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BRIEF SKETCHES

OF THE

New Jersey Chaplains

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STATE MILITIA,

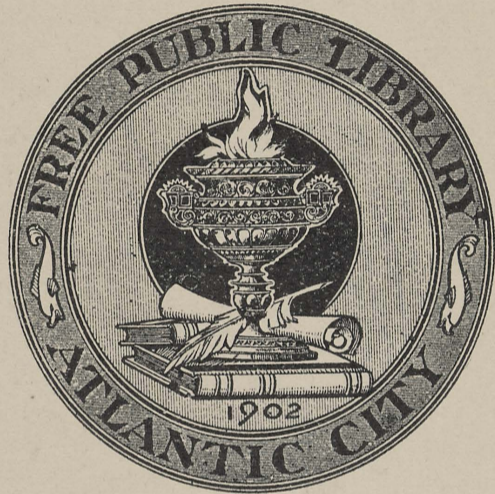
During the War of Independence.

By REV. F. R. BRACE.

PATERSON, N. J.:

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BRIEF SKETCHES
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NEW JERSEY CHAPLAINS
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The principal sources of information from which these sketches of the chaplains from New Jersey in the War of Independence have been drawn, are Stryker's "Officers and Men in the Army of the Revolution"; "New Jersey Archives"; Sprague's "Annals of the American Pulpit"; Hall's "History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton"; Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; Dubbs', also Good's "History of the Reformed Church in the United States"; Griffith's "History of the Baptists in New Jersey," and Fenwick's "History of Salem."

There were twelve Chaplains from New Jersey in the War of the Revolution: Revs. Andrew Hunter, Jr., Philip Vickers Fithian, Samuel Eakin, Elihu Spencer, James F. Armstrong, James Caldwell, Alexander Macwhorter, Nicholas Cox, William Worth, John Mason, John Nevelling and Robert Blackwell.

I. REV. ANDREW HUNTER.

Rev. Andrew Hunter was a son of David Hunter, a British officer, and was born in Virginia in 1752. He was the nephew of Rev. Andrew Hunter, Sr., Pastor of the Presbyterian

Church in Greenwich, Cumberland County, New Jersey, one of the most enthusiastic advocates of the independence of the Colonies, and one of the celebrated tea-burning party at Greenwich, Nov. 22, 1774. He was graduated in 1772, from Princeton college, that nursery of so many sturdy opponents of the oppressive acts of the mother country. His theological studies were pursued under his uncle at Greenwich, and in June, 1774, he was licensed to preach, by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. After his licensure he was appointed a missionary to some vacant and newly-constituted churches in Virginia. The young man imbibed the patriotic spirit of his uncle and soon connected himself with the army. He was appointed by the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, June 28, 1776, chaplain of three battalions that were being raised under the commands of Colonels Van Cortland, Martin and Hunt, constituting Heard's Brigade, intended to reinforce the army at New York. It is said that before this he was with the brave fellows who marched to Canada, and who met with the fearful disaster at Quebec, when General Montgomery was killed. He was commissioned chaplain of the Third Battalion, Second Establishment, Continental Army, Jersey line, June 1, 1777; chaplain to General Maxwell's Brigade, June 15, 1777. This Brigade formed part of General Sullivan's force that marched from Elizabeth, May 19, 1779, up through North Jersey to Easton, and thence through the mountainous country of Northeastern Pennsylvania to the Wyoming valley to put a stop to the awful cruelties perpetrated by the Indians. On July 4th he preached a sermon to the soldiers to encourage and stimulate them in their hard work. After his return from this expedition he was commissioned Chaplain of the Third Brigade, September 26, 1780. This Brigade landed September 21, 1781, on the James river, Va., about five miles from Williamsburg, and was afterwards part of the army engaged in the siege of Yorktown. Before the march to the Wyoming valley, and while the Brigade was near Elizabeth, Mr. Hunter was taken prisoner in the night, on returning from the Governor's house, whither he had gone to give an alarm respecting the approach of a body of the enemy. He, however, made his escape. He was discharged

at the close of the war. At the battle of Monmouth he received the personal thanks of General Washington for his conduct.

After resting for a few years after the close of the war, he became, in 1786, the supply of the Presbyterian churches of Woodbury and Blackwood, in which relation he continued until 1797. Besides preaching he opened an Academy at Woodbury, and taught the higher branches of learning to a large number of young people. This Academy was built in 1791, on land conveyed by Joseph Bloomfield, afterwards Governor of this State, to Rev. Andrew Hunter and others, in trust, for the sole purpose of building an Academy upon it. He resigned his work in Woodbury and Blackwood, and moved near Trenton, where he cultivated a farm on the Delaware. He was chosen Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy in Princeton in 1804, and held that position until 1808. He was trustee of Princeton college from 1788 to 1804, and again from 1808 to 1811. From 1808 to 1810 he had charge of an Academy at Bordentown. In 1811 he was appointed Chaplain of the Navy, and was stationed at the Washington Navy Yard. He died at Burlington, N. J., Feb. 24, 1823. Mr. Hunter was a prominent minister in the Presbyterian Church, and was a Commissioner to its highest Church Court at least twice, and was a member of the committee to revise and print a report that related to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church.

II. REV. PHILIP VICKERS PITHIAN.

Rev. Philip Vickers Fithian was born in or near Greenwich, Cumberland County. The Presbytery of Philadelphia licensed him to preach, Nov. 6, 1774. He married the daughter of Rev. Charles Beatty. He was a Presbyterian Evangelist and travelled through South Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, conducting religious services. Enthusiastic in his devotion to the cause of American liberty, he was one of the leading spirits in the celebrated tea-burning at Greenwich, Nov. 22, 1774. On June 20th, 1776, he was appointed Chap-

¹ A brief sketch of Rev. Andrew Hunter is printed in the N. J. Archives, 2d Series, 3: 108.

lain of the Battalion under the command of Colonel Newcomb, and to the Battalion to be raised in the Counties of Middlesex and Monmouth, which was destined for New York. He accompanied the Battalion in its march to the assistance of the army near New York, was at the battle of White Plains, and was killed at Fort Washington, Nov. 16, 1776.

III. REV. SAMUEL EAKIN.

Rev. Samuel Eakin was graduated from Princeton College, September 26, 1763, and received the degree of Master of Arts, September 24, 1776. The Second Presbytery of Philadelphia licensed him to preach and ordained him in 1770. He was installed pastor of the Third (old Pine St.) Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, and continued as pastor for two years, when, in 1773, he moved to Penn's Neck, Salem County, and took charge of the Presbyterian Church there. When the time came for men to declare their sentiments about the right to throw off the yoke of the British government, he was outspoken, and helped greatly to arouse the patriotic spirit of the men in Salem county. He was at all their military trainings, and whenever an order was issued for a detachment of soldiers to march, he was sure to be there to encourage the men and inspire them with his eloquent, impassioned words. It is related of him that he never failed in his public prayer to implore the Lord "to teach our people to fight and give them courage and perseverance to overcome their enemies." He was appointed a Chaplain of Militia in Salem county, but because of his ardent advocacy of the war for independence he so aroused the hatred of the Tory element, that he had to leave Penn's Neck in 1777. He removed to Delaware, where he lived and preached until his death in 1784.

IV. REV. ELIHU SPENCER.

Rev. Elihu Spencer was born in Haddam, Conn., Feb. 12, 1721, and was a graduate of Yale College in 1746. He was ordained in Boston, September 14, 1748. His first work was as a missionary to the Indians. Then, February 7, 1749, he

became pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth, preaching part of the time at Shrewsbury. His ministrations there closed 1756. His next charge was in Jamaica, Long Island, where he remained two years. In 1758 he received an offer from Governor Delancey, of New York, of a chaplaincy to the troops of the Province then detailing for the French War. In May, 1761, he was received by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, and supplied churches at Amboy, Middletown Point and along the seashore to Egg Harbor. He was also sent on important errands to the Southern colonies, and ministered to many churches. In 1766, January 17th, he became a member of New Castle Presbytery in Delaware, and on April 17th, was installed pastor of the churches of St. George and Apoquiminy, now Middletown. As the place did not agree with his own and his family's constitution, and their health was greatly impaired, he requested the Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relation. This was done Oct. 19, 1769. He moved to Trenton and commenced his work with the congregations of the First Presbyterian Church and Maidenhead, Oct. 17, 1769, although he was not received by the Presbytery of New Brunswick until the spring of 1771. He was never installed pastor, that is, there is no record of it. Dr. Hall says, "There is no record to show when, if at all, Mr. Spencer was installed in Trenton. At his reception in Trenton by the Presbytery in 1771, it was without the mention of any particular place. His patriotic spirit may have forethought that he should be called, if not like his co-presbyter, Witherspoon, to the public councils, yet to a return of his chaplaincy in the army." In 1775, he and Rev. Alexander Macwhorter, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Newark, were appointed by Congress, in accordance with an invitation from the delegates from North Carolina, to take a journey to that colony and preach and converse for some time among those people, as their case was extremely critical. In the Journal of the Continental Congress of Dec. 15, 1775, is this minute: "Resolved, That orders be drawn on the Treasurer in favor of the Rev. Elihu Spencer and the Rev. Mr. Alexander McWhorter, who have undertaken to go to North Carolina, for the sum of one hundred and twenty dol-

lars each, being three months' advance, they to be accountable."

The Colonies were divided into three military departments. The middle one comprised New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the lower counties on the Delaware, now the State of Delaware, and Maryland. In October, 1776, it was ordered that a hospital be provided for this department, in New Jersey, which was done, and on October 20, 1777, Mr. Spencer was elected by ballot, chaplain of that hospital. He was so ardent and active in behalf of the patriots that a reward of a hundred dollars was offered for his head by the British government, and during the occupation of Trenton, in 1776, by the British forces, his furniture, books and papers were all destroyed. He continued pastor of the Presbyterian Church until Dec. 27th, 1784, when he passed to his rest and reward. Mr. Spencer was very active in church work, and served on many important committees. He was also a trustee of Princeton college from 1752 until the day of his death.

V. REV. JAMES FRANCIS ARMSTRONG.

Rev. James Francis Armstrong was born in Maryland, April 3d, 1750, and was educated at Fagg's Manor, Pa., and at Princeton. He was licensed to preach and ordained by the Presbytery of New-Castle, January, 1777, in order that he might become a chaplain in the army. His licensure could not take place in New Jersey because of its occupation by the British troops. He had been a volunteer in Captain Peter Gordon's company, First Regiment, Hunterdon county, but believing that he could do more for the cause of independence by becoming a chaplain, he presented himself for licensure and ordination to the Presbytery of New Brunswick. His trials in the various branches of knowledge required of those desiring to enter the church were begun before this Presbytery, but the presence of the enemy in Trenton and vicinity prevented his finishing his examinations, and so he was permitted to go to the Presbytery of New-Castle, in Delaware, to pass his final examinations, where he was ordained. His appointment as chaplain was made July 17, 1778, and he was assigned to the Second Maryland Brigade. Before his commission was re-

ceived he accompanied the troops on the Southern campaign. He performed his duties as chaplain until the close of the war. He returned to New Jersey in 1782, and became a supply of the Presbyterian church of Elizabeth. That year he married Susannah Livingston, a daughter of Robert James Livingston. In 1784 he came to Trenton and commenced his work in the First Presbyterian church, and served that church until his death, January 19, 1816.

Mr. Armstrong was a man of great influence in the Presbyterian church, and had much to do in the preparation of the constitution of the church. He was also deeply interested in the education of the young, and was one of the zealous workers for the establishment of the Trenton academy in which the boys of Trenton were prepared for college for about one hundred years. He was also engaged to take the general superintendence of the academy. He was a supporter and director of the Trenton Library Company. In 1799 he was elected a Trustee of the College of New Jersey, and filled that important position until his death.

VI. REV. JAMES CALDWELL.

Rev. James Caldwell was pastor of the First Presbyterian church, of Elizabeth, when he was appointed chaplain. He was born in Charlotte county, Va., in April, 1734. His education for the ministry was obtained in Princeton college. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, July 29, 1760, and was ordained pastor of the church at Elizabeth, March, 1762. His devotion to the cause of liberty, and his speeches, sermons and influence, gave so much strength and enthusiasm to the patriots, that he was an object of the greatest hatred by the Tory element. He was chosen in May, 1776, chaplain of the Third Battalion, First Establishment, under the command of Colonel Dayton. Afterward he was made Deputy Quarter Master and Assistant Commissary General. In these several capacities he served until he was shot, Nov. 24, 1781, by a soldier believed to be in the pay of the British.¹

¹ The soldier was a sentry on duty and pretended to have made a mistake. He was tried and convicted of murder, and hanged January 29, 1782, at Westfield.

His wife had been barbarously murdered before (June 8, 1780), in a house in Connecticut Farms, whither she had fled for refuge. His church was burned down by the enemy, January 25, 1780. He was the chaplain, who, when he learned that the soldiers had no wad to compress the powder in their guns, rushed into the Presbyterian church at Springfield and brought out in his arms the hymn books (Watts') that were used in that church, and tearing out the leaves, gave them to the soldiers, crying out to them, "Give them Watts, boys, give them Watts."

VII. REV. ALEXANDER MACWHORTER.

Rev. Alexander Macwhorter was born in New Castle, Del., July 26, 1734. His academic education was obtained in Princeton, where he was graduated in 1757. Rev. William Tennent was his theological instructor. In 1759 he was ordained by the Presbytery of New Brunswick and became pastor of the First Church, Newark, the mother of so many active, successful churches in the city of Newark and in the county of Essex. Like all the Presbyterian ministers, he was an active patriot, and stirred and stimulated the members of his church to heroic efforts in behalf of the struggle for independence. He was appointed a chaplain of a Division of the Continental Army, and was with General Henry Knox at White Plains. He was in the camp of Washington at Penn Shore, opposite Trenton, prior to the battle of Trenton, December, 1776, to concert with Washington measures for the protection of the State. He had followed the retreat of the American army through New Jersey. In 1778 he was chaplain of the artillery Brigade, Continental Army. In 1775, he went with the Rev. Elihu Spencer, of the First Church, Trenton, to enlist his old friends in North Carolina in the movement for independence. In 1779 he went to Mecklenburg, North Carolina, but returned to Newark in 1781, where he again took up his work in the First Church, continuing there until 1807, when he fell asleep in Jesus.

VIII. REV. NICHOLAS COX.

Rev. Nicholas Cox was born in New Castle county, now

Delaware, March 24, 1742. He was licensed to preach in Philadelphia, 1771, and ordained by a council of Baptist ministers in Wantage, Sussex county, N. J., shortly thereafter. He was appointed chaplain of the First Battalion, Second Establishment, November 28th, 1776, and was retired September 26, 1780. He continued pastor of the Baptist church at Wantage, until 1783, when he removed to Kingwood, Hunterdon county, and was pastor of the Baptist church in that place until 1790. He joined Trenton lodge No. 5, of Masons, in 1793. His children were, John, Martha, William, Elizabeth, Lydia, Susanna, Thomas, David and Benjamin. The time of his death is not recorded.

IX. REV. WILLIAM WORTH.

Rev. William Worth received his academic education in the Hopewell Baptist school, founded in 1756 by Rev. Isaac Eaton, A. M. Mr. Worth was there between 1756 and 1767, when it closed. He was ordained pastor of the Pittsgrove Baptist church, in Salem county, May 16, 1771, and continued to serve as pastor until the day of his death.

He was appointed chaplain of the Second Battalion of the troops in Salem county.

XI. REV. JOHN MASON.

Rev. John Mason was born in Scotland, in 1734. He was the son of a farmer, but determined to be a minister of the gospel. His collegiate education was obtained at Edinburgh, where he was graduated in 1753, and his theological education was at Abernethy, an institution belonging to the Reformed Presbyterian church. In this seminary he was professor of Divinity, also of Logic and Moral Philosophy, from 1758 to 1761, when he was ordained. Having received a call from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian church in Cedar street, New York, he came to this country and became pastor of that church in 1761. His pronounced sentiments in opposition to the burdensome acts of the British Government made him obnoxious to the Tory element, and he had to flee from New York during its occupation by the British. He took his family to Plucka-

min, N. J., where he was at first a chaplain in the militia, and afterwards in the Continental army. He was a wise counselor and a great inspirer of the men under his care. He was a trustee of Princeton college from 1779 to 1785. He continued his pastorate in the Cedar street church until the time of his death, April 19, 1792.

XI. REV. JOHN WESLEY GILBERT NEVELLING.

Rev. John Wesley Gilbert Nevelling was born in Westphalia, Germany, 1750. He came to this country while he was yet young. His studies were pursued in this country. He was licensed to preach by the Coetus of Pennsylvania, German Reformed church in 1781, and was ordained pastor of a German Reformed church, in Amwell, N. J., in 1772, which position he held until 1783, when he removed to Reading, Pa. He was appointed chaplain of the militia, and was so devoted to the cause of the patriots that it is said he loaned all his money, \$12,000, to the American government, for which he received a certificate. This certificate was lost and he was never reimbursed. Because of his loyalty to the patriotic cause, the British offered a reward for his capture. Washington ordered out a troop of horse to protect him. After removing to Reading he became an invalid, although he lived to the age of ninety-four years. The last years of his life were spent in Philadelphia, where he died, January 18, 1844. He was buried in a vault by the side of the Race street church.

It is said that while riding on horseback with a long pipe in his mouth, his horse fell and his pipe inflicted a severe wound in his throat, which permanently affected his speech; but he continued to preach for many years.

XII. REV. ROBERT BLACKWELL.

Robert Blackwell, son of Jacob Francis Blackwell, of Long Island, New York, was born May 6, 1748. He entered Princeton college, and graduated September 28, 1768, on which occasion he delivered a "judicious Harangue on Genius," as we are told in the New York Journal or General Advertiser, of

October 6, 1768, quoted in the New Jersey Archives, 27: 287, a sketch of Mr. Blackwell being given in that volume, to which we are indebted for the account here given. After his graduation he studied for the ministry, and on June 11, 1772, he was ordained a Deacon in the chapel of Fulham Palace, near London, by Bishop Richard Terrick, and subsequently to the order of the Priesthood. Returning to America, he was stationed in the southern part of New Jersey as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, officiating at Gloucester and Waterford and at Greenwich. In the War of the Revolution he served as chaplain to the First Pennsylvania Brigade, and surgeon to one of the regiments in the year 1778. Although not acting with the New Jersey troops, he may nevertheless be classed as a New Jersey Chaplain. In 1781 he was called to be one of the assistant ministers of Christ church and St. Peter's, Philadelphia, where he served until 1811. He died Feb. 12, 1831.

