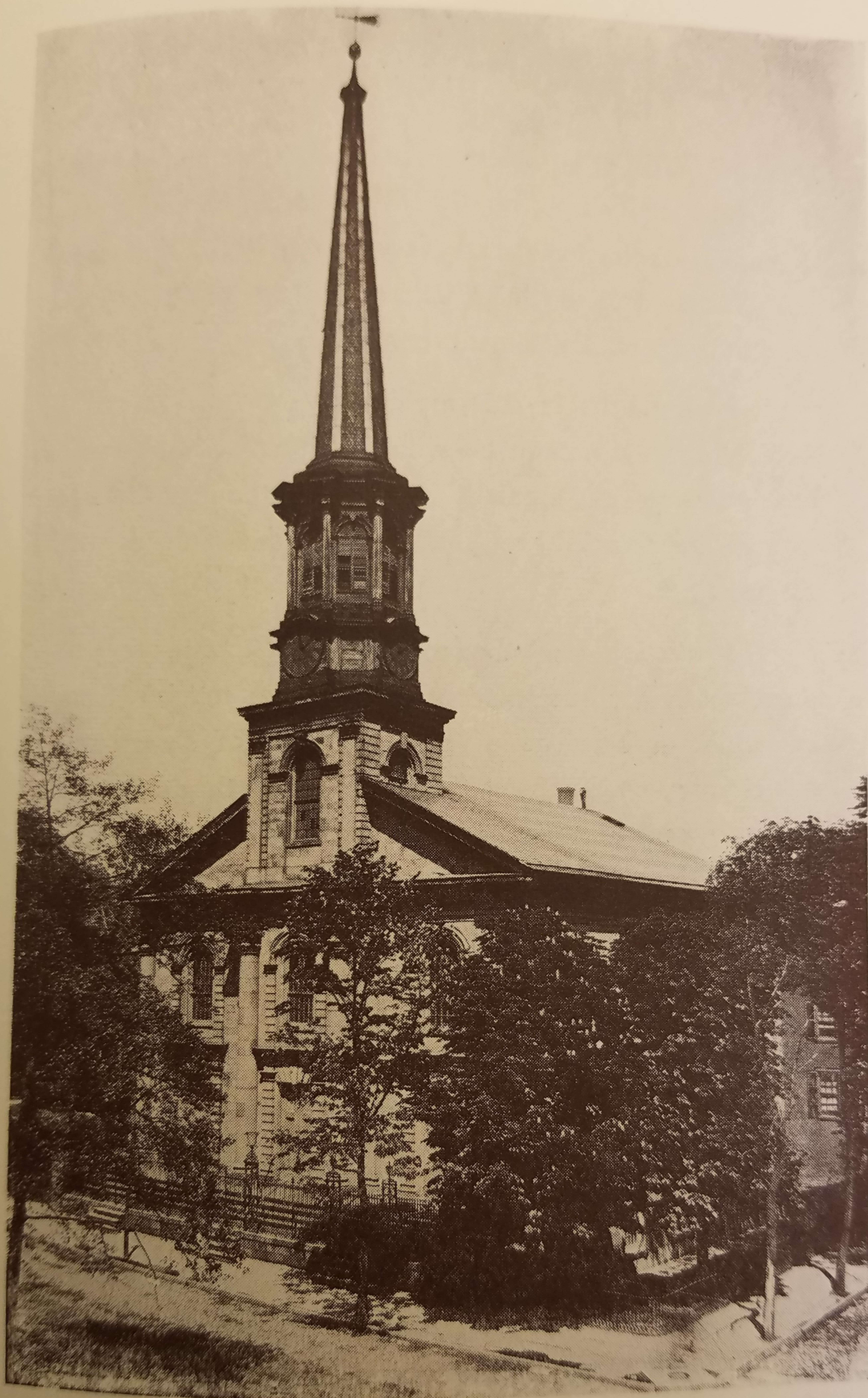
In the month of April 1792 the late Mr. James Leslie left the Trustees two hundred pounds for the same charitable end. The Trustees are obliged however to depend principally upon an annual collection in each Church for paying the Master's salary, and other incidental charges; which collections have been hitherto sufficient for the purpose. The school consists of about fifty poor children,





*Wall Street in 1828  
(Looking East from Trinity Church)  
First Presbyterian Church to the left.*





*First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, (built in 1834) taken after its sale in 1844 to the First Presbyterian Church of Jersey City and its removal to and erection in that City. As it stood on Wall Street it was without a basement and the cupola then upon it was replaced by a spire in order that a clock might be installed.*



boys and girls; who are taught to read, write and the use of figures, Psalmody and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This school is visited every quarter by the Ministers, and a Committee of the Trustees, and the proficiency of the scholars carefully marked.

It having been in contemplation some time to call a third Minister as a co-pastor with their present Ministers, a parish meeting was regularly convened in the new Church, to consider this important subject on the 29th day of August 1792.

The meeting was numerous and respectable—it was unanimously resolved to adopt the measure; and Mr. Samuel Miller a licentiate of the Presbytery of Lewes was unanimously fixed upon as the person whom they chose for this purpose. In pursuance of this resolve, a call was prepared for him and prosecuted before his Presbytery, agreeably to the rules of our discipline, which he accepted November 20th and arrived in the City in the first week of January 1793, and was ordained as co-pastor of these united congregations with Dr. Rodgers and Dr. McKnight, on the fifth day of June following.

The idea of applying for a distinct charter for the congregation that worships in the new church being suggested by some of the members, the Ministers, Elders, Deacons and Trustees met to consider the propriety of the measure, and upon maturely weighing the subject, agreed: that a distinct charter must necessarily create a separation of interest in certain views, which might in time issue in dissolving the union between the two congregations; an event which the

people of both societies earnestly wished to guard against; they therefore agreed to apply to the Legislature praying they would pass a law, capacitating the present Corporation of the Church, to hold an estate of twenty four hundred pounds per annum; instead of twelve hundred pounds, the sum they are allowed to hold under the Act of Incorporation; a measure that would be strictly conformable to the spirit of the law, as they had two churches and were in reality two congregations; though it would not accord with the letter of it. This was accordingly done, and the Legislature readily granted their request. This Act was passed March 6th, 1793.

It is not improper to observe here that the only stated revenue of the Church from which they have been enabled to support the Gospel among them from time to time, has arisen from the rents of their pews. In aid to which they have always had, and still have a collection at every sermon (a practice in standing use among the churches of every denomination in the City). They have been obliged in four instances, when calling an additional Minister, to have recourse to an annual subscription for a few years—but this practice is now laid aside.

Such is the present state of these congregations, that a third church is absolutely necessary for the accommodation of their People, and such strangers as are daily moving into the City, and who would wish to join with them; this is in contemplation, and it is hoped will be effected at no very distant period. I only add at the close of this narrative, that amidst the unhappy differences that have more than once



taken place in these congregations, there has never been any respecting the great Doctrines of the Gospel—both Ministers and People, from the first foundation of these Churches, have been warmly attached to the peculiar Doctrines of Grace, as taught in our public standards—and they still are.

MINISTERS  
of the  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1716—1726.....	JAMES ANDERSON
1727—1753.....	EBENEZER PEMBERTON
1750—1753.....	ALEXANDER CUMMINGS
1756—1763.....	DAVID BOSTWICK
1762—1776.....	JOSEPH TREAT
1765—1811.....	JOHN RODGERS
1785—1788.....	JAMES WILSON
1789—1809.....	JOHN MCKNIGHT
1793—1813.....	SAMUEL MILLER
1805—1809.....	PHILIP MILLEDOLER
1815—1824.....	PHILIP M. WHELPLEY
1826—1865.....	WILLIAM WIRT PHILLIPS
1866—1883.....	WILLIAM MILLER PAXTON
1886—1890.....	RICHARD DAVENPORT HARLAN
1891—1918.....	HOWARD DUFFIELD (since 1918 Pastor Emeritus)
1919—1930.....	GEORGE ALEXANDER
1919—1924.....	HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK
1919—1928.....	THOMAS GUTHRIE SPEERS
1928—1932.....	PHILLIPS PACKER ELLIOTT
1927—.....	J. V. MOLDENHAWER



## SUPPLEMENT

- 1706—Presbyterian group holds Prayer Meetings in the homes of members of the group.
- 1716—First Church organized. "70 to 80 persons of the Presbyterian form of Belief, natives of England, Scotland, Ireland and New England, organize themselves into a church, and call the Rev. James Anderson." (From Minutes of Church.)
- 1719—First Church building erected on Wall Street between Broadway and Nassau Street.
- 1748—Church building enlarged and improved.
- 1756—A group withdraws and becomes "Scotch Church."
- 1768—Growth of congregation necessitates building of Chapel on Beekman Street, later known as "Brick Church."
- 1776—Congregation disperses during the Revolution being "zealously attached to the American Cause in their struggle with Britain for their liberties." They return in 1783 to find both their Churches in a dilapidated condition. Brick Church is repaired first and is opened to worship on June 27th, 1784. First Church is repaired and is opened June 19th, 1785.
- 1784—Incorporated. "The Corporation of the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York."

- 1798—Another collegiate Church is formed. "Rutgers Church."  
(The foregoing sketch probably written by Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller about this time.)  
The Church makes rapid progress, and in
- 1808—A group forms the "Cedar Street Church" now the Fifth Avenue.
- 1810—Wall Street Church is rebuilt.
- 1834—Wall Street Church burns and is rebuilt.
- 1835—The Great Fire wipes out the lower part of New York, but only slightly damages First Church. In the rebuilding of the section it is devoted to business and the residential section moves uptown.
- 1840—Presbytery recommends removal uptown. A Committee gives long and careful attention to the selection of the new site and finally purchases the ground on Fifth Avenue, 11th and 12th Streets.
- 1844—Cornerstone is laid.
- 1846—January 11th—Present building is dedicated.  
The present building was designed by Mr. Joseph C. Wells, Architect, who took as his model the Church of St. Saviour, in Bath, England. The Tower however follows that of Magdalene College, Oxford. Cost of the edifice \$55,000. Mr. J. G. Pierson was the builder.



"The Church building in Wall Street was sold to the First Presbyterian Church in Jersey City for \$3,000; taken down by them and removed to that city."

The record of removal of the burying ground from Wall Street has been lost. It is probable that many families removed their dead to private burying grounds. However, in the vaults surrounding the present edifice are the remains of many notables connected with the early Church. Dr. Rodgers among them; his vault is near the corner of Fifth Avenue and 11th Street.

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1918—University Place and Madison Square Presbyterian Churches unite with First Church.

1920—The present Church edifice was enlarged and beautified. The Chancel was built at this time.



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