

JOURNAL

of the

Presbyterian Historical Society

VOL. IV.

December 1908

No. 8

THE DEDICATION OF MAKEMIE MEMORIAL PARK AND MONUMENT

The year 1906 was observed by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America as the bicentenary of its formal organization. The chief figure in the creation of the original Presbytery was Francis Makemie of Virginia. He was the first Moderator. In view of this fact, the Council of The Presbyterian Historical Society was asked to consider a proposition to buy the site of Makemie's grave and erect thereon a suitable monument. This was favorably received, and Dr. McCook, accompanied by a member of the Society, visited the traditional site to investigate and report upon the condition of affairs.

These gentlemen reported that they had located the private cemetery in which and his family had been buried on the eastern bank of Holden's Creek, Accomack County, Virginia, an affluent of Pocomoke Sound. This confirmed the views of the Rev. Dr. L.P. Bowen and Dr. J.T.B. McMaster, made public some thirty years before.¹ Thereupon the Council approved the purpose announced by the Rev. Dr. Henry C. McCook, President of the Presbyterian Historical Society, to undertake the purchase of the property and the building of a suitable monument.

The entail which theretofore had prevented the sale of the land had just expired, and the ground could be bought; but the heirs refused to sell separate from the farm the only part desired by the Society – the cemetery site. Accordingly, the entire farm, a part of that owned by Francis Makemie, and on which was his dwelling place, was bought. Three acres, covering the site of the cemetery and original house, were set aside, and the remainder sold to John Cullen, a lineal descendant of John Milligan, to whom Makemie's daughter, Mrs. Anne Holden, had left the property. The General Assembly of 1907 (see Minutes of that year, p. 215) adopted the following:

Whereas, The graveyard where Francis Makemie lies buried, has been redeemed from its past neglect, and has been purchased for The Presbyterian Historical Society and is in its keeping; and

Whereas, The General Assembly by resolution on Overtures from the Synod of Baltimore and the Presbytery of New Castle, in 1898, endorsed the proposition to erect a monument to Francis Makemie, and to endow his first and favorite church at Rehoboth, Maryland; therefore, be it

Resolved by this Assembly, That the movement to erect such a monument and endow the Rehoboth Church, be endowed anew, and commended to the patriotism and Christian spirit of the whole Church; and that a Committee of five be appointed, who shall, without charge to the Assembly, proceed with all diligence to collect the sum of \$6,000 for a monument, which shall be under the care of The Presbyterian Historical Society; and the further sum of \$10,000, which shall be held by the Trustees of the Assembly for an endowment for the Rehoboth Church.

The committee appointed (see Minutes of the General Assembly of 1907, p. 251) consisted of Drs. Henry C. McCook and Mervin J. Eckels, of Philadelphia, and Dr. Donald Guthrie, of Baltimore, ministers; and Alfred Percival Smith, Esq., of Philadelphia, and Mr. Emerson G. Polk, of Pocomoke City, Maryland, elders.

Under the leadership of Dr. McCook, the committee made the following gratifying report to the next General Assembly (see Minutes of the Assembly of 1908, pp. 75-77):

The work of redeeming from desecration the grave of Francis Makemie was well under way when your venerable body honored the effort with your approval. The Presbyterian Historical Society had undertaken this duty as especially appropriate to its mission, hoping to complete it before the close of the bicentennial year, as a crowning act of that great anniversary. But insuperable obstacles in obtaining possession of the property hindered our plan in that respect. But the work has now been completed. The old Makemie farm was purchased, and three acres thereof retained as a park. This included the site of the old Makemie family cemetery, which, according to the then prevailing custom, was placed near the residence. The original dwelling had long been destroyed, and the farmhouse on the place was removed. The whole three acres were cleared of barns and outhouses; the ground was graded, sown to lawn grass, and surrounded with a privet hedge. A granite base, with a statue of Makemie in the attitude of preaching, and looking toward Rehoboth, his old-time church on the Pocomoke River, which is in view, has been erected, and protected by a circular iron open fence. The monument stands about seventeen feet high. Further, there has been placed a mausoleum faced with broken bricks from the ruined table tombs and the house, and bearing a suitable inscription to the wife and children and other kindred of the family, buried within the enclosure. . .

The statue was unveiled and the grounds dedicated with suitable ceremonies on the 14th of May, A.D. 1908, a date nearly corresponding with the 200th anniversary of Makemie's death. An interesting feature of the order of exercises which does not appear, was an adjourned meeting of the Presbytery of New Castle, whose bounds over the original Makemie churches now surviving in southern Maryland. Many other ministers and ruling elders from our own as well as from the Southern Church and other Protestant communions sat as corresponding members.

Your Committee has pleasure in stating that our Historical Society has raised all the money required to pay all expenses attending this difficult and complicated enterprise, except about \$250.00, for the final landscape gardening of the ground and the placing of a small stone to mark the site of the old Makemie house. Besides, the sum of \$1,000 had been raised and invested as a fund to keep the grounds and monument in permanent repair.

As stated in the foregoing report to the General Assembly of 1908, "the statue was unveiled and the grounds dedicated with suitable ceremonies on the 14th of May, A.D. 1908." The day was almost ideally beautiful, and in the air there was a suggestiveness of the genial warmth of approaching summer. A large assemblage gathered from eastern Maryland and from northern and eastern Virginia. The local committee had estimated an attendance of not more than three hundred; the actual number present was, perhaps, not less than twenty-five hundred. It was a typical "Eastern Shore" gathering. All sorts of vehicles, from automobiles to mule carts, had come from farm, village and town, bringing their loads of interested spectators. This remarkable manifestation of local interest was as gratifying as it was unexpected. A special train, personally superintended by Mr. William A. Patton, president of the New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk Railroad, conveyed members of The Presbyterian Historical Society and above one hundred prominent Presbyterians from Philadelphia to the nearby Makemie Park Station.²

A covered stand had been erected on the bank of the creek not far from the Monument, in which those who were to take part in the ceremonies, and others, assembled. The exercises proceeded in the following order:

1. The Rev. Joseph B. North, LL.D., pastor of the Makemie Memorial Church, Snow Hill, Maryland, offered the Prayer of Invocation.
2. An Introductory Statement was made by the Rev. Henry C. McCook, D.D., who presided throughout the exercises.
3. A Commemorative Poem, by Dr. Henry van Dyke, of Princeton University, vice president of the Presbyterian Historical Society, who was unable to be present, was read by Professor De Benneville K. Ludwig, Ph.D., treasurer of the Makemie Monument Fund, and who has been for a

quarter of a century the treasurer of The Presbyterian Historical Society. The sonnet was as follows:

Francis Makemie,
Presbyter to Christ in America 1683-1708

To thee, plain hero of a rugged race,
We bring a meed of praise too long delayed.
Thy fearless word and faithful work have made
The path of God's republic easier to trace
In this New World: thou hast proclaimed the grace
And power of Christ in many a woodland glade,
Teaching the truth that leaves men unafraid
Of tyrants' frown, or chains, or death's dark face.

Oh, who can tell how much we owe to thee,
Makemie, and to labors such as thine,
For all that makes America the shrine
Of faith untrammelled and of conscience free!
Stand here, grey stone, and consecrate the sod
Where sleeps this brave Scotch-Irish man of God!

4. The Scripture was read by Mr. William H. Scott, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Presbyterian Historical Society, from the Twenty-third Psalm, in which the audience was asked to join. It was noticed that the large assemblage seemed to unite as with one voice in reciting the psalm.

5. The national hymn, "America," announced by the Rev. J.N. McDowell, pastor of the Pitts Creek Church, of Pocomoke City, Maryland, was sung; the singing being led by a volunteer choir composed of representatives of the five original Makemie churches – Rehoboth, Makemie Memorial (Snow Hill), Pitts Creek (Pocomoke City), Manokin (Princess Anne) and Wicomico (Salisbury).

6. Mr. E.G. Polk, who as been for forty-five years a devoted elder of the Rehoboth Church, presented the following

Record of the Purchase and Transfer of the Makemie Park and Monument Site

In speaking of the Makemie farm on which we are today assembled, I feel that I am talking of holy ground. There is no spot in all this broad continent that has a stronger claim upon the reverence of American Presbyterians.

¹ See Dr. Bowen's *The Days of Makemie*, pp. 546-549

² Interesting descriptions of the dedication of the monument, and incidents connected therewith, may be found in *The Presbyterian* of May 13, 1908, pp. 8 and 9, and May 20, 1908, pp. 20 and 21; *The Interior* of May 23, 1908, pp. 707 and 708; *The Westminster* of June 6, 1908, p.9; and *The New York Observer* of June 25, 1908, pp. 825 and 826. In *The Westminster* of May 16, 1908, pp. 8 and 9, Dr. McCook tells "The Story of the Makemie Monument."