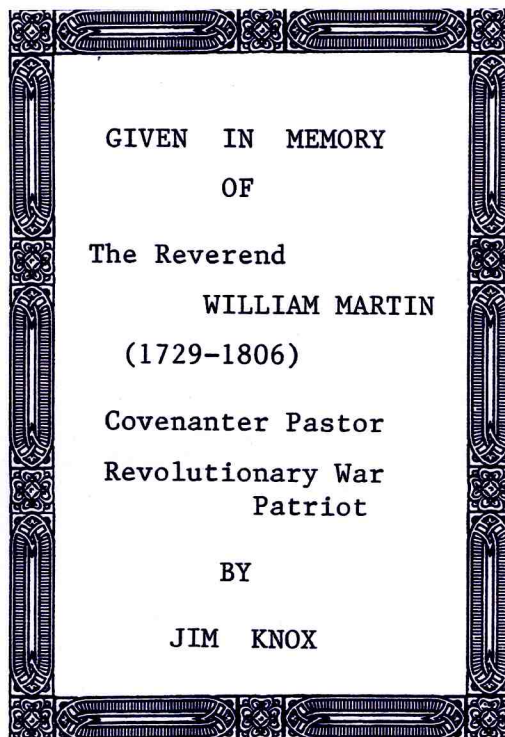


**THE COVENANTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORK OF THE REFORMED
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA**

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A. R. Presbyterians Carry On History

(This article was published in the News and Reporter, Chester, SC on October 18, 1978. It appears the writer confused the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, in both the title and also the photo captions which were in the original article.)

There were: 20 cars, with headlights on, moving down the rural Chester County road toward the old cemetery, led by a sheriff's escort and carrying about 75 Reformed Presbyterians, radiantly enthusiastic as they sang the old Psalms.

The people beside the road, in typical Southern fashion, took off their hats in respect for the dead.

What they didn't realize as the caravan passed was that the latest death involved had been in 1847. It was the historical commemoration of Reformed Presbyterianism in South Carolina, observed by the Southeast Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, on Friday and Saturday, October 13-14, in Chester County.

Over two centuries before, the first "Covenanters" had moved into the Piedmont along the banks of Rocky Creek, coming from Pennsylvania, but also from the old countries of Scotland and Ireland. John McDonald and his wife had pioneered the town of Chester in about 1750, only to be massacred by the Cherokees in 1761.

Crucial to the development had been the announcement posted by Rev. William Martin, pastor of the R.P. congregation of Kellswater, County of Antrim, N. Ireland, on Jan 3, 1772, "To give notice to his present and former hearers that have a design to embrace this favorable opportunity to go to a country (S. Carolina) where they may enjoy the comforts of life in abundance with the free exercise of their religious sentiments." Five boatloads sailed from Belfast in September of that year. As it turned out, the "abundance" consisted primarily of game to be hunted and trees to be felled, but the "free religion" was very real.

They built their first log house of worship The Rocky Creek Reformed Presbyterian Church building in 1773; and six other congregations were organized one by one. At the merger of many of the Reformed in the north into the new Associated [sic] Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1782, the Carolina societies continued the R.P. name and heritage until the official, national reconstitution of the denomination by James McKinney and his colaborers in 1798. To a large degree, today's Reformed Presbyterians owe their church to the Scotch-Irish of Chester County and elsewhere in the southern Piedmont.

The observance in Chester began with the communion service of the stated fall meeting of Southeast Presbytery on Friday evening, Oct. 13, Rev. David Alexander, pastor of Second Street Presbyterian Church, Albermarle, N.C., who had been responsible for planning the services, had engraved by hand over 100 polished brass communion tokens, disk-shaped, marked RPCES on one side and TOKEN 1978 on the other. Though distributed in advance, they were not turned in at the actual observance of the sacrament, as in the old days, but retained as souvenirs. The Presbytery had prepared psalm booklets and these were sung, just as in the old days. Dr. Barton Payne, professor at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., let [sic] the worshippers in reviewing the R.P. distinctive beliefs in respect to the inerrancy of Scripture and the anticipated earthly kingship of Christ, which marked Covenanters, then and now.

Saturday afternoon was caravan time. First stop was the site of what, after 1810, was the "Old Brick Church" of the Rocky Creek congregation. The building is gone, but the cemetery has been well kept by the Chester Scouts, encouraged by Dr. and Mrs. Malcolm Marion of Chester. The

iron gate and stone wall stand well preserved, for which the R.P. General Synod so faithfully took offerings in the 1890's and early 1900's.

Rev. Werner Mietling of the Lexington Church, N.C. had prepared xeroxed copies of four of the long poems that mark the graves of the former R.P. pastors Rev. Mr. King, McKinney, Riley, and Donnelly. The concluding lines on Rev. McKinney's gravestone still reads, "Spare boasts, truth's foes: though whirling winds to heaven Elijah bor, Elisha soon was given by Him who, in the greatest love, can raise Another champion in McKinney's place."

The Reformed Presbyterians began to move to Ohio and Illinois so that by 1832 only one congregation remained in South Carolina. But it was these covenanters who built the R.P. churches that have continued to this day in the "Northeast Territory", such as Sparta or Coulterville in southern Illinois.

Rev. Thomas Donnelly served as moderator for the 7th R.P. Synod in 1818; and it is true that next year (1979) will mark the 157th General Synod, R.P.C.E.S. But though he died in 1847 and the last R.P. Church in the area, Bethesda, at Hazelwood, Chester County, was officially dissolved in the following year, the gathering on Oct. 14 still maintained a number of personal links with the past.

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Faris came from Kansas City to represent their distant ancestor Faris, who had served as a ruling elder in the early days of the Rocky Creek congregation. Mr. Hugh Henry of Aiken, S.C. was present and related tales from the life of his great grandfather Henry who, at his death in 1867 was the last of the older S.C. Covenanters --- he would never affiliate with another denomination. If only he could have waited a little longer---well, 75 years longer, because it was not until 1942 that Reformed Presbyterianism returned to the Piedmont, with the Faith RP Church, Charlotte, N.C., and 1945, with the Augusta St. Church, Greenville, S.C.

From the cemetery, located seven miles out east of Chester (highway 44) the caravan wound its way to old Catholic, whose present building stands three miles west on highway 97. It received its name because it was "Catholic" (universal) for all the Scottish Presbyterian bodies, starting in 1759. The present (U.P.U.S.) structure back on the old site in the 1840's. But in 1773 the R.P.'s who by this time constituted the majority of the congregation, put up their own building, one mile southeast. As an early account describes it, "here in the summer of 1773 these pious Covenanters might be seen from day to day, felling trees and clearing a space of ground upon which they reared a large log meeting house, many of them living in tents at home, till a place was provided for their services." The caravan could only examine the site --- no building --- it had been burned by the Tories in 1780. The R.P.'s had no love for the English crown!

The last two stopping points were three miles east (highway 901) on the soil of Mr. Martin's own farm. There, by the stones that remained from his home, Mr. William Martin himself spoke to the group --- a descendant of the fighting pastor's brother, James Martin. Their family had moved to Illinois, but some later returned to South Carolina.

The group drank the cool water that still flows from the rocks, over which a spring house once stood. The final service was at the Rev. William Martin's grave nearby.

Before Rev. Lawrence Withington, of the Anderson Church, and moderator of the SE Presbytery, R.P.C.E.S., pronounced the final benediction, the tribute written by Adam Loughridege, principal of the Theological Hall, Belfast, of today's Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, which he had composed for the 200th anniversary of Martin's ordination (1757-he was the first R. P. minister to be ordained in Ireland) was read: "We accept the challenge of his life of courage and fidelity to principle, and we count it an honor to be the heirs

and successors of such worthy men in maintaining the same cause, "For Christ's crown and covenant."

So his heirs in America sang the stirring metrical version of Psalm 72, "Christ shall have dominion, over land and sea ...", inspired to live more faithfully for our Saviour and King.

Footnotes

1 Rev. D.S. Faris, "Reminiscences of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in South Carolina," The Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter Volume XIV, Feb. 1876, pp.57,58

2 William Melancthon Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America (Baltimore, MD: Hill and Harvey Publishers, 1888) p. 574

3 Robert Lathan, "An Excursion-III," The ARP, Volume XXXV, No. 36, 6 September, 1888

4 Glasgow, p. 602

5 Constitution and Minutes of the Reformed Presbytery of North America, p. 3

6 William B. Sprague, Annals of the American Associate, Associate Reformed and Reformed Presbyterian Pulpit (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1869) p. 28

7 Louise Kelly Crowder, Tombstone Records of Chester County, SC and Vicinity, Volume I (South Carolina Tricentennial, 1970) pp. 36-37

HOW TO GET THERE:

The Rocky Creek Cemetery is approximately 6 miles from Chester, SC. If you get on Highway 97 in Chester and head in the direction of Great Falls, SC, you will not go far until you veer off to the left on county road 44 on which you will travel until you come to a road on your right which is Fire Tower Road. Turn to your right on Fire Tower Road and go about a quarter mile. Look to your left. The pulpwood road on which the cemetery is located is hard to see. Park your vehicle safely on the main road and walk down the pulpwood road. You will pass through pines. Eventually you will come to the clearing where the cemetery is located.

POSSIBLE LOCATION OF THE OLD CHURCH BUILDING

March 21, 1996

During an excursion to the Rocky Creek Cemetery, Rev. William Roberts and I searched the surrounding area for the church site. It seemed to be a fruitless search because the ground outside the cemetery is covered with pine needles and pine trees. As we continued our search, about 200 feet north of the cemetery, we came across brick chips which appeared to be from very old brick. In the midst of the brick chips we found an arrowhead which was broken. Could this have been shot at the church building during an attack or had it been lost by hunters of long ago? We don't know.

It is our best guess that the Brick Church was located 200 feet north of the cemetery, perhaps covering part of the old pulpwood road. The terrain around the area of the cemetery also supports our guess. The area around the cemetery drops off, in some areas sharply. The area north of the cemetery has the largest level area for a building site.