

PASTORS OF FAIRFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Rev. William Ramsey
Pastor from 1756 – 1771



Photo by Michael Schuelke, 12/27/2005

The Table stone Grave Marker of Rev. William Ramsey (on the right)

Compiler's note: The mention of a divided Fairfield congregation refers to the Old Light – New Light conflicts arising out of the Great Awakening in the American Colonies in the 1740's. Sparked by the fiery preaching of the Presbyterian Tennent brothers of Freehold, New Jersey, and the Rev. Jonathan Edwards, Enfield, Connecticut, the traveling Methodist Evangelist, George Whitefield, united the revival fires from north to south. The New Lights supported this powerful and emotional preaching while the Old Lights were suspicious of an apparent, but not real Arminianism. The Rev. Daniel Elmer, Ramsey's predecessor, did an admirable work in seeking to minister to both parties within the congregation. The divided church came together at Daniel Elmer's death and the Rev. William Ramsey was called to continue the healing ministry. Ramsey, an "Old Light" Presbyterian himself, won the trust, love, and admiration of his congregation before his untimely death in 1771.

M. Schuelke

The excerpt below is from Richard Webster's, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 1857.

William Ramsey, the son¹ of James Ramsey, a pious man, from Ireland, was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His youngest brother, David, born in 1749, was a physician in Charleston, and distinguished as an author as well as for his worth. William Ramsey graduated at Nassau Hall in 1754, and, while preparing for the ministry was selected as a suitable person to unite the divided congregation of Fairfield, in Cohanzey, left vacant by the death of Elmer. Dr. Alison² furnished their messenger, Mr. Ogden, with a letter to President Stiles, to assist them in seeking a candidate, both parties being anxious to come harmoniously together. Ramsey went to Connecticut, and was licensed by the Association of the Eastern District of Fairfield County, in order that he might appear before the people free from all that could alienate any from him. He was received by Abingdon Presbytery, May 11, 1756, and was ordained and installed at Fairfield, December 1, 1756.

He died November 5, 1771, aged thirty-nine, greatly lamented. His brother-in-law, Dr. Jonathan Elmer, pronounced a glowing eulogy on his piety, talents, and excellence. It was printed.³

He lies buried in "the old New Englandtown" graveyard, with this inscription—*"Beneath this stone lie interred the remains of the Rev. William Ramsey, M.A., for sixteen years a faithful pastor of the Presbyterian Church in this place, whose superior genius and native eloquence shone so conspicuously in the pulpit as to command the attention and gain the esteem of all his hearers. In every situation of life he discharged his duty faithfully. He lived greatly respected, and died universally lamented."*



Photo by Michael Schuelke, 1/11/2006

The table stone of William Ramsey on the left

¹ Memoir of Dr. David Ramsey.

² Stiles MSS.

³ New York Historical Society's Library.

The 325th Anniversary Committee of the current Fairfield Presbyterian congregation is planning to do some restorative work to the *Old New Englandtown Cemetery*, including repairs to these table stones of the Rev. William Ramsey and his wife Sarah.

It is noted in Webster's work that William Ramsey, ". . . married Miss Sarah Sealy, of Cohanzy." She later married the Rev. Dr. Robert Smith (not a pastor of Fairfield).



Photo by Michael Schuelke, 1/11/2006

The table stone grave marker of Sarah Ramsey Smith

The inscription on Sarah's stone reads:

Here was deposited the Body of
SARAH SMITH
Successivly the wife
Of the Rev d William Ramsey
of this Place
& the Rev d Dr Rob t Smith
of Pequia
She was highly distinguished
for the exercise of the
Estimable and amiable qualities
in various relations of
wife mother friend and Christian
Having survived her last
worthy husband a few years
In great weakness of body
she fell asleep in Jesus
August 9th 1801 aged 63 years