



~ Celebrating 250 Years ~

The First & Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, Maryland

From 1761 to 2011—Our Semiquincentennial

Volume 1, Issue 2

THE SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL:

From Patrick Allison to Alison Halsey

Written by Jim Schneider and Mary S. McLanahan.

This is the second in a series of Historical Minutes to be presented on selected Sundays in celebration of the semiquincentennial of The First and Franklin Street Presbyterian Church.

Yes, the semiquincentennial! "Semi," meaning "half," and "quincentennial," meaning "500 years." The celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of this Church is about to commence!

During worship over the next year, a series of brief historical vignettes will highlight the personalities, places and events that form our history.



The First & Franklin Street Presbyterian Church

210 W. Madison St.
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

410-728-5545
www.firstfranklin.org

In The Beginning...

Today we are traveling back in time and imagination to colonial Baltimore Towne.

The date is Sunday morning, October 11, 1761. We have been invited to attend worship services with a handful of other men and women who comprise the new Presbyterian congregation. They have no regular house of worship, not even the log meeting house yet to be built in two years' time. The tiny congregation has been meeting for some weeks in the homes of its members. This morning we have come with them on horseback or on foot to a two-story wooden-frame house on South Gay Street near the harbor.

The grandfather clock in the corner has just chimed 10:45am, and we are entering the parlor where the service will proceed. The crowded room holds no more than 20 people, all of whom are seated in rows of mismatched chairs.

We are greeted at the door by the Reverend Hector Alison, a man of about 60 years. He has been sent by the Presbytery of New Castle, Delaware, to conduct services in Baltimore for eight weeks. (This Reverend Alison is not believed to have been related to our first minister, Patrick Allison, the young parson whom the congregation will engage in the year 1763 and whose pastorate of nearly four decades will guide the church during its first formative years.) The congregation's call to Hector Alison to be their permanent pastor in 1761 will be rejected by the Presbytery that November as being insufficient to support him.

The members seated among us today are:

- > *The owners of the house, John Smith, 39, and his wife Mary, 28;*
- > *William Buchanan, 29, Mary Smith's brother, who in turn is married to John Smith's sister, Esther. John Smith*

and William Buchanan are exporters of wheat whose wharf can be seen from the parlor windows;

> *Merchants James Sterett and William Spear and their wives. The Smiths, Buchanan, Steretts and Spears and their children are the four Scots-Irish families who came to Baltimore in a caravan of covered wagons from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1759 to escape the ravages of the French and Indian War.*



> *William Smith, 33, merchant, and his wife, Elizabeth, who arrived in Baltimore from Carlisle just last May. (William is believed to have been John Smith's cousin.) In years to come, Baltimore will elect William Smith to represent the city in the first Congress of the United States under the Constitution;*

> *Dr. William Lyon, 46, Scottish-born physician, said to be the first pharmacist in Baltimore;*

> *Dr. Henry Stevenson, 40, from Northern Ireland, the first physician in Baltimore to vaccinate against smallpox.*

The service begins with a long prayer of thanksgiving by the Rev. Alison, followed by his reading of New Testament scripture from a cumbersome, leather-bound Geneva Bible. A group of several mothers and fathers are called by the minister to come forward with their babes in arms to be baptized. Then comes the tour de force, the preaching of an hour-long sermon founded on the scripture lesson of the day, after which communion is served by intinction. The minister intones the benediction, and the service is ended. A dinner of boiled fish, corn on the cob and biscuits prepared by Mrs. Lyon and Mrs. Buchanan is served at tables set outdoors, after which the congregation reassembles later that afternoon for another service of worship.

Two hundred fifty years have passed since that Sunday so long ago. And yet, we, the successors of that tiny congregation continue to worship as a community, not only a community of families, but as one family, more diverse, more accepting, more inclusive, yet still committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.