The Old Bergen Church

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"The Old Bergen Church"

BY DANIEL VAN WINKLE

JANUARY, 1924

THE HISTORY of the "Old Bergen Church" organization is not only of great interest but is somewhat unique, in that its establishment marks the very beginning of civilization in the State of New Jersey. Founded in the very early settlement of our country, it has endured throughout all these years, sending forth continually a stream of influence for the uplift and betterment of the surrounding community. Those early pioneers brought with them from the homeland a spirit of godliness, and, notwithstanding the struggles and privations of pioneer life, they held fast to the Faith of the Fathers. They were a God-fearing people, and scarce were their home shelters built ere their cry was for a Church in which they might continue divine worship in the new land. Religion was to them something real and as entering into every phase of human life. They firmly believed that even the most trivial occurrences were under the control and direction of an over-ruling Providence, and their greatest endeavor was to establish and inculcate a dependence upon and firm allegiance to Him. In the early education of the young it was specifically required that they should be taught the Ten Commandments and the Catechism, and at stated times were to be catechised and instructed in the elementary truths of religion by the Pastor or Elders of the Church.

May we not briefly visualize the condition existing in those early days? Those who had come to this country from across the seas and were desirous of establishing a home in the new land were not impressed with the then narrow confines and limitations of Manhattan Island and looked with favor on the wooded heights of the west side of the Hudson. They found there evidence of the fruitfulness of the soil in the "maize land" of the natives, and likewise an abundance of material for home building, and they gradually secured land patents for their future homes, but they learned all too soon from bitter experience the insecurity and danger of living separate and apart. All about them lurked the savages, whose passions

were so easily aroused, and whose seemingly friendly advances were but precursors of treacherous attacks. To secure a better defence against such dangers they determined to gather together in some spot so that they would be better protected, and August 16th, 1660, as related, "several inhabitants of this province petitioned the authorities at New Amsterdam for the right to cultivate farms and plantations on the west side of the river behind Communipaw and to make there a village or concentration." This petition was granted, provided "that such village should be founded and placed on a convenient spot that may be defended with ease and to be selected by the Director General and Council, a beginning to be made within the time of six weeks after the drawing of lots," etc.

The location of the village was determined upon and has been preserved at Bergen Square, where the surrounding streets and avenues, viz. Newkirk and Vroom Streets on the North and South, and Van Reypen Street and Tuers Avenue on the West and East, mark the line of defences that were erected around the little village. The enclosure was divided into lots, upon which the dwellings of the settlers were erected, their farms being in the "buyten tuyn" or outside gardens. This must have been a busy time for those early settlers. As may be imagined, it was a year of hard work. While building their houses, their farm lands, which were located outside the palisades, were to be cleared, so as to be ready for cultivation the following Spring, while at the same time they must be on their guard from attacks by maurauding Indians, but with persevering energy they toiled on, and before the wintry blasts came down from the North their crude but comfortable homes were grouped within the enclosure, and now their thoughts turned to the necessity of a church building.

In those early days families gathered in neighborhood homes for their simple religious services, and they were as earnest and acceptable as the most elaborate held in ornate temples—such services were somewhat typified in the regular weekly prayer meetings held in neighboring dwellings in later years. As the settlement became more compact, the need of a building in which to meet for divine service was keenly felt.

Although no record has been found giving the exact date and location of the first Church in which the worshippers gath-

ered in Bergen, still from well authenticated tradition both have been determined with accuracy. In his Annals Dr. Taylor, alluding to the little Church, states: "It has been represented to have been a log structure and was for eighteen years an humble unpretending Tabernacle for the Most High. Tradition locates it on the ground now occupied by the family vault of the late Rev. John Cornelison within what is known as the old grave yard on the hill at the junction of Tuers Avenue with Vroom Street." From this, the date of its erection is easily ascertained. In the south wall of the present church building appears imbedded the corner stone of the old octagonal church that was erected on the plot of ground formerly belonging to the church, situate on the southwest corner of Bergen Avenue and Vroom Street, on which was inscribed the date of its erection, 1680. Eighteen years previous to this, as related by Dr. Taylor, would be 1662, and this date, taking into consideration the date of founding the village, 1660, and necessary time for the erection of homes, would appear to be at least the approximate time of the erection of the little log building. Within this rude structure their simple services were held for many years. Here the little congregation gathered and listened to the reading of the Psalms or a selection from a "sermon book" brought from Holland. From the membership book of the old Church it appears that in 1664 there were 27 communicants, 9 males and 18 females. These members were widely scattered, coming from Bergen, Aharsimus, Communipaw and Hackensack.

And now that the building was completed, the thoughts of the people turned at once to efforts for procuring their own minister. They had been accustomed to cross the river to New Amsterdam, as opportunity offered, to enjoy the preaching of the Gospel, but they missed their own Dominie, as he was called, and September, 1662, the Schout and Schepens, the authorities of the village, petitioned the Director General and Council to send them a minister, stating that "25 persons had agreed to contribute yearly the sum of 417 florins (somewhat over 100 dollars) for his support."

This petition was without result, and for many years they were obliged to be content with the reading of the services by the voorleser—who by the way was a very important individ-

ual, combining in his own person the duties of clerk of the consistory, sexton, undertaker, schoolmaster, as well as conductor of the religious services. In his absence the latter duty devolved upon one of the Elders. It is recorded that in one instance Uldrich Brouer officiated, and at another time Peter Marcellus did likewise.

The little log building erected on the hill for a time served the double purpose of a Church and school house, for in the crude and hurried life of those days both time and means would not admit of two buildings being erected for such similar purposes, as the church and school were so closely united.

In 1662 Engelbert Stuynhuysen was regularly engaged as voorleser and schoolmaster. Having difficulty with the authorities as to the terms of his engagement as schoolmaster, he resigned his office and was succeeded by Rynier Babtianse Van Giesen in 1665. He continued in office for 42 years. In 1708 Adrien Vermeulen was appointed as his successor and served until 1736. P. Van Benthuysen followed him, serving until 1761, when Abraham Sickels was the last of the voorlesers, serving until the arrival of the first minister in 1789. On the termination of Mr. Sickels' incumbency Mr. John Collerd was elected Clerk of the Consistory with a salary of 2 pounds and fifteen shillings per annum, the minister thereafter performing the regular church services.

At the close of the year 1665 the Church membership was reported as 38. The population gradually increased in numbers, and in 1686 those of the congregation of the Old Bergen Church, living at Hackensack and vicinity, separated therefrom and organized a Church of their own. Mr. Guillume Bertholf, who came from Zealand in 1684 and united with the Bergen Church, was chosen as voorleser of the new Church at Hackensack. Occasionally ministers from other Churches came over to administer the Sacraments at Bergen. In 1666 Dominie Samuel Megapolensis officiated at the observance of the Lord's Supper. From 1667 to 1671 Dominie John Megapolensis did the same Gideon Schaats from Albany, N. Y., is also mentioned in 1671, Rev. Wilhelmus Van Nieuenhuysen from 1672 to 1680, and Rev. Casparus Van Zuren from 1680 to 1682. According to Veerstag's translation of the account book of the Bergen Church these ministers were paid from 25 to 75 florins

for service besides expenses and board. The N. Y. ministers were obliged to pay six florins to the ferryman and six florins for a carriage from the ferry to Bergen. Peter Marcellus and Cornelius Brinkerhoff were the ones selected for the latter duty, the last named especially for many years carried the preachers between the two points. It was not, however, obligatory upon the minister to accept these conditions, for in 1720 Dominie DuBois was allowed 6 florins "whenever he found other means of conveyance or made use of his feet in coming to Bergen to preach." The Van Houten family seems to have been selected to board and entertain the ministers, for which service they received 12 florins in seewan for every visitor.

But the early Church struggled with financial difficulties with as great embarrassment as our modern organizations, for we learn that when the widow of the Rev. John Megapolensis wished to return to Holland after her husband's death, she was obliged to apply to the Classis of New York June 16th, 1674, for relief, with following result, as shown in minutes of the Classis. At a regular meeting this resolution was adopted: "Whereas, it has been represented to us that the widow of the deceased Dominie Megapolensis and that also Dominie Samuel Megapolensis, late ministers in this city, have still due to each of them for earned salary from the town of Bergen the sum of 100 florins wampum value, requesting that the sum be paid her rather, as said widow is going to Patria, therefore the Magistrates of the aforesaid town are on her presented petition recommended to use all possible means that said arrears may be forthwith paid and discharged."

May 2d, 1678, Dominie Van Zuren, who was located at Flatbush, Long Island, complained to the Classis at Amsterdam, Holland, because of his multifarious duties and probably asking for an increase of salary, stated that "Dominie Nieuenhuysen had obtained an increase and draws salary from the congregation at Bergen for administering the Communion there four times a year, therefore he can support himself much better than others", and again September 15th, 1681, he complained because "of the burden that had fallen upon their preachers on account of their labors in New York, Staten Island and Bergen."

But notwithstanding the disadvantages under which the

little congregation labored its numbers increased to such an extent that greater accommodation was sorely needed, and in 1680 they decided to build a larger edifice. Work was immediately commenced, and the building completed in May, 1681. The total cost of the church building, as shown by an itemized account, was 2,612 florins. Of this we find specified that 1000 paving stone, value 60 florins, was contributed by Aharsimus, and that nails and 1000 paving stone by Communipaw, value 177 florins. Another item states that 42 florins were paid "for 20 pounds of nails and two gallons of rum". May 23d the building was dedicated and the sermon preached by Rev. Casparus Van Zuren from Flatbush, the collection on that occasion being 97 florins and 10 stivers.

This building was located on the plot allotted to the Church (viz. southwest corner of present Bergen Avenue and Vroom Street). It was octagonal in shape and was surmounted by a belfry, but two years elapsed before the worshippers were called together by the sound of a bell, for not until 1683 were they able to secure one. When ringing the bell the sexton was obliged to stand in the center of the Church. The seats of the male members were ranged against the wall inside the Church, while the remaining space was reserved for the chairs of the women, which were the individual property of the occupants, and even now a few of these may be found, cherished as heirlooms, among the descendants of those early settlers. Another important as well as truly necessary adjunct to a comfortable Church service, in those days of inadequate heating apparatus, was the foot stove, a perforated wooden box with metal container in which was placed, before leaving home, live embers from the kitchen fire. This was borne to the Church by the worshipper and, being used as a footstool, dispelled the discomfort that might otherwise have somewhat interfered with a true devotional spirit.

To show the condition existing at this time, quotation is here made from a letter dated October 28th, 1682, written by the Rev. Henry Selyn to the Classis at Amsterdam, Holland:—

"I have been requested to preach to the people of Bergen, a village lying across the river, three times a year. This I do on Monday mornings and afternoons and also administer the Lord's Supper. I found there a new Church and upon admin-

istering the Communion found 134 members. At other times these people were accustomed to come over the river to service." Dr. Selyn seems to have officiated for a period of seventeen years, but during the last two years of his life in association with Rev. Gualtherous DuBois, who succeeded him in 1699 and continued his ministrations until 1751. Both of these men were Pastors of Churches in New York City, their ministrations at Bergen being in addition to their regular duties in their home Churches.

From our present standpoint it would seem that some of the methods for increasing the Church revenue were rather peculiar. Of course, there were the collections at the regular services, and likewise at times legacies and gifts were received, as is herein shown. In the Church records, September 29th, 1707, there is an entry of the receipt of money as follows, "per cassa (cash) of Maritje 900 florins, which she owed to Hans Harmanse deceased, which sum he had ordered upon his sick bed to be paid to the deaconry of Bergen." Another entry shows that "on Wednesday, November 6th, 1678, when Siebe Epkese (Banta) and Marytie Arianse Sip were united in marriage in the village of Bergen by the voorleser, the collection being 2 florins and 19 stivers." This amount, with others of like nature, was added to the poor collection.

But the thrifty habits of the Church officials led them to devise other methods for increasing the revenue, and it was determined to become, in a farming sense, "Stockholders" in a new enterprise. Several cows were purchased by the deacons and named according to their color or disposition as "Brown", "Wildone", etc. These were rented to responsible members of the congregation at a "butter rent" of 12 lbs. of butter per year or its equivalent in money. In 1679 the price of butter is quoted as having been 22 stivers per pound, so that from one cow the value of the rental received for that year was 13 florins and 4 stivers. The risk of loss or gain was equally divided between the contracting parties. If the cow died during the term of lease the loss was divided equally between the Church and the custodian, and likewise in cases of the birth of calves during the term, the market value of same was likewise equally divided.

In 1715 the deacons relinquished the butter business and

resolved itself into a loaning institution, loaning money at the rate of 6 per cent. per annum, and throughout the whole community for miles around Bergen became known as the financial centre.

Another curious source of income was the renting of the pall. This was a black cloth used to enshroud the coffin during the funeral services. December 5th, 1711, the receipts for the use of the pall since its first introduction amounted to 864 florins and 17 stivers. Practically all the collections were received in seewant, and in 1695 the amount accumulated was so large "that 4,000 florins in seewan were taken to Stephen Van Cortlandt for exchange into silver money."

In those early days wampum or seewan was universally used as a circulating medium. It was made from the shells of the quohog or clam found in great abundance on the Long Island shores. It was of two values and fastened on strings, three strings of black or six strings of white considered to be equal in value to one English penny.

From inspection of receipts from collections at the regular services it would seem that ministerial influence reached even to the pocket books of the congregation, for the contributions when the minister officiated often were four times larger than when under the ministrations of the voorleser.

After the erection of the first Church, a custom prevailing in the fatherland in reference to the burial of the dead was followed in a few cases. August, 1682, the daughter of Enoch Michelse Vreeland was interred within the walls of the sanctuary, and September 4th the same year Peter Marcellus was likewise buried there. An extra charge was made for this privilege. The last person mentioned as having been buried within the Church was "Annatje Jackson, aged 49 years, who died on Friday, January 13th, 1758, at about 8 a. m., and was buried on Sunday, January 15th, in the Church in the baptistry". Although the Church was the owner of a resting place for the dead, it was not compulsory to bury them there, and it was not unusual to set apart a plot on the home farm as a burial plot for the family.

The old burial grounds becoming crowded, in 1831 part of the Tuers farm, located opposite present Highland Avenue and adjoining the old graveyard on the south, was purchased

and divided into family plots to be used exclusively for the purpose of interment.

In 1690 the expense recorded as having been incurred for the burial of a pensioner of the Bergen Church itemized as follows:—

Coffin and spirits 25 florins and 10 stivers
One half keg of beer 15 florins 16 stivers
Flour and milk 6 florins and 5 stivers
Ansprecker 19 florins and 10 stivers
Sundries 15 florins and five stivers
Matthew Cornelise for carting the goods 3 florins
Total 85 florins and 6 stivers.

In 1750 the congregation had increased to 380 members, although the requirements for Church membership were rather exacting. The applicant was subjected to examination in Bible history, evidence of the truths of Christianity and the doctrines of the Reformed Church as given in the Heidelberg catechism. On satisfactory answers being received and no complaints made against the moral character of the applicant he was admitted into membership. The children were instructed in the tenets of the Church and several years of study were required before they were deemed able to submit to the examination, and throughout the years of their probation they were obliged to go weekly to the minister or voorleser to be questioned. The Church and school were very closely allied in those days, in fact the conduct and control of the latter was under the direct supervision of the Church authorities. The schoolmaster or voorleser was obliged to be a man of good moral character, well versed in the doctrines of the Reformed religion. The Pastor and Elders were given authority to enter the school and even the homes of the people to question the young as to their proficiency in the doctrines of the Church.

This was in accordance with the provision in the constitution of the Reformed Church, as follows: "The consistories in every congregation shall be careful to provide good schoolmasters who are able not only to instruct children in reading, writing and grammar and the liberal sciences, but also to teach them the catechism and the first principles of religion". Dr. Taylor relates that "he heard some of the most aged of his pastoral flock refer to the days of their childhood, when from

all parts of the township as it then existed, including Hoboken, Jersey City and Bergen Point, they and their schoolmates were busied with their lessons in Dutch and English, using principally as a reading book the Psalter and New Testament, and rather dreading the day for the good old Dominie's catechise."

And now for the first time, ninety years after its organization in 1660, it appeared as though the Bergen Church would be able to secure its first regular minister. It had become known that the Classis at Amsterdam had authorized one Peter De Wint to preach at New Netherland, and steps were at once taken to secure his services. The Consistory thereupon convened April 1st, 1750, to consider the conditions under which the call should be made. The resolution was adopted, to submit the following articles to the male members of the congregation:—

First—Whether a call should be issued to Mr. De Wint to become Joint Pastor of the Churches at Bergen and Staten Island?

Second—Whether he should be required to live in Bergen.

Third—Should the Bergen congregation build the parsonage and keep the same with surrounding grounds in good repair.

Fourth—The salary to be 40 pounds per year and divided equally between the two congregations.

Fifth—He to preach once every Sunday from November 1st until March 1st and twice each Sunday the remainder of the year. To administer the Lord's Supper four times per year and preach a preparatory sermon the Wednesday preceding the day of its observance.

Sixth—The Bergen congregation to supply the minister with sufficient firewood the year round.

Seventh—The congregation at Staten Island to provide him with a good carriage horse, but in case of his death or disability the minister to be obliged to procure another at his own expense. They (the Staten Island congregation) shall always procure food for the minister's horse.

Eighth—If on account of wind or rain storm the minister shall have to remain at Bergen when it is Staten Island's turn to have him preach there, he shall notwithstanding preach at Bergen on the following Sunday, but if in Winter he should be

prevented by ice he should repay those times as soon as possible.

Ninth—The minister's house should be built on grounds next to the Church.

Tenth—All males who pay for the Church and religious services shall be invited from the pulpit to appear at the house of Johannis Van Houten, when all the foregoing articles shall be read to them in order to deliberate about their content and to decide by a majority of votes.

At the meeting held in response it is stated "that none of those present had any weighty objections" and the assembly resolved "that the propositions of the governing Consistory were all right and ought to be acted upon as soon as possible." "Hereupon it was also resolved to submit the articles to the persons come over from Staten Island, and if the congregation of Staten Island approved of them, to call Dominie De Wint as soon as possible."

April 17th, 1750, Gerrit Post of Staten Island and the Consistory of Bergen called upon the Rev. Du Bois at New York, who was at this time officiating at Bergen, to make an agreement between the two congregations, and as a result the Rev. Peter De Wint was called as Pastor of the Reformed Churches of Bergen and Staten Island.

July 21st, 1750, the Rev. Du Bois took leave of the two congregations and introduced to them their new minister, who in the afternoon of the same day preached his introductory sermon as their Pastor. But it seems as though the Rev. Peter was a little too ambitious. Scarcely had he entered upon his duties before unpleasant rumors as to his fitness were circulated which, being investigated by the Classis at Amsterdam, Holland, on January 12th, 1751 (six months after his appointment) "he was declared to be a deceiver and his appointment and ordination as minister at Bergen and Staten Island in New Netherland annulled." The Consistory at Bergen was informed that the man whom they had chosen for their Pastor was an imposter and that the credentials he had presented were forged. He was consequently discharged by the two congregations and all connection severed June 23d, 1752.

Mr. De Wint while occupying the pulpit must have preached with acceptance, for when orders were received from the

Amsterdam Classis for his dismissal, they earnestly pleaded to be allowed to retain him, but the ecclesiastical authorities were adamant, and again the Bergen Church was without a Pastor and was obliged to rely upon a voorleser or elder to conduct their regular services.

Again was the little flock without a shepherd, and great was their sorrow. Although discouraged, they continued their efforts, but for the time being they were obliged to resort to the expediency of temporary supplies. A young man named William Jackson was known to be perfecting his studies under the charge of Rev. John Frelinghuysen at Raritan, N. J. After a searching investigation, on the 22d of June, 1753, the two Churches determined to issue to him a call. He was required to go to Holland and there continue his studies under the direction of the Classis of Amsterdam and there obtain his ordination. He accepted the condition with the understanding that he was to be paid 100 pounds for his support while there. He sailed for Holland and on arrival handed over to the Church authorities as stated, "his academic and ecclesiastical certificates with an accompanying call from the Churches of Bergen and Staten Island in North America." He applied himself diligently and after a time asked to be examined preparatorily and finally. This was granted him on condition that "before his admission to the ministerial office he make declaration that he will not co-operate in any plan to promote the erection of any independent Classis or Academy in New York or the neighboring provinces."

January 11th, 1757, he took his preparatory examination after a sermon preached by him on the text "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired you." He gave so great satisfaction that he was recommended to be admitted to the sacred ministry. April 4th, 1757, he took his final examination and "was ordained as minister of Bergen and Staten Island in North America."

The congregation had waited four years for the return of their minister, but during this interval they had not been idle. The parsonage promised him in his call had been completed, and upon his arrival at Bergen he found a comfortable home awaiting him. The comforts and delights of a true home life allured him, and his thoughts turned to the companion of his

student days—the daughter of his old teacher. He at once renewed the intimacy, with the result that within a short time after his return the parsonage had as occupants the newly married pair. He entered upon the duties of the ministry with enthusiasm. He is stated to have been a forceful preacher and was much sought after to fill the pulpits of other Churches. In one instance, as related by Dr. Taylor, "at the Raritan Church the assembly was so large that he was obliged to leave the pulpit and take his station at the church door to deliver his sermon", a greater number being without the church.

On one occasion, when preaching to a large congregation at New Brunswick and lengthening out his discourse far beyond the usual lenghth, a friend, in order to remind him of the passage of time, held up his watch. Mr. Jackson at once called out, "Schureman, Schureman, put up your watch, Paul preached till midnight," whereupon he resumed his preaching with renewed vigor.

Mr. Jackson was an uncompromising patriot, and during the Revolutionary War preached a sermon to the Tories who were stationed at Fort Delancy at Bergen Neck on the text, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you, and they covenanted with him for 30 pieces of silver," Matt. 26:15. He made special application of his text to his hearers, some of whom were members of his own congregation. He was arrested and taken before the commanding general at New York, charged with disloyal utterances. When asked why he preached against His Majesty, he justified himself by the reply "that he was only performing his duty". Fortunately Lord Howe and he were on terms of friendship and, after a reprimand, he was forgiven. He, however, continued the practice, and when remonstrated with by one of his congregation, replied, "Lord Howe has forgiven me, why can't you".

As the growth of the colony continued, the titles to land were questioned in some cases, and in 1764 a special commission was appointed by the Legislature to investigate the allotments made at the formation of the village, and in their subsequent report four plots of ground are mentioned as the property of the Church. The first plot mentioned and adjudged to be in the Church ownership "being that whereon the Church now stands with the burying yard adjoining to it." This is the

plot located on the southwest corner of Bergen Avenue and Vroom Street recently sold.

The second "being that whereon the parsonage house now stands, with the garden and a small piece of pasture land adjoining thereto"; a portion of this has been sold, the only part remaining in the Church ownership at this date is that on which the present Church and parsonage now stand, with the adjoining plot in the rear now occupied by the Bergen Tennis Club.

The third "is a farm lot lying southerly of the town of Bergen and back of Communipaw"; this was a large plot lying on the west side of present Bergen Avenue south of Communipaw Avenue, sold several years ago by the Church. The fourth plot, "being a lot of timbered land" located in North Bergen near present Grove Church. This was part of the common lands belonging to the village of Bergen and distributed among the owners of lots in the village for wood lots from which they might obtain their fuel or material for fencing. This likewise has been sold, so that at this date, January 1st, 1924, the only real estate belonging to the Bergen Reformed Church is the plot on which the Church and parsonage now stand, with the tennis court in the rear, and the old burying ground on which the little log building stood in the early history of the village, as to the ownership of which there has never been any doubt, together with the portion of the Tuers Farm adjoining on the south, previously mentioned. The property purchased by the Church as a parsonage for the Rev. Dr. Cornelison has also been disposed of.

December 20th, 1771, during the reign of George III. of England, a Charter of Incorporation was granted to the Church in the name of its then officials, viz.: Rev. William Jackson, Minister, Abraham Diedericks, Robert Sickles, George Vreeland and Abraham Sickles, Elders, and Johannis Van Wagenen, Hendrick Kuyper, Johannis Van Houten and Daniel Van Winkle, Deacons. As at the time of the allotment by the commissioners the Church had not been incorporated, it was adjudged wise for the persons named therein to execute a new conveyance to the Church as Trustees, and in 1799 such conveyance was made.

But the old Octagonal Church was becoming much dilapi-

dated. For 92 years it had been the place of gathering for the Bergen Congregation, but its condition made it necessary that some action should be taken in reference to its repair and enlargement, or the erection of a new and larger building. The latter was determined upon, and early in May, 1773, work was begun on the new house of worship. It was located on the same spot on which the Octagonal Church stood. Time will not permit a full description of the building, suffice it to say, the materials of the old Church were used as far as possible in the construction of the new. It was symmetrical in appearance, its architectural design being harmonious and attractive. Unlike the old Church, for the first time pews covered not only the main floor, but were likewise placed in the gallery. Sittings were sold, which at the death of the owner descended to the next of kin on payment of six shillings for such seat, called an heir seat.

A brief quotation from an address delivered by old Dr. Demarest in after years will explain somewhat the Church conditions, so to speak, in those early days. It will be remembered that a number of the communicants lived at a distance from the Church, he states. "They would make all their preparations on Saturday, so that they might start early in the morning, for the distance was nearly 20 miles and the roads were not macadamized, the wagons were springless and the farm horses not very fleet. Besides, it was desirable to have, after so long a journey, a half hour's rest before service, for the good of body, mind and soul. The proximity of the inn to the Church, customary in those days, was not an unmixed evil. Perhaps after the services some Van Horne, Van Winkle, Van Riper or Van Wagenen, Vreeland or Newkirk, would insist on taking the company home for dinner—for nothing pleased the Dutchman of that day so well as to have his table crowded on a Sunday by people whom he respected. . . . . Perhaps they brought their lunch with them and, having been refreshed by it, started on their tedious journey home, which they would not reach till after nightfall."

After ministering successfully for over 32 years Mr. Jackson at times experienced mental disturbances and committed indiscretions that rendered him unfit for the performance of ministerial duties, consequently he was advised to resign, and

on November 17th, 1789, he relinquished his claim to the pulpit. The Consistory at Bergen gave to him the use of the parsonage and surrounding garden for the term of his natural life. His death occurred July 25th, 1813, nearly 24 years after his retirement from active duty.

With the termination of his ministry in 1790 the connection between the Churches of Bergen and Staten Island was dissolved. After three years of temporary supplies the Churches of Bergen and English Neighborhood affected a union for the purpose of securing a Pastor, and on the 28th of November, 1792, the two congregations united in a call on the Rev. John Cornelison to become their joint Pastor. On the 26th day of May, 1793, he was ordained and installed as Pastor of the two Churches, with the understanding that two-thirds of his services were to be given to Bergen and one-third to English Neighborhood. To provide a parsonage for him the Bergen Church purchased the homestead of Cornelius Sip, then standing on the northwest corner of present Bergen Avenue and Bergen Square, the original parsonage built for Mr. Jackson still being occupied by him.

Dr. Cornelison was a good type of the old-fashioned Dutch Dominie. He considered himself a member of every family belonging to his congregation and was always heartily welcomed. He was deeply interested in the spiritual welfare of the children and frequently catechised them, and he likewise showed a special interest in the colored people of the community. It being the days of slavery, many of them were held as slaves by members of his congregation. He personally taught them the rudiments of the English language, and several of them became members of his Church, but previous to this time the colored race had been recognized, for as early as 1679 the name of Jochom Anthony, colored, is recorded on the membership roll of the old Bergen Church. In 1826 the old building was thoroughly repaired and renovated.

The *early* history of the Bergen Church may be said to have ended during the pastorate of Rev. Dr. Cornelison. A new era was dawning. The Dutch language was being gradually displaced by the English, which was becoming in a great measure the universal language, especially among the younger generation, the Rev. Dr. Cornelison being required to preach

in the morning at Bergen in Dutch, but in the afternoon to expound the catechism in English, and his preaching in English Neighborhood to be always in English.

But the labors connected with such a wide extended Parish, from Bergen Point to near Hackensack, with the increasing population, was becoming too onerous, and on December 2d, 1806, after 14 years of harmonious union, the connection between Bergen and English Neighborhood was severed, Dr. Cornelison becoming Pastor of the Bergen Church solely.

He was then required to alternate the language at public services, preaching one Sunday in Dutch and the next in English, but gradually the latter predominated and the Dutch language was only occasionally heard in the pulpit. The entries in the Baptismal Record, however, continued in Dutch until 1809.

Again quoting from Dr. Taylor, "An aged person, while visiting a son at Jersey City, for several days craved an opportunity for some conversation in his beloved Dutch language and was brought to our then quiet village, where many could be found to gratify his wish. He applied to the author (Dr. Taylor) for an introduction to some aged citizen with whom to spend an hour or two in social chat. In a few minutes he was in the presence of an octogenarian like himself, and soon the countenances of those venerable men—both then vigorous and active—brightened as they spoke in Dutch of the generations that were and presently of their school-boy days, each narrating the studies pursued and the playful pranks of boyhood, often followed by the rod of correction with stripes many, when one of them mentioned the name of the renowned Van Benthuysen as especially severe on his own back. Each in his native place had outlived a large majority of his early companions, but the psalter, the catechism, the schools and the venerated master of the schools were precious in their memories."

In the entries of the Church marriage records made by Rev. Dr. Cornelison the amounts paid for such services were entered after the names of each couple married by him as ranging from $1.00 to $20.00.

Dr. Cornelison was ably aided during his ministry by the labors of his wife, who was indeed to him a true helpmeet. One of her activities was to gather the children of the nearby

community at the parsonage on Sunday afternoons, relating to them stories taken from the Bible and in simple language instructing them in the way of right living. This was before the day of the Sunday School.

Dr. Cornelison labored with great success for 35 years, during which there were added to the communicants of the Church at Bergen on confession 244 and 23 by certificate from other Churches, and to the Church at English Neighborhood 30 on confession and 11 by certificate, the total additions to both Churches being 308. During the latter part of his pastorate his health began to fail, and in 1827 he was obliged to relinquish his active duties, and while incapacitated his pulpit was filled by supplies from other Churches, among them the Rev. Benjamin C. Taylor, then Pastor of the Church at Acquackanonck. Dr. Cornelison's death occurred March 20th, 1828, and in the discussion and search for a new Pastor, the preaching of Dr. Taylor was remembered, and when the congregation was called together to determine upon Dr. Cornelison's successor, he was virtually unanimously decided upon, the vote being 90 to 3. In order to ascertain more decidedly the sentiment of a larger number of the congregation, a personal visitation was made, the result being a confirmation of the previous decision by a vote of 116 to 6, and thereupon the call was issued on the 29th of May, 1828. It was accepted by Mr. Taylor, and he began his labors on the first Sunday of July following, being regularly installed as Pastor of the Reformed Church at Bergen July 24th, 1828.

The emotions experienced by Dr. Taylor at the time of the delivery of his first sermon as Pastor of the Bergen Church are here given in his own words:—

"The comeliness and neatness of the sanctuary as to its internal arrangements (having been but recently remodeled), the appearance of the worshippers in their plain apparel of domestic manufacture, a large number of the females with the ancient black bonnet resembling in shape those worn by nuns or sisters of charity which, being laid off during the service, showed the neat plain and snow-white caps in every part of the house (only the young female venturing to wear a leghorn or straw). The presence in almost every pew of one or more of those venerable forms whose hoary heads admonished me of

the responsibility I had assumed, prompted the inquiry, 'how can I presume to teach so many whose age and experience bid me sit at their feet and learn', but remembering the Savior's promise, 'Lo, I am with you', I took courage and said, 'I will trust and not be afraid'."

The natural growth of the county brought with it an increased congregation, and April 5th, 1841, the Consistory received three petitions signed by many heads of families, praying for enlarged accommodations for divine worship. A meeting was called and the matter fully discussed by the great Consistory, composed of all the Church officials, both present and past. It was decided to adjourn until May 3d for further consideration and likewise extending an invitation to all pewholders to meet with them.

The history of those early days shows clearly that no project of any importance, especially one that included the expenditure of money, was undertaken without first calling the pewholders together for their consideration and determination, as is illustrated in the following paragraph:—

"Resolved, That the Consistory of this Church be recommended to cause a plan of a Church to be made and the pews numbered, and estimate what the building will cost, and sell the pews according to said plan to the highest bidders before the present building be taken down."

There is in the possession of the Hudson County Historical Society a receipt dated July 23d, 1842, signed by the Rev. B. C. Taylor, for $90.00, covering the purchase of pew No. 135, located on the ground floor of the Reformed Church at Bergen, and also $6.50 for cushions and trimmings. These pews were considered as part of the estate of a deceased person, as witness by a public notice, also in possession of the Society, that the same pew number given would be exposed at public sale August 21st, 1854, and described as "an eligible pew on the floor of the Reformed Dutch Church of Bergen."

In accordance therewith the plan was procured and the proposed pews offered for sale. As the result of such action $9,905 were realized, but the actual receipts of such sale were reduced by allowance for the seats in the old Church. July 22d, 1841, contracts were executed for the erection of the building. On the last Sabbath of that month, viz. July 25th, 1841, the last public

services were held in the old building, where the people had gathered for divine worship for 68 years. The committee appointed for the superintendence of the work were Jacob D. Van Winkle, Garret Sip and Abraham Vreeland. The demolition of the old Church was commenced at once as also of the old parsonage built for Dominie Jackson while he was prosecuting his studies in Holland (the latter standing on the site determined upon for the new building where the present Church edifice is now standing, southwest corner of Bergen and Glenwood Avenues). The materials of these old buildings were to be incorporated in the new, and while the building operations were progressing the Church sessions were held in the old Columbia Academy on Bergen Square. The corner stone of the present Church building was laid August 26th, 1841, with appropriate ceremonies. The work progressed rapidly and the third Sabbath in March, 1842, the basement was so far completed that it was occupied on that date for religious service. On the 14th of July following, the Dedicatory Exercises were held with a large attendance and regular services resumed. On November 26th, 1842, a full report of the Building and Finance Committees were submitted with the allowance made for the value of the pews in the old Church held by private owners, approximating $20,000.

In 1851, the old parsonage at Bergen Square showing signs of decay, it was decided to erect a more modern building and the new parsonage, still standing on the northwest corner of Bergen Square and Academy Street, was completed. The entire cost of same, including fixtures and the digging of the well, was $3,944.80. This property, with the entire plot purchased as a parsonage for Dr. Cornelison, of which it is a part, was sold by the Church several years ago.

The annual donation parties were an interesting feature of the early Church-life and continued down through the greater part of Dr. Taylor's ministry.

The Historical Society of Hudson County has in its possession an invitation issued January 16th, 1862, of which the following is a copy: "You are cordially invited to the Annual Donation Visit to be made to the Rev. Dr. B. C. Taylor, D.D., of the Reformed Dutch Church of Bergen, on Thursday afternoon and evening, 30th ins., at the Parsonage." Signed by the committee. On such occasions the afternoon was devoted to the

reception of the older members of the congregation, but the evening was wholly given up to the younger set, and who that participated in these joyful events can ever forget the delights of "Pillows and Keys", "Copenhagen", or "Standing in the Hall" with a congenial partner. These Donation Visits were primarily intended to augment the domestic larder, but whether the contemplated benefit equalled the expectations of the donors or recipients depended upon the number and appetites of the participants.

In the olden days the minister, or dominie, as he was universally called, wielded almost supreme authority throughout the community. The reverence of the people for sacred things extended to him as being their spiritual advisor and they looked to him for guidance in the ordinary affairs of life. Likewise because of his superior learning, he was regarded as the natural arbiter of all differences.

But with changing conditions, with the increasing possibilities for the acquisition of knowledge, a newer generation sprang up and this special reverence waned until at last, as related by Dr. Taylor himself, on an occasion when an improvement, to which he was opposed, was carried through: "Time was when the people listened to the old Dominie, but they don't any more."

During his pastorate his ministrations extended over a vast extent of territory, for members of his congregation resided at North Bergen, Hoboken, Aharsimus, Communipaw, Greenville and Pamrapo, and his pastoral visitations consumed a considerable portion of his time. But the increase of population in the different sections demanded Church organizations of their own, and consequently the Parish of the old Bergen Church was gradually reduced until, at the latter part of his incumbancy, the old Bergen village with its immediate surroundings furnished most if not all of his congregation. True, some of the older members from these distant sections continued their connection with the old Church until failing health decided otherwise, but the number rapidly grew less and the congregation was confined to nearby residents. The scattered congregation of the olden time had gradually withdrawn from the Mother Church as opportunity offered neighborhood sanctuary privileges and the members alluded to by Dr. Demarest as previously made mention, were no

longer obliged to make their weary uncomfortable journey to attend Church services.

At the time of the installation of Dr. Taylor in 1828, there were only four Churches in what is known as Hudson County, viz: St. Matthews Episcopal, and a Presbyterian Church. later becoming the Grand Street Reformed, both located in lower Jersey City, a small Methodist organization in North Bergen and the old Bergen Church. But during his Pastorate of 44 years he aided in the organization of many others. He was deeply interested in the education of the young and was at one time the Superintendent of the Public Schools of the City of Bergen. The nucleus of a Sunday School had been formed before his arrival and the meetings held in the old Columbian Academy. Immediately on his installation he incorporated it as part of the Church organization.

After a long, active pastorate, preaching over a term of 42 years, owing to failure of health Dr. Taylor was made "Pastor Emeritus" and continued as such until his death February, 1881.

Rev. James L. Ammerman was installed as his successor May 7th, 1871. A remarkable degree of mutual confidence and sympathy existed between these two, and thus were happily combined the buoyancy and strength of youth with the wisdom and experience of age. What might be called the joint administratin of these two clergymen continued as long as the old Dominie was able to co-operate. Dr. Ammerman ministered faithfully to his congregation until June 1st, 1876, when, feeling that he was called to perform active personal missionary work in foreign fields, at his own request he was dismissed and became a missionary to Japan.

The Church was without a Pastor for only two months when the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Brett was called and installed August 1st, 1876.

Although Dr. Taylor was declared "Pastor Emeritus" several years previous to Dr. Brett's installation, he presided on that occasion and accasionally during the interval performed simple services, but his failing health caused his entire relinquishment of all duties and he quietly passed to his reward at the age of 81.

It is scarcely necessary to speak at length of Dr. Brett to the present generation. He was known throughout the whole

county as a man of superior mental attainments. He was popular in the fullest sense of the word, not only as a preacher, but as a citizen and soldier likewise. In the pulpit he presented the Faith of the Fathers in all its purity and simplicity, yet without the stern unyielding doctrine of retributive justice. He was a firm believer in the brotherhood of mankind and not only preached that doctrine with earnestness, but throughout his whole life exemplified his belief in it, in his intercourse with his fellow men.

But his activities were by no means confined to the pulpit. He was prominent in the civic and social life of the community, always advocating with earnestness whatever was for the betterment of the community. His social temperament gave him great power with all classes of men and through his intercourse with them was able to effect in a quiet way, an influence for good that was felt throughout the whole community.

His military life is fully well known. He loved his regiment and his military associates and carried with him there all the loving characteristics that so charmed his associates, but he was at the same time extremely observant of true soldierly requirements. For eight years he faithfully performed his duties as Chaplain and left the impress of his personality upon all with whom he came in contact.

The continuous growth of the congregation and added burdens in connection therewith demanded pastoral assistance, and Rev. William V. D. Strong became Dr. Brett's efficient helper. After three years of congenial association, Mr. Strong was called to a pastorate of his own and the connection was dissolved. Shortly after the Rev. John J. Moment was elected Associate Pastor with Dr. Brett and ministered acceptably until he too was called to become Pastor of his own Church at Newark, N. J.

Notwithstanding Dr. Brett's failing eyesight, he continued to preach with his accustomed vigor, but was unable to perform his pastoral duties efficiently, and Rev. Abram Duryee was called as his assistant. Mr. Duryee's temperament and executive ability enabled him to at once take up the work for which he was intended with efficiency, and under the joint efforts of the two Pastors the old Bergen Church continued to flourish. Soon, however, Dr. Brett's increasing infirmities impelled his complete

withdrawal from active Church service, and in 1920 he was declared "Pastor Emeritus". During the time of Mr. Duryee's labors with Dr. Brett he received an appointment to an important position in the Educational Board of the Reformed Church, but on the retirement of Dr. Brett from active service Mr. Duryee consented to fill the pulpit of the old Church for a specified time.

In 1919, Rev. Willard P. Soper was called as the regular Pastor, but after a short service of a little over three years he accepted a call to a Church at Stamford, Conn. The Bergen Church was, however, but a short time without a regular Pastor, for a call was extended to the Rev. James S. Kittell of Albany, who accepted and was installed 1922, and entered upon his duties with characteristic energy. The Church and Parish House being greatly in need of renovation and repair, it was decided to restore the interior of the Church building as far as possible to its original colonial condition and adding several needed modern improvements.

This work is now being carried on and when completed it is hoped that a sanctuary will be presented, comfortable and attractive and worthy of being designated as the house of the Living God.

Notwithstanding the changes that have taken place, the Church remains with the sanctity of past years enshrouding it.

The same doctrine as of old is being preached, the same welcome extended and the same efforts made to make this part of the world, at least, a more fitting place in which to live.