

HISTORY OF THE ROBINSON'S RUN CHURCH AND CEMETERY



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The Associate Reformed Church of North America, Robinson's Run, South Fayette Township, was formed about 1772 as members of several Presbyterian groups crossed the mountains and settled in this area. The congregation organized by these people got its name from the stream running just northwest of the church. Robinson's Run received its name from a man named Robinson who had acquired a large tract of land in this area called "Tiperary". Some members traveled as far as 15 to 20 miles to attend, as it was one of not more than two or three congregations in the county.

They first worshipped in a tent which was erected before 1790. It was a raised platform having one side and one end closed, and a roof which sloped toward the closed side. This was for the Minister and the "clark", who led the praise service. The congregation was seated on logs in front.

The church was duly organized in 1790, with 188 members, and plans were made to build a log church. The Rev. Howitson officiated at this time. The log church erected in 1790 was built by the congregation on land which they purchased for \$13.00 from Jacob and Margaret Hanson and which was formerly granted to John Lee Webster. Each family hewed and hauled so many logs, then had a "raising" which took 8 days. It was all volunteer work and was seated by contract. These seats were movable and were carried outside to the tent in the summer, weather permitting. Communion was by token which one received earlier in the week if he had attended Preparatory Service. This church which stood within the graveyard, a little east of the first gate was used during the long pastorate of Rev. Riddell, who served from 1794-1829. The Rev. Riddell was a graduate of the University of Glasgow, Scotland, and emigrated from that country.

Rev. Riddell was a small man with piercing black eyes, a superior scholar and a powerful debater. No one among the early ministers of the Associate Reformed Church was more strongly attached to the principles of the church, or more able to defend them. He served 35 years and is buried in the old section of the Cemetery.

The first brick church was built between 1833 and 1835, 50' x 70'. 16' high with 5 double doors, 20 windows, 88 pews, a pine roof and was used 33 years. In 1834 Rev. Moses Kerr, Jr., served 6 months, and left April 25, 1835. Rev. William Burnett served from 1836-1838. The first Ruling Elders were James McBurney, Matthew McConnell, William Robb, John Wallace, Robert Campbell, James Robb, John Scott and John Berry.

Rev. James Grier served the longest pastorate in the church history 1839-1878. He was a preacher of more than average ability, possessed of good social qualities, much beloved by his people, and greatly respected by all who knew him. He served 39 years and is also buried in the old section of the cemetery. With his loving care and the blessings of God a steady growth marked their progress up to 1850 when Venice Church was organized, taking 50 members.

At that time union of the Associated and the Associate Reformed bodies was formed and gave the church a new name "United Presbyterian". A new version of the Psalms was adopted and the old custom of distribution of "Communion Tokens" was discontinued.

The third church, built of brick, 53' x 84' and 20', was erected in 1865 on land which they exchanged and secured by deed from Thomas McEwen containing 5 acres,

1 rod, and 16 perches for \$2.00. Needing more room for sheds, in 1883 the congregation secured land containing 320 lots from James McEwen for \$116.25. In the Spring of 1889 they received as a gift a piece of land lying at the east corner of the cemetery containing 3 acres on which they erected a parsonage, the whole property costing about \$3,000.00. The first Deacons were James Miller, W. J. Wallace, Andrew Shane, Francis Jamison, James Robb, John Morgan and John K. Cook.

In 1876 another group left to form the McDonald Congregation, 17 members and two ruling elders, On August 8, 1889, the Oakdale Congregation was organized taking 28 members. Rev. J. W. English became the fifth pastor and served 30 years, 1879 until the church re-located in McDonald, Pa., and resigned August 30, 1909.

In 1893 every pane of glass in the building was broken by an explosion of a Nitroglycerine Magazine, half a mile away in Oakdale. The congregation remodeled and refurbished the whole interior of the building at a cost of about \$4,000.00 making a comfortable circular seated auditorium and two large class rooms, in 1895.

On Easter Sunday, March 30, 1902, the church was demolished by a great storm. "The Sabbath morning dawned bright and beautiful, giving no hint of the awful havoc to be wrought before the day was done. As the service began at 11:00 a.m. a few drops of rain fell, but a little later the sun shone out brightly. About 11:40 the room suddenly grew dark with the gathering storm, a violent gust of wind swayed the locust tree at the side of the building, followed instantly by a tremendous blast which struck the west end of the building, lifting the roof and carrying portions of it hundreds of feet away."

"This left the gable unsupported and the wind hurled it inward. It brought down with it a section of the ceiling about 18' x 30', the whole mass of brick and timbers falling on the pulpit platform where the pastor was standing and on the front rows of pews. Those not pinned down fled to the yard in terror, but instantly ran back to the rescue of those under the debris. In a pelting rain and hail they were carried to the parsonage, about 500' away."

"In a very short time Drs. Taylor, Miller, LaRoss, Dickson and Douglass of McDonald and Dr. W. P. Taylor of Noblestown were dressing the wounds."

"Those requiring their attention were the following: Mrs. Paul Averill, head cut; Leon Averill face and skull fractured in two places, seriously hurt."

"Robert Patterson, age 10, head and face cut, compound fracture of the left leg below the knee, very seriously hurt; Margaret Patterson, age 8, back bruised; Mrs. J. T. Patterson, mother of Robert and Margaret, head cut, shoulder and arm bruised."

"Mrs. Josephine Masquelier, head cut and body bruised; Grace Smith age 10, head cut; Katy Smith, age 8, head cut and skull fractured. Mary G. Wallace, Sabbath School Teacher, head cut, shoulder and arm bruised, painfully injured; Rev. J. W. English, the Pastor, head cut and body bruised."

"Many others were cut and bruised but did not require medical attention. That any of those under the falling wreckage came out alive is a wonder, all recovered." The only fatality occurred when Levi Gregg was dismantling the remaining structure and he fell from the rafters, sustaining a fatal injury.

The church services were held in Arlington Schoolhouse which was located on the hill above the church, and is now part of the Cemetery. A chapel was built on a lot at the corner of Lincoln and Center Avenues in McDonald, Pa., and was dedicated January 31, 1904.

In 1874 James McEwen had laid out a plot of 320 lots adjoining the old burial ground surrounding the church built in 1865. More land was added from time to time until it contained 531 lots. This was the original plan of the cemetery. On the death of Mr. McEwen, by his will, he directed that the cemetery be incorporated and managed by seven trustees named in the will. They met in August 1903,; James Wallace, T. A. Campbell, G. W. Hoffman, James Kelso, J. Cook, W. J. McEwen and James Clark and organized and directed that a charter be applied for, which was done under the laws of the State of Pennsylvania. In Mr. McEwen's will he also directed that a piece of land laying between the cemetery and his homestead be laid off in lots.

In 1906 the Trustees of the Robinson's Run Cemetery entered into an agreement with the Robinson's Run U. P. Church whereby the cemetery was to receive the ground where the church had stood and the hitching ground surrounding it, in consideration that they would take charge of the old burial ground and keep it in good order, the church having relocated in McDonald.

The cemetery since then has added to its holdings, having purchased the public school lot adjoining in 1913 and a piece of land from Adam Kress comprising about four acres, which was laid out in 1916. More land was purchased from James McEwen on the east side of the road in 1923, property bordering on the north in 1941, and the Kirk home and buildings in 1945. An additional 14 acres was purchased from Ralph Ziegler in 1985.

The care and growth of the cemetery can be attributed to the time and effort given it by the following Superintendents: David Campbell Kirk from 1904 to 1943; Clair Porter from 1944 to 1967; Clair "Bud" Porter and his wife Ruth Ann took over in 1968, Clair serving until his death in 1983 and Ruth Ann Porter serving until the present.

It appears there were burials in the old cemetery ground prior to 1790, but the two oldest marked graves are Rachel Dickson who died May 20, 1798 and Agnes Dickson, who died February 11, 1799. The tombstone on this family plot bears the following verse:

There is a Land of Souls
Beyond this sable shore,
Where sorrows, tears and Death
and aprtings come no more.
Its Light is Jasper like
Its Gates like Pearly Dew
Its Walls of Glittering Gems
Its Streets of Golden Hue
Its King, the Lamb of God
Lifes Waters cease there never
Its Citizens abide
Forever and Forever.

The names of many prominent people who helped make this community and country what it is today are found on the stones marking their resting place. One of which is Elizabeth Gilmore Berry, who was a nurse at Valley Forge during the American Revolution and fought in the ranks at the side of her husband John Berry. After the war they moved to a farm near McDonald and she died 8/21/1824, 68 years of age. A large monument was erected in her honor by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Another monument was placed in honor of Thomas Abbott, a Klansman who was killed in the riot in Carnegie, Pa., on August 25, 1923 between the Ku Klux Klan and the townspeople, by his fellow Klansman of Washington, Pa..

The two most distinguished monuments are: the Soldier's Monument erected on the spot where Company D, 149th. Pennsylvania Volunteers, "Bucktail Brigade", was organized on August 22, 1862. "This monument we erected at the "Old Hill Church" the Cemetery being known as "Robinson's Run Cemetery", near McDonald, Pa. in 1907, by the members of Lt. S. M. Adams Post No. 330 of the Grand Army of the Republic of Pennsylvania, with financial assistance from patriotic friends and citizens."

The monument is of fine Vermont granite, handsomely finished and is dedicated to the memory of the soldiers of the Civil War who are buried in this cemetery. There are 13 Revolutionary War Veterans, 52 Civil War Veterans, over 200 World War I Veterans and many Veterans from World War II, Korean War, Spanish American War, Vietnam Conflict and The Gulf War buried here.

The Mankedick Mausoleum Vault was built around 1880 and is the only mausoleum in the cemetery.

In recent years there have been three structures added to the Cemetery. In 1970 the old Kirk home was demolished and a new brick home built for the current Superintendent and his family. In 1976 was built "The James McEwen Chapel" located near the main entrance of the cemetery. This is used for burial services if a family so wishes. Then in 1980 a large concrete block storage/maintenance building was constructed for the protection of the machinery and equipment. In 1993 a cemetery office was added on the side of the Superintendent's home.

Robinson's Run Cemetery is still governed by a board of Trustees as stipulated in its charter of 1903, and the will of James McEwen.