



~ Celebrating 250 Years ~

The First & Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, Maryland

From 1761 to 2011—Our Semiquincentennial

Volume 1, Issue 1

THE SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL:

From Patrick Allison to Alison Halsey

Written and present by Jim Schneider

This is the first 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...

We are the earliest Presbyterian Church to be founded in the City of Baltimore. Our story begins in the year 1761, when nine or ten Scots-Irish families living in what was then a tiny village clustered around the inner harbor began holding Christian worship services according to the Presbyterian faith in their own homes. A few years later they built a log meetinghouse and called a 23 year-old parson named Patrick Allison to be their first minister. He had been teaching some of their children at a school in Newark, Delaware, because there was then no school in Baltimore.



Some of the members of that first congregation had come from the western frontier around Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where they had found themselves living in a war zone at the time of the French and Indian War. They came to the colony of Maryland to find peace and freedom. What they found instead was that they could not freely exercise their faith because the Anglican Church was the established church of Maryland, publicly-funded and dependent for its support upon taxes imposed on every citizen.

From the beginning ours was a congregation of Dissenters. Patrick Allison would lead the fight to disestablish the Church of England and would become a leading advocate for the separation of Church and State. With the coming of the Revolution, the leaders of this Church stood in the forefront of the fight for independence. Dr. Allison was the chaplain to the Continental Congress when it convened in Baltimore in 1776. General George Washington presented him with this walking stick as a token of their friendship. The names of all the senior pastors since Patrick Allison are engraved on it. *(At this point, Mary McLanahan held up the cane. She is the latest*

generation of the Allison family to be actively involved in the life of this Church. Patrick Allison was the brother of her great-great-great grandfather, Colonel John Allison.)

In 1852, Dr. John Backus, this congregation’s fourth minister, asked: “Who can estimate the results of planting that little church? Of how many churches here and elsewhere has it afforded the seed? How many souls has it thus been the means of introducing into the kingdom of God?”

Two hundred fifty years! Too many people, places and events to mention in one brief Historical Minute! Many you never heard of. But there is one well known to us all, one whose significant anniversary we will also celebrate over the coming year.

It is now a decade since we, the successors of that first congregation, called as our senior pastor the Rev. Dr. Alison Halsey. Just as Patrick Allison came to this Church from Newark, Delaware, so did Alison Halsey, working there on a project to lay the groundwork for a new diverse congregation on the Eastern Shore. She began her pastorate here ten years ago in September 2000, when she took up the mantle of freedom fighter first worn by Patrick Allison. As in the past, this time the cause has been individual freedom of worship in the form of the right of all to freely serve God and the church, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation, and also the undeniable right to marry the person of one’s choice as a civil right that no government can lawfully deny. For 250 years, we have been and continue to be a witness to Jesus Christ in Baltimore and to the world!

This is our heritage. This is our future. This is the vision we will celebrate over the coming year of our SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL!