

HISTORY

This History was written by Edwin Collis in 1956 for the 100th anniversary of the Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association.

Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association was incorporated on September 13th, 1856, one hundred years ago. The cemetery is located on Pleasant Hill Road, Township of Chester, Morris County, New Jersey.

For more than one hundred years preceding its incorporation this was the site of the First Presbyterian Church of Roxbury. The name was later changed to the First Presbyterian Church of Chester after the new Township of Chester was set aside in the year 1799.

Here was the revered and beloved church of many of the first families who came in the middle 1700's and settled the area which later became known as Chester, Mt. Olive, Flanders, Bartley, and Succasunna.

It was the custom in the early days to have the burying ground around or near the church. So it was on Pleasant Hill and so it was for more than a century. As time brought growth and changed conditions it was decided to move the church to the town of Chester and so in the year 1851 the First Presbyterian Church was built there and the church on Pleasant Hill was taken down.

Of course at this time it became necessary to reach some decision as to what should be done about the old graveyard. Then it was that the men of the church, mostly descendants of the early settlers, decided to incorporate and they gave it the name of Pleasant Hill Cemetery. When a church and its burying ground have been part of community life for more than 200 years it is only fitting and proper that we recall and record what we know of its history. How did it happen that this church and yard were located on this beautiful hill site when it was just a heavy virgin woodland? Why was it located on this Pleasant Hill road? Why was the church moved and all the land set aside as Pleasant Hill Cemetery?

Now this is the story of the old church and graveyard. In the year 1736 settlement of the Chester area began. It was then called Black River. Two related families, the Browns and Luses came from Southold and the Hamptons, on Long Island, all strong Congregationalists and Presbyterians. This stream of Long Island settlers continued until after the Revolution.

Previous to 1736, almost all the land in this area still belonged to the proprietors of West Jersey, a British Colonial Corporation. In order to help develop the country and enhance the sale of land a road was laid out leading from the Brunswick Landing on the Raritan River near Piscataway up through the Somerset and Morris County area into Sussex. This road was called the Landing or the Brunswick Landing Road and though in the beginning little more than a woodland trail it had much to do with the development of the country. A section of this Landing road runs through the Township of Chester. It is the old Gladstone-Chester Road; from there Main Street, Chester, to the Chester House; thence Hillside Road to the fork; and then down the old road, past the Sturzenegger and Van Allen properties and across Black River in Pleasant Hill; thence on to Flanders end the old road to Stanhope and Sussex County.

Almost all the first families who settled here built their homes and shops and taverns along this ancient path. And along it they built their churches too.

In the year 1744 among the settlers from Long Island there came William Larrison who purchased on January 1, 1745 the proprietary Fretwell tract from Fretwell Wright. This was a tract of 400 acres through which the Landing road passed. On this tract at the foot of the hill, for two centuries called Larison's Hill, William Larrison built his home. At the crest of the hill lies Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

William Larrison was the great grandfather of Hames Larison, the father of Willis and Mabel Larison, now Mrs. Clifford Emmons. From James Larison, who died about fifteen years ago, and from my father, William F. Colis, and Henry C. Howell, all men who spent their lives on or near Pleasant Hill, I have the information that William Larrison, about the year 1750, donated the land for the Presbyterian Church and burying ground on Pleasant Hill. This was the beginning of the Old Hill Church and graveyard.

Now in those days our countryside was virgin forest, mainly of oak and chestnut. Roads which are now good highways were either paths or had not been laid out. Families were clearing and burning the woodland to establish their farms. Many settled in the Mt. Olive area others in the Chester area and others on the land toward Succasunna. But all could get to church. The church was on the Landing Road and it was accessible. The gift of land by William Larrison was one of great value to the whole community.

There are no church records or minutes in existence to tell us about the beginning of this early church. What we know was handed down from generation to generation and what little information I have came from several elderly people who lived on Pleasant Hill. We do know that the old burying ground is on the western end of the yard.

Tradition says that the first building was a log meeting house set up between the old graveyard and the present chapel; that this served as a church from 1731 to 1756 when the new building was completed. This was the church that served the congregation until 1851. Mr. Henry C. Howell, who was born about 1840 and lived his life on Pleasant Hill, told me that it stood on the ground to the east of the present chapel. It was a rectangular building, without a steeple. The pulpit was at the front of the church and the entrance was beside the pulpit so that any latecomers had to face the congregation on entering.

I took Mr. Howell from his home to the cemetery a few years before his death. It was then that he showed me the location of the church and told me the few things he remembered. The building was about 40 by 60 feet and sat obliquely to the road. The church was not heated and many brought little charcoal heaters to use in the box pews. Mrs. Carrie W. Fox and her sister, Mrs. Sarah J. Chamberlain (Woodhulls) who attended church here before 1850 had the one in their home which their family used.

During the century from 1750 to 1850 this place never appears to have been called the Presbyterian Church. It was always referred to in deeds and records as the Hill Church, the Hill Churchyard, or the Hill Graveyard. At times it was called the Hill Meeting House. In later years, when the third and fourth generation from the early settlers were its members it was called reverently "The Old Hill Church." It is so called in the booklet published at the time Pleasant Hill Cemetery was incorporated.

In the 1790's, in order to make the church more accessible to the Bartley and Mt. Olive members, a road was laid from Bartley that runs alongside the wall of the old burying ground. This was called the Road to the Hill Meeting House and the survey is recorded in the Morris County Hall of Records. This road, discontinued after 1860, can still be followed in part as it winds through the woodland and ends in the old Bartley-Chester road near the bridge on the old Naham Trimmer farm.

When the middle of the 19th century came, conditions had changed greatly for the Old Hill Church. Many of the families who were members were the fourth and fifth generation of the early settlers. Homes and homesteads had grown old and the villages and countryside had increased considerably in population. Flanders Mt. Olive and Bartley had become separate communities large enough to have churches of their own. Even with better roads the old Hill Church was a long way from Mt. Olive and Budd lake and the top of Flanders mountain.

The idea of a church at Mt. Olive was discussed for a long time. Finally a decision was made and forty-eight members from Mt. Olive withdrew and established the Mount Olive Presbyterian Church. Then about 1850, twenty-six members from Flanders decided to withdraw and build a Presbyterian Church in Flanders Village.

It was then that the remaining members of the Old Hill Church, about fifty in number and all from Chester decided to build a new church in Chester village. The building was erected on Main Street in 1851 and the Flanders members withdrew officially in 1852.

I have heard that the Old Hill Church was torn down and used in the construction of the Chester church; but I have no proof. All that remained on the hill was the Old Hill Graveyard. For five years there was much discussion as to what to do about the graveyard. Three new churches had been built and it appeared at first that all might follow the old custom of having the burying ground around the church. At Chester there were at least two burials and as late as 1895 there were two monuments there.

But the Old Hill Churchyard was held in great veneration. As it was written at the time of incorporation in 1856, "It was hallowed by many tender associations, and sacred as the burial place of our fathers for a hundred years." Many had been carried there for burial before the roads were passable for a vehicle, and for many field stones were the only monuments. Finally, a decision was reached. The Old Hill Graveyard would be incorporated and it would be called Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Who selected the name Pleasant Hill we do not know. It had never been used before for the church, the graveyard or the hill. And so in 1856 Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association was incorporated and the whole area received its name.

On September 13, 1856 when the meeting was called at the graveyard to form the Association and incorporate, about twenty men and women are recorded as having come to take part in the proceedings. All had been members and closely associated with the Old Hill Church. Here are those that formed the association:

James S. Dickerson, Robert M. Dickerson, Alonzo Dickerson. These three brothers resided in Chester on what later became known as the John Rourke farm.

Henry Hedges. His old home is now Maple Tree Inn, Chester.

James Topping. He was an Elder in the church. He built and resided in the house in Chester now owned by Willis Larison, called the Larison Turkey Farm.

James Larrison (old spelling). He was grandfather of Willis Larison and Mrs. Clifford W. Emmons. He lived at the foot of Pleasant Hill where Dr. and Mrs. John W. Mercer, now reside.

Mary Haines. She was a daughter of Jared Haines whose home was the old stone mansion on the abandoned road from Chester to Hacklebarney, now in the possession of Mr. William Mennen.

James Topping Jr. He resided in Chester where Mrs. William H. Crammer now lives. He was not a son of the above named James Hopping but was distantly related. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Lindlaur Leek.

Obediah R. Howell. He lived at Milldale where Roscoe C. Howell now resides.

Noah Scudder. He was an elder in the Old Hill Church for over fifty years. His home was in Chester Township and is now the William H. Woodruff farm.

William Hanford Nichols. He resided at Milldale where his daughter, Mrs. William S. Charavoyne lately lived.

James Tomkins. He resided on Pleasant Hill where Parkhurst Dickerson now lives. He was the grandfather of Mr. Henry C. Howell and Mr. Dickerson's mother, Mrs. Lemuel Fordham Dickerson.

David Smith. The grandfather of Roswell O. B. Smith. He resided in Chester on the Henry Hedges Farm, now Maple Tree Inn.

Reuben Carlisle. His home and farm is now the property of William Mennen on Tanner Brook Road.

Samuel Swayzee. He resided at Chester Cross Roads at the Henry Jacobsen place. He was the father of Mrs. James Mattison.

Samuel White. He lived on Pleasant Hill. A portion of his land is now a part of Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

Benjamin P. Woodhull. He resided on Pleasant Hill on the old Woodhull Farm, now the property of Fairleigh Dickinson College.

George Crater, lived on the Bartley-Flanders Road. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Henry C. Howell.

John S. Hunt. He resided in Chester and was the son-in-law of James Topping.

Jared B. Hathaway. He was the first president of the Association and a resident of Flanders.

David A. Nicholas. He resided in Flanders where his grandson, Harry H.R. Nicholas now lives.

Over the years additional land was purchased, paths and driveways were opened. and trees were set out.

The stone chapel was erected in the year 1903 and the cost was about \$1200. At this time August H. Bartley, father of I. Prime Bartley, was president and Alonzo Green was Secretary. Lemuel Fordham Dickerson. father of Parkhurst Dickerson was Vice-President. Harry W. Cypers was Treasurer. These men held office during their lifetime and also acted as Trustees. William H. Seward of Chester, Hezekiah R. Hopkins and Oscar B. Smith of Flanders were also trustees at this time.

A Woman's Auxiliary was formed in October 1953 with Mira Louisa C. Call, Chairman, Mrs. William C. Sturzenegger, Vice-Chairman and Mrs. Jacob F. parliament, Secretary-Treasurer. The Auxiliary now has 131 members. Through its efforts the interior of the Chapel has been redecorated, electric lights installed and also a new hearing system put in. In the years to come it will work to do many things to add to the beauty of the Cemetery.

In the year 1856, the Officers and Trustees of Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association were as follows:

Jared B. Hathaway_President
Benjamin P. Woodhull_Vice-president
James S. Dickerson.....Treasurer
David A. Nicholas..... Secretary

These Officers with Samuel White, William Hanford Nichols and George Crate formed the Board of Trustees.

In the year 1956 the Officers and Trustee, are as follows:

Roswell O.B. Smith_President
Harry R. H. Nicholas_Vice-President
John W. Marden_Treasurer
I. Prime Bartley..... Secretary

These Officers with Augustus R. Sharp, William L. Tredway and Clifford W. Emmons form the Board of Trustees.

Elected officers have always served without remuneration and the cemetery is maintained as a nonsectarian, non-profit one by the association.

Saturday, Sept 1st 1956
Chester, New Jersey

Edwin Collis

Addendum

Since the preceding history was written, much has happened at the cemetery. Here are some of the highlights.

Since 1956 there have been 31 new Trustees: Paul Lund and Russell Webb in 1962, George Parliament in 1964, Robert Slockblower and Lyman Nicholas in 1966, Howard Juckett in 1972, Richard Dickinson and Fred Davis in 1975, Frank Dufford in 1978, Jerry Smith in 1981, Eleanor Rockefeller in 1982, Melvin Whiting and William Hephplewhite in 1984, Warren Stroud in 1986, Hubert Ashley in 1988, Larry Ashley in 1993, William Wineburgh in 1997, William Renzetti in 1999, Russell Duryea in 2001, John Gierveld and Leslie Ann Cooper in 2003, Cheryl King in 2006, Joseph Abrusci and Michael Wade in 2008, Kurt Alstede in 2009, Edward Hanington in 2012, Frank Carrajat and David Conover in 2016, Bernie Anger in 2017, Holly Taquinto in 2020, and Paula Hays in 2021.

In 1964 the Biblical Seminary of New York allowed us to purchase 81/100th of an acre to adjust and straighten our boundary. In May, 1989, the Association purchased 80 adjoining acres from Mr. Kennedy, originally slated for a housing development. This purchase brings the cemetery to a total of almost 100 acres and assures our continued operation for many years to come. Development plans were created and portions of the additional property have been cleared, laid out, and are now used for burials. Additional sections are planned and will be created as needed. A new Administration Building was erected and dedicated in 1999. This building is the result of a gift from Bernice Smith, wife of Roswell Smith, who left money in trust to the cemetery, specifically for a building that would have inside toilets with running water.

In 2005, the building on the south side of the cemetery that had long served as the administrative office and maintenance building was replaced by a larger and more modern pole barn, with office space and toilet facilities for the Grounds Crew, and storage space for all of the machines and tools required in the operation of the cemetery. The anticipated growth of the cemetery was a major factor in the decision to build this new building. The old building was razed and the area was graded and seeded to provide additional plots and a more tranquil setting on that side of the cemetery.

In July of 1989, the cemetery association purchased the Flanders Methodist Church burying ground on Hillside Avenue in Succasunna. This cemetery has a history as old as Pleasant Hill in that it was originally created by Mr. Miller in 1850 as an additional burying ground for the Flanders Methodist Church. An interesting sidelight to this is that the wife of Mr. Frank Dufford, a former Trustee, is a direct descendent of Mr. Miller. The ground have been renovated, a new fence and pillars erected, replating of the empty sections was completed and a sign installed. This cemetery is now known as "Flanders-Hillside Cemetery, a Division of Pleasant Hill Cemetery?"

There have been a succession of part-time Superintendents, including Charles Stroelein, Leonard McDavitt, Len Barker, to name a few. In May of 1978, Robert Slockblower resigned from the Board of Trustees to take the position of Superintendent. He became the first full-time Superintendent and was so for nine years. Following Mr. Slockblower's death in 1987, Jerry and Bob Stark were hired to oversee the cemetery on a part-time basis. After one year they could no longer continue and in 1988, Lyman Nicholas resigned as Trustee and accepted the position as full-time Superintendent. In 2003, Lyman Nicholas retired and William Wineburgh who was also a Trustee, resigned from that position and was appointed Superintendent. At that time, Michael Roesing was also hired as full-time Grounds Supervisor. A cadre of part-time grounds keepers continues to work to maintain the buildings and grounds.

The Board of Trustees of the Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association serves without remuneration and the cemetery is maintained as non-sectarian and non-profit by the Association.

William A. Wineburgh, Superintendent
July 15, 2021

Past Presidents of Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association

Kurt Alstede	2018–Present
Leslie Ann Cooper	2013–2017
John Gierveld	2010–2012
William Renzetti	2007–2009
Larry Ashley	2002–2006
William Wineburgh	1999 - 2001
William Hepplewhite	1996 - 1998
Warren Stroud	1994–1995
Melvin Whiting	1991–1993
Frank Dufford	1988–1990
Richard Dickinson	1986–1987
George Parliament	1978–1985
Robert Slockblower	1976–1977
Roswell O.B. Smith	1952–1975
Jacob Parliament	1944–1951
Augustus H. Bartley	1892–1943
Smith E. Hedges	1882–1891
Benjamin P. Woodhull	1860–1881
Jared B. Hathaway	1856 - 1859