

May 1972

RACCOON CHURCH
Tour Guide
GRAVEYARD - GROUNDS - BUILDING

The graveyard is made up of four sections: (1) the original, which extends from near the church eastwardly to the first cross drive; (2) the 1870 addition, which lies between the first and second cross drives; (3) the 1883 addition, which lies between the second and third cross drives, and (4) the 1918 addition, which lies beyond the third cross drive and the end drive of the 1883 addition.

The date of the first burial at Raccoon, like the date of the first church service will never be known with certainty. The oldest reference in writing to a church service is in the diary of the Rev. John McMillen who recorded that he preached there in 1778. The oldest record in writing of the church is a pastoral call to the Rev. Joseph Patterson in 1789. The oldest record in writing of the graveyard in the inscription on the grave stone of Martha Bigger, who died 1780.

Martha Bigger - died May 20, 1780 - age 78 years
Thomas Bigger - died Feb. 7, 1829 - age 89 years

Martha and Thomas were mother and son. They settled on land in the present vicinity of Robinson Church. In fear of Indians, they removed temporarily to the Millers run district, where Mrs. Bigger died. Thomas was a signer of the 1789 Patterson call. Note the date of birth of Mrs. Bigger, 1702. The buried history of the graveyard began, at least, 270 years ago.

Mrs. Bigger's grave was not the first in the graveyard. According to legend retold in an address made at the Raccoon Centennial of 1882 by Col. William Farrar, the first burial was of a little girl, not named, who died of sickness in nearby Fort Beelor at a time when settlers had gathered there for protection from a threatened Indian raid. The next burials, according to this address, were of two men of the name of McKinley who, while hunting stray horses, had been slain by Indians.

In the same year of Mrs. Bigger's death, four victims of an Indian raid, which is well documented, were buried nearby in the graveyard. The slain men were two sons of William McCandless, a Mr. McNely and Robert Shearer, Jr. Later, under circumstances which are not made clear by local historical accounts, Robert Shearer, Sr. and his son, Hugh, were killed by Indians and their bodies were buried near the grave of Robert, Jr. The locations of these graves are not known.

Mary Christy, wife of Samuel - died 1851 - age 76 years
Elizabeth Christy, wife of James - died 1858 - age 79 years
(central near the church)

Mary and Elizabeth were the two children of the Robert Shearer who was slain by Indians. At the time of his death, Mary was one year old and Elizabeth was five.

Rev. Joseph Patterson - died 1832 - age 80 years
(central and near the church)

This monument is a cenotaph and not a grave marker. Mr. Patterson was the first pastor of Raccoon Church (1789-1815) and this was his only charge, except for the first ten years it was joint with Montour. His last years were spent in Pittsburgh and he died and was buried in that city. His friends of Raccoon wanted a memorial of him at the seat of his labors and erected this cenotaph

John McDonald - died 1817 - age 77 years
Martha McDonald, wife of John - died 1830 - age 90 years
(close to cenotaph)

Mr. McDonald was a signer of the 1789 call to Mr. Patterson and the McDonald family worshipped at Raccoon until the First Presbyterian Church of McDonald was organized. Mrs. McDonald, Martha Tarvan Noble McDonald, was a daughter of Col and Mrs. Henry Noble of Noblestown. Mr. Noble also was a signer of the Patterson call. According to a family history, the twin sons, Andrew and William, of Mr. and Mrs. McDonald were born May 10, 1779 in Fort Beelor, where the expectant parents had gone to assure that the coming event would take place in safety.

George Allison - died 1840 - age 65 years
Martha Allison, wife of George - died 1855 - age 67 years
Robert Glenn - died 1837 - age 52 years
Margaret Glenn, wife of Robert - died 1860 - age 75 years
(close to McDonald stone)

Martha Allison and Margaret Glenn were daughters of John and Martha Noble McDonald. Robert Glenn was a signer of the Patterson call.

Christopher Smith - died 1811 - age 45 years
Sarah Smith, wife of Christopher - died 1825 - age 48 years
(near the cenotaph)

Mr. and Mrs. Smith were the tavern keepers of early days. Their place of entertainment was conducted at the sign of "The Greentree" a short distance east from the locations of the present home of Robert and Marie Smith and the home of Harold Cerezo on the ridge between Candor and Midway. An old Pittsburgh Drove Road, now vacated at this section, passed the place.

Joseph Scott - died 1822 - age 58 years
Mary Scott, wife of Joseph - died 1822 - age 56 years
(south from the cenotaph)

Joseph Scott was a signer of the 1789 pastoral call to Patterson. He was one of Mr. Patterson's elders. He was a major in the War of 1812. They were the parents of Jane Scott Sturgeon whose headstone is nearby.

William Sturgeon - died 1836 - age 80 years
Mary Sturgeon, wife of William - died 1846 - age 87

John Sturgeon - died 1868 - age 79 years
Jane Sturgeon, wife of John - died 1892 - age 97 years
(southeast from cenotaph)

The Sturgeon home was located to the north of the site of the present village of that name; 6 miles, more or less, from Raccoon Church which the family attended for three generations. John Sturgeon was a brother of Daniel Sturgeon, United States Senator from Pennsylvania (1839-1851) and was an elder of the church. He, also, was a colonel of the U. S. Army. Mrs. John Sturgeon was a relative of William Henry Harrison, 9th President of the United States. She once travelled by horseback over the mountains to Washington, D. C. After the death of John, his family moved to Candor and lived there until the close or closing of their lives. Margaret S. Sturgeon, daughter of John and Jane, wrote a history of Raccoon Church to the year 1899.

William T. Annen - died 1876 - age 60 years
Maria Annen, wife of William - died 1902 - age 86 years
(southwest corner of the graveyard)

Mrs. Annen was the daughter of Thomas and Nancy Ravenscraft Trimmer. Thomas, her father, was a son of a sister of General Anthony Wayne of the Revolution.

Jane McFarland, wife of Samuel, - died 1853 - age 39 years
Matilda McFarland, wife of Samuel - died 1865 - age 42 years
(southeast corner of original section)

Samuel McFarland was the son of the Samuel McFarland who laid out and sold some of the lots of the village of Candor. Jane McFarland, his first wife, was born Jane VanLiman. Matilda McFarland, his second wife, was born Matilda Duncan. She, Matilda, was killed by a run-away team on a Sunday morning in sight of the members of the congregation who had arrived earlier for the service. It has been said that her long and full skirt caught on the surrey step and she was dragged to the front of the church, where the horses stopped of their own accord.

Benjamin Chestnut - died 1843 - age 80 years
Ann Chestnut, wife of Benjamin - died 1836 - age 75 years
(east from the cenotaph)

Benjamin Chestnut was a veteran of the War of the Revolution and was an elder of the church.

Matthew Bailey - died 1836 - age 86 years
John Bailey - died 1851 - age 86 years
(northeast from cenotaph)

Matthew and John were sons of Alexander Bailey, Matthew being the eldest and John, the youngest. Alexander and his sons were the settlers of three original tracts of land on the creek, about a mile north from the church, which bears the family name. Alexander was an elder of the church and all three men signed the 1789 call to Patterson.

Thomas Bavington - died 1862 - age 70 years
Henry Bavington - died 1848 - age 66 years
(near northwest corner of graveyard)

Thomas and Henry were sons of Capt. John Bavington who settled on land which became the site of the village bearing the family name. John was drowned in the Ohio river on a trip to Steubenville in 1810 and his body was buried at Cross Roads, now Florence.

Thomas Partridge - died 1850 - age 86 years
Ann Partridge - died 1842 - age 72 years
(near southwest corner of graveyard)

The Partridge family settled on land which became the site of the village of Santiago. They called their tract "The Partridge Nest."

The locations of the homes of the people whose names have been mentioned indicate the extent of the territory which the old graveyard originally served. It extended to include the present locations of Noblestown, Sturgeon, McDonald, Cherry Valley, Joffre, Bavington, Murdocksville and Santiago. Close to 400 stones remain in this old part of the cemetery. Many are illegible but a leisurely search will disclose many names of families who lived in the district during pioneer days.

The 1870 addition to the cemetery, as stated, extends between the first and second cross drives. The largest monument in this section, the one with the ball on the top, is that of Jesse and Rebecca Scott. Mr. Scott died in 1894 at the age of 67 years. He was the first or among the first of donors to a permanent fund for the upkeep of the cemetery.

The 1883 addition to the cemetery, as stated, extends between the second and third cross drives. The central monument of this section is the one of the Clark family, former owners of the land. They reserved a plot, 96 by 192 feet, from their deed to the church. Most, if not all of the bodies buried here have been removed to another cemetery.

The Clark family, James and his descendants, once owned all the land in the village of Candor and adjacent to it on the north, east and south. Their holdings amounted to 600 acres, more or less; mostly made up of two original tracts. One tract was called "Big Levels" and one, "Springfield."

Joseph Patterson, first pastor of the church (1789-1816), bought the part of the Clark land lying to the north, now owned by John Roman, and made his home there during his pastorate. This farm was a part of Big Levels and it extends northwardly to include the woods of Beech Hollow.

Moses Allen, second pastor of the church (1817-1838), bought the farm on the west, now owned by M. Rauscher, and made his home there during his pastorate. This farm was made up of parts of two original tracts, one called "The Purchase" and one, "Beautiful." The home was then on a public road but now, because of road relocation, is at the end of a long lane. There is a hillock between the road and the home on which a power line tower has been built. This hillock is described in Joseph McFarland's History of Washington County as a beautiful Indian mound which rises directly from level ground. Cultivation and erosion since the history was written have cut down the mound and proven it to be of natural origin.

Clement V. McKaig, third pastor of the church (1841-1865), bought the part of the Clark land lying on the south, now owned by Neal S. and Kathryn C. Matchett, and made his home there during his pastorate. This farm was made up of parts of Springfield and Beautiful, mostly the former. Springs abound on the place. The lawn has its cypress trees, which in strong possibility were set out by Mr. McKaig.

On the east and south is the home of Robert R. and Coralie Frame. This farm was the part of the Clark land which the family chose to keep for themselves and make their home of three generations. It has an expanse of comparatively level and rolling land. Samuel Beelor, the first private owner, called it "Big Levels," the Clarks called it "Homeside" and, in recent years the name became changed to "Rolling Hills."

There is an ancient oak in the valley between the church and the parsonage. At the foot of this oak, there is a spring which supplied the settlers and the church attendants with water. And, above the spring is the generally accepted site of Fort Beelor. The spring still flows but no sign of the fort remains.

The church building is 100 years old this year. The former building was razed in the year 1872 and this building was dedicated free from debt on Thanksgiving of 1873.

The cost of the building was \$16,000.00

The tablet in the front gable is inscribed "Raccoon Church, built A.D. 1781, Rebuilt A.D. 1785, A.D. 1830, A.D. 1872

The church bell is inscribed "Cast by A. Fulton, Pittsburgh, Pa. for Raccoon Church."

The first floor is divided into the entrance, halls and stairways; the elders' room to the right, now a Sunday School room; the ladies' room to the left, now a kitchen, and the main or assembly room.

Some items and things of former days have been preserved and may be seen in the main room.

These items are:

Photograph of John McMillan, the first preacher of record to hold a service at Raccoon. The meeting was held on the first Sabbath of December, 1778

Composite photograph of the members of Pittsburgh Presbytery of C. V. McKaig's time (1841-1865)

Photographs of the pastors of the church, beginning with Patterson and carrying the list down to a current date

Plan of the sanctuary, showing the pews and pew-holders of about 100 years ago

Old reed organ and a swivel blackboard of unknown date.

The second floor of the building is the sanctuary. It has both old and added features.

The stained glass of the windows, now discarded, was imported from London, England

The pulpit furniture and the pews are the originals

The chandeliers, now wired for electricity are the originals

The plaque west of the pulpit was erected in 1932 in memory of the Rev. Joseph Patterson - 1752-1832 - First Presbyterian Minister ordained west of the Alleghenies - Pastor of Raccoon Church - 1789-1816; the ordination taking place at Raccoon, 1789

The plaque east of the pulpit was erected by the members of the Presbytery of Pittsburgh to commemorate the meeting of that body in the building on June 14, 1921, The fiftieth anniversary of the then pastorate of the Rev. Greer M. Kerr, D. D.

The combination pipe and reed organ in the rear loft was obtained in 1906 for \$1,500.00, one half of which was paid by Andrew Carnegie under a general offer by him to any church raising the other half. The organ was originally hand-pumped but is now powered by an electric motor.

The Hammond organ in the front loft was presented to the church in 1960 by James McElroy Rea in memory of his wife, the late Cynthia Russell Rea.