



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HACKETTSTOWN, NJ

(a brief history)

When the area around Hackettstown began to be settled by European immigrants in the early 1700s, a number were of the Presbyterian faith. This group began requesting supply ministers from the New Brunswick Presbytery as early as the 1750s. The first church structure known as the Yellow Presbyterian Church of Lower Hardwick was constructed in 1763-64. The land was deeded to the congregation by Obadiah Ayers in 1764. The first called supply minister was Rev. Francis Peppard in 1772. He shared his time with the Upper Hardwick church.

In 1786 the Board of Trustees was incorporated and that same year an agreement was made with the Ayers family for the burial ground next to the meetinghouse. That year also the Rev. Peter Wilson was called at an annual salary of 50 pounds plus a house and parsonage. His time was split with the Mansfield Woodhouse Church (Washington).

In 1809 the congregation called the Rev. Dr. Joseph Campbell to lead them for the next 29 years. A new church building was erected in 1819 while the original structure was sold and moved to Beattystown as part of a barn on the property of the late J.T. Labar. This second meetinghouse boasted large and beautiful spires, a sounding board over the pulpit, choir in the gallery, and aisles carpeted with striped carpet. During Rev. Campbell's tenure the Sunday School was formed in 1812. Jacob Day was the first superintendent and the first assistant superintendent was Peter D. Vroom who later became governor of the State of New Jersey. Rev. Campbell is buried beside his wife in the old churchyard.

In 1859 steps were begun to erect a "new and more commodious church building" across the street from the original sanctuary. This edifice was dedicated in August of 1862 on the same day as the Rev.

George C. Bush was installed. The original site continued to house the Sabbath (or Sunday) School and was itself remodeled for such purpose with a Lecture Room and Infant School Room attached in 1875.

From the 1850s through the 1880s the congregation planted new churches in Rockport, Schooley's Mountain, and Beattystown. In 1889 the old parsonage property was sold and a new Manse was constructed on the lot to the rear of the church in 1890.

In 1907 there were major renovations to the church sanctuary overseen by the Rev. Dr. James W. Martyn and the congregation. The exterior was repaired and repainted and the slate roof was replaced. The interior saw the long box galleries replaced with a circular balcony, new golden oak pews in a semi-circle, new carpets, a new pipe organ, new stained glass windows, and a new steam heating plant.

The color scheme was green with white and gold trimmings. The large stained glass windows were donated as memorial gifts; smaller ones were given by the Young People's Church Association and the Intermediate Society of Christian Endeavor. A marble baptismal font was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice of Athens, PA in memory of Archibald Stewart, the first president of the Board of Trustees in 1786. Besides individual contributions, the Pastor's Aid Society contributed greatly to the renovation project.

In the early 1960s a large annex was added to the 1860s church building which allowed for a Pastor's Study, kitchen, church secretary's office, music room and other areas.

The congregation called their first woman pastor in 2009, the Rev. Birda Buzan Ferguson.

Over the years the name has changed: from Lower Hardwick PC, Presbytery of New Brunswick to PC of Independence to FPC of Hackettstown, Newton Presbytery. But the desire of the congregation to deepen their faith and show God's love in the world through their actions remains.

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