

In Lancaster, in the early 1700's, Presbyterians and some other congregations were making use of the county courthouse for worship whenever preachers could be had. Most of them lacked adequate meeting places, and few had their own full-time pastors. Most preachers had to divide their time among several churches

The earliest documentation we have of our existence as a congregation appears in the minutes of the Donegal Presbytery, meeting at Chestnut Level on June 16, 1742.

In 1763, Governor James Hamilton granted Lot No. 19 on Orange Street to the Presbyterian congregation as an English Presbyterian burial ground. This lot is the center lot of three on which our present sanctuary and chapel now stand. It was also the site of our original house of worship. The building was soon surrounded by the old cemetery, which now lies beneath the present chapel and some adjacent rooms. The appearance of that first building in 1844 can be seen in a painting by itinerant artist E.R. Hammond. Now on permanent loan from the Presbyterian Historical Society, it hangs in our foyer.

In 1968, Senior Pastor Donald Wilson and a group of young people undertook the task of exploring the old cemetery and moving tons of tombstones out to spaces where they could be read and cataloged. Several of the most interesting stones were later incorporated into walls of our remodeled foyer and into a nearby basement youth area known as the "Tomb Room."

The new building on a lot deeded to the church by Robert Fulton Sr. (father of the inventor/artist) dedicated on May 11, 1851, is the one we worship in today. It is on Lot No. 25, at the corner of Orange and Cherry Streets. The building contained a central tower topped by what appears to be the same octagonal belfry we have today. And above all this was a roof-like structure that looked somewhat like a lid. It was also octagonal and curved upward only a few feet from its top. Everything above the belfry was replaced in 1877 with a well-proportioned spire.

Unfortunately, the total effect was not all that had been hoped for until 1913, when Lancaster's noted architect, C. Emlen Urban, entered the picture. With relatively small changes, he created the attractive façade we now have. These changes included the three marble doorways and the windows above them, as well as a round window on the next higher level. He also added white painted cornices which emphasize the architectural lines of the façade.

