

THE OLD STONE CHURCH

The Old Stone Church was the third of the four Fairfield church buildings, in use from 1780 until 1850. It was constructed during the tenure of the Rev. William Hollingshead. Former pastor, Lawrence C. Roff, recounts the circumstances of this move from New England Town to the erecting of the Old Stone Church.

Hollingshead's ministry has been most remembered for the relocation and rebuilding which took place during his stay. The frame building in use for so many years (since 1717) had to be torn down in 1775. Pulpit and benches were set up in the shade of an enormous oak tree near the site of the old building. Public worship was held here in fair weather. Plans were undertaken for a new site and a new Meeting House.

The hallowed and grateful association of the old place, even though sanctified by the graves of their parents, were made subordinate to the prosperity, convenience, and welfare of the people, and of posterity. The good of the township required that the church should stand on the main road running through its centre from one end to the other. Accordingly, they bought land here, and determined that a suitable edifice should be erected. Nevin, Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church, p. 226

Notes in the session records at the time of the church's bicentennial celebration recall that during 1775 and 1776, two hundred loads of stone and eight hundred feet of lumber were gathered on the newly purchased property. Local tradition preserves the story that British troops confiscated the materials and used them to build a docking facility on the Fairfield side of the Cohansey River across from Greenwich, the town where local youths, dressed as Indians, burned British tea stored in community basements, imitating the "Boston Tea Party." Whether such confiscation occurred or not is uncertain, but stones left at Laning's Wharf suggest the possibility of its having taken place. At any rate, construction of the new church home was understandably delayed by the demands and uncertainties of the Revolutionary War. The congregation met for six years on rough benches set outdoors among the trees at the old New England Towne cemetery. The harshness of the more severe seasonal weather must have been a sorely trying experience for the faithful of the congregation. But Mr. Hollingshead's ministry was adequate to hold them together and lead them on to the long-awaited erection of their new building. Finally in 1780, most of the British forces in the area were transferred further south, and work was begun.

Providence greatly favored the design, and no rain fell from the time the foundations were laid, on the first day of May, until the rafters were raised and the roof put on in the middle of June.

Thus in spring and summer the work advanced so rapidly that before the first week of autumn was past, the Rev. Mr. Hollingshead, sharing the joy and thankfulness of his people, could, in this house, lead their profound and grateful devotions. He preached his first sermon here, September 7th, 1780, from Philippians, 3:7. 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.' Arthur D. Pierce, Smuggler's Woods, pp. 118-143.

The building was erected on a lot one mile east of the former site, on the main road connecting Fairton with Cedarville. The walls were constructed of native stone, exposed on the exterior, plastered inside. A balcony extended from three walls, with a tall wineglass pulpit, capped by a sounding board, at balcony level on the fourth wall. Clear windows on both levels permitted light to pour in from all directions. There was ample seating space for prospective growth in the congregation. That growth was not long in coming. Forty-eight additions were made in the spring of 1781, and almost that many more before the end of the year. "Whitaker Address," Bicentennial Celebration, pp. 23-24.

In 1783, Hollingshead left the Fairfield Presbyterian Church, having accepted a call to serve as pastor of the large and prominent Circular or Independent Church of Charleston, South Carolina. He continued there until 1815, when he was stricken while in the pulpit on the Lord's Day. His health deteriorated until his death on January 16, 1817. "Whitaker Address," Bicentennial Celebration, p. 24.



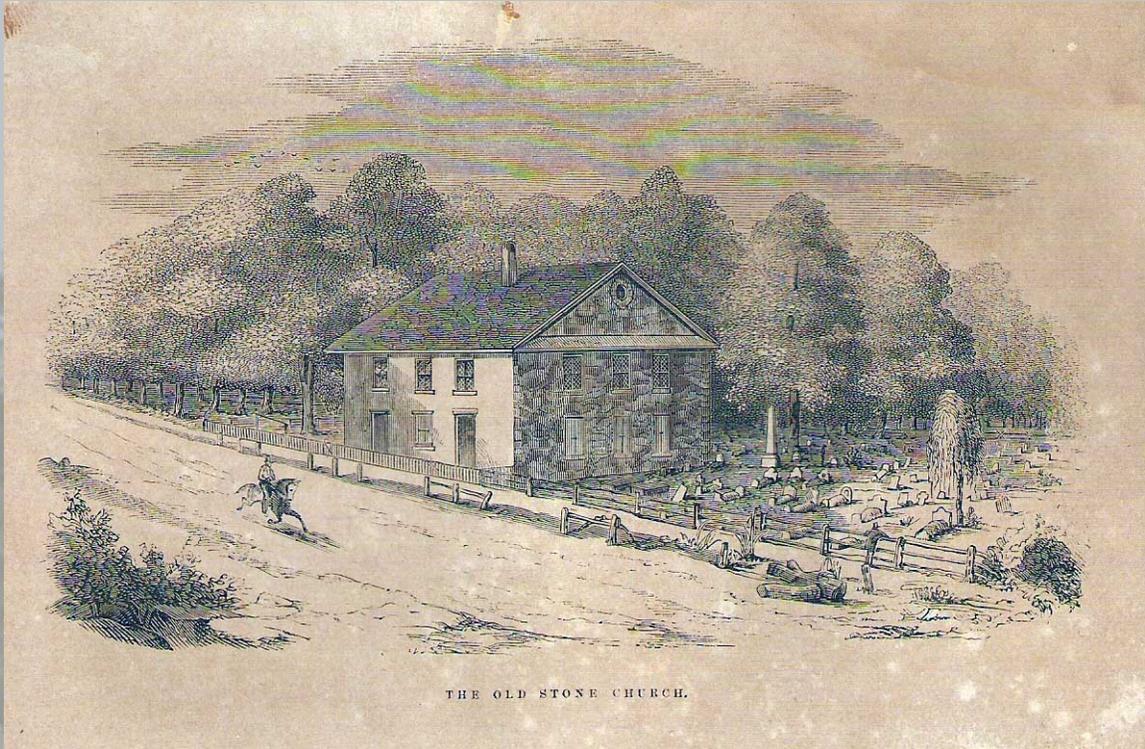
A recent photo of the Old Stone Church



An early, undated photo of the Old Stone Church, 1920's or 30's



The Old Stone church, 1932 Anniversary Celebration



THE OLD STONE CHURCH.

An engraving of the Old Stone Church, 1858



The Old Stone Church, 300th Anniversary, September 21, 1980



An undated photo of the Old Stone Church pulpit, Ethan Osborn's Portrait hangs upon it along with the call to the venerable "Pastor of the Old Stone Church"