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The Old  
Presbyterian  
Meeting House  
at  
Alexandria, Virginia

1774

1874

William Buckner McGroarty

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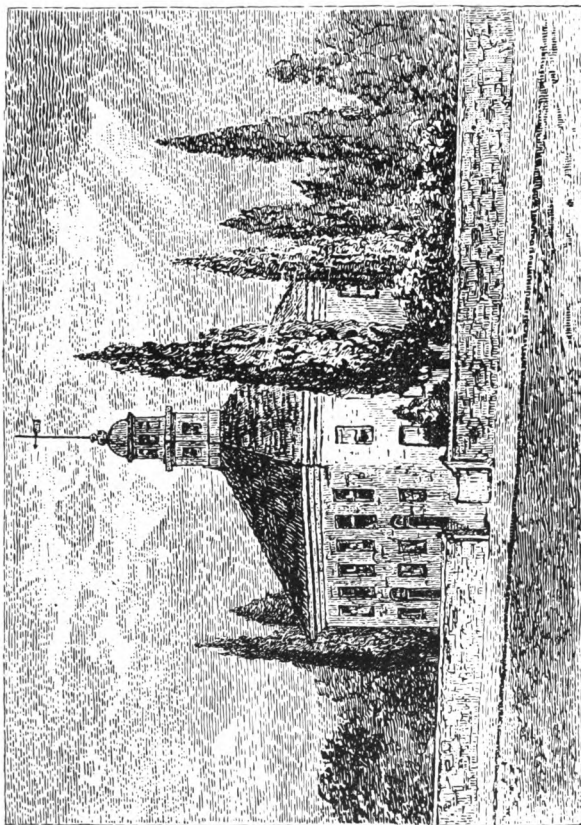
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*The Old Presbyterian Meeting House  
at Alexandria, Virginia  
1774-1874*



*The Presbyterian Meeting House, Alexandria, Virginia, 1774  
Sketch redrawn. Original artist unknown*

# The Old Presbyterian Meeting House

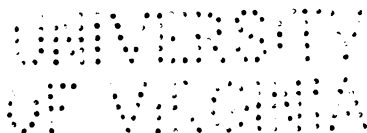
*at*

Alexandria, Virginia

1774-1874

*by*

WILLIAM BUCKNER MCGROARTY



1940

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## PREFACE

Since the correct designation of the edifice which provides the main subject-matter for this little volume is "The First Presbyterian Church of Alexandria", a brief explanation of the title which has been selected may be acceptable. For many years the Presbyterian Dissenters in Alexandria held their services, under the terms of the Toleration Act, in the upper room of the Town-house.

After the erection of their own place of worship in 1774 the citizens, and particularly the press, continued the use of the term Meeting House, probably to distinguish it from the established church, which, of course, was the Church of England. Therefore from 1774 to 1817 the term Meeting House was in general use, although the minutes of the Session and of the Committee invariably used the words "The Church" or "Our Church".

On Saturday, December 28, 1799, the following notice appeared in the Alexandria Times:

"The walking being bad to the Episcopal Church the funeral Sermon of George Washington will be preached at the Presbyterian Meeting House tomorrow at 11 o'clock."

Notices for the assembling of the citizens at the Meeting House for charity sermons, Washington's Birthday, and Fourth of July orations continued year after year. The minutes of the Masonic Lodge

use the same term until the year 1817. In that year there was a division in the church, one portion forming another congregation under the title "The Second Presbyterian Church". Naturally, this necessitated from that time the use of the name First Church for the parent body.

It is as The Old Meeting House that this valuable relic of colonial days makes its greatest historic appeal.

WILLIAM BUCKNER MCGROARTY.

Alexandria, Virginia

June 21, 1940.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
REVIEW .....	I
DR. MUIR'S REPORT.....	19
THE PASSING YEARS.....	24
THE FIRE .....	33
THE ORIGINAL CHURCH.....	38
BIOGRAPHICAL .....	44
Dr. James Muir	
Dr. Elias Harrison	
HISTORICAL .....	53
APPENDIX .....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	80

# ILLUSTRATIONS

*Frontispiece*

THE PRESBYTERIAN MEETING HOUSE, 1774

FACING PAGE

VIEW OF INTERIOR, AFTER RESTORATION . . . . . 5

SILHOUETTE OF DR. JAMES MUIR . . . . . 21

DAGUERREOTYPE OF DR. ELIAS HARRISON . . . . . 29

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION . . . . . 37

VIEW OF CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD  
FROM ROYAL STREET . . . . . 45

*The Old Presbyterian Meeting House  
at Alexandria, Virginia  
1774-1874*

## REVIEW

This is the story of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, Virginia—the story of some of those who built it, of some of those who, in early days, worshiped within its solid walls and, perhaps, of some of those who for a century or more have been sleeping within its sacred shadow.

The history of such a structure, manifestly, does not begin with the laying of a corner stone; the inquiry naturally arises, why is it here, what is its background? It has its place in a picture whose perspective fades into far distance; where does it lead?

It is a far cry back to the night of October thirty-first, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five theses on the door of the Castle church in Wittenburg, Germany; nevertheless the path of ecclesiastical history winds plainly back across the intervening centuries to that ancient city and to that momentous event. The Old Presbyterian Meeting House is in Alexandria today because of Martin Luther and because of what he did that night.

This is not the story of the Reformation; however we cannot forget that this modest, venerable structure, and what it stood for, and still stands for, represents the very essence of the spirit which prompted the Reformation and guided Martin Luther.

Martin Luther became the leader of the Protestant Reformation in Germany. He stands out as one of the

great and heroic figures of all the ages. But he did not work out any elaborate system of Theology, or any detailed form of church government; he was a pioneer. It was left for John Calvin, who came a little later, to work out from the scriptures the profound system of Theology which bears his name, and the representative form of church government which we call Presbyterianism.<sup>1</sup>

Before proceeding further it may be found interesting and profitable to seek the origin and the meaning of the name Presbyterian; it will be found that it is of ancient lineage and has Holy Writ for its sponsor. Dr. Walter L. Lingle, whom we have just quoted, after calling attention to the fact that the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek, and that the former, about 250 B. C., was translated into Greek, tells us that it is in the Greek Bible we may find the word from which we get the word Presbyterian. From this Greek word, by transliteration, we get the English word Presbyter; by translation we get the English equivalent, Elder—"So a Presbyter is an Elder and an Elder is a Presbyter". A Presbyterian church is governed by Elders—in other words, representative self government. Dr. Lingle quotes numerous passages of Scripture from both the Old and the New Testaments showing that the rule of church government by Elders was the accepted procedure from the beginning.

<sup>1</sup> *Presbyterians, their History and Belief*, Walter L. Lingle, D.D., LL.D. Richmond, Va. 1928.

..... as the ruling factors in the church the principles for which the Elder or the Presbyter originally stood had been lost in the cataclysm of the Dark Ages, it is John Calvin to whom the world is indebted for their restoration in practice. He was eight years old when Luther started the Reformation; highly educated, particularly profound as to Greek and Latin his scholarly and critical study of the Bible convinced him "that the Bible is the word of God, and the seat of Authority in Religion".<sup>2</sup>

John Calvin died in 1564. His pupils, of whom he had many, carried his doctrines into other countries. Bancroft, the historian, says that he was the father of education and the inventor of free schools. In the year 1555 a Protestant church was organized in Paris by one of Calvin's pupils, and many other churches followed. In the next few years these were known as the Reformed Churches, and their members were called Huguenots. In 1610 the Edict of Nantes, under which Protestant churches had been permitted in France, was revoked. Many thousands of Protestants fled to other countries to escape the persecution which immediately followed. Many of them went to Scotland and the north of Ireland.

John Knox, who during the reign of "Bloody Mary" in England had been forced to flee for his life, had gone to Geneva where he spent three years in close association with Calvin. When he was recalled to Scotland he took with him Calvinism and Presbyterianism. In 1560 the Scotch parliament

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

adopted, as a Creed for the people, a Confession submitted by John Knox, which was pure Calvinism. While the new church thus created was the State Church, it was not ruled by the State nor by those appointed by the State.<sup>3</sup> John Knox died in 1572.

The Church of Scotland encountered and survived severe persecution beginning with the arrival of the unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots, from France in 1561, and continuing on through the reigns, in Scotland and in England, of her son James (died 1625), and of his son, Charles the first. During the latter's reign (1637) the historic and heroic Solemn League and Covenant was drawn up by the Presbyterians of Scotland, and by many signed with their own blood. They covenanted to stand by their faith, and by each other, until death. Many of them did just that.

Troubles with his English Parliament, largely Puritan in personnel, so hampered Charles I that he was not able to visit the full measure of his vindictiveness upon his Scotch Calvinistic subjects; but what he could do he did, as history amply records.

The tragic ending of Charles I on the headsman's block throws an interesting and illuminating light upon the loyalty inherent in the Scotch character. In spite of continued persecution from successive monarchs, whom they must first have pitied, then despised, they were never shaken in their loyalty to

<sup>3</sup> Lingle, p. 70.

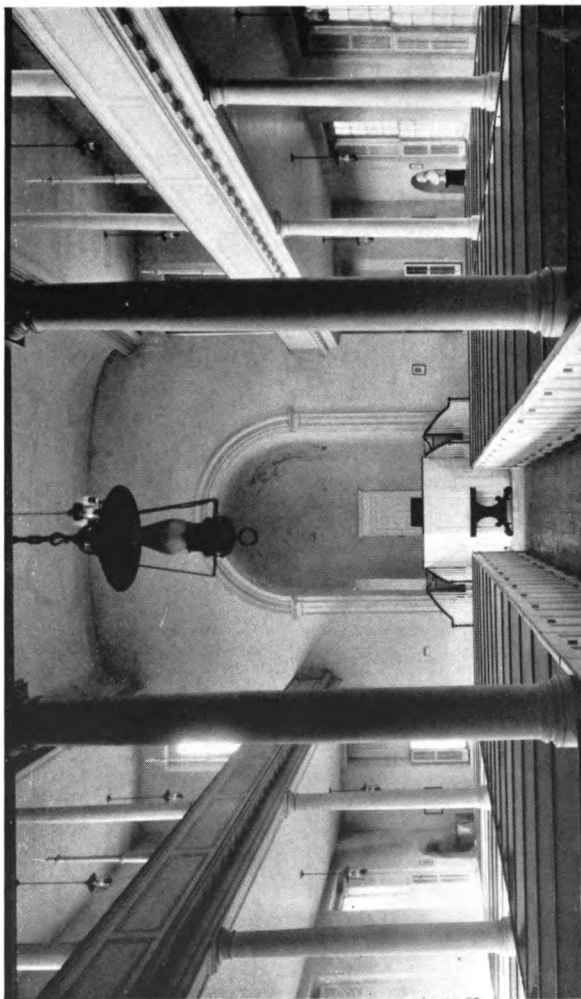


Photo by Loeb.

*The Presbyterian Meeting House; Restored. Now an Historic Shrine, Open to Visitors*



the throne. Little as his Scotch subjects owed to Charles I, they resented the death of a Stuart of Scotland at the hands of an English parliament; they brought the son of Charles I to Scotland and proclaimed him King—an act which brought swift reprisal.

Charles II, when finally settled upon the throne, proved an ingrate of the first water. The fact that he had signed the Solemn League and Covenant meant less than nothing to him. This lapse of Royal honor showed his Scotch subjects what they might expect from him, and caused them to re-affirm and to again sign the Solemn League and Covenant, which stamped upon them forever the name of "Covenanters."

In 1688 William and Mary came to the throne in England, and peace came to the Presbyterians of Scotland. This was due to the Toleration Act, passed by Parliament in 1689, of which Scotland received the immediate benefit.

Among Presbyterians the world over the church of Scotland has been looked upon as the Mother of Churches; her sons and daughters have emigrated to every other land, carrying with them their faith and their religion, and wherever they have gone a schoolhouse has followed the church, and at times has preceded it.<sup>4</sup>

Intercourse between the Dissenters in Scotland

<sup>4</sup> *Annals of the American Pulpit*, Rev. William B. Sprague, Vol. 3-xi.

and those in Ireland was so close and so continuous as to make it difficult at times to differentiate between them. So many Scotchmen lived in Ireland that they gave rise to the designation "Scotch-Irish" meaning, as might be the case, persons of joint parentage, or native Scotchmen long resident in Ireland.

Of this stock there was born in or near Rathmullen, County Donegal, Ireland, (exact date unknown) Francis Makemie, who received an academic and theological education in Scotland. He was licensed to preach of the Presbytery of Laggan, Ireland, in the year 1681. Shortly afterwards, Judge William Stevens, a member of Lord Baltimore's Council, of Maryland, appealed to the Presbytery of Laggan to send a minister to the Colony. Francis Makemie was selected. He arrived in America in 1684, and went direct to the Stevens home on the Eastern shore of Maryland. It was he who brought the church of the Covenanters to America, "but in 1748, forty years after the death of Makemie, not a single organized Presbyterian church was to be found in the older settled parts of Virginia,"<sup>5</sup> though several congregations had penetrated through Pennsylvania to the lower Valley, where they were welcomed as guardians of the frontier and, perhaps to secure their efficiency in that respect, they were not unduly restricted in the conduct of their religious affairs. There was a church at Elk Branch (near

<sup>5</sup> *The Great Awakening in Virginia*, W. M. Gewehr, 1930.

Shepardstown), another at Opecquon and still another at Cedar Creek (both in the Winchester neighborhood), as early as 1735; and the tide of emigration was flowing steadily up the Valley.

These hardy emigrants would serve as a defense against the incursions of the Indians; and, therefore, no questions would be raised as to their ecclesiastical faith and order. As Gillett says, (Vol. 1, page 106) "If they could handle a rifle, or plant along the Western forests a line of protection against the inroads of the hostile Savages, they were sufficiently orthodox."<sup>6</sup>

It would be impossible to say when the first emigrants of Presbyterian faith arrived in Virginia. A colony of Puritans settled on Elizabeth River in 1640, but refusing to adopt the book of Common Prayer, after several clashes with Governor Berkely, left the colony and settled upon the Severn River in Maryland in 1649. Many Huguenots who went to England with William of Orange came later to Virginia, settling along the Potomac, Rappahannock and James rivers.<sup>7</sup> In 1684 Mr. Makemie found a small body of Dissenters living near Sewall's Point, and ministered to them as opportunity permitted.

Francis Makemie belongs equally to Maryland and to Virginia. His church, "Old Rehobeth," the cradle of Presbyterianism in America stood and still stands on Maryland soil, but so near to the dividing state line that he was able to establish his home

<sup>6</sup> *The Planting of Presbyterianism in the Northern Neck of Virginia*, James R. Graham, D.D., 1904, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Huguenot Emigration to Virginia*, R. A. Brock, 1868.

on the Virginia side in Accomac County. His ministerial services in Virginia were largely of a missionary type and were marked principally by earnest, but unsuccessful efforts to induce the Governor and the Council to recognize and respect the Toleration Act of 1691.

In due time Mr. Makemie brought three ordained Ministers from Scotland and settled them in nearby sections. With them, in the year 1705, he traveled to Philadelphia, where, being joined by another ordained preacher recently arrived in that city, and by one who had newly come to the colony of Delaware, he established the Presbytery of Philadelphia, the first in America. In 1716 it was found necessary to divide this Presbytery into four; as a result the Presbyteries of Philadelphia, New Castle, Snow Hill and Long Island were established; these four constituted the Synod of Philadelphia.

Because of rapid growth and wide geographic boundaries differences of opinion, relating mostly to church policy, crept in. There were also certain doctrinal differences. One section, which came to be known as the New Side proclaimed a doctrine of liberalism which found expression in evangelistic action of a militant type; this the other section, or Old Side, looked upon as unwise if not unorthodox.

Strangely enough it was the great Methodist Evangel, George Whitefield, who paved the way for the advent of Presbyterianism into the older settled portion of Virginia, and it was the New Side which responded. Mr. Whitefield visited Wil-

liamsburg on his tour of 1740 and by his eloquence and fervor caused great excitement among the people, "who were weary of the deadness of the Church of England; as yet there was no organized dissent, but in the great Movement now at hand, the Presbyterians took the initiative."<sup>8</sup>

The Great Movement referred to is known to history as the Great Awakening. Its power was felt in all of the Colonies. Among the Presbyterians it was the New Side which became the most prominent. About this time the Synod of New York was formed; the Synod of Philadelphia remained Old Side. In 1746 the New Side established the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. In 1758 the New Side and the Old Side were reunited.

While the eloquence and appeal of Whitefield's preaching was still warm in the memories of those who heard him, there fell into the hands of a gentleman named Morris, in Hanover County, several volumes treating of religion. Among them were some sermons of Whitefield, and Luther's Commentary on Galatians. Morris read portions of them to his neighbors who spread the word abroad. As a result, people came from far and near to attend the services. To meet this rising tide of interest four "Reading Houses" were constructed in outlying regions, to which the people repaired in growing numbers.

Word of these unauthorized Reading Houses and

<sup>8</sup> *Virginia; A History of Its People*, James Esten Cooke (Am. Com. Ser.) 1883, p. 386.

these unusual proceedings in time reached Williamsburg, and the Readers were summoned to appear before the Governor and Justices to explain who and what they were. To their judges they confessed that they did not know what they might be called, but that their beliefs were based upon the truth brought to them by the books they had been reading. Questioning them Governor Gooch, who was a Scotchman, soon discovered that they were Presbyterians, and so informed them. They were warned but were allowed to return home.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, the stream of Scotch, Irish and German settlers flowing into the Valley continued. Governor Gooch held the opinion that they were entitled to Toleration because they were Dissenters before they came, while on the other hand the congregations of the New Lights, whom he termed Itinerates, were recruited from the ranks of the established church. In 1747 Governor Gooch issued a Proclamation against "Itinerate Preachers, whether New Lights, Moravians or Methodists."<sup>10</sup>

In response to an earnest appeal from Hanover County for a minister the Rev. William Robinson was sent by the New Castle Presbytery. He preached four times in the Morris Reading Rooms before threats of arrest for itineracy forced him to depart.

The coming of Mr. Robinson to Virginia was a

<sup>9</sup> *Great Awakening*, Gewehr, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> *The Church, The State and Education in Virginia*, Sadie Bell, p. 67.

portentious event which in its results proved disturbing to both saint and sinner. Of a truth he was a voice crying in the wilderness, and unconsciously he was blazing the trail for one greater than himself—the Reverend Samuel Davies.

Mr. Davies at the age of twenty-four was ordained by the Presbytery of New Castle as an evangelist, whose special field of labor was to be the difficult but important settlements in Virginia. He went at once to Hanover county to enter upon a career which placed him among the greatest of the many eminent men whose names are recorded in the annals of our country. From Patrick Henry, who often heard him preach, Mr. Davies received the remarkable tribute, "he is the greatest orator I ever heard."<sup>11</sup>

Davies immediately took up the cudgels for Toleration and "from the time of his coming this great and good man was the head and front of dissent in Virginia." Within a space of three years Mr. Davies had a following of three hundred communicants or more, scattered among seven congregations in five counties, some of them forty miles apart.

Mr. Davies was sent to Scotland to solicit funds for the College of New Jersey and spent the year 1754 preaching in Scotland and England. On his return he found his people in a turmoil. Within a few weeks General Braddock arrived with his army.

<sup>11</sup> Cooke: *Hist. of Va. Peop.*, p. 338. Campbell: *Hist. of Va.*, p. 483, "It is probable that Patrick Henry caught the spark of eloquence from Davies."

The news of Braddock's defeat was received with dismay in Virginia; recruits were called for to quell the attendant Indian uprising but, though their fellows were in great danger along the not distant frontier, enlistment was at a low ebb in the Tidewater section. As soon as the news was received Mr. Davies preached a sermon and called upon his hearers to volunteer, "show yourselves men, Britons, and Christians and make a noble stand for the blessings you enjoy."<sup>12</sup> In August 1755 he preached to a company of volunteers a sermon which was immediately published and widely distributed. The pamphlet bore an additional note reading: "To the Public; I point out that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but think Providence has preserved in so signal a manner, for some important service to his country."<sup>13</sup>

The Reverend Samuel Davies was apparently the first person to express publicly the belief that Washington was an instrument of Providence dedicated to the service of humanity.

In September 1755 the Presbytery of Hanover was erected out of the presbytery of New Castle. It embraced the entire state of Virginia (which then included West Virginia) and a part of North Carolina. Until the close of the French and Indian war, Davies was unremitting in his patriotic preaching. In May 1759, against his own inclination and wishes, he was elected President of the College of

<sup>12</sup> *Annals*: Sprague. Campbell, p. 482.

<sup>13</sup> Cooke-McIlwaine-Gewehr.



New Jersey. The change of environment was unfortunate; his health failed, and his death occurred in 1761, at the age of thirty-eight years. His sermons, published in three volumes, passed through several editions in America and in England, and they are generally regarded as among the most able and eloquent sermons in the English language.<sup>14</sup>

When, in 1759, Davies left Virginia never to return, he traveled his accustomed path, visiting on his way his churches at Opequon and Elk Branch, leaving Alexandria far to the right, and unvisited.

Alexandria was then ten years old and was rapidly developing into a port with its commerce spreading over the seven seas. But great as became its fame for trade and commerce, still greater became its renown as the home of patriots and statesmen. The part that Alexandria played in the founding of our nation need not be told here; it is known wherever the names of Washington and Mason are known.

Unfortunately however, the religious history of early Alexandria is not so well established; indeed, it must be regretfully acknowledged that it is surprisingly indistinct. From the beginning both the Established Church and the Dissenting body were represented amongst its leading citizens; we will consider the dissenters first.

Alexandria was founded by Scotch merchants of the Covenanter class, with a sprinkling of Irish. Some of these arrived before 1740. In a material

<sup>14</sup> *Annals*, Sprague, vol. 3, p. 144.

way they prospered, and being men of education and fine breeding, they naturally took their places among the leaders of the community, in which they found the Washingtons, the Alexanders, the Fairfaxes and the Masons already established.

Adhering to the Presbyterian custom it would be expected that the Alexandria dissenters would have appealed to the nearest Presbytery for a "supply"; there is no record that such a request was made prior to the year 1772; nor do the records of the old Philadelphia Presbytery indicate that it had any knowledge of this Presbyterian colony on the Potomac.

Mr. Makemie from his home on the Eastern Shore of Virginia traveled through Maryland when he went to Philadelphia, while the Scotch Irish swept up the Valley. Midway between these two paths lay Alexandria with its Dissenters, living their active, useful lives in seeming detachment, unhampered and unawed. It is of local record that the Presbyterians at first assembled for worship at the homes of their members, and, after 1760, in the upper room of the "Town House" with doors and windows open, and in other respects in strict conformity with the terms of the Toleration Act.

It is of course understood that in the beginning only a portion of the inhabitants of Alexandria and vicinity were Dissenters. The number adhering to the established church was greater; their church-building, which was the first Pohick and as old as the town itself, lay nine or ten miles distant from

the village. Bishop William Meade, the great Historiographer of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Virginia, a graduate of the Episcopal Seminary there and later Rector of Historic old Christ Church, strove earnestly to learn the early history of his church and its relationship to Alexandria. He wrote:

Whether there had been any public worship or a church at Alexandria previous to the enlargement of it [1763] and the great impulse thus given it, does not appear from the vestry book, but it is believed that there was; but soon after this, in 1764, Fairfax Parish is established and measures taken for the promotion of a church in this place. The vestry book commences in 1765; at that time there were two churches in the new parish; one at the Falls . . . the position of the other, the Lower Church, is not known. It may have been an old one at Alexandria.<sup>15</sup>

The New Side revivals and The Great Awakening which so profoundly stirred other sections of Virginia seem to have passed the Alexandria community by, adding nothing to the cause of the Dissenters and detracting nothing from the prestige of the Establishment. It is not to be supposed, however, that this community was any less intelligent, any less receptive to vital facts, or any less religious than were similar communities elsewhere; but the total loss, or absence of early factual records covering this important period is most unfortunate.

<sup>15</sup> *Old Churches and Families of Virginia*, Bishop Meade, Vol. 2, p. 256.

Nevertheless we have ample testimony of one gratifying fact, that is that during this period Alexandria brethren of all beliefs dwelt together in harmony.

The Presbyterian Church at Alexandria, which has become so important first appears in the Donegal Presbytery records in April, 1772. From the manner in which it is introduced it may be inferred that an organized church may have already existed there. There is no request for a preacher to be sent, but the Reverend James Hunt is ordered to supply Alexandria one Sabbath at his discretion. At the same meeting appointments were also made for Reverend Amos Thompson and the Reverend James Lang to preach at Alexandria.<sup>16</sup>

Matters civil as well as religious were approaching a crisis in Virginia in 1772. In the previous year, Lord Dunmore had taken over the reins of colonial authority from Governor William Nelson. In 1772 a Bill granting Toleration "To his Majesty's subjects being Protestant Dissenters" (which had been ordered to be prepared at the session of 1770) was published. It was far from satisfactory in its terms but demonstrated that Dissent was gaining in strength and gave promise that the end desired—full liberty of conscience—was in sight. In the absence of records to the contrary, we may suppose that this, more than any other reason, spurred the Alexandria Presbyterians to take steps towards organization, and the erection of a church building at this particular time.

<sup>16</sup> *The planting of Presbyterianism, etc.*, Graham, p. 79.

Prior to the year 1772, during the time when meetings were held in the "Town House," the Presbyterian Society had been served, in seeming pastoral relation, by the Reverend David Thom, a native of Scotland.<sup>17</sup> In 1772, William Thom, the son of David, was ordained as pastor of this flock, on the third day of December. His pastorate was short as his death occurred the following year. Application was made to Presbytery for another pastor, but, tho' frequently "supplied" a period of six years elapsed before, in the fall of 1780, the Reverend Isaac Stockton Keith was installed as the second pastor.

The six vacant years covered the period of the American Revolution, and more than one member of this little Congregation was in the field with Washington.

The pastoral relations of the Reverend Mr. Keith lasted for nine years. Some confusion regarding Parson Keith has been created in local history from the fact that in the book, "The Lodge of Washington," his name is incorrectly given as James Keith, and he is sometimes spoken of as the James Keith, Mayor of the city, who welcomed Lafayette on his first official visit to Alexandria, in 1784, and who died, aged ninety years, on the day when this same distinguished visitor returned to Alexandria, in 1824.<sup>18</sup>

The Reverend Isaac Stockton Keith accepted a

<sup>17</sup> *History of Old Alexandria*, Mary Powell, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> *The Lodge of Washington*, F. L. Brockett, p. 61.

call to Charleston, S. C., in 1788. There, full of years and honors, his earthly career came to an end in December 1813. Notice of his death was published in the Alexandria Gazette early in January, 1814. He was succeeded, March 1789, by the Reverend James Muir.

## DR. MUIR'S REPORT

For many years it was thought that all of the records of the Old Meeting House were lost, but since the restoration of the building certain of these records, unfortunately not the earliest ones, have been recovered. In January, 1816, both the Session and the Committee opened new volumes for their minutes. The first entry in the Committee book bears the date March 3. An entry in the Session book, bearing a date nearly corresponding, covers the proceedings of the eighty-eighth meeting of that body. At a succeeding meeting it was recorded that the old books of the Committee and of the Session had been carefully examined, "bringing the history of the church up to the present." It is not improbable that these older records are still in existence and may yet be restored to the church.

No details of the actual construction of the church building have come down to us. We know that the land on which it stands was given by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Arrel, and that it was deeded to Rev. William Thom, the first minister, the lots being numbers 90 and 91 (a portion of each) on the original plat of the town.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Liber L, Fairfax Co, Records. The Arrel deed transferred to the church half of lots 90 and 91, extending from Fairfax to Royal streets with a frontage of eighty-eight feet three and one-half inches on each street. While the deed does not mention it, the original plat of the town shows a nine foot alley bordering the property on the south; the Minutes of the Committee mention the alley a number of times.

Confronted with this total lack of records touching the formation of the Congregation and the erection of the church, the writer was highly pleased to locate in the files of the Presbyterian Historical Society, in Philadelphia, a report by Dr. James Muir, in his own handwriting, on the back of which is endorsed: "History of the Presbyterian Church at Alexandria, from its commencement in 1772 until the present date, A.D. 1794."

As Dr. Muir's report constitutes our earliest and only record of the subjects it covers, it is here reproduced in full. It will be noted that the church building was sixty by fifty feet in size.

## HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT ALEXANDRIA

The Presbyterian church at Alexandria took its rise in the year 1772. A few families of this denomination agreed to invite among them a stated minister. The choice fell on the Reverend William Thom; His labours were acceptable and useful. They were not, however, long enjoyed. The Master of assemblies, in the year 1773, called His young servant from this world. The congregation erected a monument in memory of his piety and zeal.

Affected were the Society by this event, but not discouraged. No house was yet built to accommodate them in worship. It was determined to build one. Mr. Richard Arrel presented the Society with a lot of ground Convenient for the purpose; Mr. Thom had left for the





*Rev. James Muir, D.D.  
Pastor of the Old Meeting House, 1789-1820*

Original in possession of Alexander Washington Lodge of Masons

use of the Society a legacy of sixty pounds; the members of the Society came forward with generous subscriptions and loans, some assistance was afforded them by their brethren of other denominations. They were thus enabled to erect and cover-in a brick building sixty feet long and fifty broad. Further steps to improve the house and organize the Society were interrupted by the War which commenced between Great Britain and America.

The Reverend Isaac Stockton Keith passing through Alexandria in the year [17]80, was invited by the Society to remain with them during the winter and exercised his ministerial talents among them with such acceptance that he was invested with the pastoral charge of the infant Society. Thirty-two names are found on the list of the congregation. They fixed on certain principles as the foundation of their future proceedings. The following are enumerated:

First: That the choice of a minister and the arrangement of the finances are among the inalienable rights of every member who contributes to their support, and is not disqualified for the exercise of the privilege of a free man in the state.

Second: Among these inalienable rights are the appointment of church meetings, of a chairman to preside, of all officers for the management of the secular affairs of the church, of a Clerk and sexton, when, and as often as these appointments appear necessary.

Third: That all elections shall be by ballot.

Fourth: That all meetings of the congregation for business shall be called by public notice when assembled for worship, or by a written invitation left at the house of each; fifteen shall be necessary to constitute

a meeting; a majority of voices of those persons present shall be conclusive in all cases whatever.

Steps were taken to support their pastor and finish their church.

A meeting of the congregation, 1781, agreed that a committee of seven together with Mr. Keith, be appointed to manage all business respecting the church until superseded by a new appointment. Under the direction of this committee the church was pewed out, and the money for Mr. Keith's support collected.

The committee having determined to build a parsonage house, and obtained considerable subscriptions for that purpose, in July, 1787, agreed with Mr. R. Brockett to prepare a house of certain dimensions and finished in a manner pointed out for two hundred and sixty-eight pounds. This agreement was complied with on both sides, and a commodious house was prepared for the accommodation of the clergyman for the time being.

In August, 1788, the Reverend I. S. Keith gave up the pastoral charge of the congregation at Alexandria to take upon him the charge of a Congregation at Charleston, South Carolina.

I received a call to take pastoral charge of this church dated the twenty-sixth of March, 1789, of which I accepted and removed with my family to Alexandria May, 1789. The Society has frequently been in a fluctuating and critical situation. A great proportion of the members of the Society found it necessary to remove to other states; some of them have died, feuds had crept in among us, our dissolution seemed approaching, but an increase of inhabitants affording us an increase of members, energy returning to our com-

mittee, and union among our members, appearances are now promising. A great expense had been entered into in finishing our place of worship. It is commodious and neat. Public worship is better attended than formerly. The funds of the church are improved. If present prospects be realized, we shall soon under the blessings of God be a numerous and prosperous Society.

Alexandria

April, 1794

JAMES MUIR

## THE PASSING YEARS

Dr. Muir's report to Presbytery, 1794, ended on a hopeful note of confidence which, unfortunately, the passing years did not sustain. We know little or nothing of the history of the church or congregation for the next twenty-two years. Coincident with the opening of the new volumes of minutes of Session and Committee, the scene changes. These records, though vague and meager at times, contain sufficient information to enable us to understand what is only half portrayed.

Dr. Muir's health was failing in 1816, and a serious disagreement had developed which in the end divided the congregation and caused one portion to "break off," as the minutes have it, from the rest. Whether or not it was the sole cause seems uncertain but certainly the inability of the two factions to agree upon a co-pastor for Dr. Muir was the chief cause.

Dr. Muir, as President of the Alexandria Academy Board had, on November 1, 1816, brought from Princeton a young preacher, the Reverend Elias Harrison, to serve as Principal of the school; he told the session, later, that it would please him if the congregation would see fit to invite Mr. Harrison to assist him. Reverend Daniel C. Baker, another young preacher, had been working temporarily with Dr. Muir, and many of the congregation wished him to remain. A congregational meet-

ing was held at which the question of who should be called was put to ballot; Mr. Baker receiving eighty-six votes and Mr. Harrison forty-five. Accordingly a call was made to Mr. Baker, who declined to accept.

In April, 1816, Dr. Muir had reported to Baltimore Presbytery a membership of ninety-nine. The membership at the time of voting was one hundred and two. It is assumed that persons in the congregation who were contributors to the church funds, but not members, were permitted to vote.

The dissenting members, thirteen males and twenty-seven females, withdrew and established the Second Presbyterian Church which prospered and developed into the strong and splendid organization it is today. The membership remaining in the Old Meeting House numbered sixty-two. Of these, fifteen were men and forty-seven women. The separation occurred in April, 1817. In September Dr. Muir made a visit to Bermuda for his health. On March 17, 1818, Mr. Harrison was called by the congregation to be co-pastor with Dr. Muir, and was installed in his office in June of that year.

On November 2, 1819, a committee was appointed to "enquire the expense of an arch for the pulpit and the other expenses attending a alteration." Before the committee had reported, the death of the venerable pastor occurred.

One of the factors involved in the division of the congregation in 1817 was that the Alexandria

church was under the care of the Baltimore Presbytery while the dissenting body was voluntarily passing under the care of the Presbytery of Winchester. It may be said in explanation that, from the start, it had been the understanding between the Synod of Philadelphia and the Synod of Virginia that the Potomac River was the boundary between the Presbytery of Winchester and that of Baltimore, "except the congregation at Alexandria which shall belong to the Presbytery of Baltimore." The Reverend Mr. Keith was sent by the Presbytery of Baltimore, in 1780, Dr. Muir, also, in 1789. The Presbytery of Baltimore directed the Alexandria church to complain to the Synod of Virginia. This, however, was not done.

In the year 1830 an insurance of five thousand dollars was placed on the Meeting house, and six hundred on the Manse.

Mrs. James Muir died in March, 1830. From the minutes we read, "In consequence of the death of the much respected Mrs. Muir, relict of our former pastor it was resolved that in conformity with her wishes her interment take place at the old burial ground at the church in the lot where her children are buried."

In 1831 stoves "for the burning of anthracite coal were purchased in Philadelphia at a cost of fifty dollars; the old stoves sold for seven dollars and sixty cents."

In October, 1834, the pastor's intimation that he would be forced to resign because of inadequate

payments on his salary, called renewed attention of the Committee and members to the highly unsatisfactory condition of the finances of the church. This condition had not improved when in July, 1835, the great calamity befell the church building, and the congregation.

After the fire, and indeed during the entire period of Dr. Harrison's long and devoted service, the financial condition of the always small congregation was distressing; but the records disclose a degree of courage and self-sacrifice on the part of the pastor and his co-workers that certainly challenges admiration and merits praise. From these records it will be necessary now, in passing, to present only brief extracts.

On February 6, 1838, it was reported that the young ladies of the congregation had collected seventy dollars to go toward the purchase of a new bell. On November 15, 1841, a committee was appointed to report "some plan for a Steeple or Tower, and the possible cost."

On December 18, 1843, the Committee reported that "the Steeple had been completed in July, previous." December 23, 1844: A committee appointed "to ascertain cost of a porch, in stone and in wood, in front of the church." December 12, 1851: "Thanks of the Committee presented to Mr. F. L. Smith and to the Proprietors of the Prince William Stone Quarry for their generous offer of sufficient stone for a platform and steps to the church."

October 1, 1852: The Session unanimously re-



solved "to petition both the Presbytery of Baltimore and the Synod of Philadelphia at the ensuing sessions to set off this church to the Presbytery of Winchester and the Synod of Virginia, and that the petition be *stressed* in both meetings."<sup>20</sup>

April 11, 1853: "Resolved, that in the opinion of the Committee a new front be put on the church if the necessary funds can be raised." October 1, 1853: "James McKenzie appointed to represent the church at the meeting of Winchester Presbytery in Fredericksburg, and the Synod of Virginia at Hampden-Sydney, Prince Edwards County."

May 8, 1854: Committee to ascertain cost of a furnace and best location for same.

April 27, 1858: Dr. Harrison wished to present to two country churches the chandeliers and lamps that were formerly used in the church; it was decided that it was inadvisable to do so.

December 31, 1860: The treasurer reports collection from all sources to be \$1179.73; disbursements, the same. This included Dr. Harrison's salary of \$800.

February 14, 1863: A meeting called because of the death of Dr. Harrison. "Funeral Sunday, three P.M., in burial ground of the First Presbyterian

<sup>20</sup> Those present were Dr. Harrison, William Gregory, Robert Bell and Louis McKenzie. From the records of the Presbytery of Winchester we learn that Dr. Elias Harrison, "at his own request," was received from Baltimore Presbytery, October 7th, 1853, and was dismissed to the Presbytery of Potomac October 21, 1859.



*Rev. Elias Harrison, D.D.  
Pastor of the Old Meeting House, 1820-1863*

Church, by the side of his consort in accord with his own request."

February 3, 1863: "Occupant of the manse has paid no rent for two years; refuses to move until he can find a place to suit him." November 18, 1863: Committee appointed to "request Colonel Ferguson to have fence repaired around the burial ground destroyed by U. S. soldiers." A committee appointed to devise what would be the most suitable monument over the grave of Dr. Harrison. On the opposite page is written, "Dr. Harrison up to within a few weeks of his death had his usual weekly services, with occasional short intermissions from indisposition. On the first Sabbath in the year 1863 he administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and that closed his services in the lower Sanctuary."

1863 (no day or month): "Reverend Mr. Gurley, of Washington, preached for us in the afternoon." May 1, 1864; "Mr. Gurley preached for us." June 26, 1864: "Mr. Van Lear, from Kentucky, preached." July 3, 1864: "Reverend Charles Haxall, from Knightsville, Indiana, was invited to fill the pulpit for two months, which he did to the satisfaction of our people generally."

October 17, 1864: "Drs. Fustan and Brown (a Committee appointed by the Presbytery of Potomac "to take into consideration a supply of a pastor for the church") appeared and stated the decision of the Presbytery and what duties they re-

quired of the pastor that should be selected. The congregation met again on the twenty-ninth, and resolved, first that "this church is not prepared to have a regular pastor at present"—Aye, 32; No, 7. Second, that "the Presbytery have not the power to appoint a pastor for us"—Aye, 32; No, 7. Rev. Mr. Haxall was nominated as a Supply—Aye, 7; No, 32.<sup>21</sup> Mr. Singleton was then nominated when much confusion ensued and the meeting adjourned." Appendix A.

October 31, 1864: At this meeting the Committee from Potomac Presbytery "decided that they would permit the Rev. Mr. Singleton to supply the pulpit provided they have undoubted evidence to the Presbytery of his loyalty to the Government of the United States; if not, they would send a minister; Meeting adjourned."

November 5, 1864: Rev. Mr. Hair of Indiana was invited to fill the pulpit for six months. He accepted "and notice of the engagement was officially communicated to Rev. Mr. Gurley, Clerk of the Presbytery of Potomac, Washington. For the meantime, Rev. Drs. Gurley, Fustan and Brown will occupy our pulpit on the Sabbaths intervening until Mr. Hair arrives."

April 3, 1865: "Our regular Sacramental services were held yesterday and many were partakers of

<sup>21</sup> The balloting, 32 to 7 is illuminating; it is evident that the minority ruled; the power of the seven votes evidently emanated from the unfortunate Gardiner Spring Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in May, 1861.

The Lord's Supper, and not a few of them were stranger."

The next entry is this, "The Committee appointed by Potomac Presbytery to examine the records of the first church of Alexandria, have performed that duty, . . . and find that there is but a casual reference to a single meeting of Session found in a record of several pages. There seems to have been no meeting of Session since April 13, 1861."

The historic old church of Muir and of Harrison which was almost extinguished at its birth by the Revolutionary War was struggling now to keep itself alive in an atmosphere ominous with internal strife. In its records, WAR is not mentioned, but its dire effects are plainly to be read. Certainly, whatever may have been the convictions or the prejudices of its individual members, the War between the States marked the real beginning of the end of all that was left in sentiment, zeal and hope of the old Meeting house per se. The struggle was continued a few years longer and then the doors were closed; there remained nothing but a hallowed, empty building of brick and stone, a casket of memories which have drifted into traditions. Without legal owners, and with no one in authority, its fate was certain; first the elements, then the vandal, without and within, each took heavy toll.

Ecclesiastically the ownership of the property rested with the Presbytery of Washington City, successor to the Presbytery of Potomac, who vol-

unteered to present it to the Second Presbyterian Church of Alexandria, if assured that it would be cared for. The offer was accepted. Headed by Mr. John Boyle Gordon, a deacon in the church, a campaign nation-wide was inaugurated to raise funds for restoring the building, and this was successfully executed. Destruction to the building as complete as that resulting from the fire through which it had passed almost a century before was faced and the work of the Committee began in 1925. The restoration was completed in 1928.

## THE FIRE

On the afternoon of July 26, 1835, the Meeting House was struck by lightning. The resulting conflagration was highly spectacular and very serious in its consequences. To the pastor, Dr. Harrison, and to his small congregation, the disaster which had befallen their Church-home seemed total and complete. "Destroyed," and so they spoke of it, and so stated it in their records: "Everything totally consumed . . . nothing left but the walls . . . a shapeless mass of smoking ruins."

On the day following the fire, Monday, July 27, a meeting of the officers was held at the home of one of the members to talk things over and to mourn together. The Committee of the church did not hold a stated meeting until January 5, 1836, at which the financial condition of the church was submitted. The report disclosed that there was a deficit of one hundred dollars existing.

At this time the regular fixed charges of the church amounted to one thousand dollars per annum; these did not include repairs and up-keep of the building, or of the manse, or other incidentals. The deep depression, amounting to despair, which the loss of the church aroused in its members is understandable when we recall that in the previous fall Dr. Harrison had indicated his intention to resign, because "his stipend had fallen so far below the annual salary of eight hundred dollars due him

as to no longer support him in decency and dignity." In addition repairs were urgently needed about the church, and the manse needed a new roof.

At the aforesaid meeting (January 5, 1836) Dr. Harrison was requested to make and insert in the minutes an account of the burning of the church. This he was already prepared to do. All things considered it is not surprising that he pitched his recital in the key of Job; in the six months that had passed the gloom had not lightened; no steps had been taken toward providing another place of worship and "total loss" still seemed to be the sum of the situation. Dr. Harrison's account, an historic document in itself, is reproduced here in full. It is dated July 27, 1835, and appears in the records as a part of the minutes of the meeting of January 5, 1836; it is apparent that he had prepared it the day after the fire.

#### DR. HARRISON'S ACCOUNT OF THE FIRE

July 27th, 1835. A joint meeting of the Committee and Session was this day held at the house of Thomas Sanford in consequence of a severe and awful calamity, which, on the day previous, had befallen the Church and Congregation.

It had pleased God in His inscrutably mysterious, yet wise and adorable Providence, to permit, that on this day, consecrated to rest and to public services of devout worship in His earthly sanctuary, their venerable church edifice, for so many years the place of hallowed devotions for their fathers and themselves, should be totally consumed by the lightnings of Heaven.



This melancholy event took place about a quarter before three o'clock in the afternoon, a few minutes previous to the time ordinarily set apart for the ringing of the bell for the exercise of public worship. It was just at the close of a refreshing shower of rain, attended, as is usual at this season of the year, with peals of thunder and vivid flashes of lightning; the electric fluid seems to have been attracted by the spire of the steeple, which, running up from the center of a four-sided roof, rising in the form of a pyramid, was rapidly conducted, by means of a large quantity of iron used for security of the timber, and, to the shingles and other combustible materials, of three of the corners of the building almost directly under the eave-line, entirely inaccessible for some minutes to any efforts which could be made for the purpose of quenching it; and constantly fed by the qualities of the matter with which it was in contact, the flame increased and hastened its work of destruction with a rapidity that was truly awful and appalling. In a space of time, too short almost to be deemed credible by such as were not witnesses of the sublime and awful spectacle, the entire roof exhibited to the immense multitude gathered around to mingle their sympathies and tender their assistance, nothing but one mighty mass of living fire curling in rapid and terrific volume around the still suspended but tottering steeple, and smiling at every effort towards extinction save that of Him, that dread and awful Being, by whom the flame had been enkindled. A period of two hours had not elapsed from the commencement of the conflagration, before the whole edifice, except the walls, was involved in one shapeless mass of smoking ruins, presenting a scene of

desolation and repulsion to the common citizen, as it was tearful and heart-rending to the Church and Congregation. "Our holy and beautiful House, where our fathers praised the Lord (to use the language of the Prophet) was thus suddenly burned up with fire, and all our pleasant things lain waste." Isaiah 64—11th.

With the exception of the lamps, a venerable clock in the front gallery opposite the pulpit, the books and cushions, a part of the windows, the stoves, a large proportion of the pipes of a splendid organ (which was split open with an axe for that purpose) and some of the plank broken from the pews, all was destroyed; and but for the zeal and practical sympathy of many of our esteemed citizens in braving dangers of no common magnitude, a like destruction had been the fate of them, also.

The house had been standing for more than sixty three years (though the steeple and galleries had been built somewhat later) and excepting the Episcopal church on Washington Street was the oldest of all the ten places of religious worship in town: for many years its bell was the only church-going signal within the limits of the Corporation, and owing to this circumstance, connected with its peculiarly clear and inviting tones, the destruction of it (which was caused by its fall from so lofty an eminence) seemed the occasion of regrets to the public at large more immediately expressed, than for the edifice itself. To the congregation no loss, inside the house, was more deeply deplored than that of the large and richly-toned Organ; not only because of its superior worth as an instrument of music, or difficulty of replacing it by another, and the sacred uses to which it was applied, but equally because it



Photo by Loeb.

*Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution*

had been presented by a few esteemed and venerated individuals, most of whom are now sleeping in the dust.

For several years there had been an Insurance effected on the building to the amount of five thousand dollars—two thousand five hundred in each of the offices in town—but it so happened in Providence, that one of these policies which had expired about four or five months previous, had never been renewed, so that, with the exception of the twenty five hundred dollars, the loss to the congregation was total.

Yet there was one circumstance that ought to be recorded with adoring gratitude; the calamity took place at a time when on ordinary occasions some individuals would have been in the house, as it was so near the hour of the afternoon service, and had that been the case, there is much reason to fear that it would have been attended if not with the loss of lives, at any rate with serious injuries to not a few; but it had been so ordained by Infinite Wisdom no doubt, that for the first Sabbath in more than two years the church was closed on the whole of that day, its Pastor having been Providentially called away to supply the Pulpit of a sick brother, in the neighboring city of Georgetown, so that no individual was then in the house, and no serious injury occurred to any individual during the progress of the fire; and thus, while there is much to produce sadness and lamentation, the Committee would feel that there is still something to awaken emotions of gratitude and praise; and that however severely the loss may be felt, yet it has not been unaccompanied with significant expressions of kindness and regard.

\* \* \*

## THE ORIGINAL CHURCH

If there is doubt in the mind of any one of our day that the present building is the original Old Meeting House, it may be excused in view of the impressive and uncompromising terms employed by Dr. Harrison in his description of what was undoubtedly a disaster. These terms were also employed by the Alexandria Gazette in its short description of the fire. They are stock phrases, used as commonly today as then in printed descriptions of fire scenes; often in the case of trivial ones.

Nevertheless this is the original structure, standing where it always has stood, upon the same foundation. Roofless once, with its interior furnishings and fixtures partially destroyed by fire, it is the original just as the beautiful and historic Wren building at William and Mary College in Virginia is the original,<sup>22</sup> just as the celebrated and venerated Old Farnham Episcopal Church, in Richmond County, Virginia, is the original,<sup>23</sup> and as the Grand

<sup>22</sup> *Virginia—A History of Its People*, John Esten Cooke, p. 306; 1883. “. . . Sir Christopher Wren drew the plan of the building . . . in 1705 a fire broke out in the building and it was entirely consumed . . . rose again from its ashes . . . it has often been burnt down . . . the last time in 1862, but it has ever risen from its ashes . . .”

<sup>23</sup> Article in Washington, D. C., *Times*, Nov. 5, 1930, *Three Virginia Churches Being Restored*: “No church in Virginia has suffered more than Old Farnham; it was the scene of a skirmish in the War of 1812 . . . so seriously damaged by fire that only the walls were left standing . . .”

Mosque at Damascus is the original structure.<sup>24</sup> Examples of this character are so numerous as to require no further mention.

In the interest of historical accuracy, and because the old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria is one of the very few of the Dissenting churches of Colonial Virginia still standing, it is both proper and important that we examine the probability of its total destruction and present some of the proofs to the contrary.

In the decision to restore, or as the records have it, to rebuild, the old church, we may be sure that sentiment played its part. With sentiment, hand in hand, went a lack of financial resources. In March, 1837, a Committee was appointed "to arrange for the deficiency that will be due on finishing the church." This committee reported at the April meeting that it had "arranged for about half of the deficiency anticipated." The sum of four hundred dollars was subscribed at a special meeting of the congregation and citizens in December, 1837, and in November, 1838 it was announced that the rebuilding debt was at that time \$939.68. In April, 1839, a final effort to raise this amount was successful, the last four hundred dollars being raised

<sup>24</sup> "Another exquisite thing in Damascus is the Grand Mosque which was once a mighty Christian Church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist; it has been often burnt and destroyed, but nothing can hide the splendor of the old church that the Emperor Theodosius the Great built in 375 A.D." *In the Steps of the Master*, H. V. Morton, London, 1934.

by placing a mortgage on the Lecture room—a clear instance of “robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

Nothing in the available records discloses how much of the money received from the insurance was devoted to the building fund. Presuming, however, that all was so used we may arrive at the approximate cost of the restoration as follows:

Insurance fund	\$2,500.00
Collected Dec. 1837	400.00
Bal. due 1839, later paid	939.68
	<hr/>
Total	\$3,869.68

These details are recited as warranting the suggestion that the amount of money expended was far below the cost of construction (even in the days when “money went further”) of such a structure as the Old Meeting House, but was sufficient to cover repairs or restoration on a fairly generous scale.

Though the fire had occurred in July, 1835, it was not until November, 1836, that a decision to rebuild on the old site was reached. Plainly, the decision had been delayed because of the insistence of a portion of the congregation upon removing to another location. Reconstruction began late in January, 1837; the building was ready for services in July. This was a lapse of time ample for restoring, but far too short, existing conditions considered, for the entire construction and furnishing of a building such as the Old Meeting House.

At the time of the fire there were ten churches in Alexandria; eight of these had been constructed later than the first decade of 1800. St. Paul's, erected in 1818, was the first of these. Not one of the eight, as far as the writer has been able to learn, was constructed along architectural lines such as marked the Old Meeting House, Christ Church and Pohick church, all nearby colonial structures. The inference is that a new church, in a new location, had it been built in 1837 would have followed the prevailing trend away from the pre-revolutionary colonial Georgian style of architecture.

On September 5, 1820, a Committee was instructed to procure a marble slab to be placed over the grave of Dr. Muir, and Dr. Harrison was requested to prepare an inscription for it. On October 5, 1825, another committee was appointed to "secure and erect a suitable monument to the memory of the late Dr. Muir." Shortly afterwards the committee reported that it had performed the duty assigned to it. This monument is a marble tablet which was inserted in the north wall of the church, above the grave of Dr. Muir, where it remains today. (Appendix B.)

As far as the records disclose no efforts were made, in rebuilding, to make any change whatever in the form or structure of the edifice, the one suggestion to the building committee, February 7, 1837, that "the galleries be lowered from their present position, if possible" was not accepted; they



were informed that "to do so was found to be inexpedient." This indicates that some of the galleries, if not all of them, were intact. Certainly the one which protected the Muir tablet was there.

Incidentally, it was probably in that same wall that the windows were "saved," which would seem to mean that the glass in them was not broken. In Dr. Muir's time, as he mentions in one of his published sermons, a hail-storm struck the Meeting House and broke upward of three hundred panes of glass in the windows. It was perhaps the recollection of this which made Dr. Harrison window conscious.<sup>25</sup>

The original walls of the old Meeting House measured sixty by fifty. Exclusive of the front vestibule the walls of the present structure measure the same. The vestibule, with its stairway on either side leading to the galleries, was added in 1853.<sup>26</sup>

The bell-tower, on the west side of the church, was built in the summer of 1843.<sup>27</sup> These records confirm the conviction of the Advisory Architect for Restoration that both the tower and the new front had been added to the original structure sub-

<sup>25</sup> The sermon was preached by Dr. Muir in Christ Church on December 29, 1811. The hail storm occurred in June of the same year. This sermon, with others, was published in book form in Alexandria in 1812.

<sup>26</sup> The minutes show that the stone for the steps and platform was a gift from the Prince William County Stone Company's quarries.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the Committee, December 18, 1843. See also, Appendix C.

sequent to the fire. The vestibule replaced a wooden porch that had been built in 1846. The east front of the building has been unchanged in appearance since 1853. From 1774 to 1853 the present inner doors of the vestibule had served as the outer or front doors of the building.

A report from the Advisory Architect for Restoration, one of the outstanding members of his profession, and a recognized authority on the subject of which he treats, is of such historic import in this instance that, in part, it is included in this volume. (Appendix D.)

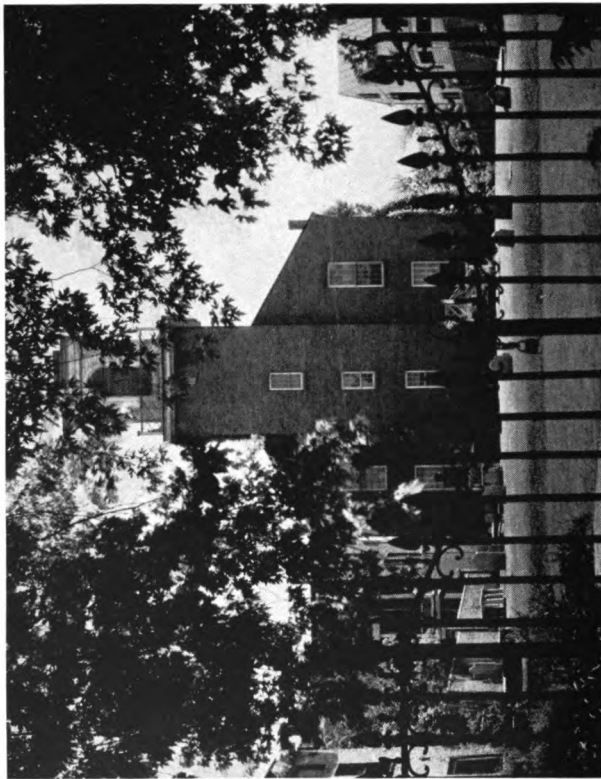
## BIOGRAPHICAL

### THE REVEREND JAMES MUIR

A call to the pastorate of the Alexandria church was extended, March 28, 1789, to the Reverend James Muir. It was accepted. Dr. Muir immediately assumed a commanding position in the life of the community, as teacher, preacher, author and leader in the religious, cultural and charitable activities of the town.

Dr. Muir was born in Catrine, Ayresshire, Scotland April 12, 1756, the son of the Reverend George and Tabbie (Wardlaw) Muir. His classical and philosophical studies were pursued at the University of Glasgow where he was graduated in March, 1776. He studied Theology in Edinburgh and London where he was licensed to preach May 12, 1779, "Conforming to the doctrines and practice of the Church of Scotland." Ordained in August, 1781, he went immediately to Bermuda, where he remained for several years as co-pastor of a church there and as principal of an Academy. In Bermuda he was married, in 1783, to Elizabeth Welman.

While on a transient visit to his father's friend, the famous Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, then President of Princeton College, Dr. Muir connected himself with the Presbytery of New Brunswick. In 1788 he preached for several months, along with the Rev. Jedediah Morse, as a candidate for assistant pastor to the celebrated Dr. John Rodgers, Pas-



*View of Church and Churchyard from Royal Street*

tor of the Old First Church of New York. (Appendix E.) The congregation was divided in its choice and, in the interest of harmony, both candidates withdrew, and Dr. Muir accepted the call to Alexandria. In 1791, at the suggestion of Dr. Witherspoon, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred on Dr. Muir by the Corporation of Yale College.

In 1818 the Reverend Dr. Elias Harrison was installed as co-pastor with Dr. Muir whose health was failing. His death occurred August 8, 1820, at the spacious dwelling of Jonathan Swift (Bel Air, later known as Colross), one of his parishioners where he had been removed in the hope that the change to the suburban district might be beneficial. "He was buried in the church, just beneath the pulpit he had occupied for more than thirty-one years. By his own request he was dressed in his gown and bands, and his grave was thirteen feet deep."<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Sprague, the author and editor of *The Annals* frequently quoted, resided in Alexandria in his early manhood as tutor in a private family and was brought into intimate contact with Dr. Muir, under whose instruction and guidance he began his study of Theology. He wrote a biography of his revered teacher (published in the *Annals*) in which he gives a vivid description of his person and personality:

He was a short thick-set man rather heavy in his movements, of a grave but most kindly expression of

<sup>28</sup> *Annals of the American Pulpit*, Rev. William B. Sprague. *The Lodge of Washington*, R. L. Brockett.

countenance, and as gentle and guileless as any human being I ever met. There was an air of simplicity and loveliness about him that led me at first, young and inexperienced as I was, to underrate somewhat his talents and acquirements; but, as I became acquainted with him, I found myself in contact with an exceedingly well balanced, well disciplined and well furnished mind. His appearance in the pulpit was certainly far from being graceful; he always wore the gown, but that served rather to make the disproportion between his breadth and his height the more noticeable, tho' to my eye, at least, it gave additional solemnity and impressiveness to his manners. I can see him at this moment, standing in that venerable pulpit, holding his little black Bible before him with both hands and reading . . . in an accent so intensely Scotch that it seemed to my unpracticed ear not only strange but ludicrous. But his sermons were always full of vigorous and condensed thought, and in point of style were very much of the Addisonian school; his kindness to me was scarcely less than paternal, and when I parted with him, in June, 1816, to return to the North, he gave me letters to several of his friends in the cities through which I was to pass, that procured for me some of the most valued acquaintances of my life. I corresponded with him until near the time of his death, and I can not imagine a more perfect representation of his mind and heart than his letters furnished.

Besides his own, Dr. Sprague reproduced in the *Annals* two other biographies of Dr. Muir, one written by Dr. Elias Harrison and the other by the Reverend James Lawrie Laurie.

Dr. Sprague states that, in addition to his own

familiarity with his subject, he had, in the preparation of his biography, the benefit of manuscripts loaned him by Rev. Mr. Harrison, and Mrs. Muir. The article was written in 1849, apparently.

Dr. Muir took up his residence in Alexandria in May, 1789. Where he joined the Masonic order is not known to the writer, but he was admitted to membership in the Alexandria Lodge, as a Master Mason, on March 27, 1792. From that time, almost continuously, he served the Lodge as its Chaplain. He had, on April 15, the year before his admission to the Alexandria Lodge, delivered the address at the placing of the first corner stone of the District of Columbia, at Jones' Point. (Appendix F.)

It was the custom of the Alexandria Masonic Lodge in the early days to celebrate St. John's Day by marching to church in a body (escorted by the military companies and accompanied by the citizens) to listen to a Charity Sermon. The money collected at these services was distributed to the poor. For a number of years these services were held in the Old Meeting House. At a later period occasionally at Christ Church, and, after 1818, at St. Paul's church also. During the entire time of his service in Alexandria Dr. Muir appears to have been accepted as the leader in the charitable activities of the community.<sup>29</sup> Washington himself, with char-

<sup>29</sup> *The Lodge of Washington*, F. L. Brockett, p. 80. "The ceremony of St. Johns Day, Dec. 27, 1812, was postponed to Jan. 3d, 1813, when the sermon was delivered at the Episcopal church by Dr. Muir; the contribution amounted to \$185.85,

acteristic unobtrusiveness, at times made use of him as his almoner. (Appendix G.)

Dr. Muir, who had been principal of an academy in Bermuda, found a similar field of activity awaiting him in his new location. The Alexandria Academy, which had been founded in 1785 by a number of the citizens of the town and vicinity under the guiding hand of Washington, soon received the benefit of his learning and experience. He was elected to the Board of Trustees, and for many years served as its President. From time to time he taught and lectured to the more advanced students.

Among the earliest efforts for the development of literary culture in the community was the organization of the Alexandria Library Company and the founding of the Alexandria Library which for almost one hundred and fifty years has shed its beneficent influence over this community and which today, more firmly established and equipped than ever, is, and well may be, a city's pride, and at the same time a fitting monument to the wisdom and prophetic vision of its founders.

The Alexandria Library Company was organized on July 31, 1794, with the Reverend Dr. Muir as President; this office he held for a number of years.

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which sum was presented to Dr. Muir, with other funds contributed for the same purpose, with the request that he direct its distribution. Dr. Muir had preached the sermon in 1809, also in the Episcopal Church, on which occasion he had received the thanks of the Lodge for "his uniform, prompt and cheerful attention to the duties of benevolence and charity."



Dr. Muir was an author himself—he published several volumes of Sermons which were distinguished for their high literary quality as well as for the keen logic and deep religious sentiments displayed. A number of his sermons were also published separately, in pamphlet form; some of these, unfortunately, have been lost, but the writer was successful in finding one of them in the library of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> It is known as “The Proclamation Sermon,” and was preached in the Old Meeting House on May 9, 1798, in compliance with President Adams’ appointment of that date as a Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer, that war, then threatening with France, might be averted. Washington attended this service.<sup>31</sup>

At the funeral of Washington Dr. Muir, as Chaplain of the Masonic Lodge which was in charge of the burial, conducted the services pertaining to his office; he preached one of the four funeral sermons delivered by the four ministers who attended the funeral, all delivered from the Old Meeting House pulpit. Dr. Muir also delivered a dissertation, replete with rich scholarship, on February 22d, 1800,

<sup>30</sup> Ten pamphlet sermons bound in one volume, all preached the same day, in different cities, among them the lost sermon of Dr. Muir’s; and, also, a sermon preached in New York on the same date by Rev. William Linn, a copy of which he sent to Washington.

<sup>31</sup> “May 9, 1798; Went to the Proclamation Sermon at Alexandria.” *Washington Diaries*, edited by Dr. John C. Fitzpatrick, Vol. 4, p. 276.

preceding and introducing Dr. Dick's celebrated Oration on Washington. Dr. Dick had preceded Washington as Master of the Lodge.

With the exception of Washington and Mason, it is doubtful if, to this day, this community has produced an individual citizen of wider permanent influence or more eminent and admirable phases of character, scholarship and morality than the Reverend James Muir, D.D.

Dr. and Mrs. Muir were the parents of seven children, four of whom reached maturity, a son and three daughters. Of the son, Dr. Harrison says in his biography of Dr. Muir, "The son, Samuel, was educated in medicine in Edinburgh and for some years was a Post Surgeon in the United States Army, in the Southwest. He married a daughter of one of the chiefs of the Sacs or Fox tribe of Indians, and was for several years regarded as one of the greatest men of the Nation; later he settled in an extensive medical practice in Galena, Ill." He left no issue.

#### THE REVEREND ELIAS HARRISON

The son of Thomas and Nancy (Osborn) Harrison, Elias Harrison was born in New York City, January 22, 1790. He entered New Jersey College, Princeton, N. J. in 1812, and was tutor there from 1814 to 1816. He studied divinity in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, where he finished his course and was licensed to preach by the New Brunswick Presbytery. In November, 1816, he went to Alexandria, Virginia, at the invitation of Dr. James

Muir, to assume charge of the Alexandria Academy. This position he held until 1818, when he accepted a call to become co-pastor with Dr. Muir, in the Old Meeting House—which now became known as the First Presbyterian Church. This was his only charge, a zealous pastorate of forty-six years.<sup>32</sup>

“Dr. Harrison died at his residence in Alexandria, Virginia, on February 13, 1863, of the decay of the vital powers; he married Elizabeth, the daughter of Richard Veitch, of Alexandria, who survived him; they had three children, two daughters now living (1867) and a son died in infancy.” (From Presbyterian Hist. Almanac and Remembrancer).

Dr. Harrison was ordained by the Presbytery of Baltimore, (in the Old Meeting House), December 11, 1817; his pastorate extended from 1817 to 1863.<sup>33</sup> The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred by Princeton. If any of the sermons preached by Dr. Harrison have survived to this date the writer has not found them. The biographical articles which he contributed to Sprague's Annals of the American Pulpit are chaste and dignified and display both scholarship and facility of expression; he contributed one of the three biographies of Dr. Muir

<sup>32</sup> “When Dr. Harrison succeeded Dr. Muir, it was to enter on a ministry of so many years, that at his death, in 1863, the pastorates of these two remarkable men extended over nearly three quarters of a century, making the annals of previous ministers mere traditions.” Mary G. Powell: *History of Old Alexandria*, p. 102.

<sup>33</sup> Biographical Catalogue, the Princeton Theological Seminary.

which Sprague published in his *Annals*, and several others relating to fellow preachers with whom he had been associated in their life-time.

Mrs. Mary G. Powell in her delightful *History of Old Alexandria* speaks of Dr. Harrison with affectionate esteem on several occasions: "His dignified presence and venerable form are well remembered by many who received from him the baptismal rite. During the last year of his life—not recognizing the new form of Government—he was unable to perform the ceremony of matrimony, and in many instances to bury those of his congregation who were interred outside the city limits, at Ivy Hill cemetery, among many of those departed friends who had known, loved and revered him."<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Harrison, during his long service, filled in the community very nearly the place left vacant by the death of Dr. Muir. (Appendix H) It is quite possible that in the present enlightened age the malady which caused the death of Dr. Harrison would have been diagnosed as Grief.

At the close of the war a tablet was erected in the Meeting House to the memory of Dr. Harrison testifying that "he was greatly beloved by his people and the citizens of Alexandria."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> *The History of Old Alexandria*, Mary G. Powell, 1928.

<sup>85</sup> Joined on the same tablet is a memorial to Ruling Elder Robert Bell (1809-1885), born in England, and "for 50 years active in all work of this church." History is indebted to Robert Bell, since it was he who preserved the Records of the Old Meeting House.

## HISTORICAL

### THE OLD MEETING HOUSE

The Old Meeting House is a veritable treasure-chest of historic incidents and memories; its close association with the Masonic Lodge of which Washington was the Master would alone give it a unique distinction and world-wide interest; the building was nine years old when, in 1783, the Lodge was organized; in that year the first celebration of St. John's Day (the Evangelist), December 27th, was held, on which day the first of the famous series of Charity Sermons was delivered here by the pastor, the Reverend Isaac Stockton Keith, who, however, was not a Mason.

On Tuesday, May 9, 1798, a "Proclamation Sermon" was preached here, by the Reverend James Muir, the Pastor; it was a community gathering, with Washington present; it is not known that Washington attended services here, either Masonic or religious, more than the one time mentioned, but certainly in no other church, indeed in no other building in the entire country, were greater and more continuous efforts made to honor his memory than in this one.

At the time of Washington's death the Old Meeting House bell was the only church bell in the town; it began tolling as soon as the news was received in Alexandria, and tradition has it that it tolled con-

tinuously until after the funeral, a period of nearly four days.

December 27, St. John's Day, 1799, the Lodge, escorted by the military, marched to the Meeting House as usual; on this occasion the Charity sermon was omitted and a funeral discourse on Washington was delivered by the Reverend William Maffitt.<sup>36</sup> Two days later, on Sunday, December 29, with the Lodge, the military and citizens present, two funeral sermons were preached from the same pulpit. In the morning by the Reverend Thomas Davis, Rector of Christ Church, and in the afternoon by Dr. Muir, the two ministers who had officiated at the burial of Washington. On the following Sunday, January 5, 1800, the Reverend Mr. Tallison, a Methodist minister delivered from this pulpit a discourse upon the "Death of Washington."

On February 22, 1800<sup>37</sup> the Lodge, the military and the citizens again, after a public parade, assembled in the Old Meeting House to "commemorate the birthday of Washington," when an Oration on "The Day and Decease of Washington" was delivered by Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, Washington's

<sup>36</sup> A Presbyterian minister who conducted a school for boys in Fairfax County, near Alexandria. He was a member of the Lodge and served as Chaplain at intervals. Mr. Maffitt married Harriet Lee, the daughter of Richard Henry Lee, the "Signer," and the widow of George Turberville.

<sup>37</sup> Washington, to the last, celebrated his own birthday on February 11. So did the citizens of Alexandria. President Adams had called for a nationwide celebration on the twenty-second, which date has since been observed in Alexandria.

successor as Master of the Lodge. Preceding Dr. Dick's Oration, Dr. Muir delivered a scholarly discourse upon "The Respective modes pursued by different Nations at different Periods for perpetuating the memory of Deceased Persons of Eminence."<sup>38</sup>

On January 14, 1800, the Washington Society of Alexandria had been organized by the friends and neighbors of Washington, "to perpetuate his fame and to carry on and supplement his charities." For many years this society took the lead in the public celebration of Washington's birthday; each year an orator of distinction—always a member of the society—addressed the public. The first of these, as we have seen, was the Oration by Dr. Dick. Among those, who, in later years, delivered their orations in the Old Meeting House were Col. Charles Simms, James Douglas Simms, Esq., Rev. Mr. Maffitt, Dr. Dick, Richard Bland Lee and Francis Scott Key. Key's eloquent oration was delivered on February 22, 1814; before the year was ended Mr. Key had given his country its National Anthem, and had written his name among the immortals.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Dr. Muir's Discourse and Dr. Dick's Oration, together with a number of similar tributes paid to Washington have been re-published in "Washington, First in the Hearts of His Countrymen," edited by the writer, and published in the Washington bi-centennial year, 1932.

<sup>39</sup> Orators, members of the Society, who delivered Orations on February 22, at the Episcopal church, were, among others of later years, George Washington Parke Custis, Francis Lightfoot Lee, Hon. Charles Fenton Mercer, Dr. James Muir (1809) and Dr. William Daingerfield.

## PRESIDENT TAYLOR'S FUNERAL SERMON

On Wednesday, July 31, 1850, the citizens of Alexandria assembled in the Old Meeting House to listen to "An Eulogy or Funeral Oration on the death of our lamented late President, General Zachary Taylor, by the Rev. Joshua N. Danforth."

Gen. Taylor was born not far from Alexandria, in Orange County, Virginia, in 1785. He died in the White House, in Washington on July 9th, 1850. The great esteem in which he was held in Alexandria, while primarily rooted in politics, may also have been tinged by a sentiment to which Alexandrians have always been subject—a biographer has said of General Taylor, "He looked to George Washington as a model, and admiring contemporaries convinced themselves of many analogies existing between the Warrior of the Revolution and the Hero of Buena Vista."<sup>40</sup>

## GOD'S ACRE

The small burying ground surrounding the Old Meeting House on three sides is truly historic and hallowed ground; here rest some of the founders of the city, patriots and soldiers, whose names are written on history's pages. A brief quotation from an editorial article which appeared in the Washington, D. C. Post, on February first, 1929, will prove interesting at this time.

Alexandria was settled largely by Scotch sea captains

<sup>40</sup> *Dictionary of Am. Biography.*



and merchants, many of whom were buried from the old meeting house. In the graveyard which surrounds the church lie the remains of revolutionary hero John Carlyle, besides the bodies of six captains of the line in the War of the Revolution, eighteen other veterans of the Revolution, twenty-two members of the lodge of Masons over which George Washington presided, two of his pallbearers and the wife of another, the chaplain who preached the funeral sermon, and the captain of the last military organization which Washington reviewed. As a result of an awakened public sentiment, the campaign to raise the necessary funds for the restoration is under way. When repairs are completed the structure will be thrown open to the public.

Time, the elements and, alas, vandalism have marred but by no means obliterated the charm and appeal of this unique and hallowed spot. The splendid massive brick wall which surrounds it (a restoration gift from the National Society Sons of the Revolution) has brought back the air of remoteness and seclusion which is the heritage of ancient burial grounds, while the tomb of the Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution, a gift from the National Society of the Children of the American Revolution, arrests the attention of the most casual visitor.

The monument over the last resting place of Dr. James Craik, Washington's oldest and most intimate friend, those marking the graves of Col. John Carlyle, one of the founders of the town, of Col. Dennis

Ramsay, one of Washington's pall-bearers, of William Hunter, Jr., who founded the Alexandria Society of St. Andrew, of the twenty or more fellow members with Washington of the Masonic Lodge, all, as one might say lying within the hollow of a hand, picture a scene which stirs the memory with half forgotten incidents and memorable events in our country's history of which these silent sleepers were once a living part.

It is probable that very few of the persons buried here were unknown to Washington, and certainly many were his personal friends. The Old Meeting House is often spoken of as the Masonic Westminster Abbey, because of the number of distinguished Masons buried in and near it.

#### THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF THE REVOLUTION

The story of the Unknown Soldier of the Revolution is interesting and in a way dramatic. When a foundation was being excavated for the rear wall of the Catholic chapel (now grown into the beautiful St. Mary's Church), the workmen inadvertently encroached upon the Meeting House property a short distance and uncovered a coffin; examination disclosed the remains of a man and the remnants of a Revolutionary uniform.

A new grave was prepared, immediately adjacent and the body re-interred. The recently discovered records of the Session contain an entry reading, "As our Catholic brethren have more use for that

little piece of ground than we have, it is not proposed to make any objections.”

The incident was doubtless known to all of the members of the church; but as years went by the Congregation changed—old members gave place to new ones; new incidents and new interests prevailed. However, there was in the congregation, in 1821, a man who, in early manhood had come from his home in Scotland, and was at that time prominently identified with the Old Church, and later for years one of its Ruling Elders. He died, full of years and honors, in 1875, in his eighty-seventh year. This was Mr. William Gregory.

Mary, the daughter of this distinguished citizen, was baptized in the Old Meeting House by the Reverend Elias Harrison, and was his pupil in the Sunday School. One Sunday morning, lingering in the churchyard after service, Mary's father told her the story of the Old Revolutionary Soldier, and pointed out to her the spot where he was buried. Mary plucked a flower from a nearby vine and placed it on the grave. Seeing that this act pleased her father she repeated it from time to time, and occasionally other little girls in her class joined her, adding their flowers to hers.

Came the year 1926. Mary, alas no longer young, was lending her invaluable aid and counsel to the restoration of the Old Meeting House just getting started; she called attention to the spot where the Old Soldier lies and expressed the wish to see it

permanently marked in her life-time, as she was probably the only person then living who knew the story and could identify the spot. The members of the local Post of the American Legion, who as volunteer workmen were clearing the yard of the accumulated debris, inspired by her suggestion immediately prepared a temporary marker (which Mary dedicated), and were preparing to replace it with a permanent one when, the story having received wide publicity by press and radio, a request was received from the National Society of the Children of the American Revolution to be allowed the honor of supplying the monument.

Mary was permitted to witness the happy ending before she, too, passed the silent portals through which the Ancient Warrior whom she had honored, and the devoted father whom she truly revered had so long preceded her. (Appendix 1)

When the lost records were recovered they were found to contain confirmation of the burial of the unknown. A single line in the record of burials in the old church-yard tells us all that we know today, and evidently all that was known to those who gave him sepulcher. "January 19, 1821. An Old Revolutionary Soldier from Kentucky."

## *Appendix*

## APPENDIX A

### THE GARDINER SPRING RESOLUTION

[From. *Presbyterians, their History and Beliefs*.  
W. L. Lingle, D.D., LL.D., pp. 134-5; 143-4.]

Notwithstanding the fact that other denominations had divided into North and South on the subject of slavery the Old School Presbyterian Assembly held together until 1861. . . . In May, 1861, the Civil war was on and the whole country was in an intense state of excitement . . . all the causes that had tended to divide the nation were operating to divide the Presbyterian Church. However the immediate cause of the division was the adoption of a paper by the General Assembly known as the Gardiner Spring Resolutions; these resolutions called upon all Presbyterians, North and South, to support the Federal Government in Washington in its conflict with the states which had seceded and with the Confederate government. It was impossible for Presbyterians in the South to do this. Besides, in passing these resolutions the General Assembly had left its purely spiritual sphere and gone into the sphere of politics; because of the Gardiner Spring resolutions that part of the Old School church which lay in the South withdrew and organized what is now known as The Presbyterian Church in the U. S.

When the Gardiner Spring resolutions were passed eight Southern states had already seceded and the Confederate Government had been fully organized. A burning question which confronted every Southern man was whether he owed his allegiance to the Federal Government or to his own state which had become a part of the Confederate Government. We can all see

that this is a political question to be decided by a man's own conscience and not a religious question to be decided by a church court. Fifty-eight members of the Assembly saw this plainly; they drew up and signed a five-point protest denying the right of the General Assembly to decide political questions—or to make loyalty to Federal Government a term of church-membership—or to inflict this cruelty upon their Southern brethren—or to pass unnecessary and uncalled for legislation—or legislation which would diminish the power and the resources of the church.

During the summer of 1861 one Southern Presbytery after another withdrew from the jurisdiction of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., until forty-seven had withdrawn. In each case the Presbytery gave the unconstitutional character of the Gardiner Spring Resolutions as the reasons for withdrawal.

## APPENDIX B

### THE MARBLE SLAB AND THE MONUMENT

(From the Minutes of the Committee) "Sept. 5th, 1820; The Committee on the funeral arrangements of the Reverend Dr. James Muir reported that they had fulfilled the sorrowful duty to which they were appointed; the body was interred in front of the pulpit & near the North Aisle; they further report that the church was hung with black as an additional testimony of regard to his memory; Whereupon, it was ordered that the expenses be paid by the Treasurer. The Committee before appointed were requested to procure a marble slab to be placed over the grave, and that the Reverend Mr. E. Harrison prepare an inscription to be engraved thereon."

"March 6th, 1821; At a meeting of the Committee of the Presbyterian church, at the house of Sam'l Marck; Present, Dr. Harrison, Sam'l Mark, Jas. Douglas, Jno. A. Stewart, Richard Veitch, Thos. Smith, John Adam; Began with prayer; The committee appointed to prepare an inscription for the marble slab to be placed over the grave of the Rev. Dr. Muir reported the same which was unanimously adopted and it was ordered to be copied in the minutes in the form it is to be engraved on the slab." [The copied inscription covers two pages of the minute book].

"October 4th, 1825. Rev. E. HARRISON, Mr. John Adam, Mr. Jas. B. Ladd are appointed a Committee to make all necessary arrangements for procuring and erecting a suitable monument to the memory of the late Dr. Muir." This committee reported, at a later meeting that it had performed the duty assigned to it.

When the restoration of the Old Meeting House was undertaken, it was found that fragments of the Slab which had covered Dr. Muir's grave were piled upon the graves of Mrs. Muir and their children, in the church-yard, and that a marble tablet of large size was embedded in the North wall, inside the church building. The fragments of the slab carry the inscription as copied in the minutes; the inscription on the tablet is not only much shorter, but different. Mr. F. L. Brockett, who was a well-grown lad when the fire occurred, writes, in 1875, "The tablet on the north wall marks the grave of this good man."<sup>41</sup>

There seems to be but one explanation of the confusion resulting from the presence of both slab and tablet. The slab covering the grave was probably under

<sup>41</sup> *The Lodge of Washington*, F. L. Brockett, p. 124.



the floor and, of course, not visible. The tablet in the wall remedied this, and was the "Monument" erected by the Committee in 1825. The Slab may have been broken during the fire, or, equally possible, by the vandals of a later generation.

The minutes of the Committee, and those of the Session are intact, covering the period from 1816 to 1865. As, after 1825, they contain no further reference to monuments or memorials to Dr. Muir the inference is strongly warranted that the portions of the slab, and the tablet in the wall, are those referred to in the ancient minutes.

## APPENDIX C

### THE LOTTERIES

In the year 1751 the House of Burgesses authorized the drawing of a Lottery, "the first thing of this kind in this Colony," for the purpose of building a church and a market house in the town of Belle Haven, in the County of Fairfax. Presumably this marked the initial movement towards construction of the church, begun in 1767, now Christ Church. A small sum of money was realized all of which was returned to the subscribers; Neither church nor market house was built. See, *History of Old Alexandria*, Mary G. Powell, 1928.

In October 1790, fifteenth of the Commonwealth, the General Assembly of Virginia authorized the raising of money by one or more lotteries for the purpose of building Academies, Churches, etc., under which William Lowery, Robert McCrea, John Murray, Andrew Jamison, Jonathan Swift, James Erwin, Jesse Taylor, John Dundas, William Hunter, Jr., Josiah

Watson, Robert Mease, and Thomas Williams, Gentlemen, Trustees, or a majority of them were authorized to raise by one or more lotteries, not exceeding five hundred pounds, to be by them applied towards completing the building of a church at Alexandria for the use of the members of the Presbyterian Society.<sup>42</sup>

In *The Virginia Gazette & Alexandria Advertiser*, of September 15, 1791, A committee composed of Lowery, Dundas, Mease, Murray and Benjamin Hamp advertise for bids for the construction of a steeple for the Meeting House, to be of brick and stone to a height of ninety five feet, this to be surmounted by a spire of wood, of sixty five feet in height; for this work 800 to 1000 bushels of live oyster shells will be needed.

In the same issue of the paper quoted, the lottery managers advertise their regret and concern because, owing to a smallpox epidemic in the village which had suspended all business endeavors they were unable to conduct the lottery in the manner originally intended. What happened after, this the writer has been unable to ascertain. Certainly, the Steeple was not built, nor did the church receive any of the proceeds. The inference is that, as in the lottery of 1751, no drawings took place.

<sup>42</sup> *Henings Statutes*, 13.

## APPENDIX D

CLARENCE L. HARDING  
Registered Architect  
Washington, D. C.

April 29, 1929.

MR. JOHN B. GORDON, Chairman  
Old Presbyterian Meeting-House  
Restoration Committee:

MY DEAR MR. GORDON:

In response to your inquiry as to whether or not in my opinion the walls of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, in Alexandria are the identical walls which were erected in 1774, I beg leave to state that it is my opinion that, excepting certain additions and repairs, they are the original walls of the building.

I have seen the photostatic copy of the records of the old church . . . and have noted that it is recorded therein that the old church was set on fire by lightning in the year 1835, with the following comment as to the damage.

“A period of two hours had not elapsed from the commencement of the conflagration, before the whole edifice, *except the walls*, were involved in one shapeless mass of smoking ruins. . . .”

Further on the account lists certain things not destroyed by the fire, viz; “A venerable clock in the front gallery opposite the pulpit, the books and cushions,” and, among other things, “A part of the windows.”

Since it would be quite unusual for any one to waste time in trying to remove the windows from a burning building (I have never heard of its being done) it would

appear from the records of the church that not only were the walls of the old church standing after the fire, but that a part of the windows in them were uninjured, which would indicate that not only were they (the walls) standing after the fire, but were in rather good condition.

Certainly there is no reason why the walls should not have remained standing after the fire, as the small amount of furniture in a church could not generate enough heat in burning to injure the walls of a structure of the sturdy type of architecture which typified the buildings of the period from which the Old Presbyterian Meeting House dates. The walls of the building are almost two feet thick, which is about double the thickness of walls ordinarily required for a building of its height. . . .

I have examined them (the walls) with a view to ascertaining if they correspond in construction detail to that of the older buildings about the city of Alexandria . . . every comparison shows that the side walls and the rear, or west wall of the present structure to be of the same general period as the older Alexandria buildings. The present front wall, facing on Fairfax Street, and the steeple are, however, of a later period; Apparently, the front wall and the steeple were added as a part of the re-building operations, after the fire in 1835; There is every indication that they are not a part of the original structure. . . .

The manner in which the brick work of the side walls and the west wall of the Old Meeting House is laid up is identical with the side walls and rear walls of practically all the older houses in Alexandria. Three rows of stretchers (the long ends of the bricks) are laid between one row of headers (the small ends of the bricks) which is identical with the side walls of *Colross*, in the northern part of Alexandria; It is the

identical bond used in the lower part of the brick wall in the rear of the older part of *Gadsby's Tavern*, on North Royal Street, which structure was built in 1752. . . .

The city of Alexandria has, by great foresight, preserved intact, despite the onrush of the modern age of commerce, a number of its old edifices which associate it with the historic past of Northern Virginia. It is true that a number of its most valuable historic edifices have had to be sacrificed to the march of progress, but those which remain constitute an historic background possessed by few American cities. The city of Alexandria should cling most tenaciously to every building constituting a part of that historic background.

Among those which should be revered most highly because of its hallowed association with the great names in Virginia and national history and Masonic lore, such as Carlyle, Craik, Ramsay, Muir, Hunter, and others, is the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, and all the more so since it is so certain that the walls of the present-day edifice are the same as those within which these great men worshipped in their lifetime.

Respectfully yours,

CLARENCE L. HARDING,

Advisory Architect for Restoration.

## APPENDIX E

WASHINGTON AND REV. DR. RODGERS .

Shortly before Dr. Muir's incumbency at Alexandria this church had been supplied by the Reverend John McKnight; it is interesting to know that he was selected for the post with Dr. Rodgers from which Dr. Muir had withdrawn. Dr. Rodgers was a noted patriot

and a valued friend of Washington's. In the book "Memoirs of Dr. John Rodgers, D.D.," by Samuel Miller, the author relates the following incident:

On the 17th day of April, 1776, General Washington reached New York and took possession of it for its defense. Soon after his arrival, Dr. Rodgers, in company with other friends of the American Cause called on the General to pay him his respects. The General received him with pointed attention and when he was about to retire followed him to the door, and observed that his name had been mentioned to him in Philadelphia, which he had just left, as a gentleman whose fidelity to the interests and liberties of the country might be relied on, and who might be capable of giving him important information; and added, "May I take the liberty, sir, to apply to you, with this in view, whenever circumstances may render it desirable"?

The Doctor after assuring him of the readiness and pleasure with which he should render him, in the cause in which he was engaged, any service in his power, took his leave. It is not improper to add that the General actually did consult the Doctor, on several different occasions afterwards concerning certain parts of the public service, and particularly in one case received from him important information. A number of letters passed between them. . . .

During the period of the Revolutionary War importations from England ceased; among the articles of which the people, and the army were deprived, were Bibles. An American edition was printed in Philadelphia in 1781. Dr. Rodgers, who during the war had served as a Chaplain, attempted to organize a body to purchase and distribute the Philadelphia Bible to the army. Among those whom he endeavored to engage in this pious design was the Commander-in-Chief.

Upon the final declaration of Peace the Doctor wrote Washington a letter of congratulation, and also mentioned the matter of the Bibles. Washington wrote in reply from Headquarters June 11th, 1783, expressing regret that the early disbanding of the army would prevent carrying out the plan: "It would have pleased me well" he said, "if Congress had been pleased to make such an important present to the brave fellows who have done so much for the security of their country's rights . . .".

Washington's letter is quoted in full by Dr. Miller—the file copy is among the Washington papers in the Library of Congress. The complete signature is "With much regard and esteem, I am, Dear Doctor, your Most obedient Servant, Go. Washington".

On December 11, 1783, which had been appointed by Congress as a "Day of Public Thanksgiving Throughout the United States," Dr. Rodgers preached a Sermon on "The Great Things God has done for us" in which he said:

The providing of a proper person to take command of the American Army is none of the least of the displays of the goodness of God to us in the struggle; how judicious, how heaven-directed the choice of Congress in this matter. You all know the illustrious Washington was the man, on whom their unanimous choice fell, the man whom heaven had raised up, for the great business of leading our armies and saving his country; the man in whom all the States and all ranks in those States, have so happily and so justly imposed the most entire confidence; but the interest had by this great man in the esteem and confidence of those whom he commanded, through the course of the War, both Americans and foreigners, illustrates in a signal manner,

the goodness of God to our country in raising him to this elevated station; and at the same time illustrates his great personal merit; but, above all, the event illustrates both these.

This sermon was printed in pamphlet form, entitled, "Divine Goodness Displayed in the American Revolution, A Sermon by The Reverend John Rodgers." A copy can be found in the Rare Book Section of the Library of Congress. It has great historical value.

## APPENDIX F

### THE CORNER STONE

From the records of Washington-Alexandria Lodge of Masons.

When Mr. Ellicott had ascertained the precise point from which the first line of the District was to proceed, the Master of the Lodge . . . placed the stone. After which a deposit of corn, wine, and oil was placed upon it, and the following observations were made by the Rev. James Muir.

Of America it may be said, as of Judea of old, that it is a good land and large—a land of brooks of waters, of fountains, and depths that spring out of the valleys and the hills—a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates—a land of oil, olives and honey—a land wherein we eat bread without scarceness, and have lack of nothing—a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayst dig brass—a land which the Lord thy God careth for—the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it; from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

May Americans be grateful and virtuous, and they shall insure the indulgence of Providence; may they be



unanimous and just, and they shall rise to greatness; may true patriotism actuate every heart; may it be the devout and universal wish; Peace be within thy walls, O America, and prosperity within thy palaces! Amiable it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is more fragrant than the perfumes on Aaron's garment; it is more refreshing than the dews on Hermon's hill.

May this stone long commemorate the goodness of God in those uncommon events which have given America a name among nations. Under this stone may jealousy and selfishness be forever buried. From this stone may a superstructure arise, whose glory, whose magnificence, whose stability, unequalled hitherto, shall astonish the world, and invite even the savage of the wilderness to take shelter under its roof.

## APPENDIX G

### WASHINGTON AND MUIR

When General Washington and Dr. Muir first met is uncertain; the latter came to reside in Alexandria one month after Washington had left for New York, for his first inauguration. Washington was not present at the placing of the corner stone, at Jone's Point, April 15th, 1791; he was then on his Southern Tour, and on that particular day was in Petersburg, Virginia, having spent the time from March 30th to April 7th, at Mount Vernon. Both men were present, Washington as the central figure and Muir as the Chaplain of Alexandria Lodge, at the laying of the corner stone of the Capitol, September 18th, 1793; if they had not met prior to this time, it is safe to presume that Washington had heard of Dr. Muir through their mutual friends, Dr. Witherpoon and Dr. Rodgers, if not otherwise.

The writer has photostatic copies of a number of letters written by Dr. Muir to Washington; the first of these, dated March 11, 1791 (a month before the corner stone laying) was in compliance with a request from Washington, delivered by messenger, to be advised "as to the state of the School"—the Academy. A full and interesting report is made, showing twenty children enrolled as Washington's wards, thirteen boys and seven girls.

On February 12, 1794, Dr. Muir wrote Washington, at the request of the Trustees, giving certain facts touching the financial needs of the Academy: to this, Washington replied, under date of February 24, rather pathetically it would seem, as follows:

SIR:—

I have received your letter of the 12th inst., and will direct my Manager, Mr. Pearce, to pay my annual donation for the Education of orphan children, or the children of indigent parents, who are unable to be at the expense themselves.

I had pleasure in appropriating this money to such uses, as I always shall in that of paying it. I confess, however, I should derive satisfaction from knowing what children have heretofore received the benefit of it, and who now are in the enjoyment thereof.

Never, since the commencement of this institution, have I received the least information (Except in a single instance) on this head; although applications for it to individuals has been frequently made. As you, Sir, appear to be in the exercise of this trust, let me pray you to have the goodness to gratify this wish of mine. With respect, I am, etc." [From the "Letter Book" copy in the Washington papers, Library of Congress.]

To this Dr. Muir replied promptly, and at length; the financial affairs of the Academy were in an ominous condition; details were fully disclosed; the nine-page report ends thus:

Whatever happens to the Academy our attention to the Washington School will be unremitting; nothing in my power shall be wanting and I shall take care for the future, whilst I continue a Trustee, that an exact statement of the School be regularly sent you.

On December 5, 1794, Dr. Muir made a further report to Washington as to the progress being made by his wards in deportment and scholarship; he ends his communication on a personal note:

I am at present publishing "An Examination into the Principles contained in 'The Age of Reason.'" <sup>48</sup> I have been encouraged from the number of subscribers to put the book to press; it would be useful to be honored with your name among the subscribers. I feel reluctant in even mentioning this, as you must be harassed with similar applications. If, however, you be inclined to encourage my production and mention this when you write Mr. Pearce, it will be obliging.

Wishing you all happiness in your high station, and the Government under which we enjoy so many blessings great stability, I am

Yours Respectfully,

JAMES MUIR.

Washington, his second term as President ended, returned to Mount Vernon in the spring of 1797. On

<sup>48</sup> Dr. Muir had preached a series of ten sermons, which he later published in book form, critically analysing and disputing the theories and doctrines of Paine's "Age of Reason." The volume met with success.

January 8, 1798, he made an entry in his Cash Book, "By charity to the poor of Alexandria, per the Rev. Jas. Muir's Rec't, \$100". On January 24, a committee "with whom the donation from you for the poor of this place was entrusted" made a full and complete report of the distribution made, disclosing that it had been divided amongst twenty-two women and three men in amounts ranging from a half dollar to ten dollars. Names were given and amount each received. Those signing the report were James Muir, William Herbert, Samuel Craig and John Dundas. It was addressed to General Washington, Mount Vernon.

## APPENDIX H

### HARRISON AND HALLOWELL

In the year 1811, the Lancasterian system of education had been introduced into Alexandria under the supervision and management of the Alexandria Academy, of which Dr. Muir was then the President. A Board of Guardians of the Free Schools had been created of which, some years later, Dr. Harrison was the head. An active member of this board was the celebrated Quaker, Benjamin Hallowell; He was a man of great scholarly attainments and the head of a school for boys. His most famous pupil was Robert E. Lee, who, previously, had been a pupil also at the Academy.

In 1834 Dr. Harrison and Friend Hallowell, with a few other citizens founded a society called "The Lyceum," "where lectures will be given once a week on Literary, Scientific and Historical subjects, to be followed by debate; political and religious subjects barred."

The Lyceum became famous and attracted many distinguished orators and scientists. When talent from abroad was not available the weekly lectures were delivered, alternately, by Mr. Hallowell and Dr. Harrison.

The only visible remains of this distinguished Society is the beautiful building on the Southwest corner of Washington and Prince streets, Alexandria, with its striking Doric columns and triglyph cornice which was constructed by the Society as its home and as a museum of "Minerals and Natural History." It is now a private residence.

As soon as this building was completed the books and treasures of the Alexandria Library were moved into it. During the period of the war between the States it was occupied at intervals by troops. The Library suffered many losses, and the museum of minerals disappeared.

Mr. Hallowell removed to his country place, in Maryland, in 1860; Dr. Harrison remained to witness the end of the Lyceum as one of the searing griefs that were clouding his closing days.

The Autobiography of Benjamin Hallowell, published in 1875, and long out of print, is of historic value, especially to those persons who are interested in data pertaining to Alexandria.

## APPENDIX I

### MRS. MARY POWELL, HISTORIAN

Those who knew her in life will recognize at once that Mary was the late well-beloved and lamented Mrs. Mary Gregory Powell, whose interest in and affection for her native place glows on every page of her inter-

esting "History of Old Alexandria," published in 1928. The story of the Unknown Soldier is given here practically as she told it to the writer. Mrs. Powell's interest in the Old Meeting House led her, many years ago, to copy all that could be found of the records on the grave stones in the churchyard. These she has published in her history. Even then many stones were gone, or unreadable. The death of Archibald Thompson, July 15th, 1772, was graven on one stone—probably the first interment in the cemetery.

The once lost but since recovered records of Marriages, Baptisms, and Funerals begins with the year 1794; the minutes of the Session and of the Church Committee, in 1816. All of these records have been copied by photostat, and can be consulted by persons who are interested. Copies have been presented to the Virginia State Library, and are on file in the Archives Division in the city of Richmond.

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