

HISTORICAL SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE

40TH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

REFORMED CHURCH

OF EAST MILLSTONE, N. J.

OCTOBER 8, 1895,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. ALONZO PAIGE PEEKE.

Pastors of Reformed Church of East Millstone

REV. GILES VAN DER WALL, D. D.,
REV. DAVID COLE, D. D.,
REV. M. L. BERGER, D. D.
REV. WILLIAM H. PHRANER,
REV. A. MCWILLIAM,
REV. J. PASCHAL STRONG,
REV. A. PAIGE PEEKE.

The Members of Consistory at present are:

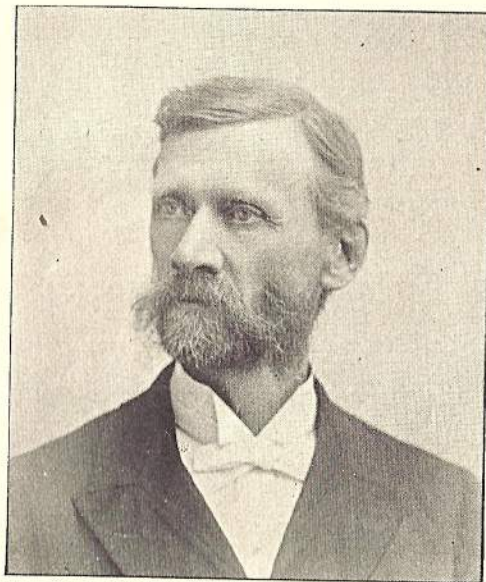
Elders.

J. NEWTON VOORHEES,
JOHN V. D. NEVIUS,
LEWIS T. HOWELL,
THOMAS COOPER.

Deacons.

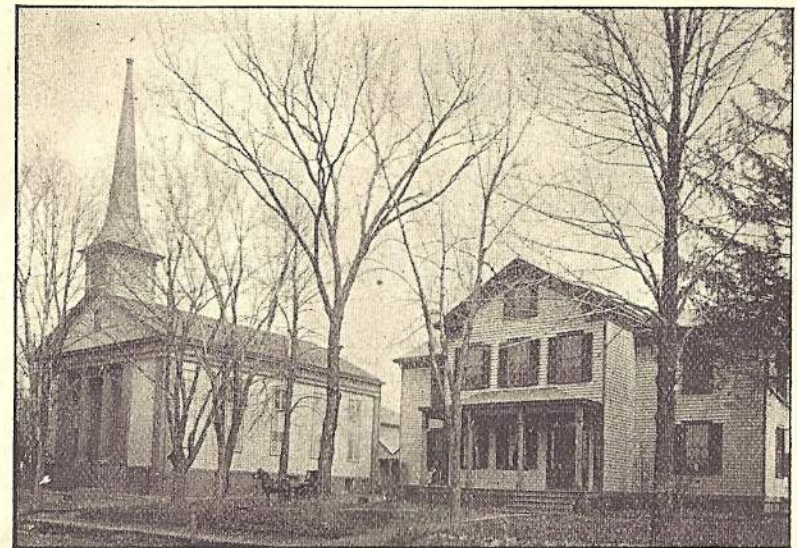
JOHN B. FRENCH,
DAVID BAKER,
C. N. WILSON,
WILLIAM M. CORNELL.

The fortieth anniversary was observed October 8, 1895. The historical discourse was given in the morning service, by the pastor. Rev. David Cole, D. D., Rev. James LeFevre, D. D., Revs. G. M. S. Blauvelt, Theodore Shafer, J. L. Southard, George J. Van Nest and Jacob Cooper, LL. D., took part in the exercises of the morning or afternoon, all of which were very interesting.



REV. ALONZO PAIGE PEEKE.

Oct 8, 1895



REFORMED CHURCH AND PARSONAGE, EAST MILLSTONE, N. J.

DEUT. 2 :7.—*"These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing."*

Every day of life is a leaf of history, and every year a volume. A thousand millions of men and women of every nation are in the streams of humanity that flow through the world. Like a rushing flood they go down to the ocean of eternity. Some floods fertilize the soil; others leave desolation in their track. The flowing waves chase those that precede; the new-born chase away the old, and they also pass away. Millions of Jews were led by miracle out of bondage through the waves and the wilderness toward an assured inheritance, and yet only two of them entered the land of promise. Nevertheless the lame can leap over mountains by God's help. Who hesitates between two mosques returns without prayer. Decide and then act. Who loves, labors. It is easy to talk, hard to be valiant. Words are women, deeds are men. History is the record of what has been done. In the present we are recording our past. As the sun's shadow shifts, so there is no permanence on earth. In the fadeless light of God we are writing records which will meet us in the resurrection morn.

This day the Reformed Church of East Millstone, ends forty years of organized existence.

October 9, 1895, a committee from the Classis of New Brunswick, met in the neighboring church of Millstone (or Hillsborough) which gave sixteen members for the new enterprise, and the organization was effected. Two members, a husband and wife, came from Franklin Park. Eighteen members were the entire church at the beginning. Not one of these is living here to day. Mrs. W. W. Van Doren, who passed from earth in February 1895, was the last of the original church.

Rev. Dr. Mesick, the chairman of the committee of Classis who directed the formation of the organization, the election of the elders and deacons, the installation of officers, and preached the first sermon to the infant organization, is still living in this county and is kept from us to day in the discharge of his duties as Stated Clerk of the Classis of Raritan.

When this Church ended ten years of existence they "resolved, to celebrate the day as shall be conducive to good." Also, "that the Rev. Prof. Cole be invited to preach the historical sermon, giving a review of the good way in which the Lord has led us." They decided to hold a fair and festival, "that dinner and tea be provided, that none need return to their homes after the sermon, but that all may spend the afternoon and evening in social intercourse." The financial result of this occasion is not stated, although they appropriated the proceeds of the festival to church expenses. Neither do the minutes allude to the historical address. And but for printers' ink and the wise preservation of valuable documents in our church archives, we would not have known what a full and interesting account the second pastor gave of the affairs and leading men in those important ten years of foundation building. This celebration occurred during the ministry of the third pastor, who left this locality for Fishkill-on-Hudson, where he had been called to the pastorate of a Reformed Church.

Thus one fourth of the history of this Church passed under the ministrations of Revs. Giles Van der Wall, David Cole and Martin L. Berger. Each of these has since received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. Each was also here ordained to the ministry when installed.

What is already written of this decade need not be repeated except to a very small extent. Every pastor leaves his personal im-

pression upon the church, and community. In different ways and with varying intensity it is true, and yet every man's characteristic influence abides.

Some ministers also make it a point to leave their record in some material improvement in every church they may be called to occupy. Under the first pastor this suitable and substantial house of worship was erected although an energetic, generous and courageous little band made large preparations for building before deciding their choice of pastor. At the dedication the cost of lot and building and bell was found to be \$5748.23. The large, commodious and attractive parsonage was constructed during Dr. Cole's pastorate, upon a plan suggested by himself and at no little personal sacrifice. But the congregation thus obtained a home for their pastor, at no immediate outlay for construction, and the pastor paid the interest of the entire cost instead of the rent formerly paid for his residence. Beside the cost of the parsonage, \$3300, there were arrears of over \$1000.

Rev. M. L. Berger was a man of abounding force, and dominance of purpose who could not be comfortable under such a debt, and rather welcomed the monumental task of removing it. And so with gigantic effort and wondrous generosity on the part of the congregation and their friends, \$1458 were raised and all indebtedness canceled. It was a grand achievement for which the man and the times were singularly adapted. Of the generous contributors who made the effort successful, there remain in the community only N. S. Wilson, James Y. Elmendorf, H. V. D. Garretson and W. B. Ribble, M. D. This was done in June 1863. In April 1864, the record shows \$397 given for benevolence. This ecclesiastical infant, by her vigorous activities, may have colored the cheeks of her ancient maiden sisters.

Rev. William H. Phraner was called to become pastor in April 1866. Dr. Cole reports the numerical strength of the Church at the close of his pastorate, April 1, 1863, 77 families and 130 members, in actual communion. The Classical report, April 1866, reads, 70 families, and the total in communion 129.

The second decade began under auspicious circumstances and went forward under the discreet, resourceful and restless activity of the fourth pastor. Up to this time the choir had occupied the gallery. Rev. Berger designed a plan for pulpit and

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platform, which resulted in this niche which he lighted from above, or rather tried that method, and thus a change was made in the architecture of the building. Rev. Phraner had the platform extended forward. Although he has always been able to fill any place as a minister which he has consented to occupy, he found an undesired amount of unoccupied pulpit around him. This led to energetic effort to secure a pipe organ. It was resolved to raise \$800 for this purpose. But the committee to raise the money and make the purchase, viz: Messrs. Joseph H. Olcott, N. S. Wilson, I. I. Van Nuys, P. P. Wortman, William Wyckoff, their wives, and Mrs. W. H. Phaner, raised the money and had built and placed in this niche an organ costing \$1200. It is the same instrument still, with some improvements added a few years ago by Mr. L. T. Howell. It looks ancient now but its tones are pleasant still. The pastor's good wife presided at the keyboard, and her praises for this welcome and skillful service have not ceased on earth, although her angel fingers now strike the harps of Heaven. How great a possession this organ was for the young and enterprising church, you will perceive when you are told that this was nearly twenty years in advance of a pipe organ in the church at Middlebush, thirty years in advance of a pipe organ in our venerable Millstone mother whose vigorous life runs almost thirty years in her second century, and thirty years in advance of a pipe organ at Franklin Park, where our venerable and flourishing neighbor is almost in the last decade of the second century of a prosperous existence. It was at that time the only pipe organ in rural Somerset County. It is well known to the musically devoted, that of all helps to the service of praise, no instrument of music can be a satisfactory substitute for this.

In January, 1870, Rev. W. H. Phraner left this Church to become the pastor of the Second Church of Schenectady, N. Y.

The report to Classis in 1870, reads: Number of families 79; total in communion 131. At this date the growth of the village had ceased. Railroad changes in the locality effected great alterations in business purposes. The church planted here to meet a manifest necessity in a new and growing community, had reached its boundaries of extension. It had and still has its place to fill, but its possibilities of enlargement must be in the growth of the village or in some changes in the relations of the rural families to the sister organizations where kindred ties are old and strong.

Rev. Alexander McWilliam was called in April, 1870. He became pastor in June, and exactly twenty years afterwards he preached his last sermon. His personal ministry thus covered exactly one half of our history. The report to Classis for 1890, reads: Families 65, total in communion 140. The inevitable subject of repairs had already commanded the attention of the Consistory. Looking up was the noble habit of the people. Already at the beginning of the fourth pastorate a defective spire was a discouraging feature in their aspirations. This was a matter of prompt consideration, and at last the needful repairs were effected. At the beginning of the fifth pastorate they are again considering defects in the starward direction. The record, says, "on examination it was found that the ceiling was poor, that it was unsafe. It was then resolved that it be replaced by new, that a close floor be laid over it on the north side to protect it from drifting snow," and, "that the ladies of the congregation (with the approbation of the Consistory) assume the expense of frescoing, painting and graining the inside of the Church." This was in September 1871. In 1885 the Church is still looking up and new difficulties disturb their vision. The roof was in bad condition. A new one was imperative. The safety and beauty of the frescoed ceiling were in danger. The present metallic roof was the result of the investigation by the committee. The Church and parsonage were both painted as well as repaired when necessary between 1870 and 1890, and the money raised to meet the necessary expenses. The large and frequent repairs of the plastering in the ceilings of the Church and parsonage has an unpleasant ecclesiastical suggestion of daubing with untempered mortar.

In the years of Rev. McWilliam's pastorate the record shows the uniform results of faithful and steady ministrations among the people. The minutes of a Consistory meeting, June 3, 1876, are remarkable. There is no mention of special services, even to the extent of a prayer meeting, yet 41 persons were then received on confession of their faith, and 4 by certificate. An event of such importance in the history of any church is entitled to more than a brief mention for the instruction and encouragement of future generations. The record of accessions is large during this long pastorate. But the deaths and removals were also many. In 1890 the

report to Classis shows twelve families less, and ten members more than Dr. Cole reported in 1863.

"*Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*" The passing years have made great changes in the personnel of the membership. Of the original church of 18 members not one is among us to-day. Of the 166 names making up the list at the close of the second pastorate, but eleven represent persons living in the congregation to-day. Only twenty-three remain of those who were members at the close of Rev. Phraner's ministry.

In August 1890 Rev. J. Paschal Strong, of Cohoes, N. Y., was called to this church. He signified his acceptance in September, and was installed in October.

On December 6, while preaching and with arm extended in gesticulation, he fell forward out of the pulpit with a stroke of paralysis, and afterwards gave no sign. His interment was at Passaic, N. J. The bereaved Church paid the funeral expenses, recorded a touching memorial of their esteem and appreciation of their pastor, were pleased to have his excellent family occupy the parsonage until their future plans could be adjusted, and made them the objects of affectionate and unremitting consideration. The brief pastorate was full of helpful and abiding results. The parsonage was put in repair for the new incumbent, a large furnace was placed in the cellar, and the house supplied with flues and registers. A range was also placed in the kitchen. He reorganized the Ladies' Aid Society, secured the adoption of new methods, and thus set in motion activities full of financial benefit to our congregation.

The present pastor was called in July 1891, from Centreville, Mich., and was installed in October.

Up to this date the basement of the church had served the purpose of its construction, as well as that of a select school, until the rollicking children became too great an annoyance to the resident pastors. For the weekly devotional meetings and the Sabbath school it became more and more objectionable. There were many earnest wishes and praiseworthy efforts for a more desirable place, but the workers for this object became discouraged, and putting accumulated monies at interest, their purpose lapsed into innocuous desuetude. With a new leader there were new purposes and adjustments in many things, as was to be expected. The submission, by the pastor, of architectural plans for an addition to the

original structure with estimate of its cost, after full discussion by all interested, resulted in the giving of \$700 by those who had accumulated money for a chapel, \$200 by the Ladies' Aid Society and the promise of one-third of the entire expense, or \$500, by Mr. L. T. Howell. The result is the attractive structure attached to the eastern part of this building. It was adjusted to the former choir rooms, at either side of the organ, so that they are now library, infant class or cloak rooms, and has pleasant access to the main auditorium. It is also connected with the original basement, where is now a convenient kitchen and a large and commodious dining room. The old pulpit was at that time exchanged for this of modern shape and adjustable. The platform was also lowered and broadened with the most gratifying results in appearance and serviceableness. The seating of the chapel was mainly secured by a suggestion that individuals give the average price of a chair or one dollar. The platform chair was the combined gift of the oldest and youngest members of the church, viz.: Sarah Van Nostrand, in her 105th year, and William Carlton Baird, in his 13th year. The Frink reflectors were given by Mrs. L. T. Howell. We now have these improvements without an item of expense unpaid. If, when you shall have examined them, you know of any Reformed Church in Somerset county, outside of Somerville, as well provided in these respects, please tell it in Gath and publish it in the streets of Askelon. The sheds were rebuilt and removed to their present position, under John R. Sutphen and Garret Garretson, as committee, to make way for the new structure. The building committee for the chapel and cotemporary improvements were Joseph H. Olcott, L. T. Howell and Thomas Cooper. The parsonage was painted in 1872, and the church and chapel in 1893, the funds being provided by the Ladies' Aid Society. This society placed a large new furnace under the church, in 1892, and made and finished the kitchen in 1894. The present pastorate has covered one-tenth of our history. These are the material results at the end of four years after great and persevering effort on the part of the people. The ladies have nearly a hundred dollars on deposit for further improvements, and were all subscriptions and pew rents for the last year collected the consistory could cancel all obligations to date. The material results at the end of forty years, this house of worship with unusual conveniences, and the parsonage, both newly painted and

in good repair, are a pleasant feature of our village, the satisfaction of the congregation and the admiration of the passer-by.]

Of the spiritual results we will not presume to speak with accuracy. The report to Classis for 1885 reads: Families, 74; total in communion, 152. The last name in the roll of members is numbered 596. A few of these names are numbered twice, because the individuals have moved away by certificate, and returned. A flourishing Sabbath school has existed all these years. The seed of the Kingdom has been planted in the minds of children and adults by teacher and preacher, with persevering faithfulness. The moral or religious instruction has been of certain sound. The Word has been faithfully preached, and God's ordinances piously observed. But ordinary records can never state the whole truth about the spiritual influences of the Christian church. The life of personal walk with God, known to Him who seeth in secret, the family altar, the reading of the Bible, the awakened interest in the extension of Christ's Kingdom, the various forms of Christian Endeavor, all having their source and encouragement in the church, have uplifting influences as broad as the world, and as endless as eternity. This has been to many none other than the house of God, and the gate of Heaven.

The first death during the present pastorate, was that of Peter Albert Nevius, whose record of faithful attendance upon church services is unequaled. The last was that of John R. Sutphen, who, with his departed wife, were for many years esteemed and valuable members, ready for every good work. There are in the church a Women's Society; a Mission Band, named Hopeful Workers; a Society of Christian Endeavor, and a Ladies' Aid Society.

The following items will be of interest to many:

The first sexton of the church named in the minutes was W. W. Van Doren. The first chorister, Boyd Van Doren. The second, William H. Smith. The first treasurer was Richard H. Kuhl, who was also clerk. The second was B. B. Van Nuys, who gave \$275 toward building the parsonage, or removing the debt, then went west and became a preacher. The third was James H. Stryker, whose widow is still with us. F. S. Wynkoop, who gave \$800, and Thomas Denny, Jr., who gave \$500 in 1863, both non-residents, are still living in New York city. Mr. Garret T. Garretson has been the acceptable custodian of our benevolent contributions

over twenty years. Mr. John V. D. Nevius was the efficient and faithful treasurer of this church for twenty-three years. The burdens of this uncompensated office should be gratefully appreciated. There is nothing more helpful to the minister's efficiency, than exact and prompt business methods in church finances. This will keep the machinery in good running order, prevent the distressing howls of dry axles on the chariot wheels; obviate all danger from heated journals; insure pleasant progress, and further the safe arrival at the city of the undefiled, of all on board and on schedule time.

No one can tell whether the changes in farm occupants or village residents will bring financial strength or the reverse to this church. It cannot be told of any neighboring church. The field of usefulness, and the ability to occupy it has been demonstrated. The original demand for such an organization here, has been increasingly recognized, and noble helpers have, from time to time, cast in their lot with us. Although the borders of the old contiguous congregations have changed but little in our favor, there has proved to be room and reason for this newer organization, and encouragement abounds. And it is pleasant to know that we increasingly, have the good will and sympathy of our neighbors.

If there were a city or village in America without a Christian church, even Robert G. Ingersoll would avoid it as a place of residence. There may, sometimes, be too many church organizations in a community, but never too many Christian influences.

One of the supreme assurances given to God's ancient people, that the Divine Redeemer was among men, was: "Unto the poor the Gospel is preached." And does the true prosperity of the average church depend, after all, as much upon the size and wealth of the congregation, as upon their liberality? The church, or people who sacrifice most to do Christian work, where needed, are laying up treasures in Heaven. There will always be those who prefer being in large churches to save a few dollars, to being in smaller churches, planted, where needful, in the hope of saving a few souls. And I have no doubt this spirit of indifference to the extension of Christ's Kingdom occasions more joy in the nether regions, than it does in the realms on high. But there is no respect of persons with God.

And there is danger that the prosperity which results from the Christian religion, may engender unholy pride, neglect of religious

duties, worldly extravagance, and even dissipation, all of which produce undesirable results. When the Christian church in this land becomes a social club with elegant appointments, where the rich and poor no longer meet together, it will prove a Pandora's box, from which will come mutual antagonism between poverty and riches, labor and capital; and anarchy and socialism, with all their unwelcome brood, will increasingly menace the peace and welfare of society. The security and happiness of the better classes then will be that of men dwelling in Pompeii, while Vesuvius is making the Heavens lurid with blazing eruptions.

When a president of a great railroad explained his willingness to give "Clerical Orders," because every worthy minister along their line was worth more to their property interests than several policemen, he asserted what every honest thinker could confirm. And from this lower consideration, we believe that every property interest in a Christian community is under financial obligations to the church of God, and so is every individual because of benefits, possible only to Christian civilization. No other light or moral education can fill its place, however unsatisfactory the workings of the church sometimes are.

You may plant your seed in the finest soil, where the sun shines not, and supply abundant artificial light, from the taper's feeble gleam to the dazzling electric glare, you will get no satisfactory growth or fruit. There can be produced no desirable harvest without the light from God's sun in the Heavens. So you may try any method of which the world has ever heard for enlightening and civilizing men, and making them better for this life and the future, but no desirable moral, spiritual, or religious harvest in any place beneath the stars, has ever been produced where the true light of Heaven, the Son of Righteousness, has not shone.

If there is a spot on earth predestinated from all eternity to be the home of the Reformed Church in America, it is found in those square miles of New Jersey lying west of a line drawn from New Brunswick to Princeton, and occupying nearly all of Somerset county, outside of her villages. This large territory is occupied by the churches of Middlebush, Millstone, Franklin Park, Griggstown, Harlingen, Blawenburgh, Nesbanic, North Branch, South Branch, Readington, etc. In not one of these, nearly all old and flourishing congregations, is there a rival Protestant organization, existing and seeking sup-

port in the same field, except in this the youngest, with the smallest contributing territory. And every minister of our denomination and every member is interested in the upbuilding of every one of our own church enterprises. The brethren of Classis are greatly interested in us. The reason for the existence of this church is greater to-day than it was forty, thirty, or twenty years ago. Does it not begin the last decade of the half century with as good, if not better prospects for usefulness, and better equipped than at the beginning of any similar period?

When an industrious bovine was grazing on a very stony hill top, the owner's neighbor said "Patrick your cow has lean picking up there." "Thru, your honor, but she has a very foine prospect." Although our pastorate or pasturate, is not so rich in tithes or turkeys, that we can ever add to our attenuated anatomy the abounding corpulency of our immediate neighbors, we nevertheless in the noblest sense have a fine prospect. The village may take on large growth, and more strong families may come to us, for reasons the Master will approve. There is and shall continue to be need of earnest work for Christ here, in this varied and varying community. This, the owner of property, the friend of law and order, the lover of good neighborhood and worthy citizenship, as well as the servant of Christ, cannot fail to appreciate.

The past is secure and the future hopeful! There has not been a mortgage upon our property since 1863. At the end of five years the second pastorate persuaded the church to become self-sustaining. It has continued so thirty-five years, and you see how it appears to-day. When we consider the size of the congregation, or the number of its well-to-do families, the amount of money given during these years to provide and preserve their church property and sustain religious ordinances is almost marvellous. Had they given many times more generously to Christ's cause at home and abroad the church would have been still stronger from having been more benevolent. "There is that giveth and yet increaseth, there is that withholdeth more than is meet and it tendeth to poverty." Every church is enriched by giving, and has a surer and more useful life the more it gives for religious and benevolent purposes. A church of many prosperous but parsimonious families leaving their church property in shabby condition, their current expenses in arrears and their benevolence shamefully little in proportion to their

wealth, is undoubtedly dying. In Scripture phrase, "is dead while she liveth." But was there ever a church of few or many families that died from large outlay to sustain the means of grace in their midst, even if some thought they were being bled to death for church support? Was there ever a church that became weak and died from benevolence? If you know of one name it, and in the spirit of another I will find that church, if I have to wander far over the earth. I would travel, if need be, day and night, and reaching the moss grown and vine covered ruins, and surveying them in the moon's dim light, lifting my hands reverently over the remnants of departed worth, and my eyes to Heaven, I would say: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." There is a sense in which no church can die. The material structure may perish, and the membership depart, but the church, invisible, may say:

"Men may come, and men may go,
But I go on forever."

This particular organization seemed to be needed here when it was formed. It has had forty years of useful life. How much more of good it might have accomplished with fewer obstacles, and more encouragement we can never know. But, by the blessing of God upon the efforts of the faithful, she lives to-day, a thing of strength and efficiency, far beyond the prospects of her cradled infancy. And may she live

"Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold."