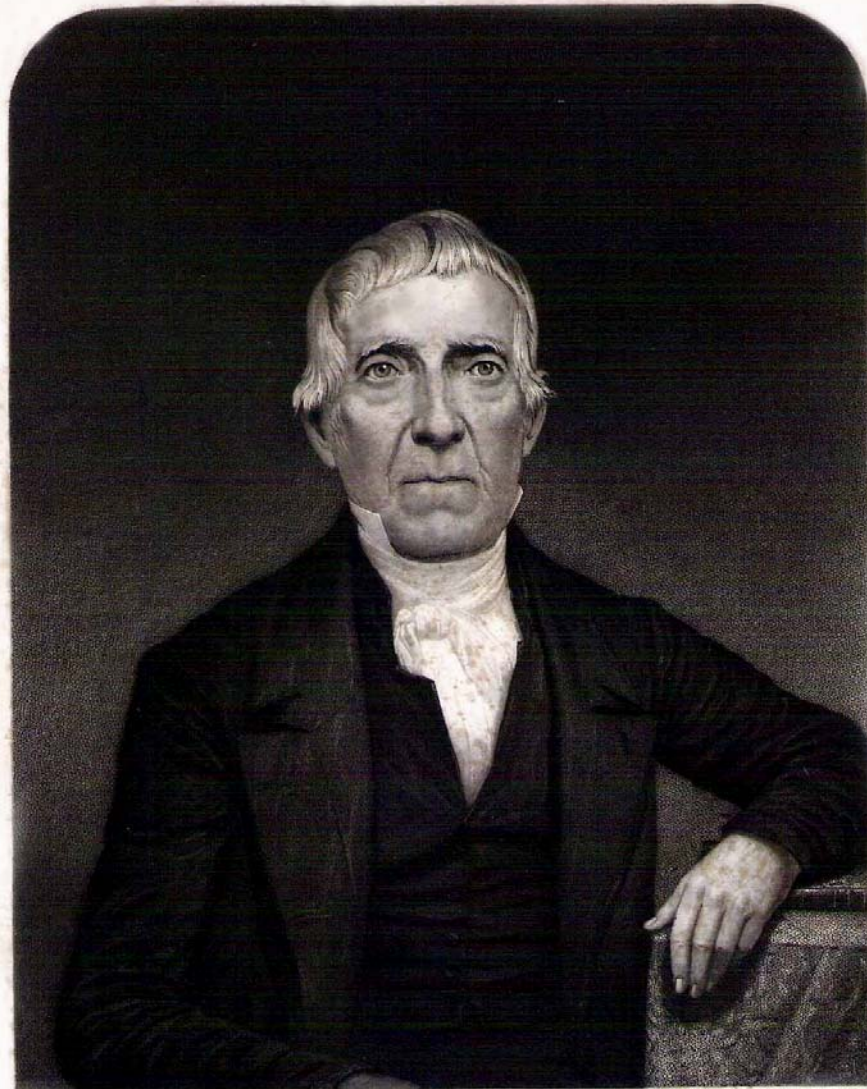


**PASTORS OF FAIRFIELD PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

The Rev. Ethan Osborn
Pastor from 1789 – 1844



ENGRAVED BY JOHN SARGENT. - PHIL. *

I remain your cordial friend,

Ethan Osborn

*Pastor for 55 years of the Presbyterian Church, Fairfield, N.J.
Died May 1st 1858 in the Hundredth Year of his Age.*

Below is an excerpt from *The Fairfield Presbyterians, Puritanism in West Jersey from 1680*, by Lawrence C. Roff

FATHER OSBORN [1789 to 1844)

Ethan Osborn was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, on August 21, 1758. His parents, Capt. John Osborn and Lois Peck (both of whom lived well into their eighties), raised nine children: John, who died at the age of seventy-nine; Ethan, ninety-nine; Eliada, eighty-six; Rebecca, eighty; Elizabeth, forty-six; Herman, nineteen; Lois, twenty-one; and Thalia, who remained in good health at age eighty-one at the time of Ethan's death. (76)

Details of his early life and conversion are scanty. The best information comes from Osborn himself. In 1822, after thirty-three years as pastor of the church, he delivered two sermons based on Acts 20:18, "Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons." In these sermons, he reviewed his life and ministry up to that date, a practice frequently repeated during his labors at Fairfield. Though these two particular addresses have not been preserved, Hotchkin, one of his successors in the pulpit, was able to quote from those manuscripts. Osborn's words trace his spiritual pilgrimage in his early years. The Godly training in his home conditioned his mind and heart for the journey through legalistic efforts to please God to that warm embrace of the free grace of Jesus Christ that set him free.

My condition and school education were like those of other children in my native place. I was favored, thanks to God! with religious parents and a religious education. My parents are gone to their long home, and I trust sleep in Jesus. They trained me in habit of attending public worship, but for some years I went to meeting rather reluctantly, or against my inclination. Some alarming providences impressed my mind with serious thoughts of death and judgment. This was perhaps before the age of nine or twelve years. After my serious impressions began, I went to religious meetings without persuasion or driving. I then went, not to see and be seen, but to hear the word of God, and to learn how I must escape the wrath to come and obtain eternal life. The Sabbath became a most welcome day, which I tried to keep holy, and improve for my best spiritual interests, for this was my principal concern. Compared with my soul's salvation, every affair of this life appeared low and trifling.

About this time I began secret prayer, which I have continued more or less to this day, though I am conscious that I have often been too remiss in it. * * * I felt conscious that the eyes of the Lord were upon me, and I fully resolved carefully to avoid whatever my conscience and his word and Spirit should tell me was my duty. But, like David, I soon found that innumerable evils had compassed me about, and mine iniquities had taken hold upon me. I found

that my own strength was weakness; temptations assaulted me and too often prevailed against me; yet like Job, I tried to hold fast mine integrity.

When I was preparing for college, while studying the Greek Testament, I saw more clearly than ever before the amiable excellency of our Saviour. My mind was enamored of his heavenly beauty, and my soul's desire was to be like him and with him. Ever since, I have had a trust that I have received the Saviour by faith, and am interested in the special favor of God through his merits and mediation, though it often seems too exalted a favor and blessedness for such a sinner to expect. And scarcely, if ever, do I feel that assurance of salvation which I desire. May the Lord perfect in us all that which is lacking of grace, faith, and assurance!
(77)

After a period of earnestly "trying" to do and to be what he felt would satisfy God, he at last discovered, perhaps gradually through his personal Bible study, what it was to simply rest in the Saviour for divine acceptance.

In due course, probably at the age of seventeen he commenced his college training at Dartmouth. It was a good time to be in such a place. A revival occurred in the parish and in the college in the winter of 1782. Fifty converts were admitted to the church in Hanover. Later, of a graduating class of seventeen, Osborn was one of thirteen who became ministers of the Gospel.
(78)

While I was a student in Dartmouth College, I was admitted to full communion with the Presbyterian Church there. Never shall I forget the first time I partook of the Lord's Supper. My mind was solemnly and devoutly exercised, and with a good degree of consolation.
(79)

His course of study at Dartmouth was interrupted by the American Revolution. At the age of eighteen, in the second year of the struggle for independence, Osborn left school to aid the cause. He was among a sizeable company of volunteers from his native township. Though his connection with the army was brief, it extended through one of the darkest periods of the war, the campaign of 1776. He was with Washington's forces in their retreat through New Jersey. His experiences made profound and permanent impressions on him that he continued to share through his later years.

He kept in his mind a catalogue of providential deliverances from imminent perils of death. One of these interpositions of heaven on his behalf occurred during this service. While the division of the army to which he belonged occupied Fort Mifflin, above New York, he was compelled, by sickness, to accept a short furlough. During his absence, the fort was taken by the British, and the prisoners were removed to New York. Some were confined in the building known by the name of the Sugar House, and others were thrown into prison ships. Close confinement and a fare that

was next to starvation, produced a mortality so great, that only four persons of the company to which Mr. Osborn belonged survived. If, in his then enfeebled health, he had been subjected to those exposures, there is little doubt but that his personal history would from that time have belonged to another world. (80)

After his term of enlistment expired, he returned home to Connecticut. Dartmouth had been temporarily broken up as the result of an invasion from Canada. This delayed his return to his studies. But return he did, and was a graduate of the class of 1784. His college years were a very satisfying experience for him. He later made conversational references to this period of his life that "contained many affectionate allusions to the then presiding officer, Dr. John Wheelock. For him, he seems to have cherished a peculiar attachment..." (81)

As there were no theological seminaries available yet to young men preparing for the ministry, further instruction was conducted under the close tutorial supervision of experienced pastors on the field. Osborn took advantage of this opportunity to sharpen his skills by working under Rev. Andrew Storrs of Plymouth, Connecticut, and later with his cousin, Rev. Joseph Vaill in nearby Hadlyme. During this time, inner spiritual struggles were being resolved by the ministerial candidate.

After I left College, I was disemployed for about three years. During that time, being often exposed to vain company, I insensibly and gradually became too much conformed to the spirit and fashion of the world. More than once my feet, like David's, were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. More than once I was almost drawn into the whirl of iniquity. But in mercy the Lord sternly rebuked me, stopped me in my presumptuous course, and once more turned my feet unto his testimonies. For ever blessed by his name! (82)

By 1786 he felt sufficiently prepared to present himself for licensure. Within a few weeks he had been invited to become the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Spencertown, New York. He declined this call, desiring more time to "shop around," to consider more possibilities before making this permanent commitment. He travelled to Philadelphia with this in mind. There, at the advice of Dr. Sproat, he set out for further travel into the lower counties of New Jersey. His excursion on horseback brought him first to Pittsgrove. From there he came down to Deerfield. Here he spent his first night in Cumberland County. It was his thirtieth birthday. He lodged in the home of Ephraim Foster, the family to which he allied himself some thirty years later by marriage.

He then came on to Fairfield, where, after laboring with acceptance through what was then the usual time of trial, he entered upon that pastoral settlement which was destined to be so enduring, and so fruitful of blessed results. On the 3rd of December, 1789, the Presbytery of Philadelphia inducted him into this charge under the ordination formula of

his church. The sermon was preached by the Rev. George Duffield, D.D., Pastor of the Pine Street Church, Philadelphia. (83)

The church was in desperate need of capable pastoral leadership. It had been five years since Hollingshead had departed. In the interim, "the congregation appears to have lived under the precarious and comparatively thriftless ministry of occasional supplies." (84) The grave concern over their plight and high hopes of answered prayers are strongly conveyed in the call extended by them to Osborn, whose preaching over several months' time had convinced them that he was God's choice for them.

'To Mr. Eathen Ozburn.

SIR.— We the subscribers, members of the Presbyterian congregation of Fairfield in the County Cumberland, and State of New Jersey, having been for sometime passed Destitute of the Stated Means of Grace the Preaching of the word of God among us do most Sincerely lament the loss of so Great a blessing, and desire to bewail over our sins which has provoked the Lord to strip us of those priveleges we have so long enjoyed in time passed and too much abused and being Deeply affected with this our bereaved situation would most humbly implore the Supreme Ruler of all Events, and head of that Church so to Dispose the hearts of this people that truly repenting of their Sins and returning unto God he would graciously return unto us and Grant the Settlement of the Gospel in this place Again. —

And Sir haveing had the opportunity of Some Personal Acquaintance with and frequently heiring you preach, have upon the Most Mature Deliberation Unanimously agreed to Call and invite you to Come and take the Charge of this Church and Congregation: and Cannot but Entertain pleasing hopes that Devine providence has destined you for this part of his Vineyard in as Much as he has inclined the hearts of this people to Unite in this Call. —

And for incoragement in a temporal respect and for the support of yourself and family we do hereby promis and ingage for our selves that if you should Come among us as our pastor that you Shall have the whole Use of the Passonage in this place of one Hundred and fifty Acres of Land, with the houses and Buildings and improvements thereon all put in Good Tennantable repair, and likewise will pay unto you or to your Order Yearly and Every Year, while you Continue our Minister at the Rate of One Hundred pounds per annum, Gold or Silver, and do Every thing in our power to make your Situation among us as Comfortable and easy as possible. —

and again, Sir, we beg leave most Earnestly to Solicit and intreat you to Except this our call and invitation to Come and take the pastoral Charge of this Congregation; you Know our Destitute State, and are acquainted in some Measure with the Dispositions and tempers of the people, we must therefore leave it to your own consideration, and most Sincerely pray that God May Direct you in your Deliberations thereon, and incline you to Determine in Such a Manner as may be most for his Glory and the Good of Church in General —

Witness our hands this Twenty-fourth Day of March one Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Nine.'

Signed by one hundred and four persons, apparently all the male members of the congregation. (85)

Osborn's ministry was characterized by sound, if not especially dynamic, preaching, and a wonderfully warm pastoral love and personal concern for each member of his church. The messages delivered by him from the high pulpit of the Old Stone Church were in-depth expositions of the Scriptures, carefully thought-out and organized, with specific applications offered, always intended to demonstrate to his hearers in what ways their lives should be altered to live more in conformity with the pattern of Gospel living expected of followers of Christ. His own comments about preaching, delivered in an ordination sermon he presented at Cape May before 1809, are helpful in understanding his own goals and style.

Preach the law and preach the gospel. Preach the law in all its strictness and spirituality, as an external rule of right, binding on every moral agent, and as covering all the exercises of the mind as well as outward actions, requiring perfect and perpetual obedience in every act, word, and thought, on pain of condemnation. And make close application to the conscience for the conviction of impenitent sinners, to make them duly sensible of their sin, and to make them feel as if standing in the Day of Judgment.

But not confining yourself to the law, preach the gospel. Hold up the blessed remedy it provides for guilty, perishing sinners. Preach Christ and Him crucified, in all His fullness and freeness to save. Preach Him in all His offices and sacred characters, as the way and only way to the Father through whom alone we can be redeemed from the curse of the law, and obtain salvation. Show His ability and willingness to save all who come to Him believing, and also the necessity of the Holy Spirit's influence to enable and dispose them to come believing. Show the happy consequences of belief, and the fatal consequences of resisting the Spirit's influences and remaining in a state of impenitency and unbelief. Do not confine yourself to general doctrines and truths. Descend frequently to particulars, so that you may touch the particular cases of your

different hearers. And let your practice correspond with your preaching. Pay a proper respect to the discipline of the church to purify and build it up. And in all things approve thyself a minister of God, in much patience and perseverance in the blessed work to which thou hast devoted thyself. (86)

Additional comments gleaned from some of his autobiographical discourses by a later pastor, Samuel Anderson, are worth noting.

“You know after what manner of style I have preached to you, that it has been a simple and plain style.

“Though I might have used a more elegant, learned or sublime style, yet I thought it my duty to follow the example of Paul in speaking to you with great plainness of speech. For the design of preaching is to convey ideas, and give instruction and knowledge to the hearer. But if my language is above the understanding of many hearers I might as well preach to them in Greek or Hebrew. And, therefore, to speak the truth has been my first object, and next to speak it in such language as to be intelligible or easily understood. I have been all along sensible that by using such a plain style, I have sacrificed my reputation for learning; but this is a matter of little consequence. I ought not to care whether I am thought learned or ignorant, if I can but promote your Christian knowledge and be a helper of your faith.” (87)

In another sermon, he set forth the intense concern he felt for the genuine conversion of his hearers, whether he was speaking from the pulpit or in the parlor.

“In the first I aimed to represent religion as the most important of all things with which we have any concern, and that it ought to be the chief object of our desire and pursuit. As we are fallen, depraved creatures, I urged the necessity of a change, by the renewing and sanctifying influence of God’s Spirit. I urged it home to the conscience by this serious question – ‘Do you really think you have experienced such a change, or possess true gospel religion?’ When the answer was in the affirmative, I reminded them of their constant need of the grace of Christ to keep them in such a state, and their obligation to live near to God, by walking as Christ walked.

“When the answer was in the negative, I reminded them of the lamentable character of a conclusion and their gloomy prospect beyond the grave. I solemnly warned them of the danger of resting there, and exhorted them immediately to seek for mercy. After mentioning some essential duties, such as repentance, faith, love and obedience, I spoke of the relative duties of parents and children, and urged on parents and guardians the important duty of bringing up their children in the fear of God. After this I led on the conversation to the duty of family prayer and inquired whether

it was performed in the family. After this I turned my conversation to the children and others present. Here I urged the importance of obtaining religion in early life, as youth is the most favorable time for it." (88)

One who grew up under Osborn's ministry later recalled the regular format of the pastor's sermons. He had been quite impressed by the setting of the preaching in his earliest years.

"In my childish notion of things I believed that somewhere about that sounding board there was an Angel, or some invisible Being, communicating with the speaker, dictating, and directing the words he uttered; and the surroundings, filled me with awe, and the most profound reverence for the place and the day." (89)

Later, this Jagers was able to appreciate more intelligently the sermons he heard from Osborn. They were quite methodical in organization. Three parts were consistently present: introduction, doctrine, and application. The first two occupied thirty minutes, the application fifteen. The forty-five minute time frame Osborn imposed on himself was enforced by his frequent checks with his silver pocket watch.

Osborn's pattern of arrival at the church and preparation for the service were equally methodical and predictable.

"Some ten or fifteen minutes before the hour of service he might be seen, on a morning in summer, slowly and thoughtfully walking along the grove up to the church. The trees, large and in full foliage, afforded a delightful shade. A number of the well known members of the congregation, standing in groups, discussing the events of the day, would each in turn, as he approached, step forward to grasp the cordial hand extended, with the usual salutation and inquiry as to the family welfare. The line generally extended some considerable distance, from the center of the grove to the church fence, and sometimes nearly to the door. He would take those directly in his way by the hand, bowing politely to others in the background, or at a distance, who were too diffident to approach him. He then entered the church reverently, taking off his hat as he passed through the door, and, with a measured step, walked along the upper isle to the pulpit steps, and ascended. Taking his seat in the pulpit, he would draw from his pocket a brown silk handkerchief, and wipe his eyeglasses thoroughly, after which he was ready for service." (90)

The music in the church was typical of the day. Four leaders officiated from the "clerk's seat" at the base of the pulpit. After setting the pitch with a fork and giving the note for each of the four parts, the singing began. Hymns as well as Psalms were used. A choir was formed about 1837 and a new song-book was introduced. The young people of the church were quite pleased with this development. Predictably, the older members were very distressed! The music

was sung unaccompanied. The first organ was not obtained until 1862, after the congregation had left the Old Stone Church for its new home in Fairton. (91)

Osborn's ministry was faithfully conducted, not only from the pulpit, but in the homes and schools. He was diligent in visitation. Every three months, he visited all the public schools in the area. His purpose of these visits was to hear students' progress in recitation of the Westminster Shorter Catechism and to offer explanations of the doctrines contained there in a manner suited to the children's level of understanding. Osborn had cause to remember this aspect of his ministry for many years. He was much impressed by God's providential deliverance of himself from death on an occasion of this laboring. Early in his ministry he was conducting such catechetical instruction in the schoolhouse in Fairton. While he was standing before the children, lightning struck the building. The electrical current, apparently following the course of a row of nails in the floor, entirely tore a toe away from one foot. He escaped without any other injury than that. That night at home, his house caught fire when a member of his family was in the attic with a light, searching for material to use in bandaging his foot. No one was harmed. The house was saved, but not before a considerable portion on the roof had been destroyed.

More organized instruction of youth was begun during Osborn's ministry. On December 12, 1818, in a meeting at the schoolhouse in Fairton, citizens appointed a committee of seven to institute and operate a program modeled after the plan of the Sunday School Union. They would teach in rotating teams of two on Sundays. Though not an official operation of the Presbyterian Church, most of those involved were Presbyterians. It was disbanded in 1821, but was resuscitated six years later on a more permanent foundation. Joseph Dayton was chosen to serve as superintendent. He continued faithful in this post until 1840. Effective teachers diligently continued the Biblical education of the children of the community, holding classes in the schoolhouse until 1865 when they moved to the "chapel" recently erected behind the new sanctuary built in 1850 in Fairton. (92)

In 1794, Osborn married Elizabeth Riley, a member of his congregation. Shortly thereafter, his salary was raised from 100 to 125 pounds. In 1802 it was returned to the original hundred pounds, as promised in the call of 1789. In 1803 it was further reduced, now that a parsonage and farm were to be provided. When they were sold four years later, the salary was increased, now amounting to \$400 annually. Fifty dollar increases were granted in 1809 and again in 1812. It remained at \$500 (supplemented by generous donations, up to \$100 at a time, when urgent needs were discovered) until 1836. (93)

In that year, an additional pastor was called to share the duties Osborn had thus far carried on his own shoulders. David Davies McKee was born on August 14, 1805, in Harrison County, Kentucky. He completed the Central College of Kentucky in 1832 and moved to New Jersey to attend the seminary in Princeton, graduating in 1836. The call to Fairton was his first pastoral responsibility. He and his wife were here from 1836 to 1838. During their stay, a daughter born to them died, and was buried in the Old Stone Church cemetery. After leaving Fairton, he served several churches as stated supply, but never

again as pastor. His charges included Russellville, Kentucky (1839-1840); the Winchester, Union, and Providence Churches in Illinois (1840-1844); Vandalia, Illinois (1844-1846); Freeport, Pennsylvania (1846-1848); and Fairfield, Indiana (1849-1854). He was then associated with the White Water Presbyterian Academy from 1854 to 1855. He entered the United States Army as a chaplain in 1864, near the end of the Civil War. His duties over the nine year period 1854 to 1864 are not known. In 1865 he left his army position, the war having come to a close. He remained in ill health from that time on, whether from war injuries or age, and died in Hanover, Indiana on January 17, 1884, just a few years after sending his letter of greeting back to Fairton for the 1880 anniversary celebration.

At a congregational meeting at three o'clock on Monday, June 20, 1836, Osborn announced his willingness to have McKee called to be his assistant. He offered to have \$200 of his own salary taken away to provide a suitable income for McKee. The congregation voted to call the young man, promising him \$400 (\$100 more than Osborn would now be receiving!). McKee was informed of the action the next day at Osborn's home. He declined the call. He was not willing to serve as an assistant minister. He would, however, consider a call to be co-pastor with Osborn. The congregation met again on July 5th. There was, understandably, much discussion about McKee's views. Finally, a vote was called to determine the congregation's desire to have "any person to become colleague with Mr. Osborn." Thirty-five voted yes, eighteen voted no. Osborn then announced to the congregation that he had changed his mind about giving up \$200 of his salary. The moderator, Rev. Samuel Lawrence, ruled him out of order since that was not on the docket for the meeting. After further motions and votes, the congregation voted forty-one to one to issue the call to McKee to serve as co-pastor. At a congregational meeting on July 16, Osborn expressed satisfaction with the decision and retracted his retraction of the \$200 from his salary. McKee was examined, ordained, and installed by the Presbytery of Philadelphia on August 4, 1836. Session records report that all found the proceedings of that occasion to be very "Solemn and impressive." There is no indication of friction between McKee and Osborn, despite the confusion of the call issued to McKee, but it was announced to the congregation in a meeting on July 21, 1838, that McKee wished to be dismissed from his pastoral relationship there. (94) At the time of the 1880 anniversary celebration for the church, McKee, then sixty-seven years old, was residing in Hanover, Indiana. (95) He had been invited to attend the special services but poor health prevented his coming. In a letter he sent to the church, he briefly reviewed his ministry with Osborn. He had come in April 1836, after completing his studies at Princeton Seminary, at the suggestion of Dr. Archibald Alexander, to spend some time in training under the seventy-six year old veteran at Fairfield. He recalled his two year ministry here with great joy, remembering especially his privilege in sharing in the revival that occurred during that time. (96)

At the time of McKee's departure, Old School/New School controversies, already causing great difficulties in Presbyteries, made their impact on the Fairfield Presbyterian Church. Osborn's views were in accord with the New School, while many of his most influential elders, a great number of his church members, and a majority of his Presbytery brethren sided with the Old School.

After so many years of harmony and revival, controversy split the church. A great number left to organize a new church in Cedarville, an action contemplated spasmodically for decades previously not just because of doctrinal disputes, but because of the distance and number of people now living in that separate community distinct from Fairfield. Osborn's problems were not over with their departure.

“Although he believed and preached the doctrines of personal election and the certain perseverance of Christians, still his friends never claimed that he was a strongly Calvinistic theologian; and in this time of unusual sharpness in searching out heresies, he made several free exposures (once at least before an assembly of co-presbyters, under much provocation as he averred) of views of atonement which were sure to be offensive to be a rigid Calvinist.”
(97)

The comments before Presbytery caused such concern that there was much discussion of the matter for some time afterward. Though no formal charges were filed against him for heresy, his reputation among some circles was sadly tarnished and his ecclesiastical position for a time was imperiled. (98)

Those in the church who remained loyal to him and his views joined with others of like mind in other churches to form a New School Presbytery. On May 11, 1840, the Fairfield Presbyterian Church voted to withdraw from their Presbytery. Session minutes record the action.

“We the undersigned members of the Presbyterian Church & Congregation of Fairfield New Jersey Respectfully Request our Pastor & session to with Draw the connection of themselves and our church from under the care & watch of the West Jersey Presbytery at the organising of said Presbytery in our church on Wednesday the 13 inst & we the undersigned members aforesaid authorise you the said pastor & session to Declare our church & congregation free from the Jurisdiction of the said West Jersey Presbytery.

Fairfield May 11, 1849”

(Signatures follow) (99)

They affiliated with the new Third Presbytery of Philadelphia, and continued in that association until after Osborn's death. But, difficult as this action was, Osborn never became a crusader over it. And for the most part, the high esteem in which all had held him continued to be maintained. At the time of his death, his successor, Hotchkin, reflected on those years and their impact on Osborn.

“I knew him when these events were yet fresh, before lacerated tempers generally have time for healing, and my relations to him were such that if he was disposed to transmit any latent grudge to any living mortal, he would probably have sought to imbue me with it. But I rejoice to say I never heard from his lips a word which

would have gone harshly to the feelings of those with whom he had come into ecclesiastical conflict.

“It was a subject upon which he seldom spoke, and as time wore away, he as seldom thought. It is a fact full of significance respecting his spirit, that when his memory began to be seriously impaired, the division of the Presbyterian Church was the first ecclesiastical event of any importance which in his mind was clouded with a haze.” (100)

In 1844, Osborn had reached the age of eighty-six and was still active and alert in all his pastoral duties. But the weight of too many years finally compelled him to seek release from the responsibilities of the care of this congregation. Only one person remained alive of those who had been members of the church when he had come in 1789. (101) Yet, fourteen years of life remained for the senior minister. The Presbytery, at its April meeting in 1884, agreed to his wishes for retirement. In dissolving the pastoral relationship between him and this, his only church in his entire ministry, they felt it necessary to include in their minutes suitable note of the unusual circumstances of his pastorate.

“For fifty-four years Father Osborn has ministered to this branch of Zion, during which time a degree of harmony and fellowship has subsisted between pastor and people, and a success has attended his ministry, highly creditable to them, and happily illustrating the beauty and importance of permanent pastoral relation. Now, late in the evening of his life, in the eighty-sixth year of his age, after having been permitted to enjoy, in connection with his labors, several revivals of religion, and having buried all but one of those who composed his flock at the time of his installation, and after having seen the children of two generations, baptized with his own hands, succeeding to the places in the church vacated by their fathers, he comes with undiminished regard for his people, and in the unabated enjoyment of their confidence and to commit his united and happy charge to the care of this body. The Presbytery commends this church for providing that their worthy and venerable pastor may continue to lean on their arm while he lives, and recline on their bosom when he dies, and hope that other churches may follow their example.” (102)

His retirement was not one of inactivity. His name had become a household word throughout the churches of the region, and his services were constantly in demand. He could be found supplying the pulpits of Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist Churches from Pittsgrove to Cape May. And in his own church, his ministry continued. For at least six years he conducted the morning worship service on an average of once a month. (103) At the age of ninety-two, he agreed to preach the final sermon in the Old Stone Church before services were moved to the new building in Fairton. This last occasion of his ascent up the staircase of the pulpit in the seventy year old house of worship was a tremendous emotional experience for all present. In a clear and searching sermon, he reviewed the doctrines he had preached, the repentance toward

which he had urged people, and the joy in Christ he longed for them to continue to experience.

“As we expect this to be the last Sabbath on which I shall speak to you from this pulpit, let me say in the presence of God who knows my heart, that I have endeavored and prayed that I might faithfully perform my ministerial duties. Though I am conscious of much imperfection, God is my witness that I have ever preached such doctrine and precepts as I verily believe are agreeable to his word. I have repeatedly said ‘the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.’ With gratitude to God I look back upon the religious revivals with which he has blessed us and the friendly relations which have subsisted between us. It is no small satisfaction that as pastor and people we separated as friends, and that a pleasant intercourse subsists between myself and my successor, your present pastor. Never were the people more dear to me, I shall love them as long as I live.

“Excuse my plainness, and permit me once more to say in the fullness of my feelings, that my heart’s desire and prayer to God for you all is, that you may be saved. As it will not be long before we must each answer to God – I for my ministry, and you for your improvement of it, let us be diligent in what duty remains and in advancing toward heaven. Let brotherly love continue and abound, until it shall be perfected in the heavenly kingdom. And may God prepare us all to meet in heaven! I now bid you a cordial farewell, praying that it may fare well with you in this world, in blessings of health and prosperity, as far as shall be for God’s glory and your own good, and that in the future world, entered with your blessed Saviour into the joy of your Lord, you may FARE WELL.”
(104)

Though he continued to preach on occasion for the people in their new sanctuary in Fairton, ever greater distances of time separated those treasured services. His final sermon was in the summer of 1855, at the age of ninety seven.
(105)

The last few years of his life witnessed a rapid decay of his mental powers. His memory failed him to the point that he sometimes lost recollections of closest friends and events immediately past.

“He would sometimes perform family worship twice in the morning, and I believe in some cases a third time, forgetting that it had been observed at all. It is however a striking index to the state of his heart, that his memory of worship was never treacherous in the opposite direction. He never forgot to observe family devotions.” (106)

Those who visited with him may have entered distressed over his mental weaknesses and inability to enter into the activities of life around him. But they departed amazed at the contentment of his soul, seemingly lost in a spiritual world all his own. He could be found sitting or walking, “singing some happy

song of Zion, or relating some sweet experience, talking always of mercies, and wondering how any can complain when God is so good." (107)

In the winter of 1857-1858, revival broke out again. The aged saint was alert enough to understand the reports he heard and to devote himself even more enthusiastically to private prayer that God might be pleased to call many of the unconverted to Himself. Osborn was even revived himself temporarily by his new concerns. He seldom left the house, but a fresh mental keenness manifested itself. His last church appearance was related to this revival. In the last year of his life he attended a service at the "White Church" (later named the Osborn Memorial Presbyterian Church) in Cedarville. Between one hundred fifty and two hundred young converts were assembled for a special service. After the sermon by one of several ministers present, Osborn was asked and agreed to add a final exhortation and closing prayer. One of those ministers present recorded his impressions.

"He seemed like an old veteran commander in the army, taking a view of the recruits just entering the service for King Immanuel. He reminded them it was a service for life, and their warfare would not be done until they obtained their crown. In such a manner he spoke, and then prayed God that they might be faithful unto death." (108)

The time of his death had arrived. His niece, who had for many years been as his own daughter in her constant love and attention to his needs, was present during his last week. Her letter, to Rev. Robert Osborn, is a most beautiful account of Ethan Osborn's departure from this life to the home prepared for him by his Saviour. A summary of its contents could never do justice to the sentiments associated with the event. It must be read in its entirety.

"MY DEAR COUSIN, — It appears to me like months instead of weeks, since I stood by the dying bed of my ever dear uncle, and saw him draw his last breath. Of how little importance did the world then appear to me! He had so long been the object of constant care and solicitude, the centre of all my thoughts and labors, that it almost seemed that there was nothing left for me to live for; and I still feel an indescribable dreariness that none can realize who have not felt the same. I am glad it is not wrong to weep, and I can at times rejoice that his glorified spirit is free, no longer cramped and bound by the frail tenement that had borne the trails of almost an hundred years. But he was so ripe for heaven and enjoyed such a blessed nearness to the Saviour, and was so abundant in prayer, that although for him to depart and be with Christ was far better yet his death has left a void that no common Christian can fill.

"How I wish you could have been with us the day before he was taken down. I shall always feel thankful for the privilege of being with him when he had, (as I believe,) a view and foretaste of heaven. He had passed a night of suffering. In the morning he slept till ten o'clock. When he awoke he was all life and animation,

and his whole appearance was changed. He had been so long confined, mostly to the house, that his complexion had become very fair and clear. Now, his face was full, without a wrinkle, his eyes sparkled, he walked erect; the stoop in his shoulders was all gone – his appearance was beautiful. He came out of his room singing words that I never heard him sing before, 'O happy! O happy! My happy, happy home!' then spake in a loud clear voice, 'O what a glorious King is Jesus! The martyr Stephen saw Heaven opened and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.' He then spoke of the glories of Heaven as described in the Revelation. After repeating the passages – 'and there shall be no night there; they stood on a sea of glass; they sang the Song of Moses and the Lamb; and after speaking in the same strain a longtime, he sang –

'O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like me God,' &c

"I could but look and listen almost spell-bound, and the words 'They shall flourish in immortal youth,' were constantly in my mind. He took a slight dinner, and then seated in his rocking chair, with his head resting on the back of it, and eyes fixed upwards, he sang songs of praise most of the afternoon, without the least apparent fatigue; not low, humming, but loud and clear, ringing sweetly through all the house, and heard distinctly at the barn.

"When asked to supper, he said, 'Yes, willingly and thankfully.' He wheeled round his chair, asked a blessing and then sang –

'My flesh shall slumber in the ground
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound;
Then burst the chains with sweet surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise.'

"It was the first time he had sung that verse, though the preceding ones he had repeated often. He took supper with a good appetite, and in the evening asked us to sing –

'How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord.'

"He attended family prayer three times, and went to bed apparently in good health. He was awake most of the night, but did not suffer as usual.

"Next day he slept till noon, took a little dinner – then slept again. At three o'clock I found he was unwell, and called the Doctor, who was very attentive to the last. About midnight he expressed his belief that he would soon leave us and be with the Saviour, where there is 'fullness of joy.' He gave me his last charge to trust in the Lord, look to Him and He would not forsake me. These were his last connected words. But let me pass over those two days and a half. Suffice it to say, 'he was made perfect through suffering,' and left us at noon on Saturday!

'Servant of God, well done!
Praise be thy sweet employ.'" (109)

Five days after his death, a funeral was held such as the residents of Cumberland County have never before nor since witnessed. Reports of it were carried not only in local papers but also in Philadelphia. The Bridgeton Chronicle included several full pages covering the funeral and memorabilia about Osborn's life. Scores of carriages coming from Bridgeton, Cedarville, Deerfield, Greenwich, Hopewell, Millville, and Newport, clogged the roads to the Old Stone Church. The building was jammed long before the funeral procession itself arrived. By all estimates, over fifteen hundred persons were present for the services honoring the venerable old saint. The church accommodates only slightly more than three hundred. With windows open to receive the crisp spring air, well over a thousand people stood outside, straining to hear the words being spoken inside. A special platform had been built at the front of the church. Seventeen ministers, of different denominations, were present to share in the service. A former pastor of the Fairfield Presbyterian Church, Beriah Hotchkin, preached a sermon based on II Kings 2:2, "And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more; and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two places." The pastor of the church at that time, Rev. James Boggs, also preached. His sermon was taken from Proverbs 10:7, "The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot." (110) The congregation took some time to file past the open casket before it was taken outside to be interred in a grave immediately behind the building.

On August 21, 1858, services were held again at the site of his burial, while his memory was still fresh in their minds. On that day, the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, a monument was placed over his grave. It is a shaft, ten feet in height, made of Italian marble. Inscriptions on its four sides commemorate his life and ministry.

FRONT – "Erected August 21st, 1858, to the memory of Rev. Ethan Osborn, born in Litchfield, Conn., August 21, 1758; died full of faith, and in the hope of a joyful resurrection, May 1, 1858, aged 99 years 8 months and 10 days.

RIGHT SIDE – "Graduated at Dartmouth, 1784, licensed 1786, called to Fairfield 1788, ordained 1789, and resigned his charge 1844, having been pastor of this Church 55 years.

REAR – "A soldier of the Revolution, a good man, a faithful minister of the Gospel.

LEFT SIDE – "He obeyed the command – 'Go preach my Gospel.' His children in the flesh and in the spirit lie around him." (111)

A eulogy was delivered by Judge Lucius Elmer and an address was presented by Rev. N. C. Burt.

Osborn's family included thousands whose lives he had touched on behalf of his Saviour. Many enjoyed his company in visits to his home, always open to callers who wished to receive his cordial greetings. It was said to be "A centre of attraction for some of the best society in Cumberland and the

adjacent Counties, who sought it, not for its hospitality alone, but for the impressions of tranquillity which they were sure to carry away." (112)

His own family included eight children, only three of whom survived him. His first wife was Elizabeth Riley, born near Bridgeton on January 30, 1775. They were married on September 18, 1794. Their children were Anna (1795), Betsey (1797), Ruth (1799), Ethan (1801), John Elmer (1803), Mary (1805), Harriet Seymoure (1810), and Robert (1813). Ethan died in 1811, Harriet in 1816. Robert became a minister. Father Osborn's wife through these years died at age forty-two, on October 9, 1817. He remarried on May 8, 1822. His second wife, Ester Foster, of Pittsgrove, was born in 1785. She died on June 7, 1835. (113)

A cousin of Osborn's, Luila, composed a poem at the time of his death expressing the affection of his own family.

Go care-worn soldier to thy rest,
Thine earthly race is run;
In heaven thou art forever blest,
With Christ, thy father's son.

For ninety-nine long weary years
This sin stained earth thou'st trod;
And watered well with many tears,
the seed thou'st sowed for God.

While young in years with manly zeal,
Thou trod the battle field;
For freedom's cause thy country's
weal
Thou bore the sword or shield.

'Mid toils of war and scenes of strife,
Undaunted still thou sent;
'Tho all the morning of thy life,
In tumults sore were spent.

Thou braved the terrors of disease,
And held by angels power;
Thou stood the storm of many a
siege,
Unhurt in dangers hour.

The morning dawns, the victory's won,
Of freedom's joyous band;

Of happy Sons, thou too art one,
To hail dear freedom's land.

Late in the morning of thy life,
Warned by a Saviour's voice;
Thou left the scenes of warlike strife,
And made a heavenly choice.

A minister of gospel grace,
To bear the holy word;
Started anew thy earthly race,
To labor for thy Lord.

Watering with tears the precious seed,
Rejoicing thou shalt come;
Bearing on faith the well filled sheaves,
Thy father greets thee home.

Beloved in life and blessed in death,
Thy works of faith and love;
Shall point us from the scenes of death,
To that pure home above.

Thou'st reached the goal, the stream is passed,
Of Jordan's swelling flood;
In heaven thou'rt safely housed at last,
To sweetly rest at last.

- 76) Beriah B. Hotchkin, "Memorial of Rev. Ethan Osborn" in *The Pastor of the Old Stone Church* (Philadelphia: William S. and Alfred Martien, 1858), pp. 8-9.
- 77) Ibid, pp. 12-13.
- 78) Ibid, p. 15.
- 79) Ibid, p. 14.
- 80) Ibid, p. 16.
- 81) Ibid, p. 17.
- 82) Ibid, pp. 17-18.
- 83) Ibid, p. 19.
- 84) Ibid, p.28.
- 85) "Whitaker's Address" in *Bicentennial Celebration*, pp. 46-47. A photostatic copy of the original hangs today beneath the pulpit in the Old Stone Church.
- 86) Samuel R. Anderson, "History of the Old Stone Church" in *Bicentennial Celebration*, pp. 84-85.
- 87) Ibid, pp. 85-86.
- 88) Ibid, pp. 86-87.
- 89) J. F. Jagggers, "Service of Song in the Old Stone Church" in *Bicentennial Celebration*, p. 121.
- 90) Ibid, pp. 124-125.
- 91) Ibid, pp. 121-123.
- 92) Anderson, "History of the Old Stone Church" in *Bicentennial Celebration*, pp. 98-99.
- 93) Anderson, *Historical Account*, pp. 42-43.
- 94) *Session Records*.
- 95) Anderson, "History of the Old Stone Church", p. 90.
- 96) McKee, "Letter of Rev. David D. McKee" in *Bicentennial Celebration*, pp. 133-135.
- 97) Hotchkin, "Memorial of Rev. Ethan Osborn" in *The Pastor of the Old Stone Church*, pp. 43-44.
- 98) Ibid, p. 44.
- 99) *Session Records*.
- 100) Hotchkin, "Memorial of Rev. Ethan Osborn" in *The Pastor of the Old Stone Church*, pp. 45-46.
- 101) Anderson, "History of the Old Stone Church" in *Bicentennial Celebration*, pp. 91-92.
- 102) Ibid.
- 103) Hotchkin, "Memorial of Rev. Ethan Osborn" in *The Pastor of the Old Stone Church*, p. 51.
- 104) Ibid, pp. 55-56.
- 105) Ibid, p.57.
- 106) Ibid, p.59.
- 107) Ibid, pp. 60-61.
- 108) Ibid, pp. 62-63.

109) Ibid, pp. 64-66.

110) "The Bridgeton Chronicle," May 6, 1858.

111) "Centenary Exercises" in The Pastor of the Old Stone Church, p. 101.

112) Hotchkin, "Memorial of Ethan Osborn" in The Pastor of the Old Stone Church, pp. 93-94.

113) Ibid, pp. 95-96.