

Silver Spring Presbyterian Church Cemetery

Saints Who've Gone Before



Silver Spring Cemetery and "Meiting" House as they appeared in 1885

Prepared by the Cemetery Committee
2009

If these stones could talk, what stories they would tell...

There are nearly two thousand people buried since 1747 in Silver Spring Presbyterian Cemetery. Some of them were famous. Others were quite ordinary. Some have ornate or large headstones. Others have no marker at all, and the names of some have been lost to history. But all were important to some, and all were important to God. Here are the stories of a few of these people, gathered from research or from oral tradition passed down through generations of **Saints Who've Gone Before**.

The original, or "old" section, of the cemetery comprises about two-thirds of the two-acre churchyard. Closest to the stone Meiting House, it contains 1268 graves, arranged in a seemingly random pattern. This cemetery was created as a "resurrection" burying ground. According to this design, all graves are positioned with the head of the deceased at the west end of the grave, with the body at rest facing east toward the rising sun. Considering that the old section developed over the years without a formal plan, it is believed that the irregular arrangement of the graves was the result of burials occurring during different seasons which influenced the position of the rising sun.

The "new" section is that portion closest to Silver Spring Road, accessed through the small Ferguson gate along the south wall of the cemetery. This area was laid out in orderly rows in typical family grave plots during the 1840's.

The main entrance to the cemetery is closest to the Meiting House via the larger D.A.R. gate, erected in 1914 by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of 1812. The bronze plaques at the gateway pay tribute to 24 soldiers of the Revolutionary War buried here, but we believe that there are actually 44 at rest, as twenty others served in the Cumberland County militia, which never directly faced the British redcoats. Throughout the cemetery there are flags honoring not only veterans of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, but also the French and Indian War, the Civil War, World Wars I and II and later conflicts.

Folklore persists that the stone wall surrounding the cemetery was built so that it could be used as a fortification during Indian attacks.

It is true that worship began on these grounds in 1734 and it is true that in the mid-1700's settlers and Native Americans were often in conflict. Nevertheless, the first section of the wall, enclosing a burying ground about two-thirds the present size, was not built until 1792. This was nine years after the stone Meeting House was built, by which time the threat of Indians was but a memory. It is far more likely that the wall was built to mark the perimeter and to keep livestock from wandering into the sacred ground. The wall originally was unbroken by gates and ladder-like "stiles" were used to cross over the barrier.

There are various kinds of monuments in the churchyard. The large flat stones, typically 3 x 6 feet, are called "ledger stones" since they are large enough to provide a lengthy accounting of the life of those they memorialize. One of these is the monument remembering **John Wood**, located just inside the D.A.R. gate. The inscribed drawing on Wood's ledger stone shows him as a farmer, dressed in breeches, with shoulder-length hair, and a three-tined pitchfork over his shoulder.

Nearby is the monument of **Captain John Lamb**, who served in the 3rd Battalion of the Cumberland County militia, known as the "1776 Volunteers." Many other local men volunteered in 1777, after citizens were incensed that British troops occupying Philadelphia had used the tombstones of the Jewish cemetery there for target practice. Lambs' Gap Road, less than a mile north of the church, once led to the Lamb family's farm.

Captain John Trindle and his brother **Captain Alexander Trindle** both served in the Cumberland County militia. Later they became part of George Washington's Regulars. As food and gunpowder were scarce, it was the practice not to activate whole units but to select those with specific needed skills, e.g., sharpshooters and blacksmiths, for active duty. Ten years after the Revolutionary War ended, Simpson Ferry Road was built from Michael Simpson's Ferry on the Susquehanna River to a path (now Trindle Road) that led past Trindle Springs Farm, the home of John and Alexander's parents. Wagon trains headed west would regularly stop there overnight to replenish water and pasture their stock. And if the wagons' wheels needed attention, the wheelwrights (mechanics) in Mechanicsburg were happy to be of service.

The monument of **William McMean** (some records show McMeans), who died in 1747, is one of the two oldest surviving gravestones in the cemetery.

Major Andrew Galbraith served on Washington's staff. He was heading a small group of soldiers en route to Newark, New Jersey when they were taken captive by the British and held on the infamous prison ship "Old Jersey" in New York harbor. The ship had been converted to a floating stockade on short notice, and there was no food for either prisoners or their guards. Major Galbraith gave his captors what little funds he had in order that they might go ashore and purchase food. The guards were so grateful that his group was among the first to be repatriated when prisoner exchanges were arranged.

Esther Say Harris McChesney is best remembered as the wife of John Harris, whose fair-dealing trading post on the east bank of the Susquehanna River earned him the respect of both settlers and Indians. At John's Harristown settlement (later renamed Harrisburg) he established the first ferry service across the deep, wide, and fast-flowing river in 1734. Oral tradition suggests that the availability of a ferry may have been a deciding factor when The Rev. Alexander Craighead agreed to establish preaching points for the west shore settlers. Notably, one of these locations was at James Silver's spring. John Harris died in 1749 and his wife Esther married west shore resident William McChesney a few years afterward.

There are 37 Mateers buried at Silver Spring, thus there are more markers with this name than any other. **Margaret Mateer** died in 1802 at age one hundred. That was quite remarkable, being three times the average Pennsylvanian's life-span in the 1800's. Margaret's stone was one of 34 restored by our church's Trustees in the 1990's.

James Silver, Sr. was one of the earliest permanent settlers of the Cumberland Valley. In a letter from James Steel to the Secretary of the Proprietaries in December of that year, it was reported that James Silver "...crossed over the Sasquahanna [sic] 1724." Silver and his wife Hannah acquired 532 acres of land on which there was a clear spring. Settlers who followed gathered regularly at the spring to barter goods and exchange news as early as 1732. That

was two years before the first “preaching service” was held there. The spot became known as Silver’s Spring, and later Silver Spring. The present 14-acre campus of the church and the spring were originally part of James and Hannah’s land. Water from the spring is still used, 275 years later, for infant baptism. It is not known where James Silver Sr. rests, but his son **James Silver, Jr.** is buried in this cemetery.

Not only did the Silvers give name to the township and the church, but when it became clear that law enforcement and a magistrate were needed closer than the county seat in Lancaster, James Silver petitioned for what is now Cumberland County to be “spun off” from Lancaster County. A name was needed and Silver proposed “Cumberland County,” apparently because his parents were from Cumberland, England. Over time, North Valley became known as Cumberland Valley.

The monument for **James Fisher** was at one time repaired, but apparently in haste, as it was re-installed backwards. For the first two hundred years the cemetery never had a paid caretaker. Volunteers did the mowing and looked after the churchyard as best they could with the limited funds available. Early Trustees of the Church never envisioned how much it would cost over time to maintain the cemetery. Thus, in the early years no fee or donation was asked when graves were made available.

Jeanette Walker, the wife of Archibald Walker, died in 1800. The two decades following the Revolutionary War were times of hardship for many families. With the men away, farmlands could not be worked and families often went into debt in order to survive. The Walkers were apparently a couple with limited means even by 1800 standards, as Mrs. Walker’s monument was a small, rough-hewn slate that was simply inscribed. It served as a marker for 200 years before crumbling beyond repair. The Church’s Trustees replaced it in 2000 with a ‘replica made of sturdy Pennsylvania bluestone.

Stark white, twin monuments mark the graves of **John and Mary Carothers**, who were poisoned by their housemaid Sarah Clark. The couple would not permit their son to marry working-class Sarah, so she decided to “eliminate their opposition” by adding arsenic to the butter churn. John died as a result, but Mary survived. When opposition to the marriage continued, Sarah churned a second batch

of arsenic-laced butter, this time killing Mary Carothers. Sarah’s crime was discovered and she became the first woman to be hanged in Cumberland County. (Sarah is *not* buried at Silver Spring.)

The McCormick family was affluent and influential. Some members lived in Dauphin County but spent summers west of the river, while others were permanent residents of the west shore. Robert McCormick moved from Cumberland County to Virginia in 1779, and it was his grandson who perfected the McCormick reaper. Originally called the Virginia reaper, the introduction of this device in 1831 revolutionized farming. Both the International Harvester and Case Tractor companies had their roots in this invention. In 1831 it took 92 percent of the country’s population to feed America, whereas today less than two percent of Americans are required to work the farms and ranches that fill the nation’s tables.

It was the McCormick family that founded the newspaper now known as *The Patriot-News* and established Harrisburg’s first library and its first bank, Dauphin Deposit Trust. During the Great Depression, when depositors staged “runs” on banks clamoring to withdraw their funds, bank President Vance McCormick quickly dispatched his chauffeur to the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia with instructions to “fill the limousine with one dollar bills.” Several hours later the vehicle returned and the currency was stacked inside the bank in plain view to reassure depositors. Seeing that their funds were safe, they willingly went home empty-handed and the bank survived.

The McCormicks were good stewards. During a time when most families contributed to the church by means of a pew rental fee, the average annual donation was \$4 per family. But the two McCormick families, recognizing that God had richly blessed them, each paid \$100 per year, 25 times the going rate. The Church possesses the records of the estate of **William McCormick**, who is buried here. Prepared by his widow, Margery, the records show that she paid \$7.50 to have his coffin made, and when she held an auction the following year his hand-saw brought an equal amount, indicating that tools were expensive but labor was cheap.

Ann Marshall Witherspoon Walker married three times. Following the death of her first husband, Dr. Armstrong Dill, she married the Rev. John Witherspoon. “Reverend John” was President of Nassau

Hall (later to be re-named Princeton University). He was a member of the New Jersey legislature and had the distinction of being the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. Ann's marriage to John in 1791 occurred a few weeks prior to her 24th birthday, whereas he was 67 years of age. The difference in their ages reportedly caused much speculation and comment. She bore him two daughters before his death just three years later, in 1794. Several years after that she wed David Walker, one of Silver Spring's Revolutionary War patriots.

Jonathon Hoge was an attorney, a 2nd Lieutenant in the Revolutionary War and, upon return from the conflict, an Associate County Judge. He and his wife Gwendolyn donated the first pewter communion pieces to the Church in 1747. The complete service is on display in the McCormick Chapel, along with accompanying communion tokens. It was the practice of the day that in order to be served Communion at Sunday worship, one had to attend a mid-week preparatory service, at which time a communion taken was provided. That, in turn, was presented in church on Sunday. It is said that family jewels were sold so that the Hoges could purchase extensive acreage in what is now known as the village of Hogestown.

The Brandt family purchased a tall upright monument. **Dr. E. B. Brandt** was a Civil War surgeon and doubtless saved many lives – without regard to whether the uniform was blue or grey. Yet, without the advances of modern medicine, he was unable to save the lives of any of his five children, four of whom died before the age of two.

The Rev. Thomas J. ("T.J.") Ferguson served as pastor at Silver Spring for fifty years. The cupola gate on the south wall was constructed as a memorial to this beloved pastor. He is one of only five former Silver Spring clergymen buried here. Those buried within the wall are Samuel Cavon (pastor 1749-1750); Samuel Waugh (pastor 1782-1807); Edward Ardis (pastor 1928-1956); and Robert Anderson (pastor 1980-1986).

All the monuments, lined up like soldiers in rank and file, family by family, help us to recall the lives of those whose commitment to God, country and Silver Spring Church have been our sure foundation for over 275 years.



D.A.R. Gate, Silver Spring Cemetery

Early grave markers were made of wood, slate and sandstone and many have fallen victim to time and the elements. Because hundreds of these old monuments have disappeared, and because no formal graves register was kept during the early years, many of the names of those buried here have been lost to history. In an effort to correct this, in 2003 the Cemetery Committee developed an alphabetical directory of more than one thousand monuments and graves where the names are known, providing the location of each within the cemetery.

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