



THE MAKEMIE MONUMENT.

JOURNAL  
OF THE  
Presbyterian Historical Society

---

---

VOL. IV.

DECEMBER, 1908.

No. 8.

---

---

THE DEDICATION OF MAKEMIE MEMORIAL PARK  
AND MONUMENT.

The year 1906 was observed by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America as the bicentenary of its formal organization. The chief figure in the creation of the original Presbytery was Francis Makemie of Virginia. He was the first Moderator. In view of this fact, the Council of The Presbyterian Historical Society was asked to consider a proposition to buy the site of Makemie's grave and erect thereon a suitable monument. This was favorably received, and Dr. McCook, accompanied by a member of the Society, visited the traditional site to investigate and report upon the condition of affairs.

These gentlemen reported that they had located the private cemetery in which Makemie and his family had been buried on the eastern bank of Holden's Creek, Accomack County, Virginia, an affluent of Pocomoke Sound. This confirmed the views of the Rev. Dr. L. P. Bowen and Dr. J. T. B. McMaster, made public some thirty years before.<sup>1</sup> Thereupon the Council approved the purpose announced by the Rev. Dr. Henry C. McCook, President of The Presbyterian Historical Society, to undertake the purchase of the property and the building of a suitable monument.

The entail which theretofore had prevented the sale of the

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Bowen's *The Days of Makemie*, pp. 546-549.

A SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE THAT THE TRADI-  
TIONAL PLACE OF FRANCIS MAKEMIE'S  
BURIAL IS THE TRUE SITE.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE PRES-  
BYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY BY DR. HENRY C. MCCOOK.

1. The unbroken chain of traditional and local testimony fixes the site of the Makemie farm and house. This is indisputably the old Milligan, late the Miles farm on Holden's Creek, Accomack County, Virginia.

2. The will of Mrs. Holden, the daughter of Makemie, giving the "old part" of the farm where "I once lived" to Milligan and the new part to Mary Milbourne (see record of will). The deeds trace this property in unbroken line to the present.

3. The testimony of Mrs. Charlotte Corbin, a niece of the Milligans, a contemporary of the contemporaries of Mrs. Anne Makemie Holden. She was examined by the Rev. Dr. L. C. Bowen<sup>3</sup> and Dr. McMaster, Pocomoke City, Md. Her recollections began within twenty years of Mrs. Holden's death, were clear and positive and consistent. She remembered the details of the brick wall around the old cemetery, on which, as a child, she had played, and the tombs and graves. There was no other graveyard or cemetery on the farm at the time. She remembered, later on, the desecration of the tombs, carting away the stones for door steps, oven doors, whetstones, etc., and the indignation of the community thereat. Mrs. Corbin was an aged woman, seventy years old, when examined in 1879, but was bright, intelligent and of clear memory, recollecting the incidents of her early life.

4. Mrs. Corbin's testimony was confirmed by that of an old colored woman, Peggy Milligan, born about the time of Mrs. Anne Holden's death. She was interviewed by J. T. B. McMaster, M. D., a grandson of Mrs. Holden's pastor, Rev.

<sup>3</sup> See his letters to McCook and appendix to *The Days of Makemie*.

Samuel McMaster. She was intelligent and trustworthy, and wholly confirmed Mrs. Corbin's testimony. She remembered the low brick wall surrounding the graves, and in addition that this was originally surmounted by a wooden fence, and that this was the only graveyard in the neighborhood with such a wall. Also that the graveyard in the Fletcher farm in "the new part" was made later and only used after Mrs. Holden's death.<sup>4</sup>

5. Personal visits were made to this place on Holden's Creek, Virginia, one accompanied by the Rev. Samuel C. Huston, a member of the Council, confirmed this testimony. The foundations of this wall were located by us, and the traces of the old so-called English bricks were everywhere around, lying on the ground, built into the chimney, etc. At one point investigations were made at an earlier date by other parties, one of whom, Rev. John More, of Pocomoke City, was present, and found human bones identified as those of a child. I discovered some little distance (about two feet), beneath the surface remnants of brick vaults such as were then used for graves. But forbade further digging, as I deemed it unnecessary.

6. This evidence was so conclusive that Dr. Bowen, nearly thirty years ago, after continued, persistent and most careful study, examination and sifting, announced it and published it. The Presbyterian Historical Society at that time endorsed his conclusions, and (see Dr. Bowen's letter to McCook) would have coöperated in an effort to build a monument to Makemie on that spot, but the effort was blocked by the fact that the farm was entailed, and a clear deed could not be made. The Historical Society and the officers of the Board of Publication, at that date, were convinced of and practically endorsed Dr. Bowen's conclusion.

7. This farm was purchased for the Society in order to procure the three acres required for the Makemie Monument Park. The remainder was then sold to Mr. John Cullen, who has long been the owner of the adjoining farm. Mr. Cullen is a grandson of the John Milligan to whom the old

<sup>4</sup> *The Days of Makemie*, appendix.

Makemie farm site and cemetery were left by Mrs. Holden. He was familiar with the fact that the site now set apart and marked with a monument is the original family cemetery. The graves of his father and mother are within the enclosure near those of his grandparents, the Milligans. This fact, with the testimony of Mr. Cullen, puts beyond doubt the location of his ancestral burying ground, the old Anderson and Makemie cemetery, on the old farm.

8. Was Makemie buried on the old place in the old cemetery? First, it must be considered that at that time public graveyards were unknown on the Eastern Shore. The universal custom was to bury in private cemeteries, on the plantation, and near the house. This was confirmed by visits to the grave of Colonel William Stevens at Rehoboth plantation, and to that of the Dennis family, on the "Beverly" plantation in Maryland, an old and well-preserved colonial estate. The close contiguity of the Makemie family cemetery to the living house, so contrary to modern ideas and habits, is thus in harmony with the customs of that era and section.

9. Negative testimony is not conclusive, but is sometimes confirmatory. Let it therefore be remembered that for nearly two hundred years not a whisper adverse to the traditional view, as above, was heard at any time from any person. Dr. Bowen, in his prolonged historic investigation, never heard such or of such. (See his letters to McCook.) Not until announced in a side remark by a speaker at the bicentennial celebration in New York in 1906<sup>5</sup> was it ever intimated that Francis Makemie died elsewhere than in Accomack County, Virginia, or was buried elsewhere than in his family cemetery. To support the intimation that he might have died and have been buried in Boston, there was not and is not the slightest documentary or other proof known to me.

<sup>5</sup> The Rev. Dr. Wm. H. Roberts, who made this statement, attended the meeting of the Society's Executive Council (at the invitation of the president) at which this paper was read. On its conclusion he rose and stated that he was now entirely convinced by the evidence presented that Dr. McCook's contention was correct, and that Francis Makemie was buried in the private cemetery on the Holden Creek farm.

10. On the contrary, we may appeal to the will of Makemie.\* It was made on the twenty-seventh day of April, 1708, and begins thus: "In the name of God Amen I Francis "Makemie of the County of Accomack in his Majty Dominion "of Virginia being weak and infirm of body but in perfect "soundness of mind and memory, and sensible of the uni- "versall frailty of human life and an approaching desolution "by death," etc. Observe that in addition to the usual, general and perfunctory reference in wills to "the universal frailty of human life," there is the unusual and specific reference to weakness, infirmity, and "approaching desolution by death." He was a sick and dying man, and he knew it!

This will was made in Accomack County, Virginia, for it was witnessed by six citizens of those parts, *viz.*: John Parker of Mattaponi, Elizabeth Davis, Elizabeth Pihee, A. Hamilton, Tully Robinson and John Lewis.

On August 4th, following, three months after the making and witnessing of the will, it was probated, three of the above witnesses, Andrew Hamilton, Tully Robinson and John Lewis appearing and being approved by the court as sufficient evidence. (See copy of official records.)

Now let us suppose for the moment that Makemie had died in Boston or elsewhere, would not that fact have appeared? Would not the evidence of death at that place have been required? Would it have been taken for granted that the testator was dead without further proof? Does not the entire character and content of the record of probation indicate that the court knew that Francis Makemie had died in his own county and at home? It surely does; and evidently he would have been buried in his own family graveyard. Where else?

11. Some time between April 27, 1708, and August 4, 1708, Francis Makemie died. We do not know the exact date; but we know that he was at home sick on April 27th. If he was in Boston and died there in 1708, it must have been between those two dates! Consider the distance between Accomack County, Virginia, and Boston, Massachusetts, which at

\* See official copy in the Society's JOURNAL, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 125-130.

that time must have been traversed by the slow and tedious methods of the time. Is it a theory worthy of the slightest consideration that this man, confessedly weak and infirm and already feeling the "approaching desolation by death," could have made that journey, have undergone his sickness and the news of his death have reached Accomack? For the facts require that all this must have occurred within the three months at the very furthest. In the utter absence of proof that Makemie was in Boston during 1708, or at any time later than his visit of 1707, are we not compelled to declare the improbability, nay, the impossibility, of such an event?

12. Let us still further attend to the documentary proof which our investigations have uncovered. From the proba- tion of the will forward there appear upon the county rec- ords many items relating to the settlement of the Makemie estate. For example, the appraisers report and the execu- tors record every item small and great within the house. This gives us an interesting picture of the great founder's home and the daily environment of his life. There also ap- pears, August 28, 1710, a record of various accounts settled, from which a few items are here quoted as of special impor- tance in this investigation. (See official copy of records.)

Mr; Francis Makemie his Estate	Dr	
To pd Coll Tully Robinson as from undr.		
hand- .....		5£
To pd William Williamson Pr artickles of agreement .....	500 lbs. tobacco.	
To Pr Morgon Bradshaw .....		15s.
To Pd Mr. Nathaniel McClenahan .....	84£	14s.
To Pd Mr. Andrew Pepperell as Pr account in Book .....	14£	15s 2d
To Pd Mr. William Coman for funirell and Trouble of his house in Mr. Makemies sick- ness .....	12£	7s
To Pd Dr. Cha. Barrett for Meanes & vissits in Mr. Makemies last sickness.....	5£	
To Pd Mr. John Vanliver at Philadelphia...	6£	
To Pd Mary Riging Pr Bill.....	20£	

Here now seemed to be a valuable clue. Who were these men—Bartlett and Coman, the doctor and acting undertaker? Were they Boston men, or men of the vicinity? Glancing down the column we are at once struck by the fact that in the most numerous items, evidently settled with persons of the locality, there appears directly following those of Bartlett and Coman one as follows:

“To Pd Mr. John Vanliver at Philadelphia £6”

The local settlements have no locality noted, that being held needless; but of a bill of a party at a distance, as at Philadelphia, the locality is carefully noted. Now if we may again suppose for the moment that Makemie died in Boston or elsewhere, would not the same policy naturally have followed, and the item have been entered with the residence of the creditors also stated? The parties being unknown in Virginia, it seems inevitable that the court would have expected that and the executors would have done that.

13. But now arose the question: Can we identify these two persons, doctor and undertaker, as at that time residents of Accomack County? That would have been a conclusive fact. A careful search of the records in Accomack Court House failed to find any reference to either person. I wrote to the county clerk of Somerset County, Maryland, and then Rev. Mr. Moore, pastor of Pitts Creek (Pocomoke city) and Rehoboth, visited Princess Anne for me and searched the records there with no better success. This was discouraging, but not conclusive. As Dr. Bowen wrote me—and I, too, also so found it—in his prolonged search of the records of Accomack County, Virginia, and the adjacent counties of Maryland, many prominent citizens of the period were mentioned only once and some not at all. We know how it is at the present; it is a small proportion of any community that gains historic immortality by means of county records.

I then turned to other quarters. The name of Mr. Thos. Teakle Upshur, of Nassawadox, Virginia, was given me as an experienced genealogist, thoroughly familiar with the rec-

ords of the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia. I wrote him, asking if he knew of any documentary mention of Barrett or Coman, or if he knew of any persons of ancient ancestry of those names. His reply (see letter) was negative as to the records. But he added, "There are Barretts living here now, and it is an old family on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, I believe particularly in Accomack." Incidentally he said: "So far as my belief and information goes, the Rev. Francis Makemie was buried at his home on Holden Creek, subsequently for many years owned by a Mr. John Milligan, who was father of a Mrs. Charlotte Corbin, wife of Capt. Peter Dennis Corbin, of Jenkin's Bridge, Accomack Co., Va. Mrs. Corbin was born at that place on Holden's Creek, not far from Jenkin's Bridge." (See letter to McCook.)

It would be tedious and useless to recite the many and various trails followed in pursuit of this point. But the following was obtained through John S. McMaster, Esq., of Jersey City, New Jersey, who has greatly encouraged and aided me in my researches by valuable suggestions and correspondence.

The writer of the following letter, well known as a local historian, is a descendant of one of the famous Custis family, familiar in history from the name of the wife of Washington.

Accomac, Virginia, November 2, 1906.

MR. JOHN McMASTER,

DEAR SIR:—I find among our rather promiscuous data the enclosed brief notes, which may possibly be of use, at least as tentative inquiry in your proposed research concerning Rev. Francis Makemie. I sincerely hope the General Assembly [Historical Society] will carry out at once their laudable intention of marking the too long neglected grave of this noble pioneer minister. With kind regards for yourself and family,

ALICE EMMA CUSTIS.

## MEMORANDA:

"*Robert Barrett, Master of the Indian School in 1737.*"

"*William Barrett* was a burgess from James City Co., Va., in 1646."

(a) "History of the College of William and Mary from 1693 to 1870," p. 72.

(b) Historical address of Mr. T. T. Upshur, delivered at the dedication of the New Court House at Accomac and published in the *Peninsula Enterprise*, says: "There were eighty-seven male inhabitants of the Eastern Shore of Va. in 1621, twenty-two of whose names survive here as surnames." He then proceeds to enumerate the names and mentions among them that of *John Barrett*.

(c) Muster of Geo. Sands, Esq. *Nicholas Coman* and *Nicholas Eyers* came to Virginia in the Gen't. Eyers (or Eyer) became a popular name in Northampton and Accomack, and *Coman* may have been sent here also with the reinforcements to "Dales Gift," or to "Ye Plantacon of Accomack."

(d) There is in Sussex County, Virginia, a small village and post office called "*Coman's Well*," which no doubt derives its name and legend from the *Coman* family—*Coman's Well* was in ante-bellum days a popular health resort, but it is now a ruin, neglected,<sup>7</sup> forgotten.

A. E. C.

Thus was swept away the only difficulty, one which had arisen in my own mind solely on examination of the records, and had not been suggested by objectors to the traditional view of Makemie's death and burial. The men who had officiated at the last sickness and at the funeral could have

'It is to be noted that the bill for physicians services seems to imply a rather prolonged illness. *Five pounds*, in the money valuation of the period, was a large bill, and implies a number of visits, thus indicating a considerable interval over which they were spread. This inference makes even more improbable the supposition that Makemie's last illness and death was in Boston, to which place he must have gone after April 27, 1708, if at all.

been there in the vicinity of Accomack, as shown by the prevalence of their family names in that section.

Only one other field of investigation remained, *viz.*, to search the records of Boston at the dates involved, from A. D. 1700 to A. D. 1708, for persons bearing the names of William Coman and Charless Barrett. This was prevented by providential circumstances. If there be still any "doubting Thomas," this field is commended to them as one inviting to real historic investigation. But is it needed? The proof presented by a study of the records, especially of the will of Francis Makemie, seems to be irrefutable, and points surely to the fact that our distinguished founder of organized Presbytery died at his home in Virginia and there was buried some time between April 27 and August 4, A. D. 1708.