

SOME PIONEERS
OF
Washington County, Pa.
A FAMILY HISTORY

BY
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REV. JOHN SMITH.

Rev. John Smith was born in 1747, near Stirling, Scotland; was graduated at the University of Glasgow, and studied theology with Prof. Moncrieff at Alloa, near Stirling, on the river Forth.

He was ordained in 1769 by the Associate Presbytery of Stirling, with a view of going as a missionary to America. In the late fall of 1770, Revs. John Smith and John Rogers were appointed missionaries to America and sailed for their new home, arriving late in the winter. They attended a meeting of the Presbytery at Pequea, Pa., June 4, 1771, and became members of it.

The Associate Church of North America began in 1750, when the first application was made for preaching, 13 years after the secession from the Church of Scotland. Another application was made in 1770, which led to the appointment of Revs. Smith and Rogers.

Before the close of the year 1771, Rev. Smith received a call to preach from Guinston, York county, Pa., and Middle Octoraro, Lancaster county, Pa., and accepted the latter, being installed May 6, 1772, adding Oxford to his charge March 19, 1783. After the Union, the Covenanter Church

of Octoraro was also added to his church. He remained here until 1794. The congregations grew rapidly, so much so that on May 20, 1776, the Presbytery was divided into those of New York and Pennsylvania, Rev. Smith being a member of the latter, in which all his work was done.

In 1774 the Reformed Presbytery was constituted in Pennsylvania, and in 1777 a plan of union was proposed between the Associate (Seceders) Presbytery of Pennsylvania, and the Reformed (Covenanters) Presbytery of Pennsylvania, to be called the Associate Reformed Presbytery. The agitation was kept up, and in April 1781, Revs. John Smith and William Marshall were appointed a committee, to draw up an ultimatum upon which the Associate Church would enter the communion of the Reformed Presbytery, which was unanimously adopted by the Associate Presbytery, but was rejected by the Reformed Presbytery.

Another meeting was held November 29, 1781, in the report of which it is said, that "Mr. Smith, who was a man highly gifted, especially as a public speaker, directed all his efforts to secure a majority in favor of the Union." It was again brought up June 13, 1782, before the Associate Presbytery, which voted for the Union, and it was completed.

The Associate Synod of Scotland August 31, 1785, condemned the action, and held Rev. Smith and the others who voted for it, "to be in a state of apostasy," and the two members not voting for it, were constituted the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania. Later nearly all these ministers returned to the Associate Church, Rev. Smith on account of the statement of principles of the Associate Reformed Presbytery not being satisfactory.

He was one of the ablest advocates of the Union; and in a report on the subject of Psalmody, adopted by the Associate Reformed Synod of America in 1838, he is called "One of the fathers of the Associate Reformed Church."

In the trying and stirring days of the Revolution, the ministers of these churches were in earnest and active sympathy with the Colonists, some of them being chaplains in the army.

Rev. John Smith was settled at Octoraro most of the time he was in eastern Pennsylvania, but by request was one of the first preachers in Washington county, Pa. Rev. John McMillan, D. D., was the earliest Presbyterian minister settled in the county, first visiting it in 1775, and was located permanently as pastor of the Chartiers and Pigeon creek churches in 1778.

Rev. Thaddeus Dodd became pastor of Ten Mile Presbyterian church in 1777, and Rev. Joseph Smith, of Cross creek and Buffalo churches in 1779. The Peters creek Baptist Church was constituted November 10, 1773, Rev. John Whitteker pastor.

In 1773 members of the Associate Church in Peters township made application to the Presbytery of Pennsylvania, for preaching, and in answer to their prayers, Revs. John Smith and John Rogers visited them, but did not organize a church, that being done by Rev. Matthew Henderson in 1778, who first visited the section in 1775. Revs. Smith and Rogers were probably the first members of the Presbyterian faith to preach in the county, if not the first of any church.

Upon the death of Rev. Matthew Henderson in October

1795, pastor of the Chartiers Associate Church, Canonsburg, Pa., Rev. Smith was called, and became its pastor November 15, 1796, remaining as such until January 21, 1802. He was also pastor of the Peters Creek Associate Church at the same time. It was said of him while pastor here, that he was "A man of superior intellectual powers and a very popular speaker."

The Associate Synod of North America was constituted at Philadelphia May 20, 1801, of which Rev. Smith was Moderator.

Soon after 1800, Revs. John Smith and John Anderson were appointed to issue a warning on the evil of slave-holding. They made a report in which they pronounced slave-holding a moral evil, and urged the necessity of fully instructing the people in reference to its nature.

December 26, 1797, while he was pastor of the Chartiers Church, the trustees purchased 4 acres, 2 rods and 13 perches of land from John Canon, founder of Canonsburg, for which they paid 45 pounds. One of the trustees was Samuel Agnew, brother of Mrs. Smith, who came to Chartiers creek in 1780. The land was situated about one mile southwest of Canonsburg, on which the congregation erected their first meeting house, and the remaining portion was used as a burial place by the people of Canonsburg and vicinity, now known as "Oak Spring Cemetery."

The house was built of round logs daubed with clay, some of the logs having been cut to give light. The seats were of round poles laid on blocks. It had no fire place, stove or chimney. There the congregation would sit for two sermons, in cold winter days, without fire, and no glass

in the windows. The church served by Rev. Smith is now the Chartiers U. P. Church. The old log house gave way to one built of limestone, which was succeeded by a brick church in 1834. This was torn down in 1869, and the present church edifice in Canonsburg was erected in its place and dedicated in March 1870.

After his release here, Rev. Smith served a while in Alexandria, Va., and after his release there he lived on a farm near Canonsburg, where he died March 25, 1825. The day before his death, a Chronicler says: "He attended the funeral of a neighbor, Mr. Weller, and after the interment he returned with the family to the house of the deceased. Several other friends were present, and he delivered a very solemn and pertinent address. He remained over night, and next morning at the breakfast table, after asking the blessing, he reclined his head backwards and immediately expired without a struggle or groan."

A church historian said of him: "In mental force, in theological learning and in pulpit power, Mr. Smith had few equals, and perhaps no superiors, among all the ministers with whom he was ecclesiastically associated, and soon after the Union of 1782, he was designated by the Associate Reformed Synod, as a suitable person to take oversight and instruction of its theological students." This position he held for about ten years.