

Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church

The first English/Scottish Presbyterians to come to America settled on the Eastern Shore in what are now known as Somerset and Worcester counties. These settlers founded groups of "dissenters" and in 1680 invited aid from the Presbytery of London, England.

As a result, Francis Makemie, of Laggan in Ulster of Ireland, was commissioned to come to America to establish Presbyterian Churches.

He arrived on the shore in 1683 and, as America's first ordained Presbyterian Minister, organized congregations at Snow Hill, Rehoboth, Pitts Creek, Manokin in Princess Anne, Wicomico in Salisbury and Buckingham in Berlin, all in Maryland, as well as several churches in the State of Virginia.

The Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church in Snow Hill is generally recognized to be the first regularly organized Presbyterian congregation in America. In addition, Makemie Memorial has the distinction of having been the first Presbyterian

Church in this country known to have issued a call for a pastor before an American Presbytery. This resulted in the pastorate of John Hampton, who served from 1707 until 1717 when he resigned due to poor health.

The Rev. Samuel Davis, who had served as pastor prior to Hampton, returned from Lewis, Del., and preached here probably until his death in 1725.

In 1717 the original Presbytery of Philadelphia was divided into three Presbyteries, one of which was the Presbytery of Snow Hill, which, although constituted, has never met.

The first church structure was built of logs and stood a little nearer the Pocomoke River. It was on the east side of Bank Street located somewhere between Green Street and the old Steamboat wharf. In 1745 the church had stood for 62 years. A contract was then made for a new "Meeting house in Snow Hill town" with William Nilson. The new church, which was erected on land purchased for the church on Market Street, was built at a cost of 557 pounds, no shillings, and 6 pence. (Ed. Note: In 2000 a descendant of William Nilson is the treasurer emeritus of the church)

In 1747, rules were adopted for paying for or "regulating the pews." These rules no longer apply, but custom seems to linger on. Most people sit in the same pew every Sunday.

The Rev. John Hamilton, in 1751 "did set apart as elders of and for the Presbyterian dissenting congregation near Snow Hill town 5 persons, making in all 12, which number had been considered a full bench of elders." Their names were: Adam Spence, Samuel Bratten, Matthew Hopkins, William Aydelotte, Robert King, Jr., John Irving, William Nilson, John Richardson, and William Aydelotte, Jr. The minister's salary was 44 pounds a year.

A new brick structure replaced the frame church, which was 50 years old in 1795. The amount secured for its erection by subscription and the sale of pews appears to have been \$1751.00 (failure for stay current with the cost of a pew was grounds for dismissal from the church.) In 1808, at least 52 families were holding pews in the new church. There were probably more families or people than the number recorded, as it is hard to tell how many were in a pew. For example, in church records a

listing might read: "33, Dr. Spence and others."

In 1883, for the 200th anniversary of the organization of the church, it was resolved to build a Makemie Memorial Church in honor of our founder. Permission was granted from the General Assembly for this building to be the only church ever to be erected in memory of Francis Makemie. At that time there were 114 members and 205 Sabbath School members. (The Sabbath School at that time was something more than our Sunday School of today. Reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught on Sunday afternoons.)

By 1884 the congregation had subscribed about \$5000. A memorial contribution of \$5000 from Lady Cortwright of London, daughter of John Richardson of Snow Hill, helped meet the construction cost of \$15,000 (Ed. Note: in 1993 repairs were made to just the very top of the large steeple. Cost-more than \$80,000.)

The present building was started in 1887 and dedicated on June 29, 1890. A copy of the letter of appreciation to Lady Cortwright from the session hangs in the sanctuary to this day.

The church is built of red brick with red sandstone trim. There are

five beautiful memorial windows in the sanctuary and the vaulted ceiling is supported by hand hewn, exposed wooded arches. The Gothic architecture of the building, with its two tall towers, is very impressive and stands as fitting memorial to the Rev. Francis Makemie.

The internal of the sanctuary remains as it was 100 years ago except for accommodations for a choir and for the organ made in 1948. In 1951, four Sunday School rooms and the kitchen were added to enhance the program facilities of the church.

The present pastor, the Rev. Debra Latture was installed September 17th, 2000.

THE CEMETERY

The cemetery adjoining Makemie church has considerable history attached to it.

The oldest tombstone is that of Samuel Gunn, who was born in 1740 and died in 1790.

Lt. Colonel Levin Handy, an aide to General George Washington is buried here. The date of the stone reads, "1756 to 1799."

A former governor of Maryland, John Walter Smith, who served

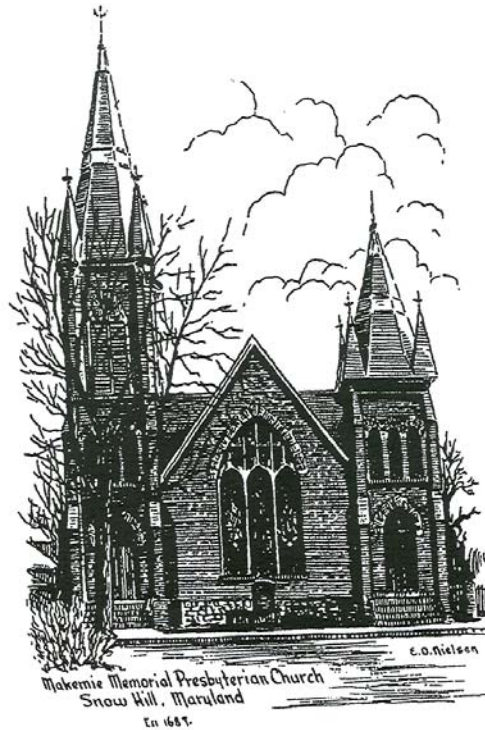
Maryland in the early 1900's, is also interred in this burial ground. While serving as a state senator he succeeded in getting a bill enacted into law at the session of the legislature in 1896 to establish a system for free schoolbooks for Maryland youngsters. His date of burial is listed as June 25, 1925.

One of the more unusual markers is that of Hanna Moore Richardson. A picture of her was sent to Italy and this Italian marble likeness was commissioned. She stands looking in the direction of her formal home.

It is sad to note the many young children buried here who were the victims of various epidemics through the years.

Several years ago, in the interest of preserving our history, photographs were made of the tombstones in the "old section" of the cemetery and the epitaphs were recorded. Many of the epitaphs are eroding with time and becoming difficult to read. The photographs may be viewed in the church office.

We hope you will visit our church and sit in the quiet of this house of God. Whether or not the history of the building is important to God only He knows, but we know that He is important to us, for it has been His guiding Spirit that has made all this history possible.



This history was compiled and written by Anne Kinstler.

**A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
MAKEMIE MEMORIAL
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

**SNOW HILL, MARYLAND
FOUNDED 1683**