

S.C. - Churches - Presbyterian - Purity

Old Purity History Dates Back To Birth Of Chester

By Mrs. Hugh H. Hamilton

America was founded by the courage and devotion of our forefathers, grounded on their devotion and faith in God. So it was that a group of families — the Whites, Kennedys, Douglasses, Walkers, Ellises, Rosses, Henrys, McAlileys, and possibly others whose names I'm not privileged to know, more than two hundred years ago laid the foundation for the community that we know as Purity.

Purity Presbyterian Church in Chester had its origin as a society of religious worshippers, long before the town or county or district called Chester came into being. Purity Community derived its name from this early place of worship. It was first known as Bull Run because it is located near a stream by that name which runs into Rocky Creek.

Purity Church site and cemetery, at the center of the community are of pre-Revolutionary date. They are situated two and one half miles southeast of the city of Chester, on state highway 97 and in the geographical center of the county. This being a plateau about half way between the Catawba River to the east and the Broad River to the west.

Peden Bridge Road branches away from highway 97, which is also Great Falls, at the cemetery and runs east. Columbia Road is approximately one-half mile west with Purity Road connecting it with Great Falls Road.

For more than a half century after the Lords Proprietors planted their colony in 1670, population did not extend more than thirty miles from the tide-water. The Carolina upcountry did not receive any great number of home makers, until about the year 1749, but a great change began about the middle of the century. The back country began to fill in with pioneers. Neither the people nor the Colonial Authorities waited for a treaty with the Indians for occupancy of their lands.

Into this region of which Chester was a part came a great throng of people during the twenty-five year period before the American Revolution. The country felt the tide of vast pioneer enterprise. Southward came many white covered wagon trains, from Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina. Another group came in through the port of Charles Town. They sought the uplands where meadows bordered many creeks and small streams, because they were cattle-raisers before they were agriculturists.

Primitive nature which had only heard the winds and thunder, or the shout of the savage, or the cry of wild beasts, gave way to this onrush of humanity. Forests were soon replaced by orchards

and grainfields. A mother's voice crooning a Christian's lullaby in a log hut followed the last child-

song of some red-skinned squaw. The skill and arts and presence of a fair-skinned race announced that the white man's civilization had come to replace immemorial savagery.

They brought with them a burning desire to worship God in their own way, and as soon as they had built crude homes for themselves, they likewise built a house for worship. The first building was of logs built on a vacant tract of land comprising eleven acres. Each neighbor brought in his unhewn log cut from the adjacent forest, and in nearly a day a shelter was made that would protect the worshipper from the sun's scorching rays and the winters cold winds. It was built of round logs covered with clapboards fastened down with weight poles.

In this crude and humble setting was born the infant church destined to grow into the distinguished Purity known throughout the length and breadth of this land and where Christian influence will echo down through the ages.

The second building was made of hewn logs and had a shingle roof and one window. The benches were made of split timber and not very carefully dressed or planed, the backs were high and straight and the little children could not touch the floor with their toes. A unique feature of this second church was its hand-carved pulpit and sounding board made of walnut by James Douglas in 1795. He was the great, great, great grandfather of Mrs. DeWitt Welborn, Sr., and she has a corner cupboard carved with the same design as the pulpit. The sounding board was constructed so that it threw the speaker's voice out toward the congregation making it easier to hear him.

This building was torn down and a frame building was completed in 1832, ceiled within and painted without — everything new except its old and venerated pulpit and sounding board which

had been used in the second log church. This building was burned in 1904 and these relics of the past were lost. This church was being used as a school at the time.

These people were probably

compelled by some strange dissatisfaction of a political or religious nature, and also invited by allurements of property, freedom and adventure. The majority of these early settlers in this community were of Scotch-Irish ancestors. A people valiant in their faith and incorrigible in their prejudices, they brought not only their religion with them but incorporated in it strong national prejudices.

Their libraries consisted chiefly of a Bible, A Confession of Faith, and a copy of Rouse's version of David's Psalms. These songs of Zion they had long been accustomed to sing in their own rugged hills of Scotland and Ireland, and refused to sing hymns which at that time had not been established in all the churches as part of the worship service. Because of this there was dissension in the congregation, which lasted many years causing some to leave this church.

It is not known why the name Purity was given to this early place of worship, but we can surmise that it was selected because they wanted in their form of worship nothing except the pure and unadulterated gospel preached.

Circumstantial evidence points certainly to a worshipping group at Bull Run (Purity) as early as 1770. From this time until the first pastor was installed, who was the Rev. Robert McColloch (some time later spelled McColough), there were fifteen or twenty supplies sent out by South Carolina Presbytery. The Rev. John Simpson, pastor of Fishing church, established Purity.

In front of the present chapel there is a granite marker bearing the following inscription:

Original site of Purity Church

Established 1787

Moved to Chesterville 1839

Erected by Old Purity Society 1939

This marker was unveiled by DeWitt Welborn, Jr. and John Hamilton, descendants of Alexander Walker, who was on the first bench of elders of Purity Church. This ceremony took place at a regular meeting of Old Purity Society.

People of Purity Church who made up this community, desir-

ing to protect the graves of their loved ones, appointed a committee to collect money for the purpose of building a rock wall around the cemetery. The committee was composed of G. Kennedy, J. Douglas, J. Walker, and Hugh Ross. Approximately one hundred men rallied to this cause making contributions ranging from fifty cents to \$4.00 each. This wall was built in 1817 by James Service. John Walker made the gate. This wall was enlarged and repaired in the early 1870's. There are 462 marked graves dating back to 1790 — and perhaps many unmarked ones. Ann Garner White is buried here.

A wire fence was erected in 1925 on the out side of the rock wall, incorporating many more acres of land.

In 1930 a pavillion was built of cement construction within the wire fence, for the purpose of a meeting place.

In 1906 Old Purity Society was organized for the purpose of keeping alive interest in the cemetery. At first it was an annual all day affair, and was looked forward to with much zeal and pleasure. Later it became the custom to meet at 5 o'clock in the afternoon on the last Thursday in August. There is always an outstanding speaker, then a wonderful picnic dinner is spread on tables at the pavillion.

There was always a school at the old church site. The frame building which burned in 1904 was being used for school. Another was built at this place, and it burned in 1920. Some of the teachers at this historic spot were James Hamilton, son of first John Hamilton on Peden Bridge Road; Miss Clara Dale, Oak Hill, Alabama; Dr. W. J. Henry, Chester; Mrs. W. C. Miller, Chester, Mrs. J. G. L. White,

Chester, and others whose names I was not able to obtain.

J. G. L. White gave land to build another school house a short distance away on the Purity Rd. It was used several years, until the consolidation of town and county schools, and was then sold to Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The settlers who came into this country from the middle of the century on until after the Revolution possessed a high mark of intelligence and culture according to John Fiske (historian). We find these qualities present in this community today.

I shall now endeavor to tell you something of the land owners and their families — their contribution to this community, and to the world; in the fields of religion, education, and business professions. Also where their homes were located.

One of these early families of whom we have a record is John White and his wife Ann Garner White. They landed in Charles Town December 22, 1767 on the ship Earl of Donegal, coming from Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland. He received a grant of

land from King George III of England on May 13, 1768. Mr. Henry White of Chester has this land grant paper. It consisted of 450 acres of land on what is now Great Falls Rd. running up to the site of the first church.

This land was bounded on one side by land of James Cobb, and on the other side by that of Benjamin Ellis, leaving two sides vacant. John and Ann Garner White had six children all born in Ireland except one. They were, William, Margaret, Helen, Isabelle, Jannet and Victoria. There are many families of Whites descended from this first family.

There is a granite marker on the Great Falls Rd. about one half mile from Purity cemetery, erected by their descendents in 1940 which stands on part of the original grant.

The home of J. G. L. White was part of the original grant. O. A. Darby purchased this in 1937 and lives there.

R. M. White owned a home on Columbia Rd. His daughter Sara is a nurse.

The M. E. White home at the intersection of Columbia and Great Falls Rds. is now occupied by his son, Moffatt. The first house was a two story frame building erected by Francis White, in 1845. His nephew Matthew Torbit White owned it next, then his son Matthew Elder White.

This house was burned in 1940, and has been replaced by a modern brick home.

Dr. G. B. White, late dentist of Chester, is a son of this home. M. H. White, president Peoples National Bank of Chester, is a son of Dr. White.

Dr. Bonner Dale White, son of M. E. White, has been an Associate Reformed Presbyterian missionary in Montgomery Pakistan for thirty-five years. His daughter is a medical missionary in the hospital there, and a son James Dale is a ministerial student at Richmond Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

Beginning with early land owners adjacent to church site, we find two brothers. Cyrus Davies Melton owned land on the northern side, running over to the Lancaster Rd. It later became the Glen property. On the east, George Washington Melton owned a tract bordering Peden Bridge Rd. Both of these men were lawyers and moved to Columbia. Lucius Melton on West End Rd. is a grandson of G. W. Melton and Mrs. W. R. Wallace is great niece of both.

G. W. Melton sold to Major Prioleau Hamilton on January 12, 1875 — 375 acres. Maj. Hamilton served his country in Civil War, but was not in this section of the country. Herman P. Hamilton in Chester is his grandson.

Maj. Hamilton sold to John Frazier, and his son, Sam Frazier owns it now.

William John Henry bought the William Ross land which joined the G. W. Melton land. He volunteered for service in Civil War

his age. He then organized a home guard of which he became captain, and was in Battle of Pocatigo.

Although he was a member of Hopewell A. R. P. Church, he organized a Sunday School at Old Purity and taught in it. He married Sara Torbit. Their children — Dr. H. M. Henry, A. R. P. minister, conducted services at Purity during summer vacation while a student at Erskine College. Judge J. K. Henry also taught Sunday School at Purity for many years. Dr. John Torbit Henry, a physician, established the first hospital in Chester. Caroline Henry, married Dr. G. B. White, dentist of Chester. Janie Henry married T. G. Patrick of White Oak, S. C.

Hugh Henry, father of William John came to America after the Revolution from Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland.

Judge J. K. Henry and family lived at the Henry place for a while. When he moved to Chester it was sold to Will White. It passed through many ownerships, of short duration, and is now owned and occupied by Mr. Joe Logan, his son Eugene, and son-in-law, Clell Rollings. The father occupying a modern grey stone home next to the old Henry house, where son Eugene lives. Clell Rollings built a modern brick home on the hill across the road and a store in front, at foot of the hill.

Next to this estate was a small tract of land owned by Mrs. Nannie Moore.

David Mabry Mobley acquired through family estate 900 acres of land on both sides of the road. His father Edward Mobley came from England. David Mabry Mobley built a splendid anti-bellum home in 1856. The staircase was imported from England. Columns on front porch had paned glass sections on all four sides. This house was occupied by William Dixon Mobley, son of David Mabry, then by his daughter, Mrs. J. W. Sill. The house was burned in 1926 and it has passed out of the family and has been sold into many small homesites.

William Dixon Mobley was in the service of his country during the Civil War.

The next plantation was first who received a grant of land owned by a man named Jagers who received a grant of land from King George III of England. It passed from Jagers to Perdue, then to Peter Wylie. John Hamilton bought it from Wylie in the early 1800s. John Hamilton married Nancy Boyd. Their children were James, William, John and Martha. The three sons defended their country in the Civil War. William died while in service. James, a senior at Erskine College, volunteered and was a Sgt. He was a prisoner the last few months of the war. When he returned, he got his diploma, moved to Chester, and settled there.

John volunteered for service at seventeen years of age. After the war was over, he purchased land across the road from his father, and his son, Hugh owns the old home and lives there.

Martha Hamilton Barber, owned the old home after her father. Then it was owned by her son John Hamilton Barber and he willed it to his son John Crawford Barber who lives there. The two story part of this old home is 200 years old. It was remodeled several years ago.

The McClintock place joined the Hamilton's. A daughter from this home married Cole from N. C. who invented the Cole cotton planter, much used throughout the south.

Jim Wallace's land joined the McClintock's.

Archie Asbury Owens' land joined that of John Hamilton II. His son Archie Alexander Owens occupied it next, then his son W. C. Owens owns it and lives there.

This is the extent of Purity Community on the Peden Bridge Rd. Children of these families attended school at Purity (after the one room school was abandoned), which stood on land now owned by John Hamilton, a great grandson of the first John Hamilton. This land was part of the Hamilton estate. Some of the teachers who taught there were Miss Ila Boyd from Ft. Lawn, Mr. Tom McKeown, and Mr. Joe Hardin.

Beginning in 1923 children were transported to the city schools in Chester in family cars for several years. Then the school bus was put into operation.

Now we will turn our attention to the historic Douglas place about two miles from Purity cemetery on the Great Falls Road.

James Douglas and his wife Rosannah were married in Ireland before coming to America. He was a cabinet maker. He owned a large tract of land about 2400 acres. Some of it was purchased from the John Knox land which was a grant to him from King George III of England, Sept. 1, 1768.

In 1784 James Douglas built a two story house of massive hewn logs, expertly celled within and weatherboarded on the outside. The two mantles on the first floor are hand carved and sand blasted. They were imported from France. The hearths are made of grey stone which was used as ballast on the ship.

His great, great, great,

great grandson DeWitt Welborn, Jr. has inherited this place and lives here. This property has always been the possession of this family.

Tradition tells us that the Kings Highway running from Charles Town north was cut out of the forests by the British soldiers a short distance from this house and evidently crossed some of this land. Cornwallis is reported to have passed through here.

H. M. Kennick bought 1300 acres of this estate in 1945 and is in the process of building a southern style colonial house on this property. Tradition also says the Kings Highway runs along the basement wall of this house.

James and Rosannah Douglas' son John married Elizabeth Ross. Their children were Rev. John Douglas, Robert, Hugh, James, Mary Penninah and Elizabeth.

The Rev. John Douglas was an outstanding minister of his day. Purity called one of her own sons to her pulpit and he served this church ten years. He preached the dedication sermon at Purity in Chester January 1, 1855. He also wrote a history of this early church in 1865. It has been said that Purity is more indebted to this minister and to this man than to any other person.

His brother, Robert Douglas left in trust a fund of \$2,000 to be used for the maintenance of the cemetery and it has more than doubled by investment. He also gave the land for the cemetery.

Mary Penninah Douglas married James Walker and lived on the northern side of Chester. They attended church at the original site of Purity. Their son William Alexander Walker built the beautiful large house on the hill on Wylie St., known as the Walker house.

James Walker was Mrs. DeWitt Welborn Sr.'s great, great grandfather and William Alexander Walker was her grandfather. She inherited this property and lives there.

Alexander Walker was on the first bench of Elders of Old Purity Church. The other two were James Kennedy and James Williamson.

William Samuel McAliley owned a home on Columbia Rd. known as the "Four Chimney" house. His son Charlie McAliley had a home on Columbia Rd. at Evans station. He married Mable Kittrel. Their children — Charles Jr. Mable, Sara, William.

Charles Jr. was in World War II and reached the rank of Major.

William is a Presbyterian minister and is living in Florida. His parents are there, too.

Samuel Wylie McAliley lived between Ashford Ferry Rd. and Columbia Rd. was a lawyer and was serving as State Senator when the Confederate War broke

out. His son Samuel Lafayette gave his life for his country. A younger son James Gregg was among the 16-year-old soldiers. After the war was over he finished his education as a lawyer and located in Chester. His daughter Mrs. Mary McAliley Colvin lives at the old home.

About 1920 S. L. Robbins from N. C. purchased land from the M. E. White estate and built a golf course and swimming pool on opposite sides of Great Falls Rd. The swimming pool and pavilion are now owned by the Moose Club.

In 1950 W. C. Wylie built the first place of business at the cemetery. It was a filling station and small store.

Wylie Bagley bought this property in 1958 and has a small super market there.

Chester County completed a very modern hospital on site of the golf course in 1952. This is on the northern side of old church property.

Purity Church in Chester built a beautiful Colonial style brick chapel on the edge of this historic site, and it was dedicated on June 16, 1956. It has been named "Old Purity Chapel".

When it was opened for worship, the plan was to use ministerial students until the church could be more securely established. Students who have served are — Robert Bankhead, York, S. C.; Maurice Musick, Gilbert, West Va., and A. J. Moreau, Jr., Charlotte, N. C.

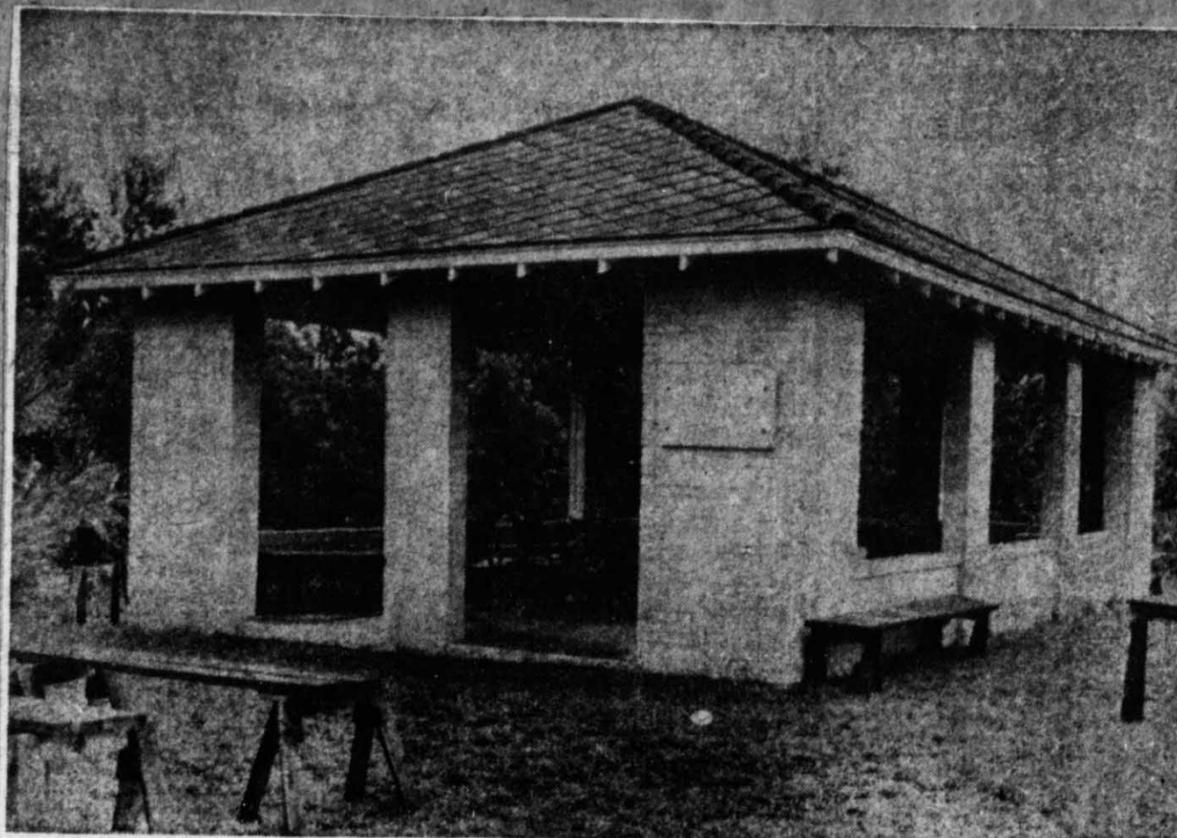
Beginning with 1958 plans were made to secure an ordained minister.

The first organist was Mrs. DeWitt Welborn, Sr. The next was Mrs. W. C. Stevenson.

Many descendants of those buried within the rock wall of the cemetery, have laid off family plots within the wire fence and planted evergreens, flowering shrubs and bulbs to further enhance the beauty of this hallowed place.

Many sacred memories of the past are enshrined at this historic spot. It is our wish that the present and coming generations will accept the torch and hold it high for posterity.

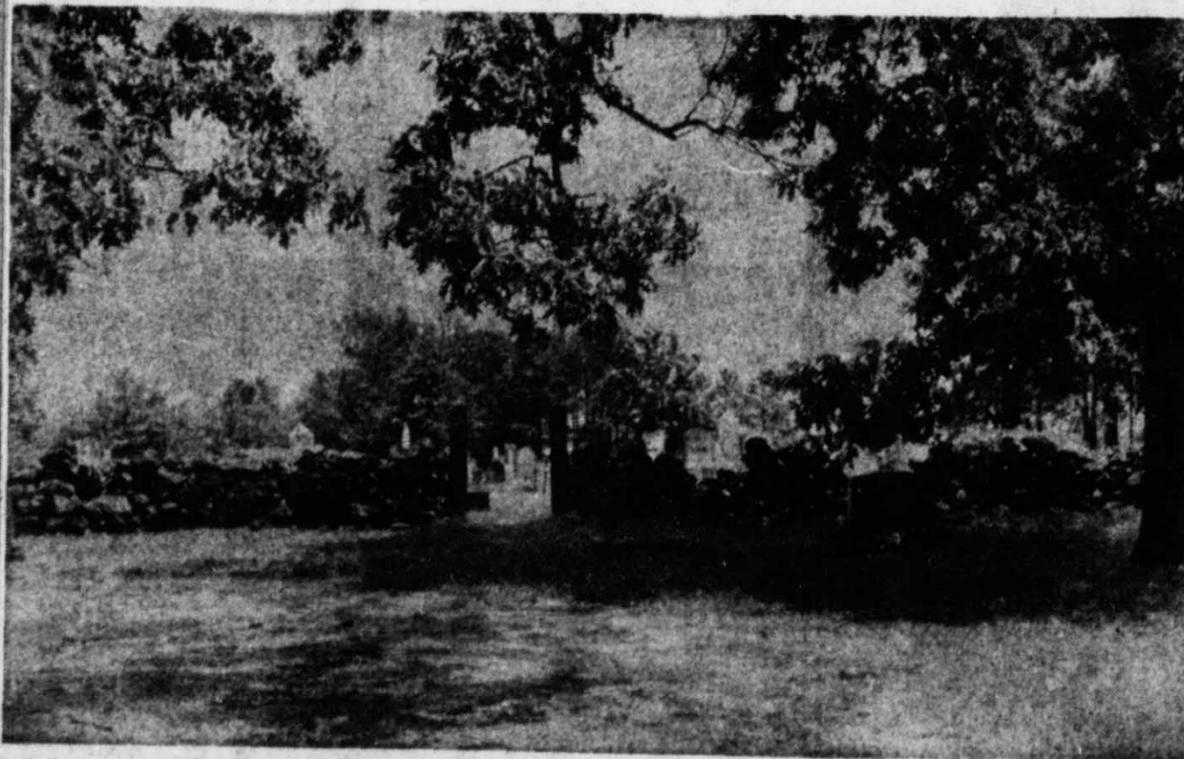
A new Purity Community is emerging with "Old Purity Chapel" as its head, and may this hallowed place be led into the future by the Holy Spirit as it has been brought forward from the past.



Site Of Historic Church

The building shown above is at present used for church meetings and picnics for members of the Purity Presbyterian Church. It was erected in 1935 on the plot of land formerly occupied by the Old Purity Third House of

Worship of the Purity Presbyterian Church. The latter was erected in 1832 and destroyed by fire in 1904. This is a favorite picnic area for church members. — (Photo by Don McKeown).



Old Purity Graveyard

The historic old graveyard beside the new Old Purity Chapel on Great Falls Road contains the bodies of the founders of the Purity Com-

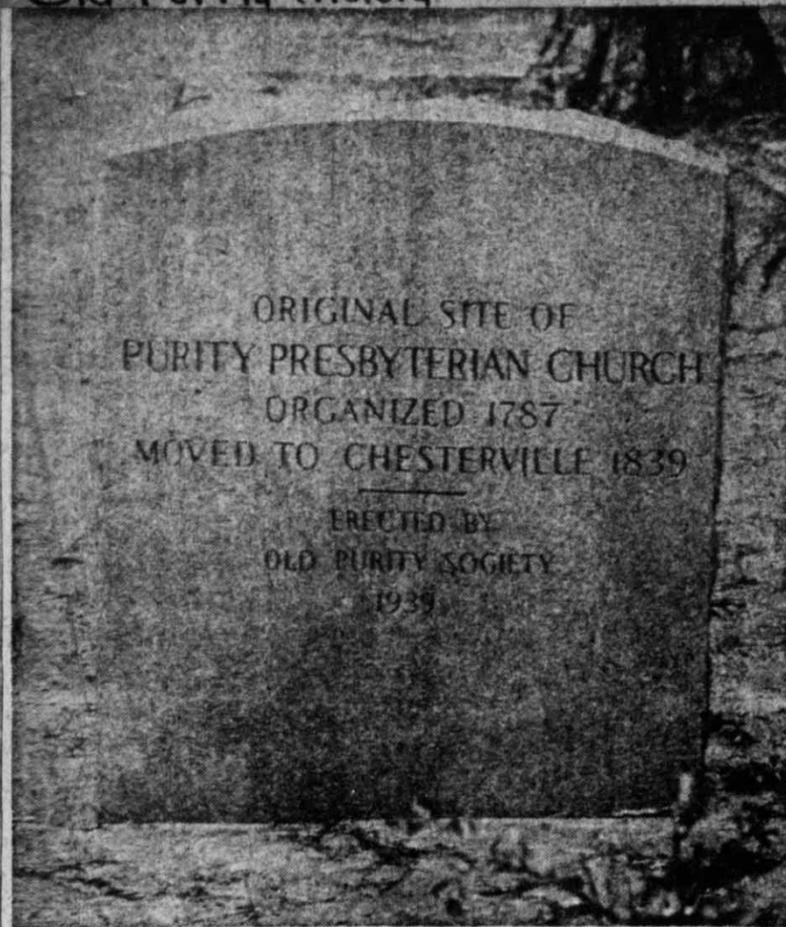
munity and of Chester County. The old graveyard is a favorite spot in the historic community. — (Photo by Don McKeown).

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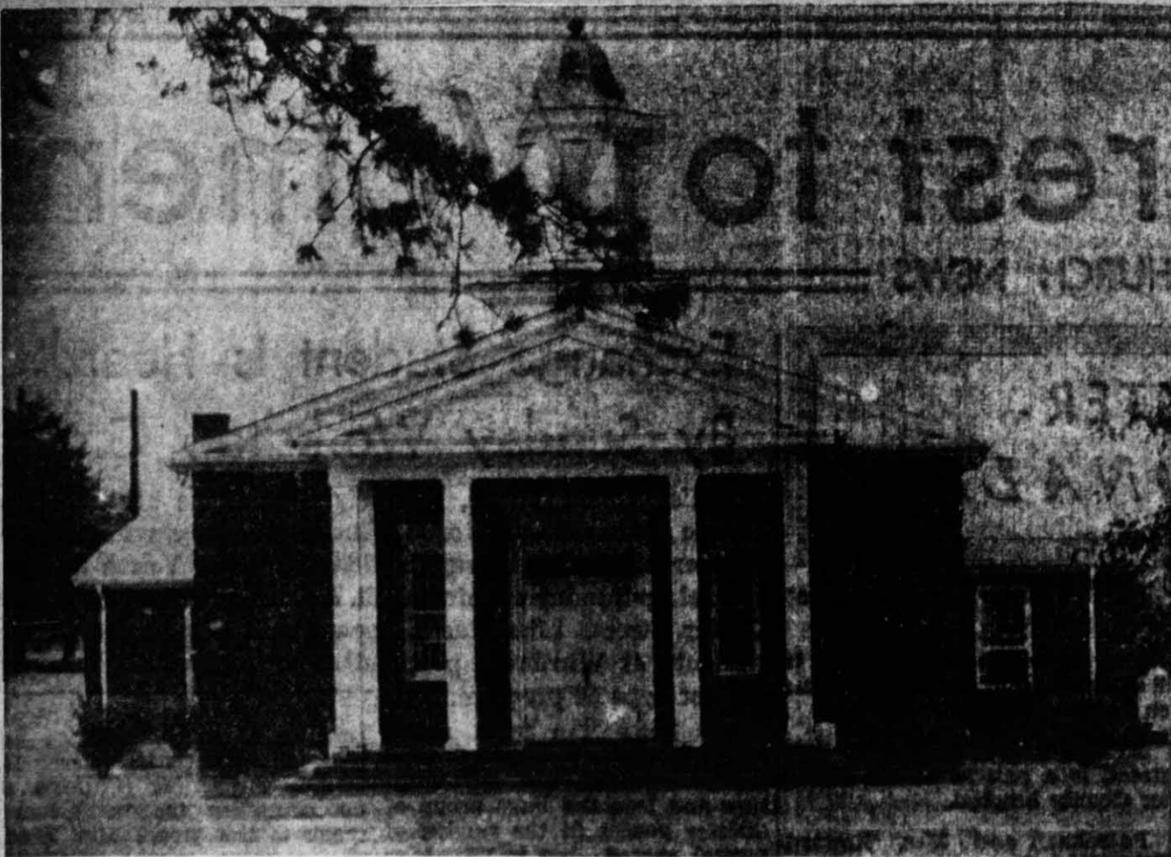
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Old Purity History...



Church's Original Site

This granite marker, located in the new Old Purity Chapel yard, shows the significance of the land on which it was erected in 1939 by the Old Purity Society. This marker indicates that this land was the original site of the Purity Presbyterian Church, which was organized in 1787 and moved to Chester, known then as Chesterville, in 1839. — (Photo by Don McKeown)



New Purity Chapel

This beautiful new Old Purity Presbyterian Chapel, opened in 1956 after renovation, is the present-day place of worship for the Old Purity

Society. Church members are very proud of their historic heritage, as well as their new place of worship. — (Photo by Don McKeown).