

RICH IN HISTORICAL LORE

Reminiscences Prompted by Services in St. Paul's, East Chester.

FIRST MEETING HOUSE WAS 28 BY 18

George Washington, John Adams and Many Revolutionary He- roes Worshipped Here—Hos- pital for Hessians.

The centennial services of St. Paul's Church, East Chester, last week, suggest many pertinent historical reminiscences, in addition to those recited by the rector, the Rev. W. S. Coffey, on that occasion. It is also worthy of mention that among the representatives of many of the oldest families, lifelong residents and inheritors of estates held in lineal descent from remote Colonial ancestors, were several direct descendants of distinguished Revolutionary forefathers, among whom may be mentioned the Bolktons, Pells, Vincents, Morgans, Underhills, Hunts, and especially Major W. C. Popham of the Sixth Continental Cavalry, (Washington's body guard,) who for years, in the subsequent peace period, was the popular President and effective individual promoter of the Society of the Cincinnati, in New-York City, and Treasurer of the New-York Chamber of Commerce.

There are traditional whispers of occasional religious ministrations, by missionaries among the Indians and the very few white settlers in the region of East Chester as early as 1634, but the first historic record of regular church services thereabout is dated in 1665, when the Rev. Nathaniel Brewster of the Congregational denomination, began pastoral work, holding meetings in private dwellings.

The first meeting house was built in 1700, and is described as a frame structure, 28 by 18 feet in dimension. The site was on the "green," its exact position being yet marked in the space between two locusts, which are furthest apart in a grand row of venerable trees that flourish in this interesting locality.

The Rev. John Bartow, an English Episcopal missionary, sent by the London "Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts," arrived in East Chester in 1702 and began ministerial work. During the pastorate of the Rev. Samuel Seabury, in 1764, the foundation of a new church was laid. Services were held in the old building until October, 1776, when the new edifice was completed, and is now as solid and substantial as when first consecrated.

A detachment of Hessian soldiers that invested the vicinity took possession of the new church in 1778, tore out its pulpit, pews, and other interior fixtures, and converted it into a military hospital. Soon afterward a fever pestilence raged, and over 300 Hessian and English soldiers perished from this plague.

Fully four years elapsed after the war before any attempt was made to repair the desecrated edifice, and to resume services. In 1795, during the pastorate of the Rev. Elias Cooper, the parish, under the provisions of "An act for the relief of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the State of New-York," was reincorporated, and then first took the name of "St. Paul's Parish." In 1850 the present venerable rector, the Rev. William Samuel Coffey, entered upon his prolonged ministry.

A rare and precious treasury of traditional, historic, romantic, and reminiscent interest environs this ancient temple and its vicinity. Gen. Washington attended service here on a Sunday in 1782, and the pew that he occupied is preserved to this day, intact.

The funeral services over the remains of the grandson of President John Adams, George Washington Adams, who was drowned in Long Island Sound, near by, were performed in this church, and the body rested in one of the churchyard vaults for several years.

This burying ground was established in the latter part of 1660. The oldest legible inscriptions are those of "M. V. D.," who died "Feb., 1664," and of "R. S.," whose death was "Dec. 14th, 1704."

The family vault of Comfort Sands, born at Sands Point, L. I., and who was in 1775 a member of the Provincial Congress, and for five years, from 1776, Auditor General of Accounts of the American Army; subsequently President of the New-York Chamber of Commerce, and for several terms member of the State Assembly, bears the date of 1790. The Fowler vault contains the remains of Capt. Jonathan Fowler, who won fame in the French and Indian wars, and his son, Capt. Theodosius Fowler of Revolutionary fame. In the "Pre-vost plot" was buried Major Gen. George W. Prevost of the British Army.

Near by lies the body of Gen. Philip Pell, Judge Advocate of the American Army, and also that of his brother, Major Samuel Pell of the Third Continental Cavalry, the body guard of Gen. Washington. Three hundred and sixty bodies of Hessian and English soldiers, victims of the fever plague, are buried in a sand pit at the far eastern end of the yard, which comprises nearly four acres of land, and contains over 6,000 bodies.

The parish has a comfortable endowment, and possesses a stately old-time rectory, with extensive surrounding premises, sloping to the edge of East Chester Creek, and commanding a magnificent view of Pelham Bay, with Long Island Sound in the perspective.

The church properties have a value far above their intrinsic worth. In the sanctuary is a grand old oil painting, life size, of "Paul before Felix," which carries an insurance of \$10,000. Among the several treasures of sacred communion vessels are a service of heavy sterling silver, presented by the Archbishop of Canterbury, England, in 1773; a richly wrought baptismal font, and a magnificent gold and silver chalice, a memorial gift from President John Adams's daughter, whose son was drowned near the church.

The silver-bronze bell, presented in 1772 by the Bishop of London, and secretly buried on an adjacent farm during the Revolutionary War, to preserve it from the vandalism of that period, was restored to its place in the belfry in 1793. Since then it has regularly rang pleasing invitations to divine worship.

Not elsewhere in this State are such precious, rare relics, mementos, and landmarks of all the periods of historic interest covering three centuries as are in the old St. Paul's Church, with its primitive surroundings in the quiet little hamlet of East Chester.