

200 YEARS OF RELIGION IN
CINNAMINSON, PALMYRA, RIVERTON
NEW JERSEY

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PREFACE

Two hundred years! Eight generations, more or less! What has it wrought? Where are we going? Will religion survive in these changing times? Will it contribute to the moral growth of Cinnaminson, Palmyra and Riverton over the next hundred years? These are the questions which confront God's children in 1976 in a country founded on religious freedom.

Of course, religious freedom in and of itself does not guarantee a virile growing personal relationship with God. To the contrary, religious freedom places an obligation on the Christian to grow in the faith and to assume the obligation for the nurture of his children. Also, people can choose to be complacent, distracted by competing social activities, and indifferent in matters relating to God. Mindful that we have had the freedom to choose under our Constitution, we think that it is appropriate to recount how our forebears have fulfilled their obligation to their descendants.

Accordingly, the Cinnaminson-Palmyra-Riverton Council of Churches authorized the preparation of this milestone account of the first 200 years of religion in Cinnaminson, Palmyra and Riverton in the County of Burlington, New Jersey. While reliving the growth of religion in our community through the Revolution, the Civil War, two World Wars and a major economic depression, the reader will be able to glean his own answers to the foregoing questions.

Comparing the religious education of our children in 1976 with that of earlier years, are we as effective as we should be? The early churches maintained strong Church School programs. Parents volunteered to teach in them. They saw to it that their children attended Church School regularly. Those who read a dusty copy of this manuscript 200 years hence will be the judge of the success of our efforts.

There are 15 individual denominations in this small community. What will be the effect on the community over the next 200 years? Will they come together to do God's work in the community with the march of time, or will there be further proliferation? The reader, therefore, may want to ask himself whether or not the churches are communicating with each other and the community in 1976 any better than they were in 1776 and 1876.

It is appropriate to note that within the walls of many Tri-boro churches one finds in 1976 truly ecumenical congregations with born and raised Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, Brethren, Catholics, Jews, Friends, Reformed, and others assimilated into the membership.

This can be said: the churches have made a start in this community with the founding of the Cinnaminson-Palmyra-Riverton Council of Churches in 1968. The Preamble of the Constitution of the Council of Churches recognizes the objective by stating that . . .

"In the Providence of God, the time has come when it seems fitting more fully to manifest our oneness in Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Savior, by the creation of an inclusive cooperative agency of the Christian Churches of Cinnaminson, Palmyra and Riverton; which body will regularly organize activities and programs which will cultivate Christian unity, and shall use its structure to seek God's will for our time and place."

Thus we leave you to relish the pages that follow, and pray that God's presence will make them live for you — especially those of you who give of yourself to be God's instrument in your own church and our community. We hope that by putting the 200 years in perspective, the uncharted future may prove easier to perceive.

We are particularly grateful to Mrs. Jean Billetter who has written this book for us. Her literary expertise and religious insight are a rare combination without which this historical account could not have been so well done.

A note of appreciation also goes to Mrs. Antoinette Rabil who created the wonderful sketches of the churches and synagogue as they stood in 1976. The hours she spent before the canvas have added greatly to the reader's enjoyment.

We would also like to thank our typists — Mrs. Marion Lawson, Mrs. Alice MacDonald, and Mrs. Anna Muller. We are especially grateful to Mr. Lloyd E. Griscom who lent his expertise to the project in numerous ways.

In conclusion, we ask God's blessing on those who led the way, and those who will follow. For it is His will, not ours, that will be done.

George L. Weigle
President
Cinnaminson-Palmyra-Riverton
Council of Churches

THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

In the century of the 1600's the towns had not been founded. The nearest resemblance thereto was the Indian place—name "Senamensing" appearing on early explorers' maps to designate the area north of the Pennsauken Creek as a hunting ground for the Indians living near Fork Landing. The geographical outlines of the present towns were not to take shape until some 200 years thereafter.

During that early century, three religious groups were represented within the scattered white civilization of the region. These included Swedish Lutherans, adherents of the "Augsburg Confession" who had settled on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware as early as 1638, and a portion of whom moved across to "Senamensing" in the 1680's. The Friends or Quakers settled along the Pennsauken Creek during the same decade as an offshoot of the principle Friends' settlement at Burlington. A few members of the Church of England (Anglicans) also settled along the Pennsauken Creek during the 1680's.

The Quakers on the local scene included John Roberts, Timothy Hancock, and William Matlack, among others. Initially members of the Burlington Meeting, they later affiliated at Chester (Moorestown) after a Meeting was instituted there. A principal figure among the Anglicans was John Rudderow, who left a legacy in his will toward the building of a church at Colestown. The various Swedish families were communicants of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes) Church in early Philadelphia and traveled back and forth by boat. The prominent figures among the Swedes were members of the Toy (sometimes spelled Tay) family who settled on the site of present-day Palmyra.

Our earliest residents, therefore, had no local church. At their death they were buried in such diverse places as Burlington, Philadelphia, Moorestown and Colestown, prior to the establishment of houses of worship on the local scene. A few were buried in an ancient cemetery near Fork Landing (of which there is no present trace) or on their home farms.

These pioneers were residents of Chester Township from the time of that township's inception in 1694. More than a century and a half was to pass before the far-flung Chester Township was divided to form Cinnaminson Township on its westward wing. Even after the division, Cinnaminson Township in 1860 was more than twice its present size (Delran, Palmyra and Riverton being removed at later dates).

The 18th Century did not bring large growth or development to this immediate area. A few other families moved in; notably the Lippincott family in 1710, taking up 1,000 acres in what is now Cinnaminson, and the Wallis (Wallace) family settling in 1721 on 300 acres beside the creek in what is now Palmyra, along with the Wright family which occupied at about 1734 the lands near Plum Point, known today as the Taylor Farm.

The surveying and building of the Burlington-Coopers Ferry Road at about 1740 (now Route 130) resulted in a small community growing at Westfield (the west field of the Lippincott farm). Toward the end of that century a Friends Meeting was inaugurated at Westfield to become the first religious organization based in our immediate area. The cemetery behind the present meeting house includes the graves of numerous pioneering families of this region.

The other roads of consequence in the 1700's were the "Road to Chester" (Riverton Road) laid out in 1721, and the Cinnaminson Trail (Cinnaminson Ave., Palmyra) laid out in 1768. The population along the river was not numerous enough to constitute a community, consisting of only a number of farming families who looked upon Westfield as the nearest hamlet and Chester (Moorestown) as the nearest town.

The remnant of the local Indian tribe, leaving Fork Landing before the year 1700, was gathered with other New Jersey Indians on the first reservation in the country in 1758, at Indian Mills.

A few black families, coming initially from Africa as slaves, were freed under New Jersey statutes toward the end of the 1700's and took up habitation near the Pennsauken and Pompton Creeks. Several of these were to become affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Their descendants were eventually to found their own Baptist and Methodist churches here with the collaboration of

numerous black families moving to this area from Virginia and other southern states. The region now known as Cinnaminson, Palmyra and Riverton came out of the year 1799 into the 19th century with a population of only a few hundred, not thousands, and these lived principally on farms or in the few village homes surrounding the "crossroads" at Westfield — at which point were located the Westfield Friends School and a small meeting house.

A few newcomers of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Moravian persuasions had moved in to join the Friends, Swedish Lutherans, and the Anglicans who were now known as Episcopalians. None of these, other than the Friends, were strong enough to organize as a body of communicants on the local scene; but early in the 19th century the Methodists were to organize, and were to be followed soon after by the Moravians, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Baptists in organizing churches.

— Lloyd E. Griscom

THE EVOLUTION OF CINNAMINSON, PALMYRA, AND RIVERTON

- 1674 West Jersey purchased from Lord Berkley.
- 1694 Chester Township founded as one of eight townships in Burlington County.
- 1848 Village of Palmyra, established within Chester Township.
- 1851 Village of Riverton, established within Chester Township.
- 1860 Cinnaminson Township, split off of Chester Township.
- 1880 Delran Township, split off of Cinnaminson Township.
- 1893 Borough of Riverton, split off of Cinnaminson Township.
- 1894 Township (later Borough) of Palmyra, split off of Cinnaminson Township.
- 1900 Populations: Cinnaminson (1,078); Palmyra (2,300); Riverton (1,332)
- 1976 Populations: Cinnaminson (18,500); Palmyra (7,200); Riverton (3,412)